

WORKFORCE CHEROKEE

Cherokee Workforce Collaborative Strategic Implementation Plan

January 2017



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Carl Vinson Institute of Government
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Cherokee County Community Members,

It is with great pleasure that we present the Workforce Cherokee blueprint. This plan will strengthen the community's workforce and help sustain economic development success. The planning process involved leaders from business and industry, K-12 education, the local chamber of commerce, postsecondary education, workforce development, and community partners.

This action plan for the development and support of a skilled workforce is in direct response to needs identified in the Opportunity Cherokee economic development strategic plan. One of the pillars of the county's economic development strategy going forward is to build and strengthen a local talent base for existing and future employers.

Governor Nathan Deal has also recognized the critical link between workforce development and economic progress through the Governor's High Demand Career Initiative (HDCI). HDCI focuses on supporting key industries with intentional resources, programs, and policies to develop skilled workers and meet growing workforce needs across the state. The work of the Cherokee Workforce Collaborative aligns our efforts with this state initiative to strengthen the local economic community and focus on continued economic development.

We are grateful to those who have invested their time and effort in the planning process and are excited about working with you to move the workforce development goals identified in this report forward. This work will pay dividends in building our workforce, supporting economic growth, and investing in our community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Misti Martin".

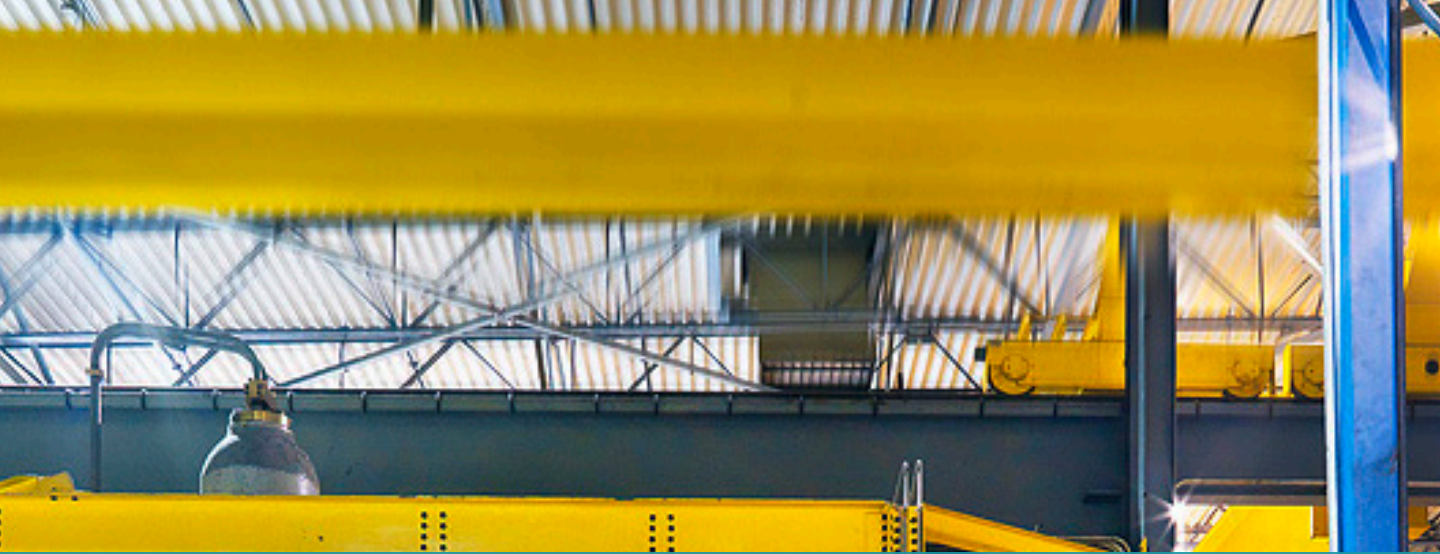
Misti Martin
President

Cherokee Office of Economic
Development

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mark Goddard".

Mark Goddard
Chairman

Opportunity Cherokee
Strategy



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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the work of the Cherokee Workforce Collaborative.

The Cherokee County Office of Economic Development (COED) convened community members representing industry, education, and other critical partners from economic and workforce development to form the Cherokee Workforce Collaborative (CWC). This collaborative evaluated labor market data and education data, and listened to the workforce needs of the business community. Using the data and industry feedback, the collaborative assessed the county's workforce strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The collaborative then developed a series of strategic goals and action items to address the talent gaps and workforce challenges identified. This document provides a strategic roadmap to help Cherokee County address its workforce needs and strengthen its ability to retain and recruit jobs.

