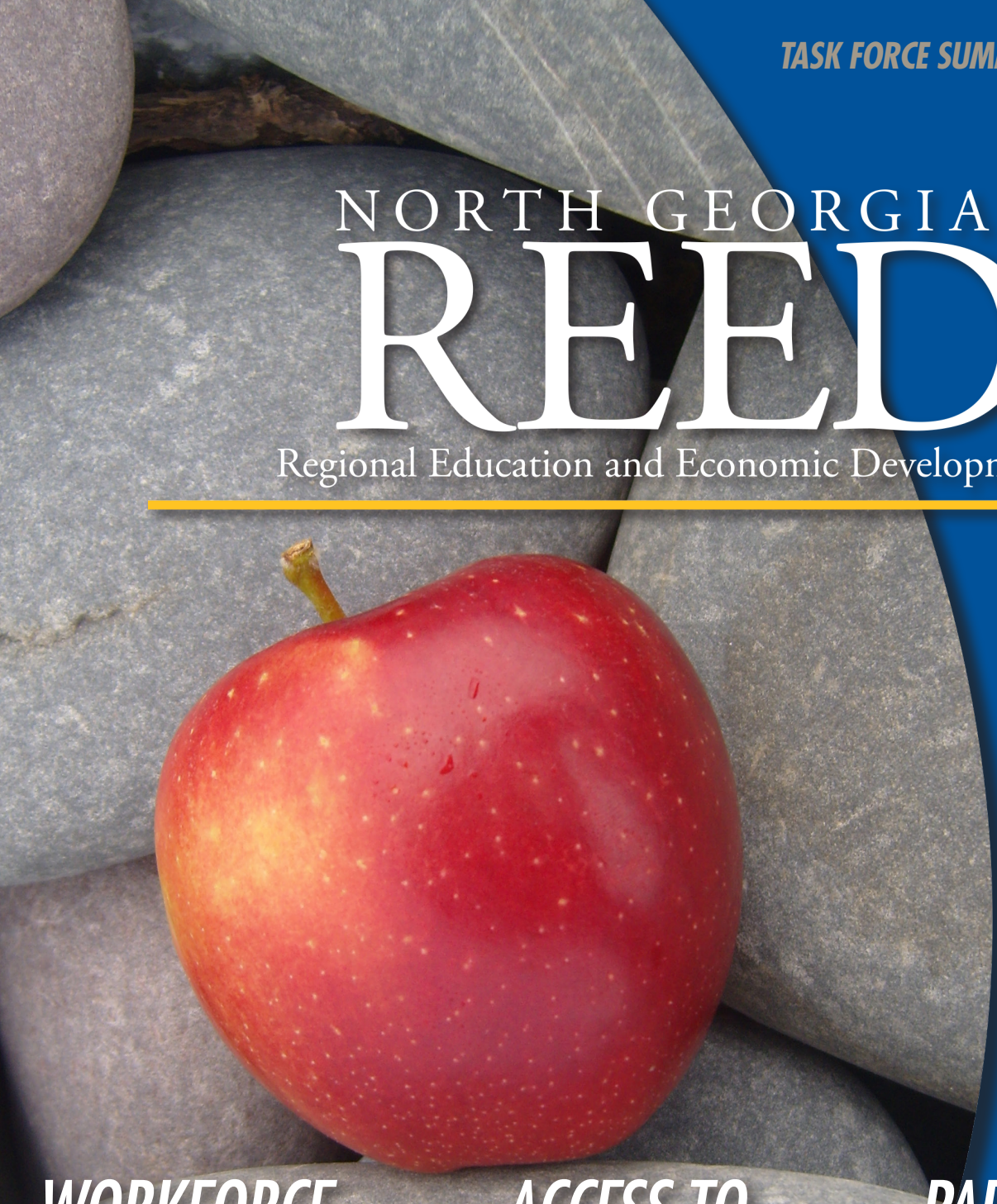
TASK FORCE SUMMARY • FEBRUARY 2014

NORTH GEORGIA REED

Regional Education and Economic Development



WORKFORCE READINESS

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION

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"By 2020, it is projected that over 60 percent of jobs in Georgia will require some form of a college education, whether a certificate, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree. Today, only 42 percent of the state's young adults, its burgeoning workforce, qualify."

