The Perceptions of Stakeholders of the Economic and Socioeconomic Effectiveness and Benefits of the Wiregrass Region Georgia Work Ready Program

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine the perceptions of stakeholders of the economic and socioeconomic effectiveness and benefits of the Wiregrass Work Ready regional program, with regard to human capital and the established goals of the program. The study was designed to provide a continuous improvement document and contribute to the body of knowledge through case study analysis of the interaction of three teams and three groups. Data were collected using a survey instrument designed specifically for this purpose.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the responses to the survey instrument and cross tabulation of percentage responses and frequencies were reported. Chi-square analysis was used to test the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between team affiliation, county of residence, and level of participation. Open ended questions were utilized to draw specific areas of improvement without regard to population demographics.

The findings of this study identified that no one common theme existed with regard to the content areas of improvement and the respective program elements. Team membership, county of residence, and level of participation were factors for the difference of perceptions for the following items: 1) identification of common training needs; 2) understanding of linkages between business and industry leaders and education and training; 3) engagement and participation of stakeholders in productive meetings; 4) outreach and promotion for the achievement of goals; and 5) ability of workers to demonstrate skills.

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DEDICATION

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

When the report of the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce was released in 1990, globalization of the economic world was just beginning ("Tough times or tough choices," 2007). The playing field was being leveled in the area of low skill labor, with the subsequent jobs going to the countries of the lowest bidder. If the United States wanted to compete in this market, the country could look forward to a continuous decline in per capita income and an increase in working hours. Alternatively, according to the Commission, the United States could abandon those conditions and set its sights on a highly skilled workforce creating high value-added products and services. To do this, the United States would need to align its workforce to internationally benchmarked standards for educating both its students and its workers in an effort to match or to exceed the competition abroad ("Tough times or tough choices," 2007). Little did the Commission know that through the use of technology and the World Wide Web that foreign countries would soon focus on and compete in these highly skilled markets. It was not until mid-2000 that Thomas Friedman would convince the United States that the world was economically flat. Friedman (2005), author of the best seller The World is Flat, insisted that through the use of technology and connectivity a platform was created where intellectual work and intellectual capital could be delivered from anywhere, and thus highly skilled, high wage jobs could be outsourced to the lowest bidder. Friedman

referred to this idea as “triple convergence,” where paradigms would stray from exclusiveness to become mutually inclusive of one another to strengthen into an overall paradigm shift (Friedman, 2005). Friedman believed that the world was flat in the sense that the competitive marketplace between industrial and emerging market countries was leveling at an astounding rate (Friedman, 2005). No longer could the United States sit idle on the sidelines and watch the game. The United States would have to make changes in its historical values, educational system, and workforce development programs if it was to globally compete.

To successfully compete in a global market place, companies and state economic developers needed to find some sort of competitive advantage that served to set them apart from the competition. In answer to that challenge, upon taking office in November of 2003, Georgia Governor George “Sonny” Perdue established the Governor’s Office of Workforce Development (GOWD). The GOWD’s primary focus was to coordinate the partnership efforts of the Georgia Work Ready Program (GWRP). This program was an effort to create a panacea for Georgia’s tough economic conditions. Working with economic development professionals, private and state business and industry, Georgia communities and regions, and the citizens of the State of Georgia, this initiative sought to improve the job training and marketability of the workforce while driving future economic growth for the state ("Georgia work ready overview," 2009).

The Georgia Work Ready Program spread like wildfire across the state. As of January 2011, approximately 158,000 Georgians worked to earn a Work Ready Certificate. Additionally, Work Ready has assisted more than 2,100 Georgia youth in the attainment of their high school diplomas. One hundred and forty-two counties in Georgia

had committed to the Certified Work Ready Community program, sixteen regional areas of emphasis had been established, and companies throughout the state were utilizing the Work Ready Assessments as a hiring tool (GOWD, 2010).

This chapter includes historical background information related to the study, the theoretical framework through which the study will be viewed, the problem of the study and purpose statement, the research questions, and the significance of the research. To provide the reader further clarification, the researcher has included a definition section to assist with acronyms, words, or phrases which may not be familiar to the reader.

Contextual Background and History

The future of the United States' economy is inseparably tied to the quality of its workforce (Schmidt, 2011). The workforce, which once was the United States' greatest asset and led to the tremendous success of the country during the industrial era, now fell second to foreign market countries. Changes in the workplace, new technologies, teamwork, and global competition fostered a shift from low skill level jobs to high skill levels at entry level positions. These changes not only required that workers obtained higher levels of education but also required individuals to develop the capacity to learn, adapt, and change quickly and efficiently to meet challenging demands (Reid & Elwood, 2004).

While the industrial work of the past required comparatively low skills, the requirements for the highly skilled information based jobs of the present era had increased. According to Penelope Schmidt (2011), the extent to which this change this change had taken place could be seen by comparing the differences in skill levels over the previous fifty years. KeyTrain Company, one of the nations largest provider of skills

gap training software, indicated that in 1955, unskilled jobs made up approximately 60% of all jobs. In 2005, less than 12% of the jobs were unskilled and 68% were considered highly skilled (KeyTrain, 2008). Through the increased use of technology in the workplace and the globalization of the economy, jobs which were once middle class jobs requiring relatively little skill, such as those in manufacturing, have become automated and technology driven and consequently require greater skills for which many people are not prepared (Schmidt, 2011).

High Technology workforce education programs and skills development was a necessary part of the workforce equation if businesses were to compete successfully in the global marketplace. Experts thought that by 2020, more than 90% of all jobs would require skill levels beyond those gained in high school. Almost all workers would need training and education at the post-secondary level. In the United States, most training was done on-the-job, and according to the Career Readiness Certificate Consortium, this situation would not change in the coming decades (ACT, 2005). Given this, states across the nation have worked with the support of the National Governors Association to promote higher skills among the workforce (Schmidt, 2011). To address this need for workforce and economic development in Georgia, Georgia Governor Perdue formed a state agency aimed at developing the workforce for the entire state.

Feeling the pressures of foreign competition in Georgia in November 2002, when Governor Purdue took office as the Governor of the State of Georgia, he responded by creating the Governor's Office of Workforce Development. The primary purpose of the office was to link education with the workforce and to align efforts with the state's economic development engine to combat foreign competition and to seek a competitive

advantage (http://Gowd.Org). On February 20, 2006, Georgia Governor George "Sonny" Perdue announced the launch of the Georgia's Work Ready Program. The program was an initiative designed to improve the training and marketability of Georgia's workforce, and ultimately bring healthy economic growth to all parts of the state. According to Governor Purdue, the Georgia Work Ready Program was designed to help Georgia citizens receive the job training they needed. "The Work Ready program will bridge the gap that exists in some communities where local workforce lacks the right education and training for the jobs of the 21st Century economy" (GOWD, 2006, p. 7). The Governor's Office of Workforce Development, led by Director Debra Lyons, set out to formulate a plan for implementation of the program throughout the state.

On January 2, 2007, the vendor contract was awarded to American College Testing to utilize the Workkeys assessment tool for the purposes of identifying the work skills needed and the assessing of the workforce of Georgia. A partnership was established among the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the Georgia Department of Labor, the Office of Economic Development, Local Workforce Investment Boards, the Department of Community Affairs, and the Technical College System of Georgia (Lyons, 2007). Each of the partners would play a major role in the implementation of the proposed initiative.

On April 30, 2007, an invitation was sent to all counties in the state of Georgia to sign up for the Certified Work Ready Community program. The period for sign-up would last for ninety days and only those signing up would be able to participate. For those communities not willing to take the plunge, six months would pass before another sign-up period would be opened (Lyons, 2007). Seventy-three counties in the state met the

criteria for registration, and the program was well on its way throughout Georgia.

National Career Readiness System

Over the last twenty years, business and industry have become disillusioned with the trainability of high school and a college graduate in relation to workplace needs (American College Testing, 2005). Changes in the workplace, new technologies, teamwork, and global competition have fostered a shift from low skill level jobs to high skill levels at entry level positions. These changes not only required that workers obtain higher levels of education but also required individuals to develop the capacity to learn, adapt, and change quickly and efficiently to meet challenging demands (Reid & Elwood, 2004). According to the literature, success in today's marketplace requires that individuals have a broad set of foundation skills, and these skills needed to be documented and certified by national norms (ACT, 2005). It was in this context that the importance of workforce development efforts and more specifically the use of National Career Readiness Programs emerged.

The National Career Readiness Certificate was a portable work related skills credential. The certificate was designed to provide a fair and objective measurement tool of workplace skills that could be accepted on a national level. This certificate was created as a result of an analysis of more than 16,000 jobs across various industry sectors. According to American College Testing, these 16,000 jobs represented 85% of the industry sectors on a national level (ACT, 2010).

The Georgia Work Ready Program

The Georgia Work Ready Program was a proactive approach for combating global competition for jobs in Georgia. In order to compete successfully in a global economy, companies would need a qualified labor pool. The Georgia Work Ready Program was designed to promote the state of Georgia for business and industry and to certify that Georgia had the nation's best workforce. Additionally, the program was designed to ensure that Georgia companies had a labor pool of qualified candidates. Work Ready is transforming the state of Georgia by making citizens its number one competitive advantage and by partnering with existing companies to provide workforce development tools that would likely reap long term success. Work Ready demonstrates that Georgia was aware of what it would take to be competitive tomorrow and that employers were preparing their workers and companies today (GOWD, 2010).

The Georgia Work Ready Program was designed to assist Georgia communities in attracting new business to the local economies while preserving the health of the communities' existing economic base. The program was based on a nationally recognized credential called the National Career Readiness System. The system consists of four key elements: Work Ready Certificates, Work Ready Job Profiling, Certified Work Ready Communities, and Work Ready Regions (www.gaworkready.org). It was this researcher's contention that program success was not only measured in terms of quantifiable means as reported by the leadership team of the regional effort but also in the gathering of the perceptions of the stakeholders as to the outcomes of the program. The program was implemented in March of 2009, with an eighteen-month sustainable period. This researcher contends that in order for the program to be self-sustaining upon the

conclusion of state-funded financial support, it must have gained the confidence of the stakeholders. The stakeholders of the program should be provided a voice in describing and verifying the economic and socioeconomic effectiveness and benefits derived from the program. This descriptive study sought to provide a constructive means of filling this void.

The Wiregrass Work Ready Region

Work Ready Regions is another facet of the Georgia Work Ready Program. A Work Ready Region is a group of counties which work together to develop regional talent pools aligned to existing and regional strategic industries. This facet included the creation of regional plans to improve regional high school graduation rates, engage at-risk and out-of-school youth, retrain dislocated workers, increase college graduation rates in strategic industry majors, and upgrade skills of the existing regional strategic industry workforce. Recognizing that this would take significant financial commitments, the State offered competitive regional grants of up to $400,000 per region (Lyons, 2007). Sixteen Work Ready Regions were established throughout the State of Georgia (Bikoff, 2010). The Wiregrass Work Ready region is known as the advanced manufacturing region. It is comprised of a conglomerate of Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Coffee, Irwin, Jeff Davis, and Wilcox Counties. The region is home to several advanced manufacturing facilities that adhere to the highest standards in product manufacturing and employment practices. Wiregrass is the home to three technical colleges and one University System of Georgia Board of Regents institution. Wiregrass boasts an organized and motivated stakeholder population committed to growing a skilled workforce ready to support advanced manufacturing (GOWD, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

Human capital refers to the stock of competences, knowledge, and personal attributes embodied in the worker's ability to perform labor so as to produce economic value. These attributes are gained by a worker through education and experience. Many early economic theories referred to this asset simply as "workforce." W. A. Lewis was believed to have begun the field of economic development and consequently the idea of human capital in 1954 when he wrote the *Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour* (Bowles and Gintis, 1975). Human capital is the set of knowledge and skills that an employee acquired through training, education, and experience, and increased that employee's value in the marketplace (http://www.Investorwords.Com/2359/Human_capital.Html).

The use of the human capital in the modern neoclassical economic literature dates to Jacob Mincer's article "Investment in Human Capital and Personal Income Distribution" published in *The Journal of Political Economy* in 1958. The best-known application of the idea of human capital in economics was that of Mincer and Gary Becker of the "Chicago School" of economics. Becker's book entitled *Human Capital*, published in 1964, became a standard reference for many years (Becker, 1993). From this perspective, human capital is similar to production. If one invested in human capital through education and training, one's outputs depended partly on the rate of the return on the human capital owned. Thus, human capital is a means of production into which investment yields additional output.