PROCESS

Leaders from business, economic development, education, workforce, and the community gathered to listen to companies, analyze data, and prioritize issues.



PROJECT FACILITATION, DOCUMENTATION, AND STRATEGIC GUIDANCE were provided by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia: David Tanner, Greg Wilson, and Mercy Montgomery. Editing and graphic design assistance were provided by Karen DeVivo and Eleonora Machado. The Cherokee Workforce Collaborative would like to thank Chattahoochee Technical College for generously hosting each of the planning sessions at the Woodstock Campus.

Additionally, the group would like to recognize Marshall Day, chairman, and Steve Holcomb, vice-chairman, of the Cherokee Office of Economic Development, for their support of this important initiative.



BACKGROUND

The Case for Investing in Workforce

**CASE
#1**

Opportunity Cherokee

**CASE
#2**

Business Retention &
Expansion Survey

**CASE
#3**

High Demand
Career Initiative

**CASE
#4**

Availability of
Skilled Labor

**CASE
#5**

Brain Drain

Workforce quality and availability is the top priority for business recruitment and retention today. Successful economic development cannot happen without the workforce to support the growth. The steering committee identified five key reasons for investing in a workforce development strategy.

#1: Opportunity Cherokee

A 2015 strategic planning process conducted by Boyette Strategic Advisors reviewed current economic development activities and programs in the county and developed strategies to ensure that Cherokee County remains competitive in the future. One of the key strategies Boyette identified for bolstering business retention and recruitment activities was to support and invest in workforce development.



Action Item: Continue to meet workforce needs of existing business/industry

The COED currently conducts an existing industry survey bi-annually. The COED should continue to survey and also meet with company representatives bi-annually, but should have an even bigger focus next time on determining any issues with recruiting existing and future workforce, as well as obtaining the training services needed. This should include identification and assessment of the white-collar or professional employment by the top manufacturing and distribution-related companies in Cherokee County, including gaining an understanding of the breakdown of the industry workforce, both from a white-collar/blue-collar perspective or hourly versus salaried.



Excerpt from the 2015 Opportunity
Cherokee Strategic Plan

**CASE
#1**

**CASE
#2**

**CASE
#3**

**CASE
#4**

**CASE
#5**

#2: Business Retention & Expansion Survey

COED completed their most recent bi-annual existing industry survey in 2015. More than 30 local employers provided feedback on their workforce needs and business operations. Overall, the survey showed a need for continued investment in talent development in the county.

Other key survey results are listed below:

- 84% of the responding firms surveyed plan to expand in the next three years.
- 65% of responding firms reported growing employment needs.
- 68% of responding firms indicated that they had faced recruitment challenges when seeking employees with specific skills.
- Many businesses reported the need for workers with hard skills such as welding and communications as well as soft skills like punctuality, work ethic, teamwork, and loyalty.

CASE
#2

CASE
#3

CASE
#4

CASE
#5



#3: High Demand Career Initiative

The state of Georgia has made workforce development a priority through the Governor’s High Demand Career Initiative (HDCI). Through a series of 17 public meetings across the state, the HDCI team engaged more than 130 companies to learn about their workforce development, training, and skills needs. Common themes from businesses included an aging workforce; the need for soft skills training; the necessity of strong knowledge in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM); a shortage of skilled trades workers; and an increased demand for work-based learning opportunities (for example internships, apprenticeships, on-the-job training).

CASE
#3

CASE
#4

CASE
#5

#4: Availability of Skilled Labor

Companies will locate or expand their operations in areas where they can be successful. According to Area Development Magazine, a publication focused on economic development, site selectors and CEOs consistently cite workforce development as the top criteria when deciding where to locate new projects. Companies in Cherokee County compete for talent regionally, nationally, and internationally. Developing talent locally strengthens the county’s ability to retain and recruit businesses.

Cherokee County has a highly educated population. The value of education is strong in Cherokee County, with 83.1% (Class of 2014) of high school students graduating. Of those who graduated from Cherokee County public high schools in 2014, 74% were enrolled in postsecondary education the following year compared to 67% of high school graduates statewide. Compared to statewide benchmarks, Cherokee County has a much higher proportion of graduates enrolling in college. Cherokee is similar to other metro-Atlanta counties in postsecondary enrollment.

Despite this success, the talent pipeline in Cherokee County can be strengthened. Table 1 details that the Cherokee County School System had an 83.1% graduation rate in 2014, with 54.4% of graduates eligible for the HOPE Scholarship (B average GPA). This means that 17% of the high school students did not graduate and that of those who graduated, 46% did not have at least a B average GPA.