—Complete College Georgia

"The REED Project is a unique opportunity for the university system to support innovation, entrepreneurship, and business development in our communities."

—Mark Lytle, Vice Chancellor for Economic Development
University System of Georgia

"Facilitating the REED Task Force Meetings and Summit allowed me to truly experience the collective spirit of the Northeast Georgia region. It is this unity of purpose–increasing educational opportunities and strengthening local economies–that makes the REED initiative so important. It will require an intentional effort to maintain the momentum, but our communities are worth it."

—Dr. Janet Marling
National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students

"It is vitally important that our regional education and community leaders work in partnership to identify the needs of our region and the resources necessary to achieve our goals."

—Dr. Bonita C. Jacobs, President
University of North Georgia

NORTH GEORGIA
REED
Regional Education and Economic Development

ADVANCING THE REGION
ONE GAMECHANGER AT A TIME

Greetings, Friends of the Northeast Georgia Region,

The Complete College Georgia initiative has revealed an alarming statistic: only 17 percent of Georgia's public high school freshmen will graduate on time from a two- or four-year college or university. In addition, many of our young people are not prepared to join the workforce of tomorrow. To address these issues and positively impact the future of our region, the University of North Georgia established the Regional Education and Economic Development (REED) Task Force, a partnership of more than 100 invited business, education, government, and community leaders from a 27-county area of the northeast region of the state. These dedicated task force members took on the charge of identifying the challenges and opportunities for ensuring that more of our K-12 students will succeed as adults and contribute to the economic prosperity of their communities.

The University conducted three, daylong task force meetings held across the region. Consistently, the conversation came back to three overarching themes for change:

- **workforce readiness**
- **access to education**
- **partnerships and collaborations**

This summary presents task force recommendations for action around the three themes and examples of existing models of success—or "gamechangers." REED's three themes will be part of our university's new strategic plan, reflecting our commitment to strengthening educational opportunities and economic development in the Northeast Georgia region.

My hope is that you will use this report as a resource to continue the momentum established by the REED Task Force. Advancing our region requires a collaborative effort and the following pages demonstrate that we are well on our way. As a public university with four campuses and over 15,000 students, the University of North Georgia has a responsibility to the citizens of our region, and we are committed to "kicking the rocks out of the road" with you. I look forward to sharing in the success of this continued collaboration.

Sincerely,

Bonita Jacobs

Bonita C. Jacobs, PhD
President
University of North Georgia

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Cumming • Dahlonega • Gainesville • Oconee

REED Task Force Meetings

The North Georgia REED Task Force met three times during the summer of 2013. Sites for the meetings were strategically located across the northeast area of Georgia. Many of the communities in this 27-county region are located in small cities and towns adjacent to rural settings traversed by mountains, rolling hills, or long winding rivers. Each site was selected to reflect the communities in their area and to provide reasonable access to all task force members.

In June and July, members of the REED Task Force, comprising over 100 invited government, business, nonprofit, and education leaders, gathered in Blairsville, Gainesville, and Watkinsville. At these meetings, they identified and discussed opportunities for increasing educational attainment and strengthening the regional economy.

In October of 2013, the REED Task Force met again, this time in Dahlonega, to participate in a summit, a day-long opportunity for task force members and special guests. There, they discussed findings and learned from gamechangers, examples that illustrated the trends which emerged from earlier task force input.

While task force members were invited to attend all three REED Task Force meetings, the majority of members chose to attend the meeting held in, or nearest to, his or her community. Several members did attend all three meetings, providing a rich prospective for discussions.

Blairsville

A small town with a population of nearly 700, it is the seat of Union County. Two-thirds of Union County is designated as part of the Chattahoochee National Forest, and the county is contiguous to the North Carolina state line. Blairsville sits on a major highway, allowing it to serve as a hub of activity for the north Georgia mountain region.

Blairsville's was the first and northernmost meeting, held on June 16 at United Community Bank.

Gainesville

A diversely-populated medium-sized city centrally located in the REED 27-county service area, the seat of Hall County is a fast growing community and a rapidly expanding economic engine in northeast Georgia.