Adam Smith (1776) defined four types of fixed capital all of which were characterized as that which afforded a revenue or profit without circulating or changing

masters. The four types were: 1) useful machines, instruments of the trade; 2) buildings as the means of procuring revenue; 3) improvements of land; and 4) human capital. Smith defined human capital as the acquired and useful abilities of individuals relative to their workforce potential. The acquisition of such talents, through ones increased acquisition of education, study, or apprenticeship, always cost a real expense. Smith stated that those talents, as they make a part of one's fortune, likewise makes up the society to which he/she belongs. The improved dexterity of a workman may be considered in the same light as a machine or instrument of trade which facilitated and abridged labor, and carried a certain expense and repaid that expense with a profit. Therefore, Smith argued that the productive power of labor was dependent on the division of labor. Smith stated that the greatest improvement in the productive powers of labor, and the greater part of the skill, dexterity, and judgment with which it is anywhere directed or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labor. There is a complex relationship that exists between the division of labor and that of human capital (Smith). One can surmise that investments in education, workforce development, life skills, and medical care were examples of capital investment. These investments increased workers' earnings, improved their health and well-being, and added to their socioeconomic package and therefore should be regarded as human capital and considered to be of tangible benefit. These assets were called human capital because people could not be separated from their knowledge, skills, health, or values in the way they could be separated from their financial and physical assets (www.econlib.org/library/enc/humancapital.html). Human capital theory seemed to be the basis for the Wiregrass Region Georgia Work Ready Program. The regional program sought to develop the workforce through investments in training and education and thus

affecting their financial well-being and quality of life. Thus, it is appropriate to use human capital theory as the theoretical framework with which to interpret the results of the study.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of the study is that continued funding is likely to be significantly reduced or perhaps completely eliminated from the program with no independent data which seeks to support sustainability of the program once the regional grants have expired. The best case for continued funding cannot be made without independent research to show stakeholders perceptions of the Georgia Work Ready Regional program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, the study proposes to determine the perceived benefits and effectiveness of the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program by the Core, Home, and Industry Network Teams as identified by the region's leadership team. Second, the study will develop a set of recommendations, to provide a mechanism of continuous improvement, and to support future actions and sustainability of the program.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be used to guide this study:

1. What are the perceptions regarding the degree of effectiveness which the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program has achieved the goals set forth by the program as related to each stakeholder team?
2. What specific suggestions are made by each stakeholder group to support future improvements and sustainability?

3. What are the similarities and differences between the perceptions of the three stakeholder groups, participation levels, and county of representation?

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study will be to provide independent documentation of the stakeholder's perceptions of the benefits and effectiveness of the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program, which will provide a more complete basis from which considerations for future funding could be made. Furthermore, recommendations for further improvement and to maintain sustainability of the Wiregrass Regional Program will be solicited to serve as a data-driven guide. This will be used in a continuous improvement effort to assist in program sustainability and drive future actions.

Definition of Key Terms

For this study the following terms were defined to provide a basis of uniform interpretation:

Wiregrass Work Ready Region - A conglomerate of counties that share an industry sector. The Wiregrass Work Ready Region consists of Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Coffee, Irwin, Jeff Davis and Wilcox Counties and is focused on Advanced Manufacturing (GOWD, 2009).

Technical College - A postsecondary unit providing undergraduate career and technical education leading to certificate, diploma, or associate degree (GOWD, 2009).

Georgia Work Ready Program - A program designed to link education with the workforce and to align efforts with the state's economic development engine to combat foreign competition and to seek a competitive advantage (GOWD, 2009).

American College Testing - Abbreviated ACT. Organization which established the National Career Readiness System (ACT, 2005).

Leadership Team - Usually three or four individuals representing technical colleges, economic developers, and educational leaders who will oversee and administer the grant (GOWD, 2009).

Project Leader - One of three or four people who oversee and lead efforts within the Work Ready Region (GOWD, 2009).

Core Team - This group consists of workforce, technical colleges, economic developers, and educational leaders who provide support to the leadership team (GOWD, 2009).

Home Team - This group consists of each community's Certified Work Ready Team leader, education, community and business leaders, and other interested partners who can assist in obtaining community goals (GOWD, 2009).

Industry Network Team - This group consists of leaders within manufacturing in each respective county (GOWD, 2009).

Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) – (GOWD, 2009).

Human Capital - A set of skills that an employee acquires through training, education, and experience, and increases that employee's value in the marketplace (Becker, 1993).

County Leader - One or more people who serve as leader(s) of the Work Ready program in a county (GOWD, 2009).

Certified Work Ready Community (CWRC) - A county which achieved designated numbers of individual Work Ready Certificates and specified increases in their public high school graduation rates (GOWD, 2009).

Governor's Office of Workforce Development – Abbreviated GOWD. The Governor's Office of Workforce Development is responsible for the oversight and organization of the Georgia Work Ready program (GOWD, 2009).

Higher Skill Jobs – An inclusive term for jobs that generally require education beyond high school.

High School Graduation Rate (HSGR) - High School Graduation Rate is the percentage of students entering the 9^{th} grade and complete graduation requirements in four years (GOWD, 2009).

Potential/Existing Workforce - Current and recent graduates of Georgia public high schools, Graduate Equivalency Diploma programs, college or university programs, plus unemployed individuals (GOWD, 2009).

Skill Levels – Levels scored on the Workkeys assessments which lead to a Georgia Work Ready Certificate (GOWD, 2009).

Reading for Information - A Workkeys skill that requires comprehension of work-related reading materials, from memos and bulletins to policy manuals and governmental regulations (GOWD, 2009).

Applied Mathematics - A Workkeys skill that applies mathematical reasoning to work-related problems (GOWD, 2009).

Locating Information—A Workkeys skill that uses information from such materials as diagrams, floor plans, tables, forms, graphs, and charts(GOWD, 2009).

Wiregrass Georgia Technical College (WGTC) - A post-secondary unit of the Technical College System of Georgia (GOWD, 2009).

Altamaha Technical College (ATC) - A post-secondary unit of the Technical College System of Georgia (GOWD, 2009).

Existing Workforce - Individuals currently employed within the public, private, or government business sector (GOWD, 2009).

Available Workforce – Individuals who are currently un-employed, high school seniors, college graduates, or working on their Graduate Equivalent Diploma who are not employed in a full-time capacity within the public, private, or government sector (GOWD, 2009).

Summary

The Georgia Work Ready Program is a proactive approach for combating global competition for jobs in Georgia. In order to compete successfully in a global economy, companies needed a qualified labor pool. The Georgia Work Ready Program was designed to promote the state of Georgia to business and industry and to certify that Georgia had the nation's best workforce. Additionally, the program was designed to ensure a labor pool of qualified candidates to Georgia companies. Georgia Work Ready was thought to be transforming the state of Georgia by making citizens its number one competitive advantage and by partnering with existing companies to provide workforce development tools that would likely reap long term success. Work Ready demonstrated that Georgia was aware of what it took to be competitive tomorrow and that employers were preparing their workers and companies today (GOWD, 2010).

At the forefront, the workforce gained the ability to demonstrate its skills to current and potential employers. Work Ready opened the door for many Georgia residents to promotional and advancement opportunities, resulting in a better quality of life. Workers also had the opportunity to build their skills in areas where they might be lacking expertise. The program was of no cost to workers and required a minimal investment of their time. Companies benefitted by having the assurance that employees had the right skill sets for a specific type of job. Work Ready sought to improve hiring practices, reduce turnover and training costs, increase productivity, and improve employee morale, which equated to better performance and an increased bottom line. Communities benefitted by achieving the Work Ready designation in the areas of marketing and workforce certification. In addition to helping existing industry to become more competitive, Work Ready was a valuable tool in attracting new business to communities. Work Ready designation was proof that a community had the workforce to fill current and future jobs and thus gave the communities a springboard toward economic growth and prosperity (Lyons, 2007). As businesses and citizens throughout the state of Georgia had come to realize, the world is economically flat. Georgia was not sheltered from a flattening effect on its economic viability. To survive, Georgia could not fight but adapt and make changes in the way it did business. It was believed that The Georgia Work Ready Program was a step toward adaptability that gave a competitive advantage to all who choose to participate.

On December 21, 2008, a letter was sent from Governor Perdue to all Georgia high school administrators asking them to "rally the horses" around the workforce needs of the State of Georgia by participating in the Georgia Work Ready program. The

Governor stated, “Georgia communities are facing a challenge: to thrive locally in an increasingly global marketplace, workers must be able to demonstrate they have the talent necessary for today’s jobs, as well as the skills to master the jobs of tomorrow” (Perdue, 2008). His letter went on to promise increased graduation rates and thriving communities that would bounce back from the economic downturns subsequent to the numerous plant closings and rising unemployment rates. It was from that letter that this author surmised that the Georgia Work Ready Program would become one of the premier educational and workforce development topics of 2010 for the State of Georgia.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study evaluates the perceptions of the stakeholders of the economic and socioeconomic effectiveness and benefits of the Wiregrass Region Georgia Work Ready Program. Additionally, this study sought to incorporate an analysis of the stakeholders' perceptions relative to their role and participation in providing recommendations for improvement and sustainability of the program. A literature review was completed to provide a greater understanding of the program, its background, and the context in which this study was developed.

Workforce Development in America

Workforce development has been a topic of great debate throughout history in the United States. According to Richard Ferguson (2010) of the American Testing Center, the United States is on the verge of what we would describe as a crisis in the workforce pipeline. Employers need more than workers, they need skilled workers. According to John Engler, president of the National Association of Manufacturing, workers typically obtain some sort of specific skill training after high school graduation. This training is considered the flashpoint for the manufacturing skills gap. According to the literature, advocates of an industry skills credential argue that students seeking academic degrees often will not seek specific skills work credentials because they cannot see their value in securing a job (www.insidehighered.com). "The day when unskilled but willing workers

could show up for a job has passed," according to Engler (www.insidehighered.com). As a nation, an effort must be made to align worker skills with an educational pathway. Most recently the National Association of Manufacturing announced that it would attempt to match millions of workers seeking employment to thousands of companies demanding skilled laborers by endorsing a national portable certification system (www.insidehighered.com).

Rise of the Global Economy and Workforce

Thomas Friedman, author of the *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, believes that the world is flat in the sense that competitive playing fields between global economies are leveling or being flattened. Friedman recounts examples of companies in China and India that are becoming part of large global complex supply chains that have no territories. Oceans are thought to be a mirage that can be can overcome in seconds through the use of technology. Outsourcing, that is providing everything from services to component manufacturing for complex equipment, would be of certain consideration if United States companies were to remain competitive on a global scale (Friedman, 2005).

National Career Readiness System

The concept of a nationally recognized credential emerged in the 1950s from an organization called American College Testing (ACT). With large numbers of students approaching college age, and most wanting to attend college, ACT's founders established an assessment designed to help students make better decisions about which college to attend and to provide information to colleges in the process of admitting students. In

2002, ACT officially acknowledged its growing role in supporting both education and the workforce. A new corporate structure comprising two divisions, Education and Workforce Development, emerged. From this structure the National Career Readiness System was established (http://www.act.org/aboutact/history.html, 2010).

According to ACT, the National Career Readiness System benefits economic development efforts through the documentation of basic knowledge skills required of today's workforce (http://www.act.org/aboutact/history.html, 2010). ACT reports, "Now more than ever, America needs a strong, skilled workforce to overcome today's challenges." There was a great concern in the private sector about the skills gap that existed between today's workplace needs and those skills exhibited by the potential workforce. Businesses recognized that there were issues relative to the basic employability skills required of a trainable workforce (ACT, 2005). Employers openly report that the costs of hiring, training, and then retaining employees can have detrimental effects on profit margins. Experts report that by 2020, more than 90% of all jobs will require more than the skills gained in high school. Almost all workers will need training and education at the post-secondary level. In the United States most training is accomplished on the job and according to the Career Readiness Career Consortium this trend will not change in the coming decades (ACT, 2005). According to the author's research, the Consortium would determine that employers need employees who are trainable and can benefit from the many opportunities afforded to them for skill enhancement.

Throughout the last twenty years, employers have become disillusioned with the trainability and work ethic of the entering workforce. Additionally, employers have been

distraught with societal concerns and employers' ability to legally assess and certify employees for the jobs that exist (ACT, 2005). The portable skills credential, a National Career Readiness Certificate based on Workkeys, a product of ACT Incorporated, addressed both of these concerns. The certificate had proven to be a fair and objective measurement of workplace skills that could be accepted nationwide (http://www.act.org.certificate.workforce.html, 2010). More than 16,000 jobs across various industry sectors were profiled using the Workkeys system, and results indicated that 85% of these profiles applied across all industry sectors. Three assessments form the basis of the National Career Readiness Certificate:

- Reading for Information—comprehending work-related reading materials, from memos and bulletins to policy manuals and governmental regulations.
- Applied Mathematics—applying mathematical reasoning to work-related problems.
- Locating Information—using information from such materials as diagrams, floor plans, tables, forms, graphs, and charts (ACT, 2010, p. 1).

According to American College Testing (ACT), a solid foundation of the three skills areas was essential for a well-qualified workforce. A recent American Management Association survey found that 38% of job applicants taking employer-administered tests lacked the reading and math skills needed in the jobs for which they applied. Information retrieval and problem-solving skills, measured by the Locating Information test, will be highly relevant in our information-based business culture (http://www.act.org.certificate.workforce.html, 2010).

ACT reports, twenty-seven states have developed statewide or regional programs to help individuals earn a National Career Readiness Certificate. In Alaska, the National Career Readiness Certificate was issued by the Department of Labor and by the Department of Education. Both departments have issued the certificate since the spring of 2008. Arizona had regional activity, with certificates being issued in the City of Phoenix and in the Tucson Unified School District. California had regional programs with the Central Coast Consortium and Work2Future, with both programs having begun in July 2009. Connecticut began issuing the National Career Readiness Certificate in May 2008, with testing done through Department of Labor locations across the state. Connecticut was continuing to issue credentials on a weekly basis, with a growing recognition of the credential statewide. The Florida Ready to Work program issued state certificates with an ACT-authorized certificate number for employers to verify in the National Career Readiness Certificate database. Georgia Work Ready was launched by Governor Perdue in August 2006. As part of Georgia Work Ready, individuals received state certificates with an ACT-authorized certificate number for employers to verify in the National Career Readiness Certificate database. Illinois had many high schools and community and technical colleges, as well as youth outreach programs, issuing the National Career Readiness Certificate. This regional activity in Illinois began in early 2009 (http://www.act.org/certificates/certstates.html, 2010).