Table 1. Metro-Atlanta High School

2014 Graduating Class	High School Graduation Rate	Postsecondary Enrollment Rate	HOPE Eligible
Bartow County	70.50%	57%	39.10%
Cherokee County	83.10%	74%	54.40%
Cobb County	79.10%	75%	50.90%
Dawson County	85.30%	57%	50.60%
Forsyth County	90.70%	80%	65.10%
Fulton County	80.50%	78%	50.10%
Gordon County	86.10%	54%	51.20%
Pickens County	85.10%	59%	57.20%

Source: Governor’s Office of Student Achievement



Figure 1 shows the progress of the Class of 2009 from the Cherokee County School System since graduation. Of the 76% of the Class of 2009 graduates enrolled in college, 41% had earned a postsecondary credential six years later. It is important to note that six years after graduation, 27% of the graduating class was working without any postsecondary credential or enrollment, and another 13% was still enrolled in postsecondary education. These education pipeline data indicate that there are opportunities to strengthen the talent development pipeline in Cherokee County.

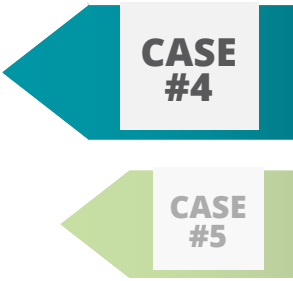
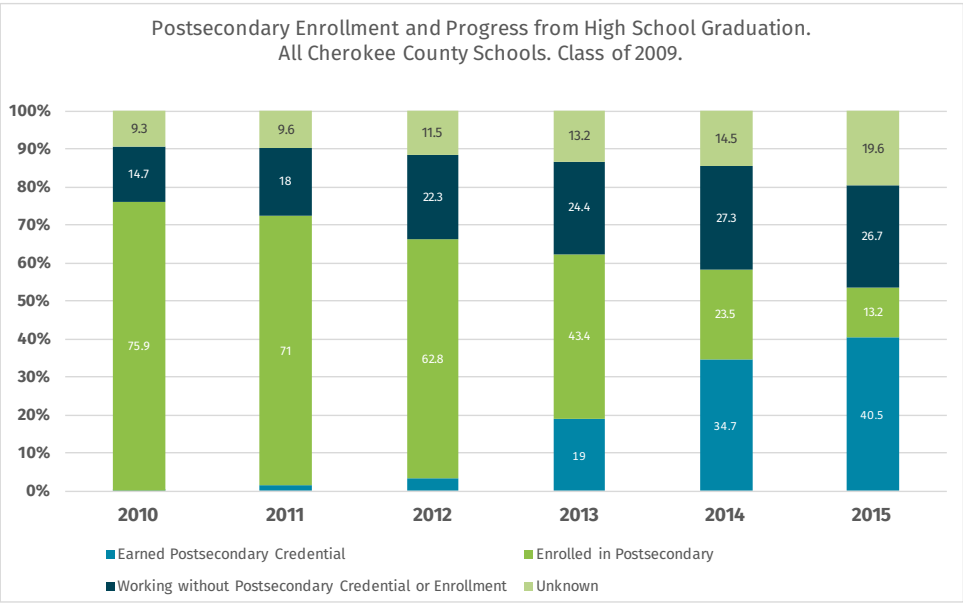


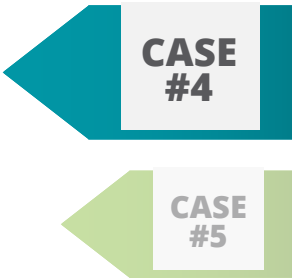
Figure 1. Cherokee County High Schools Class of 2009 Postsecondary Enrollment and Progress



Source: Governor’s Office of Student Achievement

Aligning the skill development programs in the high schools with the needs of local employers can be done through the Career, Technical, Agricultural Education (CTAE) programs in the high schools. Many communities in Georgia have also created college and career academies, which place even greater emphasis on meeting the skills and competency needs of employers in their area. CTAE programs provide students the opportunity for more hands-on learning or more applied learning programs. Statewide there are 17 career clusters with more than 133 career pathways. In Cherokee County, 15 of the 17 career clusters are offered.

Students who complete the three courses in a career pathway have a 95.5% graduation rate statewide, and in Cherokee County the graduation rate for pathway completers is 100%. As of 2015, 47.4% of Cherokee County high school students enroll in at least one or more CTAE course, compared to 60.3% statewide. A large portion of Cherokee County students are on a college track and involved in extracurricular activities. This limits a student’s ability to take CTAE courses as electives.



Students who complete a CTAE career pathways have a 100% graduation rate—almost 17 points higher than the Cherokee County School District overall graduation rate.”

