

SETWIN/DOL Grant Summary Report on Focus Groups

Focus Groups Conducted

Employers

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Economic Development

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Student

High School Lamar State College, Orange

Lamar University Apprenticeship

Superintendents

Apprenticeship & Training Association of Texas (ATAT)

Summary

Employer

Participants identified the skills they expected applicants and employees to have. These included the

- expected skills of communication,
 - ethics,
 - problem solving,
 - honesty, etc.,
- along with some unexpected skills which included
- tolerance with younger workers apathy and
 - being accountable for their work.
- Participants cited an increase in the use of staffing agencies and internet services such as monster.com and company websites as a source employees.
 - Job skill shortages mentioned by participants included a lack of science and math skills, even in college graduates.
 - Most participants in varying degrees cited absenteeism as a problem. Turnover is a major problem in some industries such as the health industry but not a problem in the petrochemical industry.

Employers use educational entities for customized training and refresher training but would like to seem them offer other services such as:

- career planning,
- team building and problem-solving,
- business ethics,
- interviewing skills
- realities of the work place.

Labor market information required by employers should be no older than 6months to a year and consist of:

- wage data,
- job openings,
- availability of trained workforce and graduating college students,
- reliable unemployment rate, and
- lay-off information.

The workforce system of Southeast Texas was rated an average of 4.5 on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest. The system may be doing a good job for the low-income applicant but not for the employer.

Economic Development

The consensus of the group was that education is an economic development tool with emphasis on college. Education in Southeast Texas was rated 7 on a scale of 1-10. Most ED's have coordinated with Lamar and with high schools in the region and had a fair idea of the services provided by each.

When asked about the services they should provide, the group mentioned the following:

- lists of programs and exemplary schools,
- teach more employability skills,
- more co-enrollment of high school students at Lamar.
- Jr. Achievement as school curriculum,
- industry-specific computer classes and

Most of the group seemed to know about the WDB but few had used their services. The group would like to see the Board

- provide more current LMI,
- serve more underemployed,
- follow-up on job applicants, and
- market their services better

POST should also have a grant writer available to write grants for the region.

Students

- Most of participants had not made a career decision.
- For the ones who had made a decision, the people who had the most influence on their decision consisted of parents, teachers, career model from work-based experience> But only 3 of 11 mentioned a counselor.
- Most participants felt that seeing and talking to people on the job was more effective than counselors, brochures, or aptitude tests.
- Students felt that there was not a career decision-making process at their high school.
- Suggestions for improving the career decision-making process at their school included:
 - concentration on career awareness activities in later grades and for non-Career And Technology Education students,
 - provide more career counselors/counseling, ▪ more work-based activitie

Superintendents

- All participants agreed that public education is an economic development tool, although it falls somewhat outside the role of the district.
- ED's should be involved but secondary education should be general rather than specific to industry.
- The district's role in ED is to offer a quality district for the community as a positive incentive for attracting new industry.
- One of the roles of the district is to prepare students for the work place but there is confusion as to how this role is to be accomplished.
- The role of the district is not to get jobs for their students but to provide a solid core of academics and activities to prepare them with the necessary tools for success.
- There seems to be a two-track system for students to choose from in high school--one for college-bound and one for non-college bound. The district should ensure that students are not locked into one track.
- In an unexpected development, superintendents told us that since the world of work is changing so rapidly, rapid career changes are expected and therefore, students should not be encouraged to

make a specific career decision but should concentrate on a solid core curriculum that will allow them to exercise career options upon graduation.

- The participants offered suggestions on how employers can help to improve a district's success. These suggestions include:
 - understanding the problems of public education,
 - being less critical and more supportive,
 - continuing to set high expectations but offer feedback and assistance to districts
- Types of assistance recommended were:
 - volunteers,
 - work site availability,
 - exerting political influence to increase funding and reduce tax exemptions,
 - promote parental involvement, and
 - planning,
 - resources,
 - think regionally when supporting education

Apprenticeship Training

- Apprenticeship programs find apprentices mostly through ads, career days, word-of-mouth, family referrals, and pre-apprentice referrals from employers.
- Apprentices decide on a career in the crafts due to:
 - Family referrals
 - High wages and benefits
 - Guaranteed job placement
 - Observing relatives' success in the crafts
- Skills lacking in available applicants include:
 - reading, writing, verbal and math skills
 - drafting skills
 - punctuality or commitment -- high school attendance not good
 - ability to read measuring tools or blueprints
- Public schools are doing a poor job of preparing students for jobs in construction or apprenticeship programs.
- Apprenticeship programs are doing a poor job of promoting themselves and their training.
- Drugs are a problem in apprenticeship programs, both for recruiting and retention
- Lack of respect for work ethics and respect -- "What can you do for me" attitude is hard to overcome.
- Industry lacks resolve to put funds into workforce training -- employers complain about quality of workers but don't support training programs
- Employment problems for apprentices and journeymen
 - Loss of local industry
 - Some employers don't want to pay a livable wage
 - Failure of local government to protect local workers -- local jobs being taken by out-of-town workers who don't contribute to the local economy
 - Drugs and transportation
 - Youth are leaving the area looking for quality of life
 - "Open-shop" employers don't contact apprenticeship programs for workers -- lack of communication between "open-shop" and union providers
 - Contractors who hire workers who lack license or certification
- How can the WDB help the apprenticeship program
 - Supplement the apprenticeship programs
 - More referrals of applicants to apprenticeship programs
 - Provide marketing of apprenticeship programs to job seekers