

Workforce Development Study Group Report Executive Summary

The prosperity of any region depends on having a strong and vibrant economy that is grounded in its distinctive assets. In turn, essential components for such an economy are a highly skilled workforce and a creative professional class working productively in tandem. Making this possible requires a robust system of education and training that continually develops the capabilities of people of all ages and backgrounds in ways that align with current and future needs of the region's economy.

The challenge for the Workforce Study Group was to understand the dynamic interrelationship of these three elements—a prosperous economy, a productive workforce, and a premier system of education and training—and how ensuring cohesive connections among them will promote the competitiveness and overall quality of life for Hampton Roads, moving the region to a new level of preeminence and realizing its remarkable potential.

The Study Group was composed of four leaders from education, seven business executives, two Workforce Investment Board presidents, and one president of a major non-profit organization. Dr. John Dever, President of Thomas Nelson Community College and Matthew Mulherin, President of Newport News Shipbuilding, co-chaired the study group.

Three straightforward tasks were outlined in the charge to the Study Group: 1) conduct a situational analysis, 2) determine best practices and strategies that make sense for Hampton Roads, and 3) prioritize two to three best practices or strategies that the region should support.

To accomplish the three tasks, the study group held nine corporate meetings. The first three meetings focused on the situational analysis and established the baseline for the group's work. With the baseline established, the group broke into four committees, Pre-K through 12 Education, Post-Secondary through Graduate Education, Helping Adults Thrive, and Business to Education and Education to Education Connections. These committees researched workforce development best practices, with specific applicability to Hampton Roads, and presented their findings to the study group membership. Finally, the study group prioritized the strategies identified using the Six Sigma Value Stream process to produce a thoughtful, informed set of recommendations.

The three recommendations adopted by the Study Group are actions that have the potential to be transformative for the region over the long term but which *require new and sustained attention in a well-coordinated manner that will result in demonstrable outcomes*. They are aligned with the best thinking across the country about economic and educational innovation; at the same time, they are adapted to the distinctive conditions of Hampton Roads and the needs and aspirations of its people. Therefore, the study group members believe that they are worthy of broad-based public

support and significant private investment that will result in a well-educated and well-trained workforce prepared to contribute to, and benefit from, a highly competitive regional economy.

Recommendation I: With the collaboration and support of regional business and industry, provide exceptionally engaging educational programs and workplace experiences for targeted groups of students that will prepare them for well-paying careers at all workforce levels.

The study group addressed the educational needs of three populations of students: the gifted, the students in the “middle” that represent approximately 60% of students, and the at-risk population. For the *gifted students*, the establishment of a Regional Governor’s School for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, focusing on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) while embedding academic and extracurricular programs that encourage business innovation, entrepreneurial risk-taking, and creative engineering solutions to real-world problems is recommended. STEM disciplines are at the core of today’s high-tech, high-skill, and highly-competitive global economy. For the *60% of students in the middle*, a Regional Career and Technical High School is deemed critical, allowing these students to benefit from concentrated and work-linked education. Ideally, such a center of career and technical education excellence would be joined with a center of excellence for STEM education for the gifted population, such as the proposed Governor’s School for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. For the *at-risk population*, a different approach is needed. Embedding key best practices of An Achievable Dream Academy or similar programs in those elementary schools where academic achievement is low, has been shown to positively influence students who are at risk of not meeting academic benchmarks.

Recommendation II: Establish ongoing regional forums and related technological communication at both the executive and management levels that promote communication and coordination between business and education to anticipate emerging workforce needs.

Business and education leaders must commit to join together in regular forums to assess the current condition of the workforce and to project what the emerging workforce needs for the region will be, both for the near future and the long term. In turn, these findings should be compared against current offerings in education and training and mapped into new educational and training programs while identifying the associated requirements for staffing, facilities, and equipment. Executive-level leaders from both education and business must come to a common understanding of workforce needs and empower their management teams to design and implement the necessary programs and services that ensure the region is prepared to thrive. Through quarterly forums and interim communications utilizing modern technologies, the demand signal for workers could transition from the current sporadic communication to a systematic

approach. The study group also recommends that a representative from a major institution of higher education and a major corporate entity become members of the Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF), the nation's oldest membership organization of business and education executives that focuses on improving U.S. economic competitiveness through innovative approaches to education and workforce solutions. The recommended regional forums and membership in BHEF would keep the Hampton Roads business–education relationship on track, with each party fulfilling its respective responsibilities to the other.

Recommendation III: Create a high-touch, high-tech system to assist separating active duty in their military transition to the civilian workplace, with particular focus on opportunities within the region for good careers and associated education and training.

The Hampton Roads region has one of the largest annual exoduses of military personnel in the United States. As the terminal assignment for 8,000 – 10,000 military personnel from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard each year, Hampton Roads has a unique responsibility and opportunity to support the needs of exiting military and their families. That responsibility includes connecting veterans' programs specifically designed to serve them in education, training, and employment. Coordination of high-quality, customer-friendly services and collaboration among the numerous entities that currently serve exiting military personnel through a Military Transition Center (MTC) is paramount to the success in transitioning veterans to civilian careers. This should not be yet another isolated program to serve veterans but architecture that leverages, and permits feedback on, existing programs and resources and identifies and fills gaps in those services. Through its combination of *high-tech* and *high-touch* approaches, the MTC would facilitate workforce development and related economic activity in the Hampton Roads region by developing military transition personnel into a skilled and effective workforce and connecting them to available jobs and career pathways.