Source: Cherokee County School District

Table 2. Cherokee County CTAE Enrollment and Outcomes

	Enrollment (2015)	Pathway Completers	Percent of Pathway Completers	State Average Pathway Completers
Male	3,041	230		
Female	2,621	159		
Total	5,653	389	7%	20%

Source: Cherokee County School District, 2015 Georgia CTAE Annual Report

In 2014, Georgia began providing more flexibility and options to students as they pursued postsecondary education in high school.

Senate Bill 132, the Move On When Ready Act, streamlined existing dual-enrollment programs with one funding source and one set of rules. This act aligned funding, created incentives for secondary and postsecondary education, and created one clear pathway for high school students who are ready for postsecondary education.

Senate Bill 2 (SB 2) provides a new alternative for students to complete high school and work towards an associate degree or technical certificate at the same time. Students who have completed 9th and 10th grade and some basic core courses and been accepted into an accredited postsecondary institution can now have the college courses count towards high school requirements. A high school student could graduate on Friday with their high school diploma and receive a two-year degree on Saturday. SB 2 opens a new path for students to complete high school and be better prepared to enter the workforce after graduation.

**Senate Bill 2
Graduation Options:**

- * Complete two English courses, two mathematics courses, two science courses, two social studies courses, and one health/physical education course
- * Complete one of the following postsecondary education options:
 - Associate degree program
 - Technical college diploma program
 - At least two technical college certificate of credit programs in one specific career pathway

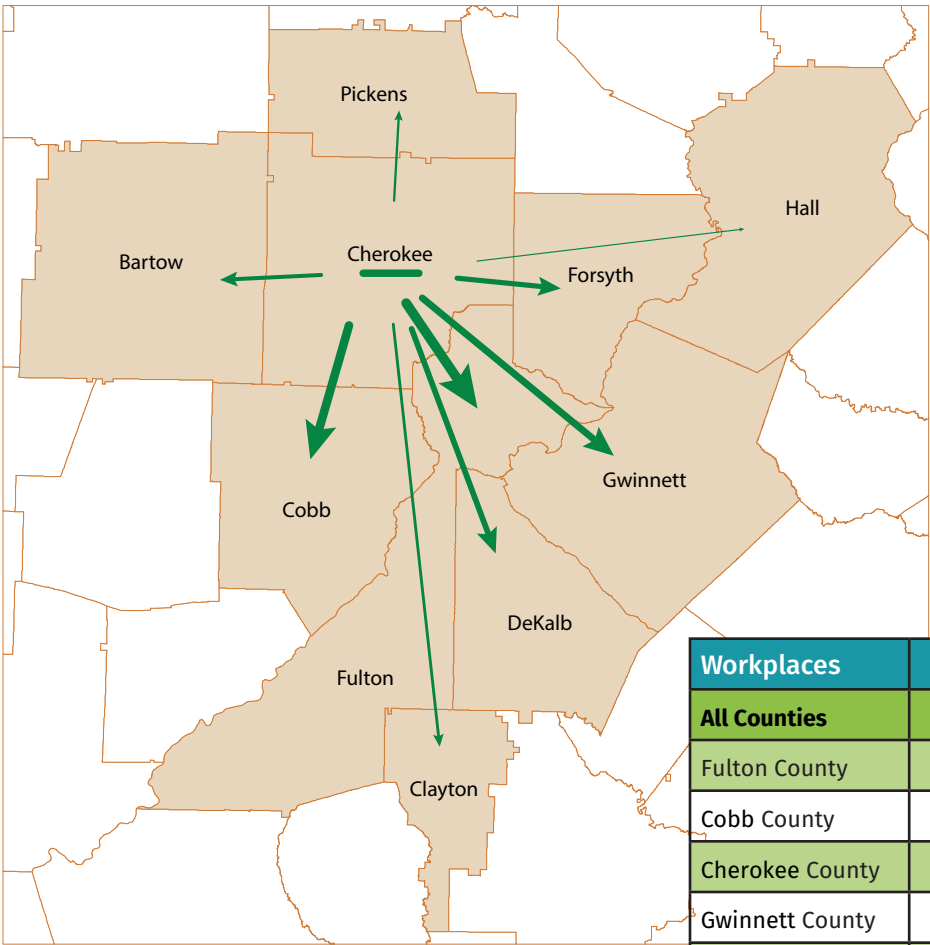
For example:

A Cherokee County student could earn a high school diploma while also completing the Industrial Maintenance and Electrical Technology Diploma program. The student would take the required secondary courses at his or her base high school and the technical college courses at Chattahoochee Technical College.