The Gainesville meeting was held on June 27 at the University of North Georgia Gainesville campus.

Watkinsville

A small town of 3,000, Watkinsville is the seat of Oconee County. It is a prosperous "bedroom" community of Athens-Clarke County which is experiencing tremendous growth, planning for and attracting new economic investments and developments.

Watkinsville's was the southernmost REED meeting, held on July 2 at the University of North Georgia Oconee campus.

Blairsville Major Themes:

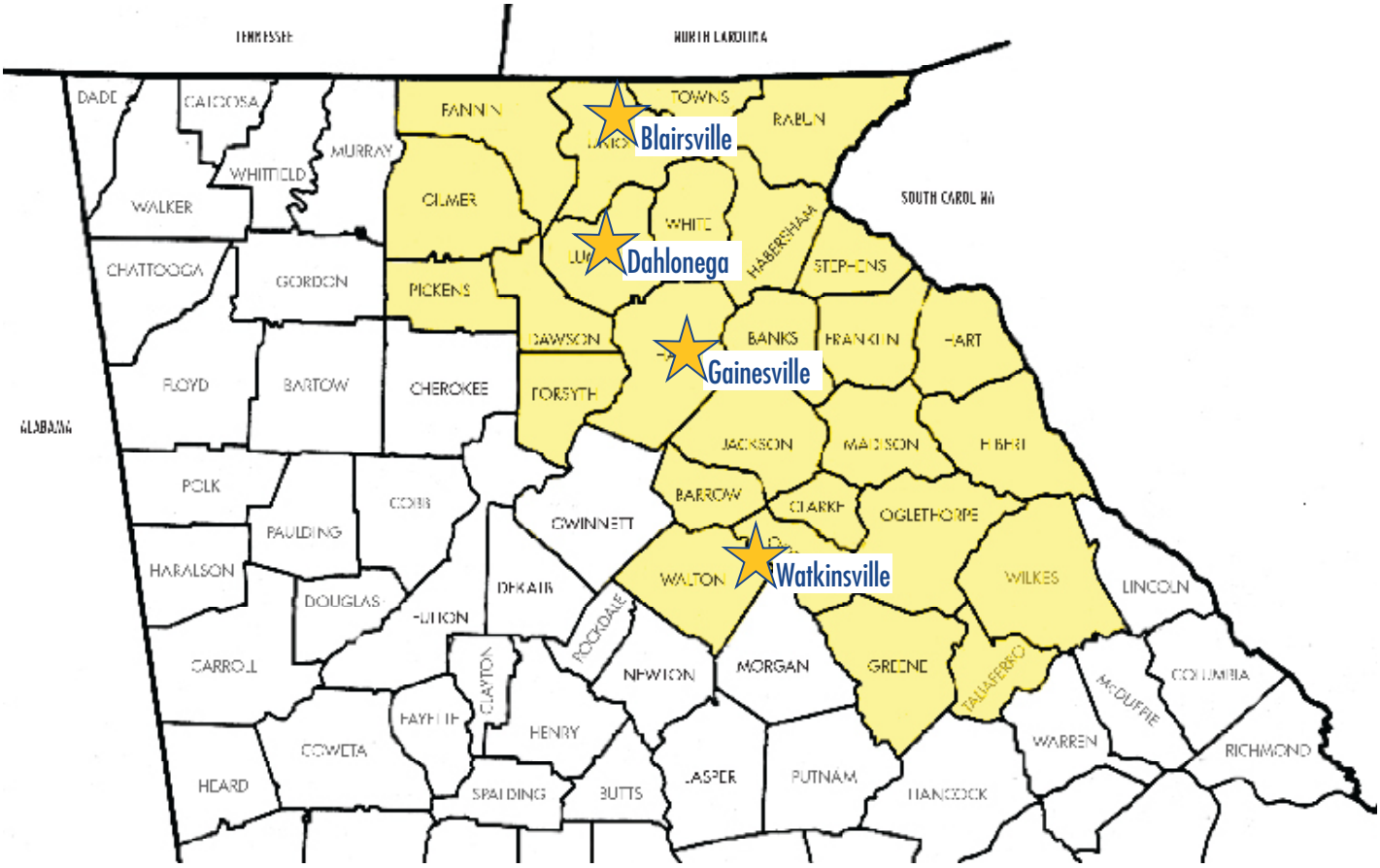
- Connect education and jobs
- Focus education on children
- Increase graduation rates
- Embrace regionalism
- Create infrastructure for growth
- Balance between growth and quality of life
- Provide jobs for people to stay here or move here