WorkOne, a partner agency of the Indiana Department of Workforce Development, established a regional National Career Readiness Certificate program across the state and was actively driving toward a statewide adoption. The Iowa Department of Workforce Development identified seven pilot Workforce Centers and

three community colleges to help launch its National Career Readiness Certificate. These credentials, signed by Governor Chet Culver, were being delivered to Iowans beginning in April 2009. The Louisiana Workforce Commission, which was made up of the Department of Labor and the Department of Education, was offering the National Career Readiness Certificate statewide. In 2006, Michigan began regionally adopting the National Career Readiness Certificate by organizing and developing leadership teams across the state to advocate and drive the adoption. Recently, Michigan's Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG) established a statewide initiative that included a co-branded Certificate signed by Governor Jennifer Granholm. Minnesota had regional adoption throughout the state and had been issuing National Career Readiness Certificates since July 2009. The Missouri Division of Workforce Development was issuing the National Career Readiness Certificate. The Missouri state seal and Governor Jay Nixon's signature was imprinted on the certificate (http://www.act.org/certificates/certstates.html, 2010).

Nebraska had one community college issuing the National Career Readiness Certificate. Mid-Plains Community College implemented the program in January 2009. Nevada has one community college, Truckee Meadows, issuing the National Career Readiness Certificate. In New Jersey, National Career Readiness Certificates was issued by the Edison Job Corps Academy. The National Career Readiness Certificate was issued in New Mexico by the Department of Labor in conjunction with New Mexico Technet and the Department of Corrections. Credentials were signed by Governor Bill Richardson and Terri Cole, chairperson of the State Workforce Board. Certificates were distributed to individuals since October 2008. In New York, National Career Readiness Certificates

were being distributed regionally through Syracuse University, Northern Area Health Education Center (NAHEC), and the South Bronx Job Corps Academy. As of October 2009, the North Carolina program issued state certificates with an ACT-authorized certificate number for employers to verify in the National Career Readiness Certificate database. Ohio had regional activity, with five career centers issuing the National Career Readiness Certificate since the summer of 2008. Since May 2008, Oregon had issued the National Career Readiness Certificate at select testing sites across the state. The Department of Labor had organized an initiative to help career centers across the state of Pennsylvania issue the National Career Readiness Certificate (http://www.act.org/certificates/certstates.html, 2010).

As part of the Work Ready South Carolina program, individuals received state certificates with an ACT-authorized certificate number for employers to verify in the National Career Readiness Certificate database. South Dakota began issuing National Career Readiness Certificates in August 2009 and currently has four beta sites. Tennessee initiated statewide adoption in October 2007. In June of 2009, the state began issuing National Career Readiness Certificates through their Technology Centers and Department of Labor sites. Two regional programs were issuing the National Career Readiness Certificate in Texas—Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas and Northeast Lakeview College. Community colleges of Vermont and the State of Vermont began issuing the National Career Readiness Certificate in mid-April 2009, with testing done at community college sites throughout the state. Virginia had regional activity through the Blue Ridge Job Corps Center. The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development began issuing the certificate at testing sites across the state in September 2009. The

Wyoming Career Ready Initiative was a joint partnership among the Governor's Office, Wyoming Community Colleges, Wyoming Department of Education, Wyoming Department of Corrections, and Wyoming Department of Workforce Services. As part of the Wyoming program, individuals received state certificates with an ACT-authorized certificate number for employers to verify in the National Career Readiness Certificate database (http://www.act.org/certificates/certstates.html, 2010).

A preliminary analysis of these programs revealed that there was no standardization of the way programs were administered or operated throughout the United States. The only common ingredient to all programs was the basis for the certificate, the Workkeys test. Workkeys reported that the test had been used for nearly two decades and was widely accepted by thousands of companies across the globe. Workkeys tests were compliant with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and were defensible in a court of law (http://www.act.org/certificates/certstates.html, 2010). According to ACT, certificates were earned at any one of four levels, although some companies and states choose not to award at all levels. The bronze level signified that an individual had scored at least a Level 3 on each of the three assessments and had the necessary foundational skills for 35% of the jobs listed in the Workkeys Occupational Profile Database. A certificate earned at the silver level signified that an individual has scored at least a Level 4 on each of the three assessments and had the necessary foundational skills for 65% of the jobs listed in the Workkeys Occupational Profile Database, and the gold level signified that an individual has scored at least a Level 5 on each of the three assessments and had the necessary foundational skills for 90% of the jobs in the Workkeys Occupational Profile

Database. A certificate earned at the platinum level signified that an individual has scored at least a Level 6 in each of the three assessments and had the necessary foundational skills for 99% of the jobs in the Workkeys Occupational Profile Database. The certificate could be verified by employers for up to five years from the date the individual completed the assessment (http://www.act.org/certificates/certstates.html, 2010).

Georgia's Work Ready Initiative

The Georgia Work Ready Program sought to invest in individuals and organizations throughout the State of Georgia through investing in human capital. Work Ready was the first initiative of the Governor's Office of Workforce Development (GOWD) created by Governor Perdue to make Georgia's workforce its number one competitive advantage. The Work Ready initiative provided a unique economic development tool to build the talented workforce which businesses demanded and a new means to drive sustainable growth and prosperity for communities across the state. Work Ready delivers a unique advantage to Georgia because it guaranteed that a community's labor force had the talent necessary for both existing jobs and jobs in the future (http://gowfd.org).

The Governor's Office of Workforce Development (GOWD) is the office that was held accountable for Georgia's workforce development efforts. GOWD, along with the Georgia Department of Education focuses on the elimination of skills gaps that may exist between high school graduates and the needs of the workforce. Emphasis is placed on high school graduation rates and the linkage between education, employers, and the workforce. GOWD's major focus is on the administration of the Georgia Work Ready Program, which seeks to create this linkage (http://gowfd.org).

The Georgia Work Ready Program (GWRP) was the state's transformational economic development strategy. GWRP was created in partnership with the Georgia Chamber of Commerce and built upon Governor Perdue's vision for Georgia's workforce. Debra Lyons, Executive Director of GOWD, stated: "We need a workforce development system that links workforce development and education together and aligns to the economic needs of the state, its regions and local communities" (Lyons, 2007). The program was designed to assist Georgia communities in attracting new business to the local economies while preserving the health of the communities' existing economic base. The program consists of four key elements: Work Ready Certificates, Work Ready Job Profiling, Certified Work Ready Communities, and Work Ready Regions (www.gaworkready.org).

In November 2002, George "Sonny" Perdue took office as the Governor of the State of Georgia. Feeling the pressures of foreign competition for jobs in Georgia, the Governor responded by creating the Governor's Office of Workforce Development. The primary purpose of the office was to link education with the workforce and to align efforts with the state's economic development engine to combat foreign competition and to seek a competitive advantage (http://gowd.org).

On February 20, 2006, Georgia Governor Perdue announced the launch of Georgia's Work Ready Program. The program was an initiative designed to improve the training and marketability of Georgia's workforce, and ultimately bringing healthy economic growth to all parts of the state. According to Governor Purdue, the Georgia Work Ready Program was designed to help Georgia citizens receive the job training they needed. "The Work Ready program will bridge the gap that exists in some communities

where local workforce lacks the right education and training for the jobs of the 21st Century economy" (GOWD, 2006). The Governor's Office of Workforce Development, led by Director Debra Lyons, set out to formulate a plan for implementation of the program throughout the state.

On January 2, 2007, the vendor contract was awarded to American College Testing to utilize the Workkeys assessment tool for the purposes of identifying the work skills needed and the assessing of the workforce of Georgia. A partnership was established among the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the Georgia Department of Labor, the Office of Economic Development, local Workforce Investment Boards, the Department of Community Affairs, and the Technical College System of Georgia (Lyons, 2007). Each of the partners would play a major role in the implementation of the proposed initiative. Five counties were chosen to pilot the Certified Georgia Work Ready Program, and a launch date was established for the spring of 2007.

On April 30, 2007, an order was sent to all counties in the state of Georgia to sign up for the Certified Work Ready Community program. The period for sign-up would last for 90 days and only those signing up would be able to participate. For those communities not willing to participate, six months would pass before another sign-up period would be opened (Lyons, 2007).

Work Ready Certificate Program

The Work Ready Certificate Program allows workers to complete a free job assessment and become eligible to receive a certificate indicating their skill and knowledge levels for potential employers. The Workkeys test measures proficiency in reading, math and locating information, as well as other proficiency measures as required

by an employer. Assessments were conducted through Georgia's twenty-six technical colleges of the Technical College System of Georgia and three Board of Regents schools with technical college divisions. Once assessed, an individual's score was recorded and a certificate issued based on the lowest proficiency level mastered. In the case of an individual's skills not meeting the requirements of the employer, technical colleges provide free online gap training to help workers upgrade their job skills (Georgia Work Ready - Get a Certificate, Get a Job, 2008).

Job Profiling

Another key component to the Georgia Work Ready program was job profiling. Job profiling was designed to help Georgia employers match the right workforce to their needs. This component was focused on the employer and a linking of the skills needed to perform the duties required of the job. The program provides Georgia employers an opportunity to profile required job tasks and the needed skill levels to match candidates to jobs within the organizations. By comparing job profiles with individuals' certification levels, companies could make reliable decisions about hiring, training and program development. Profiling was conducted at no cost to employers who annually met certain minimum levels of growth. For each job profiled, the employer needed to hire a minimum of fifteen employees if the company was classified as manufacturing or logistics. In the service area, the employer needed to hire a minimum of twenty-five employees to receive profiling services at no charge. Profiling services were conducted in conjunction with the Technical College System of Georgia by ACT authorized profilers (GOWD, 2008).

Customized job profiling was also available for certain white-collar professional jobs as well as jobs in manufacturing, healthcare, customer service, law enforcement, and the hospitality industry. Customized profiles included requirements for foundational skills (reading, applied mathematics, locating information), along with customized skills and work habits. An ACT/Work Keys authorized job profiler worked collaboratively with groups of employees from the company or industry to complete each job analysis; job incumbents served as the subject matter experts who defined the tasks and skills needed to successfully perform a specific job. The profile became a legally defensible job description to be utilized by the employer to align the right workers with the right jobs. The most recent data reported that more than 10,000 unique job titles have been profiled by ACT (Lyons, 2007).

One may ask, "What does this mean to the company in terms of the bottom line?" One Georgia Company, Tyco Healthcare of Macon, Georgia, utilized the Work Ready assessments for their production workers. Over the course of the following year, Tyco recognized a 67% savings in cost and time to hire qualified candidates for production jobs. Also, Tyco reported a 200% improvement in the training of entry level employees, a 35% improvement in production efficiency, and a 58% reduction in scrap and waste generation (http://gowfd.org). To date, 183 Georgia employers have completed 357 Work Ready job profiles (Bikoff, 2010).

Four certificate levels, bronze, silver, gold, and platinum, were issued to test takers based on the lowest level demonstrated on the Workkeys test. Georgia observed the established parameters set by the National Career Readiness Certificate Consortium:

Award Level	Level Score	Percent of Skills in the Workkeys Database
Bronze	3	35
Silver	4	65
Gold	5	90
Platinum	6	99

(ACT, 2007)

Individuals who tested below the expected levels could participate in free on-line gap training through a local technical college to bring their proficiency levels up to the requirements of the job (Lyons, 2007). As of January 2011, 20% of Georgians have earned a Gold level Work Ready Certificate (Bikoff, 2010).

Certified Work Ready Community Initiative

The Certified Work Ready Community Initiative was a voluntary initiative that enabled communities to demonstrate that they had the talented workforce needed to fill current and future jobs. The program sought to showcase a community's commitment to education and to improving high school graduation rates, which was an important factor for attracting businesses. Lyons (2007) noted that the best chance for success occurs when community leaders, educators, and business leaders united to help their communities to achieve the Certified Work Ready Community designation. To date, forty counties within the state of Georgia have realized this designation, with Jefferson County being the first Georgia County to meet all criteria and earn full Certified Work Ready Community distinction (Bikoff, 2010).

The distinction of being a Certified Work Ready Community in Georgia required that a specified percentage of county residents successfully attain the Work Ready Certification. The program mandated that each Georgia County must have 3% of its existing workforce and 25% of its available workforce earn a certificate. Additionally, each county must meet a benchmark of at least 70% graduation rate of those entering the ninth grade. Based on the rates achieved in 2006, each county must then increase, with respect to the county make-up, their high school graduation rate by a pre-determined percentage each ensuing year. To do this, the state had offered assistance in targeting at-risk students and placing high school graduation coaches in all Georgia high schools to identify at-risk students and support these students in attaining a high school diploma (Lyons, 2007). In March of 2010, the GOWD reported that 158,000 Georgians have earned Work Ready Certificates, 2,692 unemployed Georgians have been hired using their Work Ready Certificate, and since March of 2009, 8,370 Georgians landed jobs using their certificate.