#5: Brain Drain

CASE #5

Cherokee County has a highly educated workforce, but per figure 2 nearly 80% of the residents commute outside the county each day with a majority going to either Cobb County or Fulton County. This out-commute cuts into workers’ quality of life, adds additional transportation costs, and represents talent that existing and future businesses in Cherokee could tap into.



Workplaces	Count	Share
All Counties	95,616	100.0%
Fulton County	24,293	25.4%
Cobb County	22,617	23.7%
Cherokee County	20,150	21.1%
Gwinnett County	5,906	6.2%
DeKalb County	4,820	5.0%
Forsyth County	4,141	4.3%
Bartow County	1,505	1.6%
Clayton County	828	0.9%
Pickens County	808	0.8%
Hall County	548	0.6%
All other locations	10,000	10.50%

The Case for Investing in Workforce



GOAL

Continued Economic Development
Success in Cherokee County



Employer's Workforce Needs

Business leaders from the health care, medical device, aerospace, and manufacturing industries provided input on current workforce needs in Cherokee County.



The leaders discussed several common themes:

- There is a strong need for foundational skills such as critical thinking, a strong work ethic, accountability, punctuality, team work, entrepreneurial spirit, organizational skills, and conflict resolution for entry-level employees.
- Workers are needed at all skill levels in the county, from entry-level low-skill positions to graduate-level high-skill positions.
- There is a demand for workers with training and experience in hard skills such as CNC programming, welding, laser cutting, programming, and design.
- Companies from several industries identified a common need for information technology knowledge and experience.
- Business leaders stressed the importance of strong basic education skills such as reading, writing, and basic mathematics.
- More practical experience opportunities are needed, including internships and on-the-job training to allow students to apply learning in a professional setting.
- Parents and students are unaware of career opportunities in advanced manufacturing, and perceptions of manufacturing need to change.
- Accounting and sales workers are needed.
- Microsoft Office suite skills are in demand, especially Excel.
- Graphic design skills are in demand.

The collaborative discussed the following additional workforce-related challenges:

- Some difficulty in recruiting employees that can pass background checks and drug tests for entry-level positions.
- Single high school diploma option.
- Communication and coordination between education providers and businesses.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The collaborative conducted an analysis to identify community workforce strengths, weaknesses in current efforts, external opportunities to be leveraged, and external threats or barriers to the success of workforce development efforts.

This SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis yielded critical insight into the current climate of workforce development in Cherokee County, and it provided a framework for identifying potential strategies and goals for improving the county's workforce climate.

Strengths

- Quality educational opportunities, both postsecondary and K-12
- Strong sense of community with collaborative, stable growth as a focus
- Strategic location with ample support services and a variety of business opportunities
- Quality and diversity of workforce, both locally and regionally
- Cherokee Office of Economic Development and Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce

Weaknesses

- Limited communication among industry, education, and other community partners at present
- Lack of a strategic plan and designated champion for workforce development goals
- Challenge of overcoming negative perceptions of certain jobs or industries by potential workers, current students, and parents
- Limited public transportation access and infrastructure
- Difficult to keep graduates in the area

Opportunities

- Expansion and development of internship and apprenticeship opportunities
- Creation of procedure and platform for job matching and information sharing
- Soft skills development through embedded training as well as specialized curricula with associated partnerships and opportunities for work experience
- Many organizations and industry leaders invested in workforce development
- Development of a college and career academy to offer specialized training and educational opportunities for students while fulfilling the needs of target industries
- Possibility of leveraging collaborative community mindset for shared progress
- Expansion of diploma opportunities to allow for more diverse student experiences

Threats

- Competing globally, nationally, and regionally for talent. Business can relocate production where comparable labor is less expensive
- Differing expectations of younger workers regarding flexibility of work schedule and relaxed work environment; job hopping
- Shifts in workforce demographics and an aging workforce
- Negative impression of certain types of positions or industries
- Lack of critical soft skills such as punctuality and customer service
- Limited access to public transportation

A close-up photograph of two young girls, one Black and one white, looking intently at a tablet computer. The girl on the left is wearing a blue sweater and has an orange and blue ribbon in her hair. The girl on the right has long, dark, curly hair. They are both focused on the screen, which is partially visible at the bottom right. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting like a classroom or library.