Gainesville Major Themes:

- Remove barriers to success
- Explore flexible models for instruction and learning
- Communicate the importance of education
- Provide the time to accomplish goals
- Formalize a unity of effort
- Build on current assets
- Market the region
- Communicate with each other
- Collaborate and trust
- Create global connections

Watkinsville Major Themes:

- Develop quality leadership early
- Collaborate strategically and intentionally
- Identify and overcome barriers
- Build on assets
- Create partnerships
- Broaden diversity
- Prioritize education and make it relevant
- Collaborate and share
- Acknowledge educational experience inside and outside of the classroom
- Foster entrepreneurship
- Partner with education



Although each area of the region has its own particular notion of community, the region as a whole values *civic character, natural assets,* and a *high quality of life.*

—Task Force

REED Summit • Dahlonega

On October 16, 2013, the REED Task Force convened for a summit at the University of North Georgia campus in Dahlonega. A small mountain city, Dahlonega is the seat of Lumpkin County. This site of America's first gold rush is located ten miles from the southern genesis of the Appalachian Trail and an hour north of Atlanta. Each year, over a million people visit this tourist destination spot, including the Dahlonega campus, the former site of a United States Mint.

The REED summit was convened next door to this historic site, which is now the University of North Georgia (UNG) campus administration building. Here, 75 Task Force members, state-level guests, and presenters discussed the three major themes that emerged from input gathered at the Task Force meetings: **Workforce Readiness**, **Access to Education**, and **Partnerships and Collaborations.** Summit participants listened to leaders in local government, education, and business who presented examples of successful regional action and partnership. Each case illustrated some of the powerful recommendations identified by the Task Force as strategies for increasing opportunities in education, training, and partnerships, leading to increased prosperity for the region.

WORKFORCE READINESS

21ST CENTURY SOFT SKILLS

- Communicate effectively
- Work independently
- Follow instructions
- Dress appropriately
- Manage time
- Make decisions
- Collaborate and lead
- Serve the customer
- Solve problems
- Adapt to new situations
- Learn new skills
- Demonstrate basic etiquette
- Take personal responsibility

—REED Task Force

"We need our students today to be the innovators, entrepreneurs, and creators of tomorrow."

—Will Schofield, Superintendent Hall County Schools

Workforce Readiness is the knowledge, skills, abilities, habits, and characteristics required to be successfully employed. REED Task Force members identified workforce readiness as an immediate need for economic prosperity in the region.

So that citizens can effectively enter the labor force, the region must prepare young people to become business owners, entrepreneurs, and employees. Preparation should begin as early as middle school and continue throughout a person's work life.

Readying enough people to meet the region's workforce demands will require flexible programs, a continuum of education options, and innovative delivery methods.

Task Force Recommendations

- **Provide students with real-life experiences through apprenticeships, internships, job shadowing, and on-the-job training**
- **Expose students to businesses through virtual and onsite tours**
- **Partner with community, business, and state organizations**
- **Provide youth leadership and mentoring programs**
- **Aim strategies to reach middle and high school students**
- **Provide examples of success through modeling and mentoring**
- **Promote dual enrollment in high school and college**
- **Provide access to multiple, flexible pathways to affordable education**
- **Increase scholarships related to business and industry**
- **Encourage students to think like an "entrepreneur"**
- **Get the message out: soft skills matter!**

"As others around you obtain more education, their wages rise–and yours do, too."