Work Ready Regions

Work Ready Regions (WRR) is another facet of the Georgia Work Ready Program (GWRP). A Work Ready Region was a group of counties which worked together to develop regional talent pools aligned to existing and regional strategic industries. This facet included the creation of regional plans to improve regional high school graduation rates, engage at-risk and out-of-school youth, retrain dislocated workers, increase college graduation rates in strategic industry majors, and upgrade skills of the existing regional strategic industry workforce. Recognizing that this would take significant financial commitments, the State offered competitive regional grants of up to

$400,000 per region (Lyons, 2007). Sixteen Work Ready Regions were established throughout the State of Georgia (Bikoff, 2010).

Community Benefits

In these trying economic times, the question, "Why should communities and regions participate in the Georgia Work Ready Program" has been asked. According to Lyons (2007) participation in this program would help entice business and industry to an area, would promote a better lifestyle and livelihood of the community citizens, and would provide a significant overall return on the programs' initial investment. Projections indicated that the program would help approximately 1,600 Georgia students graduate from high school who otherwise would not. High school graduates earn $260,000 more over a lifetime compared to those who do not graduate from high school, which would equate to $416 million of additional income for the communities, the state, or the national economy (Lyons, 2007).

In his book *Good to Great,* Jim Collins makes a point to place an emphasis on the people of an organization. Collins (2001) stated that people are not your most important asset. The right people are. According to Collins, the single most important decision a company will make about its employees is whether to hire them. All other decisions will be a consequence of this initial choice (Collins, 2001). Few things caused more stress than being placed into a job one was ill-suited to perform. Inappropriate staffing decisions disrupted the lives of employees and the lives of their supervisors, co-workers, customers, and families. Hiring the wrong people also denied career opportunities to other candidates who should have been hired but were not. Hiring the wrong people not only hurt individuals, but also undermined the growth and profitability of companies, and

ultimately damaged the entire economy (Hunt, 2007). According to the *2004 Recruiting Metrics and Performance Benchmark Report*, the average cost to hire a new employee in 2004 was $4,262, some 14% of the total employee compensation (Wolfe, 2004). A 2005 report on hiring success found that 46% of new hires failed on the job within the first 18 months. As was evident, linkage of the needs of the organization and of the job with the workforce and along with the specific employee had a major impact on an organization's bottom line and profitability, thus affecting the overall success and economic impact of the company on a the state, regional, and local scale. The Georgia Work Ready Program sought to aid employers in hiring the right individual by assuring that the skills and proficiencies of the employee were matched to the necessary job skills thus reducing turnover within the organization.

Wiregrass Work Ready Region

> "Georgia's Work Ready Regions is an industry cluster strategy. Each region is an industry-led effort headed by an industry leader and guided by the region's existing Industry Network. The result is a linking of education, workforce development and training aligned to the needs of the regional advanced manufacturing industry. Its advanced manufacturing Industry Network is known as the Wiregrass Work Ready Region. The Wiregrass Work Ready Region, to date, includes Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Coffee, Irwin, Jeff Davis, and Wilcox Counties" (GOWD, 2009).

Advanced Manufacturing Work Ready Region

Each of these counties in the region was currently working toward Certified Work Ready Community status. The region was home to several advanced manufacturing facilities that adhered to the highest standards in product manufacturing and employment practices. It was supported by numerous organized and motivated stakeholder organizations that worked regionally and collaboratively to support the region's businesses and industries. According to a presentation made by Debra Lyons, “The Wiregrass Work Ready Region boasts a growing, skilled workforce ready to support advanced manufacturing” (Lyons, 2007).

The Work Ready Region (WRR) initiative was designed to link education and workforce development efforts and align them with a specific regional industry cluster. The Wiregrass Work Ready Region (WWRR) focused its efforts on training workers for careers in advanced manufacturing industries. The WWRR’s vision was to be recognized throughout the Southeast as a Work Ready Certified region that created jobs, particularly

in advanced manufacturing, by enthusiastically collaborating with economic development and education partners and by taking advantage of available resources and opportunities.

The Wiregrass Work Ready Region differs from other regions of the state. Three technical colleges and one board of regent's college were located within the seven county region. They provide numerous educational opportunities and had the capacity to deliver customized training courses. Many stable existing business and industry operations, despite recent economic conditions, validated the region's potential for success and sustainability. The region boasts access to four interstate highways and close proximity to several major seaports including Savannah and Brunswick, Georgia, as well as Jacksonville, Florida. Additionally, the region offered competitive wage rates, low start-up and operating cost for business and industry, relatively low insurance rates, and energy rates that could not be surpassed by other regions of the country (GOWD, 2009).

Summary of the Wiregrass Work Ready Region Goals

One of the primary goals of the Wiregrass Work Ready Region (WWRR) was to create a seamless entry career pathway from school to the world of work. The pipeline was imperative for the region's economic future. Also, the WWRR sought to engage at-risk and out-of-school youth and improve regional high school graduation rates. This was to be accomplished through the presentation of "The Game of Real Life" in an effort to implement a program into the high schools and community outreach programs focused on decreasing high school drop-out rate and demonstrating proper work ethics. Deficits in basic workplace skills were an additional concern of the WWRR. The Regional commitment was to negate this skills gap, as identified by the ACT Work Ready Assessments, by offering "skills gap training" to all seven counties encompassed by the

regional commitment through the *KeyTrain* on-line remediation program; thus, impacting human capital (Wilkes, 2008).

Retraining of dislocated workers, increasing college graduation rates in strategic industry majors, and upgrading skills of the existing regional strategic industry workforce were other major focuses of the WWRR. This was to be accomplished through the implementation of no cost training programs geared towards advanced manufacturing sectors. Programs would be implemented to promote regional manufacturing industries; thus, reducing unemployment rates throughout the region. In support of this effort, the WWRR was to engage regional business leaders become active promoters of the WWRR Initiative by utilizing the ACT Work Ready Assessments and Job Profiling in their pre-hire, hiring, and promotional strategies; thus, reducing turnover, impacting profitability and enhancing growth of the organization (Wilkes, 2008).

According to Wilkes (2008), all seven counties in the region were ranked as Tier One Communities by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. This meant that all counties of this region were ranked among the lowest in the state based on employment opportunities/rates, educational levels, and per capita income. The overall goal of the WWRR was to have a significant impact on the economic and socioeconomic status of the communities represented by the regional effort. This was to be accomplished through supporting job creation efforts, particularly in advanced manufacturing, with regional economic developers and business leaders. Human capital was developed in the communities by forming collaborative environments with education partners and bolstering an increased graduation rate. Additionally, collaboration would serve as the path to seamless educational opportunities focused on the advanced manufacturing

sector. The major determinant as to whether this was accomplished was the designation of all seven counties in the region as Work Ready Certified (Wilkes, 2008).

Wiregrass Work Ready Competitive Context

By building a skilled workforce, with Work Ready Certification that actively supports the advanced manufacturing industry, the Wiregrass Region was set to compete in the United States and abroad. Numerous organized and motivated stakeholder organizations worked regionally and collaboratively to support the region's businesses and industries. According to Wilkes (2008), this was the major determinant as to the overall competitive success of the WWRR Initiative.

Wiregrass Work Ready Goals

- Go for Gold – 19% of available workforce at Gold Level Certification
- CWRC Counties – All Counties would meet their High School Graduation Rate (HSGR) requirement
- CWRC Counties – All Counties would meet their Certificate goals
- Career Pathways – Develop and implement Career Pathways aligned with strategic industries in all counties
- Industry Networks – Develop an Industry Network encompassing all counties that meets pre-determined criteria
- Core and Home Team – Develop a Core and Home Team encompassing all counties that meets pre-determined metrics criteria
- Leadership Team - Develop a Leadership Team encompassing all counties that meets pre-determined metrics

- Regional Workforce/Economic Development – Development in the area of Advanced Manufacturing

Success Indicators

Program success was to be measured in small steps leading to the overall goal of Certified Work Ready Region status. To reach this plateau, the leadership team had to set both short-term (less than six months) and long-term benchmarks (six to eighteen months) as defined by the regions "dashboard metrics" scorecard. Among the short term benchmarks was to expand the current Work Ready Industry Network Team from eight to twelve members. Additionally, the team was to hold two Industry Network meetings and numerous other in-facility meetings with an established speaker's bureau from regional industry leaders. The initiative sought to complete five manufacturing specific job profiles, ensure that ten companies in the region advertise that they "Prefer Work Ready" and that two companies advertised that they "Require Work Ready." Additionally, the initiative sought to ensure that a minimum of one county attain Certified Work Ready Community status within the first six months of operation (Wilkes, 2008).

Long-term benchmarks were to have area high school teachers complete the Work Ready teacher training program. Additionally, the initiative sought to have fifteen companies in the region advertise that they "Prefer Work Ready" and five companies advertise that they "Require Work Ready." The "Game of Real Life" was to be presented in all Wiregrass region high schools as well as the completion of fifteen industry job profiles. The initiative sought to ensure that 100% of high school seniors had the opportunity to take the Work Ready Certification assessments and all area high schools had the opportunity to receive and implement *KeyTrain* skills gap training software into

the classrooms. The climaxing benchmark was to have all seven counties of region meet the requirements of obtaining Certified Work Ready Community status (Wilkes, 2008).

Wiregrass Work Ready Progress

The Wiregrass Work Ready Regional grant concluded in December 2010. To determine the quantifiable benefits and effectiveness of the regional effort a numeric value was assigned to each of the seven goals that make-up the Region's Scorecard. The benchmark for *Go for Gold* was to have 19% of available workforce at Gold Level Certification. As of the grant closing date in December 2010, Wiregrass has an overall gold percentage of 15.6%. All but one of the seven counties met their High School Graduation Rate (HSGR) requirement, and all seven counties in the Wiregrass region met their required certificate goals and thus earned their Certified Work Ready Community designation. A working plan was established toward the development of career pathways aligned with strategic jobs throughout the region, a sustainable Industry Network was formed, and common industry training was provided throughout the region. Core and Home Teams were determined to be participative and representative of all seven counties throughout the region. The Leadership Team gained state-wide recognition at the annual Georgia Work Ready Awards luncheon. Wiregrass received the 100% Award for exceeding the expectations in all areas of the scorecard and producing a sustainable workforce strategy that provided transformational change to the region. The Wiregrass Work Ready Region earned a total score of 90 out of a possible 100 points upon conclusion of the grant.

Summary

The Georgia Work Ready Program is a proactive approach for combating global competition for jobs in Georgia. In order to compete successfully in a global economy, companies will need a qualified labor pool. The Georgia Work Ready Program was designed to promote the state of Georgia for business and industry and to certify that Georgia has the nation's best workforce. Additionally, the program was designed to ensure that Georgia companies have a labor pool of qualified candidates. Work Ready is thought to be transforming the state of Georgia by making citizens its number one competitive advantage and by partnering with existing companies to provide workforce development tools that will surely reap long term success. Work Ready demonstrates that Georgia is aware of what it will take to be competitive tomorrow and that employers are preparing their workers and companies today (GOWD, 2010).

Approximately 158,000 Georgians have worked to earn a Work Ready Certificate. Additionally, Certified Work Ready Community efforts helped raise the public high school graduation rate from 69.4% in 2005 to 79.9% in 2010 and assisted more than 8,370 Georgians in finding employment since March of 2009. One hundred and forty-six counties in Georgia have committed to the Certified Work Ready Community program, seventy-five have earned the designation; sixteen regional areas of emphasis have been established, and companies throughout the state are utilizing the Work Ready Assessments as a hiring tool (GOWD, 2010). At the forefront, the workforce gains the ability to demonstrate their skills to current and potential employers. Work Ready opens the door for many Georgia residents to promotional and advancement opportunities, resulting in a better quality of life. Workers also have the opportunity to

build their skills in areas where they may be lacking expertise. The program is of no cost to workers and requires a minimal investment of their time. Companies benefit by having the assurance that employees have the right skill sets for a specific type of job. Work Ready seeks to improve hiring practices, reduce turnover and training costs, increase productivity, and improve employee morale, which equates to better performance and an increased bottom line. Communities benefit by achieving the Work Ready designation in the areas of marketing and workforce certification. In addition to helping existing industry to become more competitive, Work Ready is a valuable tool in attracting new business to communities. Work Ready designation is proof that a community has the workforce to fill current and future jobs and thus gives the communities a springboard toward economic growth and prosperity (Lyons, 2007).

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Human capital refers to the stock of competences, knowledge, and personal attributes embodied in the worker's ability to perform labor so as to produce economic value. These attributes were gained by a worker through education and experience. Many early economic theories referred to this asset simply as "workforce." Adam Smith (1776) defined four types of fixed capital, all of which were characterized as that which afforded a revenue or profit without circulating or changing masters. The four types were: 1) useful machines, instruments of the trade; 2) buildings as the means of procuring revenue; 3) improvements of land; and 4) human capital. One can surmise that investments in education, workforce development, life skills, and medical care were examples of capital investment. These investments increased workers' earnings, improve their health and well-being, and added to their socioeconomic package and therefore should be regarded as human capital and considered to be of tangible benefit. These assets were called human capital because people could not be separated from their knowledge, skills, health, or values in the way they could be separated from their financial and physical assets (www.econlib.org/library/enc/humancapital.html).

Human capital theory seemed to be the basis for the Wiregrass Region Georgia Work Ready Program. The regional program sought to develop the workforce through investments in training and education and thus affecting an individual's financial well-

being and quality of life. Thus, it is appropriate to use human capital theory as the theoretical framework with which to interpret the results of the study.