VISION

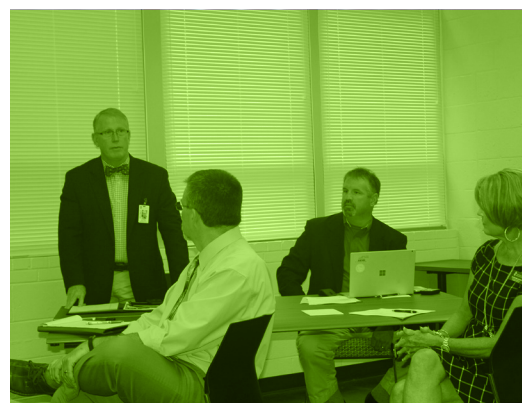
The collaborative developed a common vision to guide its work.

A teal-colored arrow pointing downwards, containing the text "Cherokee Workforce Vision".

Cherokee
Workforce
Vision

Create and support collaborative partnerships that will grow and retain local talent to meet current and emerging workforce needs.

To accomplish this vision and capitalize on the strengths and opportunities identified, the collaborative developed **four priorities.**



Cherokee Priorities

The collaborative developed four key priorities for improving the workforce pipeline in Cherokee County: (1) internships: making it real, (2) innovative career preparation, (3) business and education alliances, and (4) sustaining the momentum and aligning resources. Each priority has an overarching goal, measures of success, and detailed action plan items. Implementation of the four priorities will have a positive impact on the workforce in Cherokee County, enhance the county’s economic development competitiveness, ensure students graduate with a higher level of skills and work experience, and ultimately improve the quality of life for residents.



These strategies directly connect with overarching economic development goals identified in the Opportunity Cherokee report, and they build the foundation for long-term economic development success in Cherokee County.

Training opportunities that provide applicable experience prepare students and trainees to meet industry expectations. This real-world experience also serves as a recruitment pipeline for local companies. It is important that these programs mirror industry needs. The CWC members feel strongly that experiential learning through internships, externships, on-the-job-training, and other hands-on learning opportunities is critical to building a strong talent pipeline in Cherokee. An early CWC goal is to increase the number and quality of professional experience opportunities for students and trainees.

GOAL #1: INTERNSHIPS: MAKING IT REAL

Retain and attract Cherokee County graduates through high-quality internship experiences for secondary and postsecondary students.

Measures of Success (Supporting Data):

- Number of work-based learning participants from Cherokee County School District each year
- Number of internships filled by CWC participating companies each year

Action Plan Items
1. Increase the number of high school work-based learning students.
2. Launch a 20-person competitive postsecondary internship for Cherokee County students enrolled in Georgia colleges and universities (Young Professionals Scholarship).
3. Develop a high-caliber internship program that will increase the retention of the best and the brightest Cherokee graduates.

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS SCHOLARSHIP

To retain the best and the brightest Cherokee County graduates, the CWC will launch a young professional's scholarship. This program will provide high-quality internship experiences after the first year of college. Students will apply and interview for the positions during their senior year of high school. Local companies will employ interns and will participate in the interview and selection process. Interns will be offered college credit, participate in professional development, and have access to educational and social programs during the internship program. The program will connect college students with key Cherokee businesses and help showcase the opportunities in Cherokee County.

To ensure that Cherokee County has the skilled workforce needed to meet current and future employer needs, the education system will need to offer more creative and adaptive learning opportunities that provide students multiple avenues to successful employment. Leveraging current efforts as well as integrating innovative and responsive career preparation into educational experiences will allow students to develop in-demand skills and explore multiple opportunities for educational and professional growth. To achieve the innovative career preparation goal, the county will need to increase the number of students completing a CTAE pathway and pilot a college and career academy model focused on advanced manufacturing. Innovative use of new state programs like Move On When Ready and Senate Bill 2 may provide alternative paths to high school graduation while allowing students to earn some college course credit.

GOAL #2: INNOVATIVE CAREER PREPARATION

Pilot a Cherokee College and Career Academy Model
A college and career academy is a specialized high school that provides a unique learning environment that focuses on the needs of the local community, industries, and workforce. College and career academies combine core academic courses, career and technical education courses, work-based learning, and community partnerships to create a talent pipeline and improved student outcomes.

- Measures of Success (Supporting Data):**
- Number of industry-recognized certifications earned by students
 - Number of students who complete CTAE pathways
 - Number of postsecondary credits earned in high-school
 - Create programs of study aligned to the talent needs of the businesses participating in the CWC

Action Plan Items
1. Launch a college and career academy study committee.
2. Increase enrollment in the existing high school CTAE programs.

Strong, collaborative, and responsive partnerships between education and industry leaders were identified early on as a key element of workforce development in Cherokee County. The community is home to many educational institutions including Chattahoochee Technical College, Reinhardt University, and Kennesaw State University. Additionally, the local Cherokee County School District offers a variety of opportunities for student involvement in experiential learning.