—A Matter of Degrees, Milken Institute, 2013

WORKFORCE READINESS GAMECHANGER
Hall County District Work-Based Learning Program

The Governor's Office of Workforce Development reports that a lack of soft skills accounts for 45 percent of Georgia employees being terminated during probationary periods on new jobs. Employers complain that their personnel have no idea how to greet clients, handle a phone call, dress for the office, or work in a team. In response to this problem, the Hall County School District has developed and implemented the Work-Based Learning Program. This "real-world" learning initiative, which serves as a pilot for the Georgia's Business Ethics Student Training (GeorgiaBEST) program, provides students with the proper skills for successful employment. GeorgiaBEST emphasizes those people skills, or "soft" skills, essential for success in the workplace. Students apply knowledge through internships with organizations across the county and receive the hands-on work experience they need to successfully enter the workforce while in school or upon graduation. Because students are assessed on their abilities as they transfer knowledge learned in a classroom to real world applications on the job, they learn that successful employment will depend on their daily performances and decisions. Since beginning the program in 2012, the Hall County Work-based Learning Program has awarded certificates to more than 120 of its students.

"We have over 400 teacher education students in public schools everyday, taking coursework and practice teaching. Being on site, and on a daily basis, allows our students to show young people what a college student does and 'looks like.' At the same time, the school's experienced classroom teachers are modeling for our future teachers, demonstrating career professionalism and success."

—Bob Michael, Dean
UNG College of Education

Change the Game: Workforce Readiness

- **Partner with the community**
- **Agree on a unity of purpose and goals for success**
- **Take advantage of emerging technologies to develop innovative models**
- **Engage students with the community through work and service**
- **Match students with mentors who will model workplace skills and abilities**
- **Teach students core work ethics and behaviors**
- **Assist each student in developing a plan**
- **Assess student progress toward meeting goals**
- **Recognize and celebrate student success**

"Without a doubt, the soft skills issue is an economic development issue. GeorgiaBEST is a program that teaches the skills needed in the workplace and helps ensure that our future workforce is prepared to meet the challenges ahead of them. Through GeorgiaBEST, we are closing the soft skills gap and opening the door to new business growth and expansion in Georgia."

—Mark Butler, Georgia Commissioner of Labor

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION

- Undergraduate and graduate degrees
- Dual enrollment in high school and college
- Technical college degrees
- Continued education courses
- Career academy certificates
- Second career training
- Veterans programs
- Online programs
- Specialty certificates
- Soft skills training
- Internships and apprenticeships

—REED Task Force

The state of Georgia has a plan to increase the education attainment level of its citizens. Complete College Georgia is a partnership between the University System of Georgia and the Technical College System of Georgia that involves 60 institutions of higher education, each of which has a specific plan for college retention and completion. A major goal of Complete College Georgia is to provide access to education to a greater number of traditional and non-traditional populations. Specifically, it recognizes that "in addition to academic readiness, students need information, encouragement, and hands-on support in order to access, and be successful in, college." The REED Task Force agrees. It identified three strategies for increasing access to and succeeding in education: (1) providing multiple points of access to education, (2) reaching out to and supporting nontraditional populations, and (3) assisting with challenges that impact the learning success of both traditional and nontraditional students.

Education programs that are affordable and flexible and take advantage of innovative delivery opportunities will address many challenges. To implement such tailored programs requires collaboration and commitment at the community level. Program leaders must keep pace with the needs of the region's workforce and, at the same time, ensure that students receive a high quality education.

Task Force Recommendations

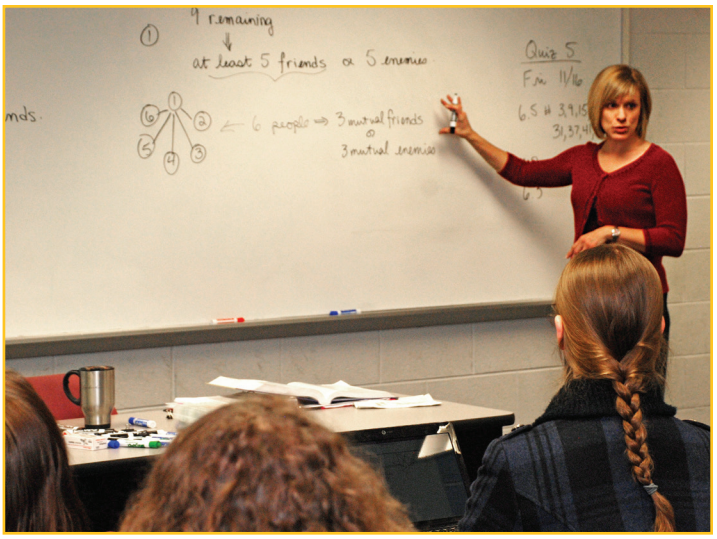
- **Give students a vision and assist them in navigating the education experience**
- **Consider the barriers of poverty, language, and culture**
- **Implement family and social support systems that will assist students with the challenges of daycare, transportation, and financing**
- **Provide students access to technology in their communities**
- **Offer adequate scholarships, lowering the cost of access to post-secondary education**
- **Design education projects and programs that take advantage of technology and increase participation**