This study sought to contribute to the body of knowledge through a descriptive case study that measured the perceptions and the interaction of three groups. The overarching purpose of this study was to gather perceptions of stakeholders, with regard to their affiliation with the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program, as to the effectiveness and benefits of the program with regard to human capital and the established goals of the program. The research questions guiding the study were as follows:

1. What were the perceptions regarding the degree of effectiveness which the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program has achieved the goals set forth by the program as related to each stakeholder team?
2. What specific suggestions were made by each stakeholder group to support future improvements and sustainability?
3. What was the overall relationship between the perceptions of the three stakeholder groups, participation levels, and county of representation?

Research Design

This descriptive study was an effort to determine the perceptions of stakeholders, with regard to the economic and socioeconomic benefits and effectiveness of the Wiregrass Region Georgia Work Ready Program as well as to solicit recommendations for future improvement and sustainability. A descriptive study is aimed at quantifying a relationship that exists between two or more groups. In a descriptive study, no attempt is made to change behavior or conditions. The researcher seeks to measure things as they

are. Descriptive studies are also referred to as observational studies because one observes the subjects without otherwise intervening. The researcher took heed to only record reported data without interjecting in the outcomes. The simplest descriptive study is a case, which reports data on only one subject or group of subjects (www.sportsci.org/jour/0001/wghdesign.html). Because data associated with individual test results is protected by privacy/confidentiality laws, this researcher chose to evaluate the perceptions of the stake holders: Core, Home and Industry Network Team's members with regard to the Regional Program. For these reasons, a case driven descriptive design was chosen to perform the research study.

The quantitative phase of the study consisted of a survey instrument that asked respondents to select answers from a rating scale with regards to perceptions of the effectiveness and benefits of the program. A survey method of research is a quantitative description of trends, attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample of the population (Creswell, 2003). Kerlinger and Lee (2000) stated that survey research is interested in the assessment of characteristics of the whole population of people. In this regard, the leadership team served as a pilot group to assist in validation of the instrument. A possible ninety-six participants could take part in the study representing seven South Georgia Counties. Study participants were asked to identify their respective team affiliation, county of representation, and self-evaluate their level of participation.

The qualitative component of the study incorporated the use of three open-ended questions. Study participants were asked to provide comments with regard to recommendations for program improvement and sustainability.

This research focuses on perceptions, as it is realized that perception is key to a program's successful implementation, effectiveness, and future sustainability. Additionally, from the survey responses, the study sought to gather data for program improvement from the survey responses as well as report the challenges and successes realized by those participating on the various teams.

Description of the Population

The population of this study consisted of all stakeholders of the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program. Stakeholders were identified as all members of the Leadership, Core, Home, and Industry Network Teams. Ninety-six non-randomly selected individuals were selected from the seven counties encompassed by the Wiregrass Region population. A complete list of all team members, the teams they represent, and their respective counties can be found in Appendices A and B.

Core Team

The first group in this study consisted of the Core Team members. This group was represented by workforce support entities, technical college representatives, economic developers, and high school educational leaders who provided support to the leadership team. This team, often referred as the implementation team, had the primary duty to communicate the relevant needs of their respective communities to the leadership team while serving also as the champion within their area of expertise. The Core Team was represented by thirty-four individuals from the seven counties of the Wiregrass Region.

Home Team

The second group in this consisted of the Home Team members. This group was represented by each community's Certified Work Ready Team leader, education,

community and business leaders, county commissioners, economic developers, and other interested partners who could assist in obtaining community goals. This team's duty was to provide the support function, and offer advice and suggestions to the Core Team to ensure community success. The Home Team was represented by thirty individuals from the seven counties of the Wiregrass Region.

Industry Network Team

The third group in this study consisted of the Industry Network Team members. As the name implies, this group was representative of leaders within manufacturing in each respective county. Members of this team were responsible for communicating the needs of the manufacturing sector in each community to the Core Team. Additionally, Industry Network Team members assisted with obtaining Work Ready Testing numbers by making their organization a Work Ready "required" or a Work Ready "preferred" organization. The Industry Network Team was represented by twenty-six individuals from the seven counties of the Wiregrass Region.

Research Procedures

This study sought to utilize a descriptive approach to the research and reporting. A descriptive approach provides an in-depth and rich understanding of the issue at hand. Descriptive methods seek to provide a greater understanding of the phenomena when one method will not suffice (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Since the Wiregrass Region Georgia Work Ready Program was a relatively new entity and little research had been conducted of this program in Georgia, this researcher proposed that a descriptive inquiry would provide a comprehensive strategy to fulfill the purpose of the study.

A survey instrument was developed to answer the research questions. The survey questions were constructed with regard to the eight program goals identified by the Wiregrass Regional effort to draw the perceptions of the stakeholders on a question-by-question basis. Content validity is a means of estimating whether the content of the instrument adequately samples the domain from which inferences will be made (Popham, 1993). To determine content validity, the Leadership Team, which consisted of four individuals who were the administrators of the program and accountable for the success of the regional program, were solicited to participate in the pilot survey and provide feedback as a means of construct validity, content validity and readability of the survey instrument. This group was chosen because the team members had the most knowledge of the program and were considered as the subject matter experts for the region. The results of the pilot test were used for informational purposes to make modifications of the survey instrument.

The study was introduced at a joint meeting of the Core, Home, and Industry Network Teams. An email followed with a message explaining the proposed research (see Appendix E). Each member of each team was asked to participate in the research project and requested to complete the on-line survey instrument.

Instrumentation

For the quantitative aspect of the study, all team members from each county in each of the three groups were surveyed utilizing the constructed survey instrument (N = 96). Each individual was asked to identify their respective team affiliation, county represented, and overall participation level in the program. Each individual was then asked to respond to a set of statements (N = 42) based on their perception of the

effectiveness, benefits, and overall performance related to the eight program goals. For the qualitative aspect of the study, each participant had an opportunity to answer open ended questions to gather data for continuous improvement, future action, and sustainability. A copy of the survey instrument can be found in Appendix C.

Survey Group One – Core Team

The first group in this study consisted of the Core Team members. This study sought to gather data from this team's perceptions of the program as identified by the research questions. Because the group members' participation and knowledge of the program could not be pre-determined by the researcher, the researcher utilized all Core Team members from each county as participants in the study.

Survey Group Two – Home Team

The second group in this study consisted of the Home Team members. This study sought to gather data from this team's perceptions of the program as identified by the research questions. Because the group member's participation and knowledge of the program could not be pre-determined by the researcher, the researcher utilized all Home Team members from each county as participants in the study.

Survey Group Three – Industry Network Team

The third group in this study consisted of the Industry Network Team members. This study sought to gather data from this team's perceptions of the program as identified by the research questions. Because the group member participation and knowledge of the program could not be pre-determined by the researcher, the researcher utilized all Industry Network Team members from each county as participants in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

The data gathering device was provided in a link to an electronic survey instrument. The survey instrument was designed based on the program goals and the knowledge of the researcher in an effort to answer the research questions. Efforts to increase survey response included electronic distribution, through LimeSurvey version 1.52+, of the survey instrument, the use of received and read receipts, web enhanced response capability, follow-up emails ensuring acknowledgement, acknowledgement of the study significance at all future regional meetings, and follow-up emails.

First, the survey instrument was released to all participants. The participants had two weeks to submit their responses to the researcher. After two weeks, a follow-up email was sent to all prospective participants, since it could not be determined who was non-responsive. An additional week was allowed for a final response. The total time for survey administration did not exceed one month.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was reported through the use of tables and various descriptive statistical methods. The data from this study was tabulated and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17 software. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the responses to the survey instrument because they describe data in abbreviated fashion and summarize the data (Huck, 2000). Non-parametric statistics were applied and utilized to measure the responses to the questionnaire. Each statement/question was analyzed using cross tabulation of percentage responses and frequencies. Additionally, complete data sets were analyzed with cross tabulation and Chi-square was used to determine statistical significance. Also, Chi-square

was used to test the likelihood that there was a relationship between team affiliation, county of residence, and level of participation with regard to perceptions indicated by the responses to the survey instrument. Chi-square is a non-parametric test of statistical significance. Chi-square is a pass-fail measurement used to indicate the likelihood that a relationship exists and it is probably not due to chance but does not attempt to measure relational strength (ocw.jhsph.edu/courses/fundepiii/PDFs/Lecture17.pdf). An analysis of the data provided a basis of reporting the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study. Qualitative data gathered through the open ended questions and responses was reported as responded to determine if themes and/or trends exist within the survey responses.

Assumptions of the Study

A major assumption of this descriptive study was that stakeholders completely understand the program, its initiative, and have been active participants in the program. Another assumption was that the program leadership team sought to gain the greatest benefit from the study and not protect itself against stakeholder and public scrutiny in the development of the survey instrument. It was also assumed that no major changes, with regard to other programs, developed in each of these communities could skew the perceptions of the Georgia Work Ready Program and its benefits and effectiveness. Additionally, it was the assumption of the researcher that all participants answered honestly and without regard to one's personal agenda.

Limitations of the Study

The conclusions and recommendations of this study had limited generalizability due to the demographics of the region. As each area of the nation and state may or may

not have its own strengths and weaknesses with regard to economic and socioeconomic development, to infer the results of this program could be applied to other regions of the nation or state might not be an accurate implication. Because this study was dealing with perceptions, the terms success, failure, challenges, and opportunities may have had their own definitions. What might be viewed in a negative respect to one individual might be a significant achievement to someone else. Thus, there is a limitation to the generalizability of the conclusions based on the findings of the questionnaire, Additionally, since 39.58% of the total population did not respond to the survey instrument and the demographics of these non-respondents were unknown to the researcher, the impact of as to how the responses of these stakeholders might have impacted the outcomes of the study is cause for further limitation of generalizability. Furthermore, responses to the qualitative component of the study were minimal. A total of at least 174 responses were possible but only fifteen (8.62%) comments were received to the open-ended questions further limiting the confidence of generalizability of this part of the study. This study sought to document, improve, and provide a segue for sustainability of the regional effort and future programs of this region. Therefore, it was the recommendation of this researcher that the results of this study should be primarily used as a continuous improvement tool for the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program until further research is conducted.

Approvals

This researcher gained permission to conduct the research study from the Internal Review Board at Valdosta State University and was guided by his dissertation committee (see Appendix J).

Researcher Controls

As the researcher played a role in the regional process as a representative of the Georgia Jeff Davis County Core Team and an employee of Altamaha Technical College, the researcher did not take part in the survey. The researcher was aware personal subjectivity could not play a part in the study and took measures to counter balance the possibility of bias entering into the findings of the study. The researcher had a working relationship with the participants as a member of the regional Core Team and was aware that this could have an impact on their responses to the survey instrument to some extent. However, it was the researchers' opinion that this working relationship actually permitted the participants to respond more openly to the survey instrument. Additionally, the close relationship to the process enabled interpretation of the results with greater accuracy. According to the research, individuals involved with programs were less intrusive during an evaluation and more sensitive to and aware of program elements than an outsider, thus, more likely to provide a candid response (Yin, 2003).

The instrument was sent to each member of the population in a mass email distribution. Return of the results were automatic and anonymous through the use of LimeSurvey version 1.52+. Responses were time and date stamped and participants were allowed to save partially finished surveys. Electronic email notification was the source of all communication regarding the survey instrument and its completion.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine the perceptions of stakeholders, with regard to the economic and socioeconomic benefits and effectiveness of the Wiregrass Region Georgia Work Ready Program as well as to solicit recommendations for future improvement and sustainability. Additionally, the study was designed to determine if a relationship existed between perceptions with regard to team affiliation, county of residence, and participation levels in the program. The accessible population consisted of the entire list of current stakeholders (N = 96) in the program updated January 1, 2011. The researcher's report for this study was based on the 58 participants (60.42%) who completed and returned the survey instrument. The researcher calculated descriptive statistics for 36 questions regarding perceptions of the program. The researcher used cross-tabulation to measure response trends and differences to determine if patterns/themes existed with regard to each survey question. Chi-square statistical analysis was used to test for statistical significance of the differences of perception with regard to the chosen variables of team affiliation, county of residence, and participation levels. Qualitative responses to open-ended questions were subjected to a content analysis to determine recommendations for improvement and sustainability.

Research Questions

In this chapter, the researcher presents the detailed findings and a discussion of the analysis of data as guided by the overarching question: What are the perceptions of stakeholders, with regard to the economic and socioeconomic benefits and effectiveness of the Wiregrass Region Georgia Work Ready Program? The following research questions were used to gain insight and to determine if differences in perception existed between the teams, their county of residence, or participation levels:

1. What are the perceptions regarding the degree of effectiveness which the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program has achieved the goals set forth by the program as related to each stakeholder team?

2. What specific suggestions are made by each stakeholder group to support future improvements and sustainability?

3. What are the similarities and differences between the perceptions of the three stakeholder groups, participation levels, and county of representation?

Findings

Demographic Data

The researcher e-mailed the link to the survey to 96 stakeholders of the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional program and received 58 (60.42%) completed surveys. Not all respondents fully completed the survey. Six surveys were returned and coded as incomplete by survey software. Incomplete surveys were not included in the findings.