GOAL #3: BUSINESS AND EDUCATION ALLIANCES

Strengthen partnerships and align resources and programs through purposeful business and industry interactions.

Measures of Success (Supporting Data):

- Number of externships completed by faculty from Cherokee County School District, Kennesaw State University, Chattahoochee Technical College, and Georgia Highlands College, and Reinhardt University
- Number of outreach events conducted by business with an education partner

Action Plan Items
1. Establish a communication plan to engage and inform the business community of the CWC and identify business needs.
2. Facilitate regular communication among business and education partners through annual or quarterly meetings.
3. Educate parents and students about multiple career pathways (including postsecondary and non-postsecondary opportunities), benefits, and progression opportunities within Cherokee County industries.

From the discussion of relevant data, analysis of current and emerging needs, and collaborative goal setting, the CWC created a framework for implementing and sustaining workforce development strategies that are relevant, impactful, and responsive to industry needs.

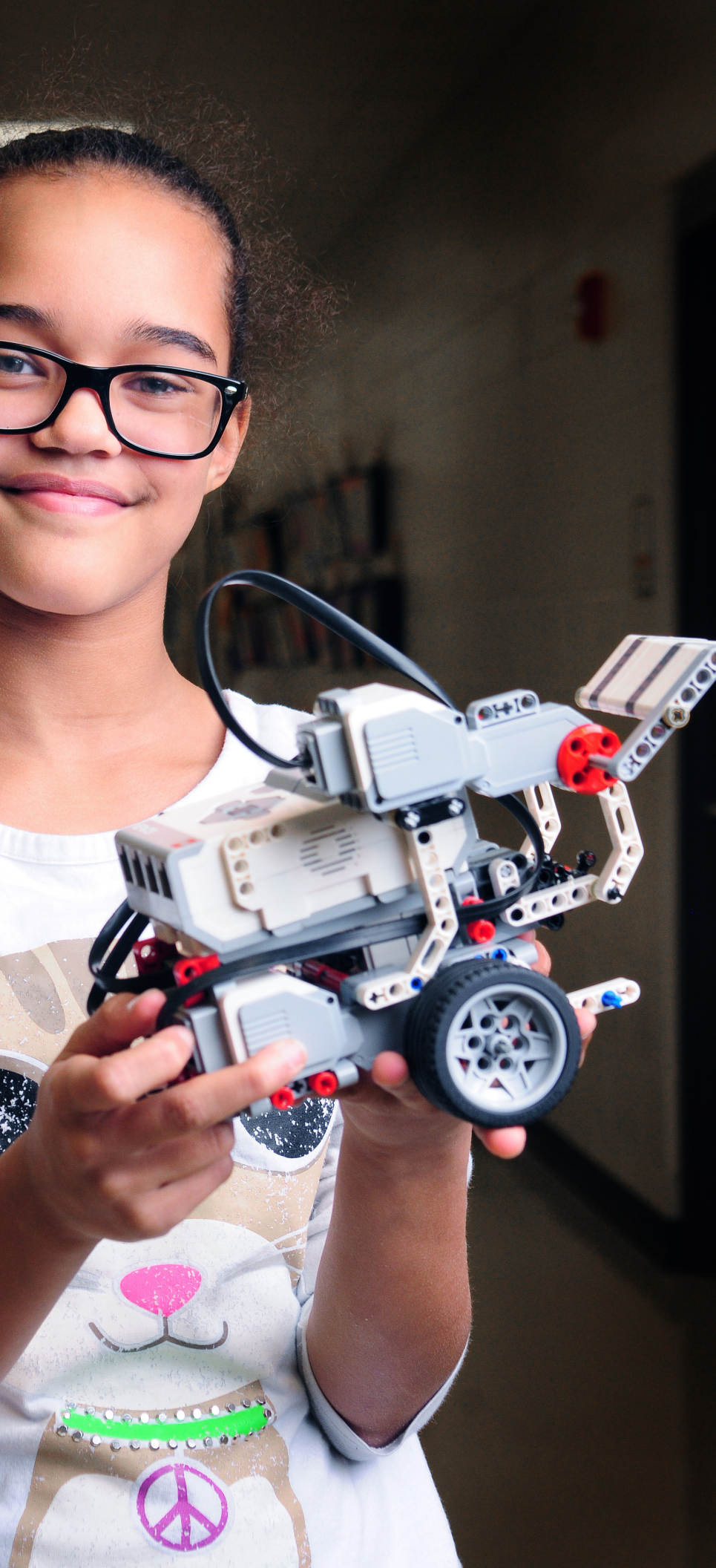
Hiring a Workforce Program Manager is crucial to sustaining the CWC’s work. This position will serve as the central point of contact for industry, education, and community leaders. This position will be dedicated to the complex and comprehensive work of supporting workforce development in Cherokee County through facilitating and supporting partnerships, engaging businesses, and managing centralized programmatic aspects of workforce development. The CWC has taken initial steps toward filling the Workforce Program Manager position within the next six months.