ACCESS TO EDUCATION GAMECHANGER:
Washington-Wilkes Career Center

Washington, a small town located 50 miles from Athens, Georgia, is the county seat of Wilkes County; it is the first county formed under the state constitution in 1777. Both communities are often referred to as "Washington-Wilkes." In 2007, under the leadership of the county's board of commissioners, Washington-Wilkes leaders responded to a lack of access to education for its residents by raising funds within the local community for a new program that would be designed to fit the area's needs. For the next several years, community leaders toured career academies across the state and considered the best model for the Washington-Wilkes community. In 2012, after several years of planning in partnership with Athens Technical College, the Washington-Wilkes governments, the Georgia Department of Corrections, and other local organizations collaborated to establish the Washington-Wilkes Career Center. The career center provides basic and remedial math courses, preparatory academic courses at the secondary level, English-as-a-second-language classes, and basic industry and business training. Since it opened in April of 2013, the Washington-Wilkes Career Center has experienced a five-fold increase in educational activity.

"To be successful, we have to take responsibility for our own future. If we don't have a future for our children, then we don't have a future for our community. This means a long-term commitment to the education of the individual. We're talking about 50, 60, or 70 years."

—David Jenkins, Director of Economic Development
Washington, Georgia



"Our community members need to prepare for tomorrow through education beyond the K-12 setting, and they need to be able to access it in the community so they won't have to leave."

—Ed Geddings, Member
Wilkes County Board of Commissioners

Change the Game: Access to Education

- **Use emerging technologies to support instruction**
- **Work with what you've got to address challenges to education**
- **Offer a variety of educational opportunities**
- **Partner with local organizations and communities**
- **Provide adult education services at no charge**
- **Ensure the completion of the General Educational Development test from every student**
- **Educate the incarcerated, those who lack basic education and training**

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION

EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

- Define goals
- Think in terms of the future
- Encourage flexibility and innovation
- Provide opportunities for new leadership
- Build on assets and strengths
- Include multiple perspectives
- Bring funding to communities
- Share their stories of success

—REED Task Force

"Building on the unique strengths and partnerships of the region and community, the Ty Cobb project is an economic driver for the region and has improved the regional competitiveness of the local economy."

—Heather Feldman, Director of Economic Development
Georgia Mountains Regional Commission

Partnerships and collaborations are purposeful relationships and targeted efforts created through the interactions of multiple parties and organizations. REED Task Force members identified Partnerships and Collaborations as an immediate need for economic growth in the region. Through partnerships and collaborations, communities can achieve goals that the individual or single organization could not. The key to partnerships and collaboration is cross-agency sharing: sharing in costs, responsibilities, workloads, and commitment to success. As the region increases workforce readiness and provides greater access to education, its communities will need strategic partnerships and collaborations to attract and support regional businesses and their educated employees.

Task Force Recommendations

- **Break out of the "survivor" mode and allocate the necessary resources for planning**
- **Plan thoroughly, strategically, and intentionally**
- **Develop clear definitions**
- **Pool resources and build on what is already there**
- **Secure local political support**
- **Seek private-public partnerships**
- **Use emerging technologies to assist the plan and to communicate**
- **Involve talented leaders and entrepreneurs**
- **Broaden diversity and adjust to difference**
- **Embrace geographic shifts**
- **Reach across sectors and jurisdictional lines**
- **Create trust by downplaying ego and concern for who gets the credit**
- **See the project through to the end**

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION GAMECHANGER
Ty Cobb Regional Medical Center

In 2007, Franklin and Hart Counties faced the closing of two failing local hospitals, forcing residents to leave the larger community for immediate and longterm healthcare needs. A study of the problem recommended constructing a new facility, but undertaking to finance a new facility could not be more ill-timed.