Questions 1, 2, and 3 asked for demographic data. Question 1 was "What team do you represent." The responses revealed 24 Industry Network Team members, 19 Home Team members, and 15 Core Team members responded to the survey. These results

indicated the largest number of respondents came from the Industry Network Team as compared to the Home and Core Teams taking into account the distribution of surveys was equal and team membership was evenly distributed (see Table 1).

Table 1

Question 1 – Which team do you represent?

Team	Respondents	% of Total
Industry Network	24	41.4
Home	19	32.8
Core	15	25.8

Question 2 was "Which county do you represent?" The responses revealed that all seven 7 participating counties were represented in the completed surveys. There were 16 respondents from Coffee County, 15 respondents from Ben Hill County, 10 respondents from Jeff Davis County, six respondents from Bacon County, four respondents from Irwin County, four respondents from Wilcox County, and three respondents from Atkinson County. The results indicated a greater response rate from the larger counties (Coffee, Ben Hill) due to an uneven distribution of representatives. The larger counties had more representation from the Industry Network Team as a result of having more industry as compared to the smaller counties (see Table 2).

Table 2

Question 2 – Which county do you represent?

County	Respondents	% of Total
Coffee	16	27.6
Ben Hill	15	25.9
Jeff Davis	10	17.2
Bacon	6	10.3
Irwin	4	6.9
Wilcox	4	6.9
Atkinson	3	5.2

Question 3 was "How would I rate my level of participation in the program?" The responses revealed that 33 (56.9%) rated their level at 50 to 74%, 20 respondents (34.5%) rated their participation at 75% or greater, one (1.7%) rated their level of participation at 25 to 49%, and four respondents (6.9%) rated their participation as less than 25%. These results indicated that 53 respondents (91.4%) rated their participation as better than 50%. Based on these results, that the vast majority of participants in the program felt they had a good to high level of participation in the program (see Table 3).

Table 3

Question 3 – Level of participation?

Level (%)	Respondents	% of Total
50 – 74	33	56.9
75+	20	34.5
25 – 49	1	1.7
>25	4	6.9

Descriptive Analysis – Team Affiliation

Statements and questions four through thirty-eight and question forty of the survey were the inquiries that revealed the perceptions of the respondents towards the program's overall benefits and effectiveness. Respondents used a five-point Likert-type scale to indicate their level of perceptions of the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program. The values on the Likert-type scale were coded according to positive response levels regardless of how the statement was phrased. If the statement was phrased with a negative connotation, the rating scale scores/perception percentages were inverted to equate to positive perceptions. The lower the rating on the Likert-type scale the less positive the respondents' perceptions were for these items. Responses indicated as no opinion were recorded with a numeric value of one and reported as missing values. Responses were numerically coded as: Strongly Negative = 2, Negative = 3, Positive = 4, and Strongly Positive = 5.

Statement 4: "The Wiregrass Work Ready Region leadership has successfully engaged community, educational, and industry leaders." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Core, Home, and Industry Network Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 4 (see Table 4).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results indicated that there was little disparity between the three teams and that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(2, N = 58) = 4.146$, $p = .126$. These findings showed that the perceptions of the respondents across all three teams agreed that the Wiregrass Work Ready Region leadership team had successfully engaged community, educational, and industry leaders.

Table 4

Statement 4 – Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				χ^2 - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core			47%	53%			
Home			68%	32%			
Ind. Network			38%	62%			
p-value					.126	.423	.125
df					2	6	3

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .126, .423, and .125 support that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by either team membership affiliation, county of residence and/or level of participation rather than by chance.

Statement 5: "Common Industry Training needs were not successfully identified through Industry Network meetings." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Industry Network Team, 63% of the Home, and 60% of the Core Team either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 5. The total population response indicated 78% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 5).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results showed that there was an apparent difference in perceptions between the Industry Network Team and the other two teams. These findings showed that the perceptions of the Industry Network respondents were strongly supportive of the Industry Network Team meetings and the ability to identify common industry training needs as a result of these meetings. Nearly 40% of the respondents from the Core and Home Teams did not have a positive perception of training needs being identified in the meetings. There was an apparent difference in perceptions mainly between the Industry Network Team and the other two teams $\chi^2(4, N = 58) = 23.569$, $p = .000$. That suggests there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance.

Table 5

Statement 5 – Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core		40%	40%	20%			
Home		37%	58%	5%			
Ind. Network			33%	67%			
p-value					.000	.001	.034
df					4	12	6

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .000, .001, and .034 support that there was a significant difference that may be caused by either team membership affiliation, county of residence and/or level of participation rather than by chance.

Statement 6: "Outreach efforts (flyers, signs, blitz weeks, guest speaker opportunities, etc…) have been significant factors in creating awareness and attaining Work Ready Certificate goals." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Home, 93% of the Core, and 83% of the Industry Network Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 6. The total population response indicated 92% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 6).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results showed that the vast majority of the respondents across all three teams reported positive perceptions regarding outreach efforts. However, there was an apparent difference in perceptions mainly between the Industry Network Team and the other two teams $\chi^2(4, N = 58) = 12.657$, $p = .013$. That suggests there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance. Overall, these results showed the perceptions of the respondents were positive towards the outreach efforts of the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program to create awareness of the program and its elements.

Table 6

Statement 6 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	6%		27%	67%			
Home			79%	21%			
Ind. Network	16%		46%	38%			
p-value					.013	.777	.149
df					4	12	6

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .013, .777, and .149 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance. The variables of county of residence and level of participation did not seem to have a relationship to the difference of perceptions with *p*-values of .777 and .149 respectively.

Statement 7: "Regularly scheduled individual meetings of the Core, Home, & Industry Network Team members have proven instrumental in strategic planning, identifying needs, and leveraging resources for regional efforts." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Industry Network, 87% of the Core, and 74% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 7. The total population response indicated 88% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 7).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results showed that the vast majority of the respondents across all three teams reported positive perceptions regarding outcomes of the scheduled meetings. However, there was an apparent difference in perceptions among all three teams $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 19.727$, $p = .003$. That suggests there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance. Overall, these results showed the perceptions of the respondents were positive towards the meetings held for strategic planning, identifying needs, and leveraging resources for the regional effort.

Table 7

Statement 7 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core			53%	34%			
Home		26%	58%	16%			
Ind. Network			50%	50%			
p-value					.003	.001	.035
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .003, .001, and .035 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by either team membership affiliation, county of residence and/or level of participation rather than by chance.

Statement 8: "Meeting the goal of the Wiregrass Work Ready Region to have at least six of the seven counties to become Certified Work Ready Communities will strengthen our region's economic growth opportunities." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Home and Industry Network Team, and 93% of the Core Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 8. The total population response indicated 97% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 8).

The findings $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 5.617$, $p = .092$ suggests that there was no significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation. These findings show that the perceptions of the vast majority of respondents across all three teams were strongly supportive of the goal of the Wiregrass Work Ready Region to have at least six of the seven counties to become Certified Work Ready Communities. Additionally, the results further indicated that the respondents' perceptions indicated that this accomplishment would strengthen the Wiregrass region's economic growth opportunities.

Table 8

Statement 8 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core		7%	20%	73%			
Home			37%	63%			
Ind. Network			38%	63%			
p-value					.467	.067	.005
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square value of .005 supports that there was a significant difference that might be caused by level of participation rather than by chance. The variables of team membership affiliation, and county of residence did not seem to have a relationship to the

difference in perceptions with *p*-values of .467 and .067 respectively.

Statement 9: "Area high school students and teachers have a greater understanding of the value and importance of education and training relative to the workplace resulting from this initiative." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 86% of the Industry Network, 80% of the Core, and 61% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 9. The total population response indicated 82% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 9).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these findings showed that the majority of the respondents across all three teams reported positive perceptions regarding the program's impact on workplace understandings of high school students and teachers. However, there was an apparent difference in perceptions mainly between the Home Team and the other two teams $\chi^2(6, N = 55) = 15.526$, $p = .017$. That suggests there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance. The results showed that the perceptions of the Industry Network and Core Team respondents were similar and notably more positive than the Home Team's perceptions of the impact of the program on high school students and teachers relative to their workplace understanding.

Table 9

Statement 9 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	7%	13%	67%	13%			
Home	39%		61%				
Ind. Network	9%	4%	55%	32%			
p-value					.017	.001	.381
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .001 and .017 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by county of residence and team affiliation rather than by chance. The variable of level of participation did not seem to have a relationship to the differences in perception with a *p*-value of .381.

Statement 10: "Georgia Work Ready's creation and use of Work Ready Regions has been essential in transforming our region's workforce into its number one competitive advantage." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 93% of the Core, 83% of the Industry Network, and 74% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 10. The total number of response indicated 83% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agree (see Table 10).

The findings suggest $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 5.553$, $p = .475$ that there was no significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation. These findings showed that the perceptions of the vast majority of respondents across all three teams were strongly supportive of the regions workforce in relation to its competitive context.

Table 10

Statement 10 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	7%		80%	13%			
Home	15%	11%	63%	11%			
Ind. Network	8%	8%	54%	30%			
p-value					.475	.019	.437
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square value of .019 supports that there was a significant difference that might be caused by county of residence rather than by chance. The variables of team membership affiliation, and level of participation did not seem to have a relationship to the difference in perceptions with *p*-values of .475 and .437 respectively.

Statement 11: "The "Be Work Ready" initiative and incentive is helping unemployed citizens in the Wiregrass Region jump start their job search while gaining confidence and a competitive advantage in the marketplace." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 86% of the Core, 68% of the Home, and 59% of the Industry Network Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 11. The total number of responses indicated 69% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 11).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results showed that there was an apparent difference in perceptions between the Core Team and the other two teams. These findings showed that the perceptions of the Core Team respondents appeared to be more supportive of the incentive programs offered through the "Be Work Ready" initiative than the other two teams. Over 40% of the respondents from the Industry Network Team did not have a positive perception of incentive programs offered through the program. However, the findings suggest $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 10.595$, $p = .102$ that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance.

Table 11

Statement 11 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	7%	7%	67%	19%			
Home	11%	21%	68%				
Ind. Network	3%	38%	38%	21%			
p-value					.102	.068	.196
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .102, .068, and .196 support that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by either team membership affiliation, county of residence and/or level of participation rather than by chance.

Statement 12: "The Wiregrass Work Ready Regional effort played a significant role in educating the state's emerging workforce for exciting careers in cutting-edge technology by creating linkage between education, job seekers, and employers." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 95% of the Home, and 58% of the Industry Network, and 53% of the Core Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 12. The total number of responses indicated 69% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 12).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results showed that there was an apparent difference in perceptions between the Core Team and the other two teams. These findings showed that the perceptions of the Industry Network and Core Team respondents were not supportive of the regional effort playing a significant role in educating the state's emerging workforce for exciting careers in cutting-edge technology by creating linkage between education, job seekers, and employers. Almost one-half of the respondents from the Core Team and 40% of the Industry Network Team did not have a positive perception of incentive programs offered through the program $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 20.247$, $p = .003$. That suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance.

Table 12

Statement 12 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	34%	13%	40%	13%			
Home		5%	84%	11%			
Ind. Network	8%	33%	33%	25%			
p-value					.003	.195	.334
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square value of .003 supports that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation rather than by chance. The variables of county of residence and level of participation did not seem to have a relationship to the difference in perceptions with *p*-values of .195 and .334 respectively.

Statement 13: "The Wiregrass Work Ready Regional effort produced results through profiling strategic industry jobs; ensuring counties reach Work Ready Certificate goals, closing the skills gap, increasing public high school graduation rates, developing career pathways aligned to critical occupations, ensuring the education community graduates enough new talent, and building an Industry Network to lead the effort." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 87% of the Core, 68% of the Home, and 67% of the Industry Network Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 13. The total population response indicated 72% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 13).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results revealed that there was some disparity in perceptions among the three teams but all were positive. These findings showed that the perceptions of the Core Team respondents were more supportive than the other two teams. It should be noted that about one-third of the Home and Industry Network Team respondents did not have a positive perception of this item. However, the data suggests that there was no significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 10.618$, $p = .101$. These findings show that the perceptions of the vast majority of respondents across all three teams were supportive of results produced through profiling strategic industry jobs, ensuring counties reach Work Ready Certificate goals, closing the skills gap, increasing public high school

graduation rates, developing career pathways aligned to critical occupations, ensuring the education community graduates enough new talent, and building an Industry Network.

Table 13

Statement 13 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	13%		60%	27%			
Home		32%	58%	10%			
Ind. Network	4%	29%	38%	29%			
p-value					.101	.008	.104
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square value of .008 supports that there was a significant difference that might be caused by county of residence rather than by chance. The variables of team affiliation and level of participation did not seem to have a relationship to the difference in perceptions with *p*-values of .101 and .104 respectively.

Statement 14: "The partnerships that the Wiregrass Work Ready Regions developed with Departments of Labor representatives have been an integral part of the region success." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 69% of the Core, 63% of the Industry Network, and 58% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly

agreed with Statement 14. The total number of responses indicated 63% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 14).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results showed that there was little difference in perceptions among the three teams. These findings showed that the perceptions of all three teams were supportive of the partnerships that the Wiregrass Work Ready Regions developed with the Departments of Labor representatives and its' role in the regions success. The research indicated that for all three teams at least 30% of the respondents did not have a positive perception. Based on the analysis of data, there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 56) = 10.615$, $p = .101$.

