

**Plenary Session:**  
**Getting Beyond the Myth of “Silver Bullet” Solutions: Customizing Workforce Policy and Practice to Particular State Needs**

Wednesday, December 12, 2007

8:30—10:00 am

Speakers

**Debra Lyons**, Director, Georgia Governor’s Office of Workforce Development

**Andy Levin**, Deputy Director, Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth

**Keith Bird**, Chancellor, Kentucky Community and Technical College System

Moderator

**Sarah Oldmixon**, Senior Policy Analyst, NGA Center for Best Practices

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*Debra Lyons, Director, Georgia Governor’s Office of Workforce Development:*

Debra addressed GA’s Work Ready Certificates (WRC) program that seeks to close talent/workforce gaps

- The WRC gives off a positive signal to employers and makes them more enthusiastic
- Access is gained through technical college, which determines the service delivery area
- Governor’s vision aligns workforce and economic development
  - Moved WIB to directly under his control
  - Linkage between education, economic development and workforce development
- Partnerships between state and local regions translates into success
  - Public-private partnership with GA Chamber of Commerce
- WRC work habits component complement skills of individual
- The program identifies the strengths and weaknesses of each participant to coach them, not weed them out
- There is a return on investment to employers from a reduction of cost of hiring

In order to promote and sustain the WRC program, we need to increase high school graduation rate:

- Achieve this by setting benchmarks for goals, to each country, region, and the state
- These benchmarks and data are available and transparent for all counties. They show exactly where all counties and regions stand with respect to similar areas and the state

*Andy Levin, Deputy Director, Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth:*

Andy began by giving a brief history of how MI got to where they are today:

- MI was one of the early one-stop states, but there is little strategy and collaboration between systems (i.e. regional community colleges)
- MI second largest state in consumer driven dollars, behind NC
- The auto industry is recovering, but is structurally different than in the past
  - MI is having a problem dealing with this issue
  - Suffer from structural decline even in “boom” economy
- Fewer residents lack high school degree than national average, but there are fewer residents with graduate degrees than national average

Good jobs verse bad jobs debate:

- We have to admit as a society that a large bulk of jobs don't require training
- Jobs available require high school degree, few require post-secondary education
- "First rung" service jobs today are what manufacturing jobs were
- Unionization/organization determined higher wages and benefits therefore establishing a large bulk of the middle class

Bottom line is that the old system is out (which is scary) but retraining workers creates hope:

- The goal is to help/retrain MI workers and transform MI economy
- Workers need to commit to entrepreneurship so they can adapt to change quicker
- Response from community college substantial, but regionally motivated and not cooperative
  - MI does not have central control over regional community colleges
- Early experience with workforce programs shows positive transformation if done to scale
  - Use \$13 million in federal and state discretionary funds to start funding program then build political coalition to build to full scale

***Keith Bird, Chancellor, Kentucky Community and Technical College System:***

Keith began by talking about the KY education reform objective:

- Education reform is KY's number one objective
- The new Governor's message is a fully integrated education system
  - Hands on leadership is where change comes from
- The goal is to create systemic, strategic, sustainable, and substantial change by connecting and converging the dots
- There is a conscious coalition of the willing to address K-12 + post-education
  - "Continuous Learning"
- He does not feel that KY is fully successful in transforming the community college system
  - Need to instill a culture of evidence and accountability
  - Workforce development is equivalent to talent development
- If KY hopes to really transform their economy, they need to create better jobs, not just more of the same

KY produced an employer survey to get a sense of employers' attitudes and thoughts on the state of the workplace:

- Employers have a sense of urgency. Don't know where workers are going to come from
- Problems identified by the survey:
  - The survey benchmarked against the U.S., but should have been global
  - Not enough jobs out there for all college graduates
  - Need to work on job creation and talent quality
- Need to seek institutional change to reflect workforce
- Need to identify paths that take individuals from high school to college to jobs (i.e. job ladders)

Keith's piece of advice to stakeholders was to maintain the sense of urgency

- Need disruptive and transformative steps to go beyond incremental policy.

- Would take KY 154 years at their pace now to catch up to other states, all else remaining equal

Q1: Are there any issues of capacity for training? How deal with openings/staff at community colleges?

- Challenge in some places but not everywhere
- Currently working on data collection to know the specific numbers of positions and where they are located
- Use innovation grants to increase capacity. For example, “Just in Time” training to reach non-traditional workers
- Create crisis of capacity and work with industry to fund. Specifically, identify critical areas and partner with industry to de-silo institutions
- Employers wish to create new service delivery systems

Q2: What do you see as next generation workforce policy? i.e. Lessons learned

- Lifelong learning: Workforce increasingly becoming such that everyone has to be an entrepreneur, constantly adapting to change and new systems and learning to promote and market themselves (horizontal and vertical learning)
- Job lengths are decreasing as more workers have many career paths in a lifetime
- Kill WIA and make TAA fundamental program
  - TAA is flexible and ties in employers
  - TAA training happens on the ground
- Convince everyone that education is valued by increasing post-secondary education as trade and talent development