In 2008, the nation experienced a tremendous economic downturn, so conventional funding was unavailable. However, Franklin County and the leaders and communities of Hartwell, Lavonia, and Royston were determined to build a new hospital: the Ty Cobb Regional Medical Center. Through partnerships and collaborations, community leaders teamed up with non-profit organizations, government agencies, and a consortium of over 60 physicians to invest in the medical center. Today, the Ty Cobb Regional Medical Center is a $72 million, 56-bed facility that has saved over 300 jobs, added 25 new jobs, and generated over $300 million for the region. It models the kind of partnerships and collaborations that can work when a region is determined to fulfill a need and lead with vision.

"The Ty Cobb Regional Medical Center Project is one of the best examples of a public-private collaborative partnership that I have ever been privileged to work with during my career. The sheer scope and magnitude of the project and the amount of time invested by all of the players necessary to carry the project to completion is a testament to their dedication and professionalism."

—Gary Fesperman, City Manager
Lavonia, Georgia

"I have worked with a number of industrial and commercial projects; however, the Ty Cobb Regional Medical Center Project presented the most challenges to the players and partners in some of the worst economic conditions that we have ever attempted to work through on prior projects. The fact that we all joined forces and worked together as a unified group to overcome and solve the challenges that arose during the project proves that public and private sector entities can indeed work together in harmony to accomplish a common goal."

—Ralph M. Owens, Mayor
Lavonia, Georgia

Change the Game: Partnerships & Collaboration

- **Engage leaders who have the fortitude to bring a big vision**
- **Move forward despite reservations**
- **Suspend typical practices; for a larger outcome, you have to look at things differently**
- **Structure partnerships and collaborations among differing organizations, agencies, and investors so that everyone benefits**
- **Explore all avenues for resources and find funding from organizations outside of the traditional government and banking systems**
- **Involve local political support, talented leaders, and entrepreneurs**
- **Call for commitment from all stakeholders**
- **Communicate, communicate, communicate**

The stories in this document illustrate what can be achieved when communities unite to accomplish a shared goal with focused leadership and infinite passion. The organizations listed below represent the resources the REED Task Force identified as related to increasing workforce readiness, access to education, and partnerships and collaborations. The University of North Georgia is committed to advancing the REED themes by incorporating the REED mission into its strategic plan, continuing to assess regional needs, and lending our expertise to help develop educational and work force skills for the region.

Useful Resources for the Region

- *Archway Partnership*, University of Georgia
- Association County Commissioners of Georgia
- Athens Technical College
- Brenau University
- *Bright from the Start*, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
- Complete College Georgia
- Emmanuel College
- Georgia Association for Career and Technical Education
- Georgia Chamber of Commerce
- Georgia Council on Economic Education
- Georgia Department of Community Affairs
- Georgia Department of Economic Development
- Georgia Department of Education
- Georgia Department of Labor
- GeorgiaBest Program
- Georgia Family Connection
- Georgia Mountains Regional Commission
- Georgia Municipal Association
- Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education
- Georgia Student Finance Commission
- Lanier Technical College
- North Georgia Technical College
- Northeast Georgia Regional Commission
- Northeast Georgia Regional Educational Service Agency
- Piedmont College
- Pioneer Regional Educational Service Agency
- Technical College System of Georgia
- Toccoa Falls College
- Truett McConnell College
- University System of Georgia
- Young Harris College
- Washington-Wilkes Career Center

University of North Georgia Resources

- Academic Transitions
- Accel Dual Enrollment
- BB&T Center for Ethical Business Leadership
- Career Services
- Center for Adult Learners & Military
- Center for Global Engagement
- Center for the Future of North Georgia
- *Complete College Georgia*, UNG office
- Continuing Education
- Distance Education & Technology Integration
- Georgia Appalachian Center for Higher Education
- Government Relations
- *Move on When Ready* Program
- National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students
- Office for Community Engagement
- Summer Scholars Institute Program
- University College

"Our game changed when we got everybody together and said, we need a decision now or it is not going happen. They all said, yes, let's do it."

—Lyn Allen, Director of Economic Development Franklin County Industrial Authority

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