

**Santee-Lynches Region Facing Facts 2008
Community Forum Results
September 24, 2009**

Discussion topic: The burden of academic remediation (youth and adults)

Academic remediation, for example: reading levels, math skills, comprehension and retention of relevant information, writing and communication, are problem areas for many youth and adults seeking postsecondary education opportunities.

Question 1

What factors or conditions in the community and its neighborhoods do you think contribute to lack of attainment of soft skills by individuals?

Response(s):

- Young inexperienced parents – lack of involvement with children
- The number of latch-key kids – single parent working
- Lack of QT with children by parents
- Entertainment industry projecting unrealistic lifestyles/consequences
- School dress code
- Technological isolation
- Lack of a sense of community
- Church leadership need greater focus on the core problem(s) and solutions

Question 2

How does the need for postsecondary remediation impact higher skill attainment?

Response(s):

- Need for language skills improvement
- Need for social skills improvement – team building
- Need for OJT training, certifications
- Need for motivation
- Need for increased personal efficiency and productivity
- Need for quality assurance and control

Question 3

What are some proven community-based strategies that you are aware of which would improve participant's readiness for postsecondary education?

Response(s):

- After school programs
- Teen centers with access to career specialists
- Easier transition between grades
- Summer programs
- Teacher input into curriculum development and application
- Social learning settings – internships, apprenticeships
- Church involvement

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Discussion topic: The urgency of empowering the community to recognize the economic changes which are taking place are irreversible

Low-skilled, routine jobs will continue to be eliminated due to globalization, technology advances, and as well as more emphasis being placed on high-skilled jobs by businesses wanting to expand or new businesses seeking to locate in the area.

Question 1

Does the community understand the local and regional significance of this irreversible change process and are they prepared to effectively respond?

Response(s):

- Education and business professionals are aware, however, the general population is only just becoming aware, primarily as a result of high unemployment. Some persons are more aware that current job skills may not be in demand in the emerging economy.

Question 2

How are individuals in the community responding now to these fundamental changes already occurring in the local and regional economy?

Response(s):

- The crime rate has increased in that portion of the population that is poorly prepared for the economic changes. Another segment of the population is taking the initiative to re-educate themselves in order to increase their employment potential.

Question 3

What are the consequences for the community, if it fails to react to the fundamental economic changes taking place?

Response(s):

- Economic stagnation, loss of services as a result of declines in the public's access to traditional funding sources.

Question 4

What will it take to get our youth to stay in school and our adults to go back to school?

Response(s):

- Proactive total community involvement and participation in both the formal and informal education process.

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Discussion topic: Are we ready for “life-long learning”?

Today’s workers are facing with continual changes in the workplace and will need higher skill levels than ever before in order to compete for new positions.

Question 1

What will the community need to do to prepare itself and its residents to accept “life-long learning” as the new workplace reality?

Response(s):

- The senior population needs to accept the concept first.
- Develop programs and educational opportunities to sell this concept to today’s workforce.
- Look at ways to get families involved in the process of their “life-long learning” experience.

Question 2

What are the barriers to “life-long learning”?

Response(s):

- Not keeping up with technological advances.
- Lack of access to resources.
- The cost to the individual and the community.
- Changing mindsets about learning and the education experience.
- Substance abuse trends.

Question 3

Who in the community needs to lead the charge and champion a universal adaptation of “life-long learning” as the community standard for self improvement?

Response(s):

- The whole community:
 - Churches
 - Schools
 - Community-based organizations – business organizations, clubs, fraternities/sororities and other special interest community-based groups
 - Non-profits
 - Any institution or organization who has an interest in “life-long learning”

* “Life-long learning” refers to a personal attitude encouraged by the whole community in which they reside that proactively seeks to make available multiple pathways for youth and adults to have continuous access to skill training and academic enhancements.

Examples: 24/7 internet training access, release time within business and industry locations to enable workers to obtain additional skills or academic credentials, universal community promotion of

the philosophy "you are never too old to learn", intentional development of job opportunities and other economic and social rewards for personal development.

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Discussion topic: Soft skills vs. academic preparation

The region's making progress in the area of academic preparation based upon standardized test scores. Employers continually cite a need for employees to possess and demonstrate soft skills in the workplace. Soft skills effectively invested in the workplace are the foundation for creativity and innovation, which enables entrepreneurial opportunities and the improvement of products and services.

Question 1

Why do youth think the capacity to consistently demonstrate "soft skills" is an essential attribute for workers today and in the future?

Response(s):

- Workers today and in the future need to be prepared to transition from industrial to new and emerging service sector jobs and the associated skills required in this sector.
- Employees need to be prepared to "sell" themselves because of the competitive nature of the workplace environment.
- Workers are considering the importance of non-academic skills sets ("soft skills") more today than they were 5 or 6 years ago.
- Recognition of the importance of "soft skills" needs to be communicated as a direct result of all educational experiences within the community.

Question 2

Outside the workplace environment, how can the at-large community contribute to the development and enhancement of "soft skills"? Provide specific examples such as who and what?

Response(s):

- Parental emphasis
- Emphasis by community groups
- Individual mentors
- Business and institutional internships
- Church groups
- Youth organizations
- Recreation groups (sports teams)

* Table discussion recognized the negative impact on this subject of a significant increase in the number of single parent households.

Question 3

What barriers are likely to be encountered within the community in response to local efforts to enhance the "soft skills" capacities of youth and adults?

Response(s):

- Lack of appropriate role models which effectively demonstrate "soft skill" acquisition.

- Peer pressure/gangs
- Lack of self discipline
- Social and economic barriers
- Lack of funding/scholarships, youth programs
- The economy – businesses are doing all they can to retain regular workers and to survive.
- Financial and transportation barriers required to access training and development of “soft skills”.
- Extracurricular activity access

* “Soft skills” are referred to in both the literature and in the workplace as: **work ethic**, i.e., a full day’s work for a full day’s wages; **courtesy**, civil conversation i.e., “please”, “thank you”, “excuse me”, “may I help you” between employees, customers, supervisors, and professional associates; **team work**, ability to share responsibilities, honor commitments, confer with others, etc.; **self discipline and self confidence**, ability to arrange one’s own tasks for best performance, able to absorb criticism and direction without being defeated or resentful; **conformity to the prevailing work place norms**, the ability to govern one’s dress, personal grooming, body language, tone of voice, and vocabulary; **language proficiency**, the ability to speak, read, and write standard English in a businesslike way; includes knowing what to say, when, and how to say it.