Table 14

Statement 14 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	23%	8%	38%	31%			
Home	5%	37%	47%	11%			
Ind. Network	8%	29%	59%	4%			
p-value					.101	.031	.115
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square value of .031 supports that there was a significant difference that might be caused by county of residence rather than by chance. The variables of team affiliation and level of participation did not seem to have a relationship to the difference in perceptions with *p*-values of .101 and .115 respectively.

Statement 15: "The Wiregrass Georgia Work Ready Regional effort opened the doors to the workforce by identifying valuable job training opportunities, and opportunities for career change and advancement." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 71% of the Industry Network, 68% of the Home, and 60% of the Core Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 15. The total number of responses indicated 67% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 15).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results revealed that the perceptions of the respondents from all three teams were positive. The Industry Network and Home Team respondents were consistent in their positive perception levels. The research indicated that 40% of the Core Team indicated a negative perception level of the regional efforts ability to identify valuable job training opportunities, and opportunities for career change and advancement. The findings support that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 10.585, p = .102$.

Table 15

Statement 15 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	33%	7%	47%	13%			
Home	11%	21%	68%				
Ind. Network	4%	25%	63%	8%			
p-value					.102	.049	.178
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square value of .049 supports that there was a significant difference that might be caused by county of residence rather than by chance. The variables of team affiliation and level of participation did not seem to have a relationship to the difference in perceptions with *p*-values of .102 and .178 respectively.

Statement 16: "The Wiregrass Georgia Work Ready Regional effort did not prove to benefit communities as a valuable tool to attract new businesses to their areas." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 80% of the Core, 79% of the Industry Network, and 47% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 16. The total number of responses indicated 69% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 16).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results show that the perceptions of the Industry Network and Core Team respondents were consistent in having very positive perception levels. A large difference should be noted in that 53% of the Home Team indicated a negative perception level of the regional efforts ability to identify valuable job training opportunities, and opportunities for career change and advancement. The findings support that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance

$\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 8.863, p = .181$.

Table 16

Statement 16 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	13%	7%	60%	20%			
Home	11%	42%	37%	10%			
Ind. Network	8%	13%	54%	25%			
p-value					.181	.017	.338
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square value of .017 supports that there was a significant difference that might be caused by county of residence rather than by chance. The variables of team affiliation

and level of participation did not seem to have a relationship to the difference in perceptions with *p*-values of .181 and .338 respectively.

Statement 17: "Industries within the Wiregrass Work Ready Region will find the Work Ready Certificate useful and reliable in their search for good employees." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Core, 92% of the Industry Network, and 84% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. The total number of responses indicated 74% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 17 (see Table 17).

These findings show that the perceptions of the vast majority of respondents across all three teams were strongly supportive of this program element. The results showed that the perceptions of the respondents were consistent and supportive that the industries within the Wiregrass Work Ready Region would find the Work Ready Certificate useful and reliable in their search for good employees. The data supports that there was no significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 5.690$, $p = .459$.

Table 17

Statement 17 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core			53%	47%			
Home		16%	53%	31%			
Ind. Network	4%	4%	46%	46%			
p-value					.459	.126	.007
Df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square value of .007 supports that there was a significant difference that might be caused by level of participation rather than by chance. The variables of team affiliation and county of residence did not seem to have a relationship to the difference in perceptions with *p*-values of .459 and .126 respectively.

Statement 18: "Regional business and industry leaders who are participating in the Wiregrass Georgia Work Ready initiative will promote Work Ready by recommending participation to other companies." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Home, 96% of the Industry Network and 93% of the Core Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 18. The total population response indicated 97% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table

18).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results indicated that there was little disparity among the three teams. These findings showed that the perceptions of the vast majority of respondents across all three teams agreed that business and industry leaders who are participating in the initiative will promote Work Ready. Also, business and industry leaders would likely recommend support and participation to other companies industries within the Wiregrass Work Ready Region and use the Work Ready Certificate in their search for good employees. Further analysis supports that might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 14.130$, $p = .028$.

Table 18

Statement 18 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core		7%	53%	40%			
Home			95%	5%			
Ind. Network	4%		50%	46%			
p-value					.028	.093	.177
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square value of .028 supports that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation rather than by chance. This difference appears to be in level of positive perception rather between a positive and negative perception between the teams. The variables of county of residence and level of participation did not seem to have a relationship to the difference in perceptions with *p*-values of .093 and .177 respectively.

Statement 19: "Utilizing Georgia Work Ready will not provide a significant benefit to companies by helping them to find high quality employees through improved hiring procedures." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 84% of the Home, 79% of the Core, and 79% of the Industry Network Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 19. The total number of responses indicated 79% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 19).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results indicated that there was little disparity among the three teams. Additionally, data analysis supports that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 48) = 4.978$, $p = .547$. These findings showed that the perceptions of the majority of respondents across all three teams agreed that the Georgia Work Ready program would provide a significant benefit to companies by helping them to find high quality employees.

Table 19

Statement 19 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	21%		36%	43%			
Home	16%		63%	21%			
Ind. Network	20%	7%	47%	26%			
p-value					.547	.108	.008
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square value of .008 supports that there was a significant difference that might be caused by level of participation rather than by chance. The variables of team affiliation and county of residence did not seem to have a relationship to the difference in perceptions with *p*-values of .547 and .108, respectively.

Statement 20: "Companies in the Wiregrass Region will recognize positive trends in reduced turnover and training costs as a result of utilizing Georgia Work Ready tools." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 84% of the Home, and 79% of the Industry Network, and 60% of the Core Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 20. The total number of responses indicated 76% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 20).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results showed that there was an apparent difference in perceptions between the Industry Network and Home Team and the Core Teams. These findings showed that the perceptions of the Industry Network and Home Team respondents were consistent and supportive of the programs ability to reduce turnover and lower training costs as a result of utilizing Georgia Work Ready tools. The research indicated that 40% of the respondents from the Core Team did not have a positive perception level with regard to this program element. The data, also, suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 25.164$, $p = .000$.

Table 20

Statement 20 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	40%		20%	40%			
Home		16%	79%	5%			
Ind. Network	13%	8%	33%	46%			
p-value					.000	.004	.120
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .000 and .004 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation and county of residence rather than by chance. The variables of level of participation did not seem to have a relationship to the difference in perceptions with a *p*-value .120.

Statement 21: "Employers in the Wiregrass Region who utilize the Work Ready system of certificates and job profiles will be more effective when matching the right people to the right jobs." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Core and Home Teams, and 96% of the Industry Network Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 21. The total number of responses indicated 98% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 21).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results revealed that there was little disparity among the three teams. Additionally, further analysis suggests that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(4, N = 58) = 6.195$, $p = .185$. These findings showed that the perceptions of the vast majority of respondents across all three teams agreed that employers who utilize the Work Ready system of certificates and job profiles will be more effective when matching the right people to the right jobs.

Table 21

Statement 21 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core			53%	47%			
Home			84%	16%			
Ind. Network		4%	54%	42%			
p-value					.185	.270	.161
df					4	12	6

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .185, .270, and .161 support that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation, county of residence or level of participation rather than by chance respectively.

Statement 22: "Regional funding to identify and implement action plans for the improvement of the High School Graduation Rates (HSGR's) was unsuccessfully demonstrated throughout the Wiregrass Work Ready Region." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 86% of the Core, 53% of the home, and 29% of the Industry Network Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 22. The total number of responses indicated 51% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 22).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results showed that there was an apparent difference in perceptions among the Industry Network, Home Team and the Core Teams. These findings showed that the perceptions of a high majority of the Core Team were positive while the perceptions of 71% of the Industry Network and 47% of the Home Team respondents indicated negative perception levels to the statement that the program had an impact on High School Graduation Rates (HSGR) throughout the region. Furthermore, the data suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 57) = 19.436$, $p = .003$.

Table 22

Statement 22 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	7%	7%	64%	21%			
Home		47%	21%	32%			
Ind. Network	21%	50%	25%	4%			
p-value					.003	.341	.032
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .003 and .032 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation and level of participation rather than by chance. Additionally, county of residence did not seem to have a relationship to the difference in perceptions with a *p*-value of .341.

Statement 23: "Stakeholders and partners have a heightened awareness and focus for improving community HSGR, decreasing high school drop-outs, and targeting at-risk students after participating in the Wiregrass regional efforts." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Core, 88% of the Industry Network, and 79% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 23. The total number of responses indicated 88% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 23).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results indicated that there was little disparity among the three teams. However, additional analysis of data suggests that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 10.829$, $p = .094$. These findings showed that the perceptions of the majority of respondents across all three teams agreed were positive towards the programs efforts at awareness and focus for improving community HSGR, decreasing high school drop-outs, and targeting at-risk students.

Table 23

Statement 23 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core			60%	40%			
Home		21%	63%	16%			
Ind. Network	4%	8%	80%	8%			
p-value					.094	.025	.002
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .025 and .002 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by county of residence and level of participation rather than by chance.

Statement 24: "The regions Industry Network's ability to identify critical jobs led to the successful documentation of career pathways aligned to the same jobs in regional high schools and technical colleges." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 84% of the Home, 73% of the Core, and 71% of the Industry Network Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 24. The total number of responses indicated 76% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 24).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results indicated that there was little disparity among the three teams. However, additional analysis of data suggests that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 11.153$, $p = .084$. These findings showed that the perceptions of about three-quarters or more of the respondents across all three teams were positive towards the regions Industry Network's ability to identify critical jobs and establish career pathways aligned with regional high schools and technical colleges.

Table 24

Statement 24 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	7%	20%	47%	26%			
Home	11%	5%	84%				
Ind. Network	4%	25%	46%	25%			
p-value					.084	.059	.054
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .084, .059, and .054 support that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation, county of residence, and level of

participation rather than by chance.

Statement 25: "I support Legislation which attempts to ensure the sustainability of Georgia Work Ready and the opportunity for continued Work Ready efforts in our communities and region." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the home, and 96% of the Industry Network, and 60% of the Core Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 25. The total number of responses indicated 85% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 25).

Based on these results, the overall perceptions of the majority of respondents were supportive of legislation that attempted to ensure the sustainability of Georgia Work Ready and the opportunity for continued Work Ready efforts in communities of the region. By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results indicated that there was little disparity between the Home and Industry Network Teams; however, 40% of the Core Team respondents indicated negative perception responses toward legislation that attempted to ensure the sustainability of Georgia Work Ready and the opportunity for continued Work Ready efforts in communities of the region, and the regions' Industry Network's ability to identify critical jobs and establish career pathways aligned with regional high schools and technical colleges. Further analysis suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 28.475$, $p = .000$.

Table 25

Statement 25 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core			7%	53%			
Home		40%	63%	36%			
Ind. Network	4%		29%	67%			
p-value					.000	.002	.153
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .000 and .002 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation and county of residence rather than by chance. Additionally, level of participation did not seem to have a relationship to the difference in perceptions with a *p*-value of .153.

Statement 26: "Georgia Work Ready Regional Industry Network, Inc. (GWRRIN), a 501(c)(3) organization, established to promote and support productivity and competitiveness of Georgia's strategic industries, will provide ongoing sustainability to our participating regional industries." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 92% of the Industry Network, 80% of the Core, and 68% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 26. The total number of responses

indicated 81% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 26).

The results showed the perceptions of the majority of the respondents from each of the three teams were positive towards the establishment of the Georgia Work Ready Regional Industry Network. Additionally, the perceptions were positive toward the Industry Networks ability to promote and support productivity and competitiveness of Georgia's strategic industries. By examining the distribution of rating percentages, it should be noted that almost one-third of the Home Team respondents indicated negative perception levels towards the program elements in Statement 26. Furthermore, the data suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 14.904$, $p = .021$.

Table 26

Statement 26 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	7%	13%	40%	40%			
Home		32%	68%				
Ind. Network	4%	4%	54%	38%			
p-value					.021	.005	.034
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .021, .005, and .034 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by the variables of team affiliation, county of residence, and level of participation rather than by chance.

Statement 27: "The appointment of a Wiregrass region representative to serve on the GWRRIN board of directors solidifies the commitment of the region's Industry Partnership to support future workforce development strategies." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 96% of the Industry Network, 86% of the Core, and 47% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 27. The total number of responses indicated 78% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 27).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results indicated that there was little disparity between the levels of the Core and Industry Network Teams' positive perceptions. The research indicated that 53% of the Home Team respondents indicated negative perception responses toward the appointment of a regional representative to serve on the GWRRIN board of directors and its ability to solidify the regions commitment to workforce development. Furthermore, the data suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 30.406$, $p = .000$.

Table 27

Statement 27 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	7%	7%	60%	26%			
Home		53%	37%	10%			
Ind. Network		4%	25%	71%			
p-value					.000	.001	.309
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .000 and .001 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation and county of residence rather than by chance. Level of participation did not seem to have a significant relationship to the difference in perceptions with a *p*-value of .309.

Statement 28: "Many stakeholders and partners from education, community and business leaders, economic developers, and other interested partners will remain engaged based on confidence gained during the Wiregrass Work Ready Region initiative." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 92% of the Industry Network, 80% of the Core, and 68 % of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 28. The total number of responses indicated 81% of the respondents either agreed or strongly

agreed (see Table 28).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results indicated that the majority of respondents across all three teams reported a positive perception regarding continued engagement in the program. There was a small disparity between the Core and Industry Network Teams' positive perceptions. These findings also showed that a much larger percentage (32%) of the Home Team respondents indicated negative perception responses toward the continued engagement of education, community and business leaders, and economic developers based on confidence gained during the program as compared to the other two teams. Furthermore, the data suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 23.792$, $p = .001$.