GOAL #4: SUSTAINING THE MOMENTUM

Strengthening partnerships for talent development.

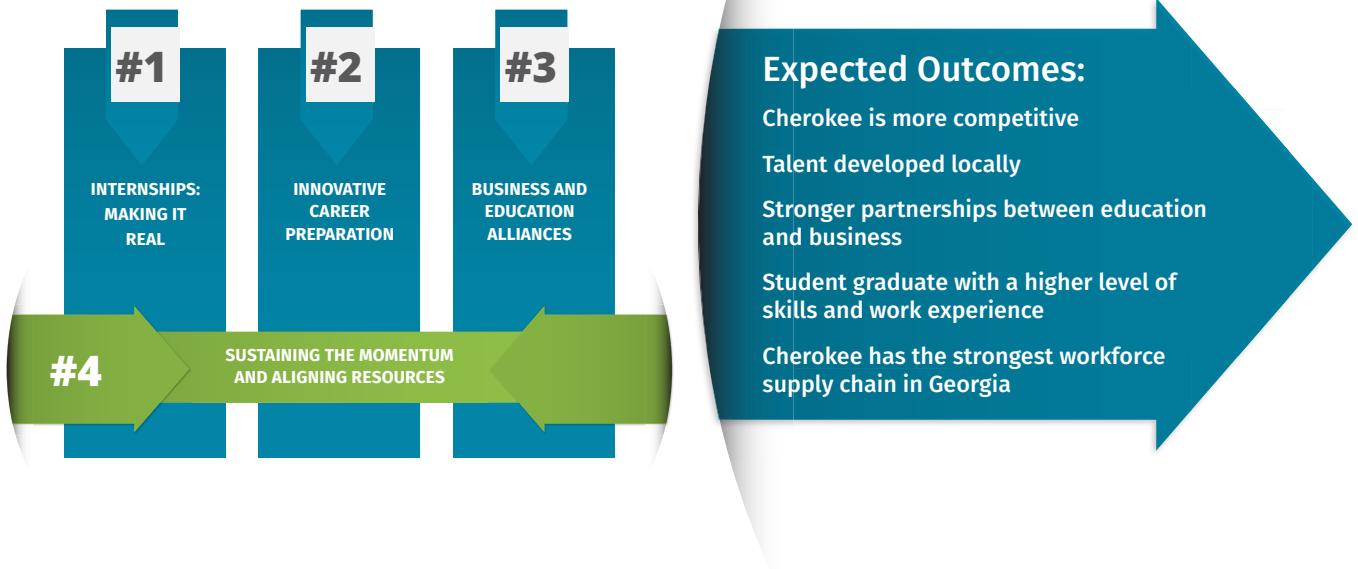
- Measures of Success (Supporting Data):**
- Workforce Program Manager hired
 - Business leader heading up the workforce effort
 - Regular meetings to monitor progress and help business and education partners address workforce needs

Action Plan Items
1. Hire a Workforce Program Manager.
2. Identify and invite a business leader to chair the effort.
3. Launch implementation teams for each goal and action item.
4. Develop a communications and engagement plan.



Industry Needs
Education and
Training Programs

CONCLUSION



The Opportunity Cherokee strategic plan identified workforce development as one of the key strategies for continued economic development success. Cherokee County is primed for future wins with a highly educated workforce, a growing population, and a strong economic development organization. A robust pipeline of skilled workers and systematic support of business and industry will help attract companies seeking talent while also retaining skilled workers already within the county.

In response to this opportunity, the Cherokee Workforce Collaborative

convened three times over a two-month period to analyze data, listen to business leaders, conduct a SWOT analysis of its current workforce development assets, and develop strategic priorities. Moving forward, the CWC plans to hire a Workforce Program Manager and focus its work in three targeted areas to implement programs and solutions identified during the strategic planning process.

As the implementation of Cherokee's workforce development plan moves forward, the support of industry, government, and education leaders is critical. The strategies identified in

this action plan require a collaborative approach for successful implementation and maximum benefit to all Cherokee County citizens and businesses. The CWC's work has made clear the link between workforce development and economic development, and the group's momentum has positioned Cherokee County to be more competitive, develop talent locally, increase the skills and opportunities for all students, strengthen partnerships between education and business, and develop pathways for students to return to Cherokee County for employment after completing postsecondary education.



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