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Partnering to Power Peach State
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Posted May 29, 2014

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Not everything is peachy in the state of Georgia. In a place where almost 1.5 million adult residents (about 1 in 3) have not graduated from high school and the unemployment rate tops 8%, this home to 15 Fortune 500 companies has a serious skills gap. Though the issues are clear, solutions are murkier; often pitting the needs of businesses against educational imperatives.

Despite the odds, [Georgia's Great Promise Partnership \(GPP\)](#) created an innovative way to engage at-risk students, benefit businesses, and reduce costs on cash-strapped communities in a win-win-win model. Launched in 2012, this public-private partnership provides young Georgians over the age of 16 the opportunity to extend their learning outside the classroom by gaining real-life experience at a local business. Different from other work-based learning programs, GPP's [12 for Life Workplace](#) focuses on promising students who typically do not qualify for traditional programs due to lack of credit hours or other challenges to succeed in school. These students are at even greater risk of not graduating high school and entering the workforce unprepared both mentally and technically. GPP provides practical experience while solving a number of public- and private-sector concerns:

Lean Machines

It is true that businesses do not often have the additional resources dedicated to monitoring a student internship program. Luckily, students hired through GPP are part-time employees that are expected to perform real work that needs to be done, such as industrial machinery maintenance or basic office administration. Students also work with their onsite mentor to learn the technical and interpersonal skills to become more effective employees. However, having a dedicated supervisor does not mean that participating businesses sacrifice efficiency. In fact, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs boasts that it saves approximately \$45,000 per year in labor costs, and the City of Atlanta has increased operational efficiency since becoming a *GPP 12 for Life Workplace* site.



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Beaulieu of America, one of the largest carpet producers in the world, has GPP students working in facilities located in North Georgia. "The high school students associated with the Great Promise Partnership mean so much more to Beaulieu than simply a 'feel good' program. We currently have 10 high school students working in two separate facilities in our company, producing a value-added product daily! Had we not partnered with GPP, these jobs would have been conducted by entry-level team members ... so this was never 'busy work,'" stated Lynn Chambers, vice president of employee development at Beaulieu. "Most of our initial roadblocks have been simple to maneuver around ... we just needed to have that 'can do' attitude that Beaulieu is famous for. The GPP program is a strong asset for Beaulieu, for the community, for the schools, for the students, and for the workforce. A win/win."

Learning Time

With GPP, learning is not limited to the classroom. The program operates as an alternative to part of the regular school day, and many students receive academic credit for their time spent on the job, thus keeping students on track to obtain a diploma while still gaining meaningful work experience. Additionally, exceptional work both in and out of the classroom is incentivized, as students may earn pay raises based on job and academic performance, attendance, and behavior. Furthermore, the complementary *WorkPrep* program is available to students in grades 9–12 and includes bi-weekly classes focused on "soft-skills" as well as guidance on career or postsecondary opportunities.

Local Costs

Communities benefit as well. Georgia's dropout rate is 12%, leaving young people in communities with few skills or job prospects. This can end up costing communities approximately \$215,580 per dropout over a lifetime of lost tax revenue, criminal justice expenses, public health expenditures, and welfare payments. By investing early, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education estimates that each new high school graduate would yield a net economic benefit 2.5 times greater than the invested public dollars.

Georgia's GPP program provides businesses with affordable labor to increase productivity, saves communities from long-term tax burdens, and improves the lives of Georgia's most at-risk students. As Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed noted, "[the] Great Promise Partnership works to train and develop the next generation of Georgia's economic future. If we give our youth access to the opportunities that exist, and teach them and show them by example the values that we espouse, then we can inspire them to put forth their best efforts to achieve their dreams." GPP is confident that with continued growth in participation from businesses and communities, the future of Georgia's education and workforce looks pretty peachy.

For more information on Georgia's Great Promise Partnership, contact Lori Heemann Bodine at Lori@gpppartnership.org.