Table 28

Statement 28 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	20%		53%	27%			
Home		32%	63%	5%			
Ind. Network		8%	42%	50%			
p-value					.001	.000	.530
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .001 and .000 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation and county of residence rather than by chance. Level of participation did not seem to have a significant relationship to the difference in perceptions with a *p*-value of .530.

Statement 29: "The use of the "Dashboard & Scorecards" metric reviews was not an effective means to provide information, measure progress, identify gaps, as well as document accountability for all areas relative to Wiregrass regional goals and benchmarks." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 80% of the Core, 63% of the Industry Network, and 32% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 30. The total number of responses indicated 57% of the

respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see table 29).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results indicated only a little over half of the respondents had a positive view of these metrics. There was disparity between the Core and Industry Network Teams' perceptions, but they both had overall positive perception levels. However, over one-third of the Industry Network and two-thirds of the Home Team respondents indicated negative perception responses toward the use of the metric reviews as an effective means to provide information, measure progress, identify gaps, as well as document accountability for benchmarks. Furthermore, the data suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance

$\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 18.325, p = .005$.

Table 29

Statement 29 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	13%	7%	27%	53%			
Home	15%	53%	32%				
Ind. Network	4%	33%	42%	21%			
p-value					.005	.043	.002
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .005, .043, and .002 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation, county of residence, and level of participation rather than by chance.

Statement 30: "The Wiregrass Work Ready Regional effort has not significantly increased the region's economic and socioeconomic status and thus, marketability, as an Advanced Manufacturing Region." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 71% of the Industry Network, 60% of the Core, and 16% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 30. The total number of responses indicated 50% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 30).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results indicated that both the Core and Industry Network Teams had overall positive perception levels. The research indicated that 40% of the Core Team responded negatively and the vast majority (84%) of the Home Team respondents indicated negative perception responses toward the regional efforts success in increasing the region's economic and socioeconomic status as an "Advanced Manufacturing Region." Furthermore, the data suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 25.803$, $p = .000$.

Table 30

Statement 30 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	33%	7%	13%	47%			
Home	32%	52%	16%				
Ind. Network	17%	12%	50%	21%			
p-value					.000	.017	.179
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .000 and .017 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation and county of residence rather than by chance.

Level of participation did not seem to have a significant relationship to the difference in perceptions with a *p*-value of .179.

Statement 31: "I am satisfied with the benefits my community has derived from the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional effort and will support and work towards sustaining efforts to maintain Work Ready Certification in my county and the Wiregrass Region." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 92% of the Industry Network, 80% of the Core, and 63% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 31. The total number of responses indicated 79% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 31).

The results showed the perceptions of the majority of respondents from across the three teams were positive towards satisfaction of the benefits derived from the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional effort. By examining the distribution of rating percentages it was indicated that over one-third of the respondents from the Home Team did not have a positive perception toward program benefits. Furthermore, the data suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 15.028$, $p = .020$.

Table 31

Statement 31 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	13%	7%	40%	40%			
Home		37%	37%	26%			
Ind. Network	8%		42%	50%			
p-value					.020	.000	.099
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .020 and .000 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation and county of residence rather than by chance. Level of participation did not seem to have a significant relationship to the difference in perceptions with a *p*-value of .099.

Statement 32: "The partnerships created in the Wiregrass Work Ready Region among businesses and industries, economic development authorities, chambers of commerce, local workforce investment boards, Georgia technical colleges, local boards of education and high schools have been the foundation for success." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Core, 96% of the Industry Network, and 84% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 32. The total

number of responses indicated 93% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 32).

By examining the distribution of rating percentages, these results indicated that a strong majority of the respondents across all three teams had positive perceptions regarding the positive impact of the partnerships formed by the program. There was little to some disparity between the three teams' perceptions. Furthermore, the data suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 16.668$, $p = .011$.

Table 32

Statement 32 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core			53%	47%			
Home		16%	37%	47%			
Ind. Network	4%		83%	13%			
p-value					.011	.000	.001
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .011, .000, and .001 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation, county of residence, and level of participation rather than by chance. The researcher observed that these differences likely are related to the levels of positive perception rather than differences between positive and negative perceptions.

Statement 33: "Training Needs Surveys were instrumental in identifying common training needed throughout the region." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Industry Network, 60% of the Core, and 42% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 33. The total number of responses indicated 71% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 33).

Based on the survey results, the overall perception regarding the utility of training needs surveys and their ability to identity training needs was positive. These findings also showed that the Industry Network Team respondents were extremely positive, but by examining the distribution of rating percentages, it was seen that 40% of the Core Team and more than half of the Home Team respondents indicated negative perception responses towards this program element. However, there was an apparent difference in perceptions mainly between the Industry Network Team and the other two teams $\chi^2(4, N = 58) = 20.035$, $p = .000$. That suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance.

Table 33

Statement 33 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core			33%	27%			
Home		40%	37%	5%			
Ind. Network		58%	75%	25%			
p-value					.000	.000	.047
df					4	12	6

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .000, .000, and .047 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation, county of residence, and level of participation rather than by chance.

Statement 34: "Regional business and industries have a greater understanding of the value and importance of education and training relative to the workplace resulting from this initiative." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 96% of the Industry Network, 95% of the home, and 54% of the Core Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 34. The total number of responses indicated 82% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 34).

By examining the distribution of the rating percentages, these results show that a strong majority of the respondents felt positively towards this program outcome. The findings also showed that there was an apparent difference of the perceptions between the Core Team and the other two teams. These findings showed that the perceptions of the Industry Network and Home Team respondents were strongly supportive of the understanding of the value and importance of education and training relative to the workplace resulting from this initiative. Almost half (46%) of the respondents from the Core Team did not have a positive perception of this program element. These perception percentages indicated consistency between the Industry Network and Home Team. Furthermore, the data suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance

$\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 32.744, p = .000.$

Table 34

Statement 34 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	33%	13%	27%	27%			
Home		5%	95%				
Ind. Network	4%		42%	54%			
p-value					.000	.048	.197
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .000 and .048 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation and county of residence rather than by chance. Level of participation did not seem to have a significant relationship to the difference in perceptions with a *p*-value of .197.

Statement 35: "The Wiregrass Georgia Work Ready Regional effort benefits workers by providing them with basic workplace skills and the ability to demonstrate skills to current and potential employers." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Core and Industry Network, 84% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 35. The total number of responses indicated 95% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 35).

These findings showed that the perceptions of the vast majority of respondents across all three teams were strongly supportive of the benefits of the program to provide workers with basic workplace skills and the ability to demonstrate skills to current and potential employers. Additionally, the results further indicated that the respondents' perceptions indicated that this benefit would strengthen the Wiregrass region's economic growth opportunities. Furthermore, the data suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(4, N = 58) = 13.491$, $p = .009$.

Table 35

Statement 35 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core			67%	33%			
Home		16%	53%	31%			
Ind. Network			29%	71%			
p-value					.009	.000	.009
df					4	12	6

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .009, .000, and .009 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation, county of residence, and level of participation rather than by chance. The researcher noted that these differences are likely between levels of positive perception rather than between positive and negative perceptions.

Statement 36: "Utilizing Georgia Work Ready will help companies find high quality employees through improved hiring procedures." Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Home, 96% of the Industry Network, and 94% of the Core Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 36. The total number of responses indicated 97% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 36).

Analysis of the data suggests that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 12.424$, $p = .053$. These findings show that the perceptions of the vast majority of respondents across all three teams were strongly supportive with regard to the programs ability to help companies find high quality employees through improved hiring procedures.

Table 36

Statement 36 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core			47%	47%			
Home			89%	11%			
Ind. Network	4%		50%	46%			
p-value					.053	.080	.228
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .053, .080, and .228 support that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation, county of residence, and level of participation rather than by chance.

Statement 37: "Companies in the Wiregrass Region will recognize positive trends in increased productivity of the workforce as a result of participation the program." Cross-tabulation of the responses revealed 88% of the Industry Network, 80% of the Core, and 79% of the Home Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 37. The total number of responses indicated 83% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 37).

These findings showed that the perceptions of the vast majority of respondents across all three teams were strongly supportive towards the establishment of the Georgia Work Ready Regional Industry Network and the trends realized by companies as a result of participation the program. Additionally, the data suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 13.341$, $p = .038$.

Table 37

Statement 37 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	7%	13%	40%	40%			
Home		21%	79%				
Ind. Network	8%	4%	54%	34%			
p-value					.038	.035	.289
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .038 and .035 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by team affiliation and county of residence rather than by chance. Level of participation did not seem to have a significant relationship to the difference in perceptions with a *p*-value of .289.

Statement 38: "Companies in the Wiregrass Region will recognize positive trends through higher employee morale as a result of utilizing Georgia Work Ready tools." Cross-tabulation of the responses showed 84% of the Home, 71% of the Industry Network, and 53% of the Core Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 38. The total number of responses indicated 71% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 38).

By examining the distribution of the rating percentages, these results showed that almost three-fourths of the respondents had positive perceptions toward this impact of the program. The findings also revealed that there was an apparent difference of perception between the Core Team and the other two teams. The Industry Network and Home Team respondents were much more supportive with regard to the statement that companies will recognize positive trends through higher employee morale as a result of using the tools of the program. Almost half (46%) of the respondents from the Core Team did not have a positive perception of this program element. Further analysis suggests that there might be a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(6, N = 58) = 16.696, p = .010$.

Table 38

Statement 38 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core	13%	33%	20%	33%			
Home		16%	84%				
Ind. Network	4%	25%	46%	25%			
p-value					.010	.039	.084
df					6	18	9

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .010 and .039 support that there was a significant difference in perception that might be caused by team affiliation and county of residence rather than by chance. Level of participation did not seem to have a significant relationship to the difference in perceptions with a *p*-value of .084.

Question 40: "How likely am I to promote and use this program and the components of this program to help my community grow and prosper?" Cross-tabulation of the responses identified 100% of the Core, Home, and Industry Network Team respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 40 (see Table 39).

By examining the distribution of the rating percentages, these findings indicated that the perceptions of the respondents, regardless of team affiliation, were supportive as to the team's likelihood to promote and use this program and the components of this program to help my community grow and prosper. Further analysis of the data suggests that there was not a significant difference that might be caused by team membership affiliation rather than by chance $\chi^2(2, N = 58) = 1.482$, $p = .477$.

Table 39

Statement 40 - Percentages of Ratings by Team and Chi-square Values by Team Affiliation (χ2TA), County of Residence (χ2CR), and Level of Participation (χ2LP)

	Perception Level				Chi-square - .05 Level		
Team	2	3	4	5	χ2TA	χ2CR	χ2LP
Core			47%	53%			
Home			63%	37%			
Ind. Network			46%	54%			
p-value					.477	.007	.027
df					2	6	3

Scale: 2 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive

The Chi-square values of .007 and .027 support that there was a significant difference that might be caused by county of residence and level of participation rather than by chance. The researcher observed that these differences are likely between levels of positive perceptions rather than between positive and negative perceptions. Team

affiliation did not seem to have a significant relationship to the difference in perceptions with a *p*-value of .477.

Data Analysis

Statements and questions four through thirty eight and question forty were the perception based inquiries that revealed the respondent's viewpoint of program elements. Based on the distribution of rating percentages, these findings indicated that the total respondents had the strongest positive response level to questions 8, 4, 40, 35, 25, 21, and 17. No consensus for one common theme emerged from the analysis of these items. Based on this finding, areas that were perceived most positively across all three teams were: 1) potential to strengthen economic growth and opportunities; 2) engagement of stakeholders; 3) likelihood to promote the program in the future; 4) ability of workers to demonstrate skills; 5) support for sustainable legislation; and 6) value of Work Ready Certificates for sustainable employment.

The next highest grouping of positive responses was Questions/Statements 36, 18, 32, 6, 7, 27, 5, 16, 28, 34, 26, and 37. The survey respondents indicated agreement with each of the statements and/or a positive response to the questions. No consensus for one common theme emerged from the analysis of these items. Based on the content analysis, elements that were positively perceived across all three teams were: 1) hiring practices; worker productivity; better economic advantage and attracting new business to the region; 2) engagement and participation of stakeholders in productive meetings; 3) outreach and promotion for the achievement of goals; 4) identification of common training needs; 5) understanding of linkages between business and industry leaders and

education and training; and 6) sustainability through the development of a 501(c)(3) regional Industry Network.

The lowest distribution of responses was to Statements/Questions 20, 13, 10, 33, 24, 38, 16, 11, 12, 29, 9, 15, 14, 22, 30, and 19. A review of these questions and/or statements revealed that there was no one common theme with regard to the content of the respective program elements. Based on the content analysis, elements that were least positively perceived across all three teams were: 1) ability of the program elements to positively impact high school graduation rate, alignment of career pathways to critical jobs, and a greater understanding of workforce education and training; 2) positively impact employer morale, turnover, training costs, hiring practices, and the identification of common regional training needs; 3) ability of the program to positively transform the workforce to have a competitive advantage through reduced unemployment levels, greater job training and opportunities for future jobs and careers; 4) successful partnership with the Georgia Department of Labor; 5) usefulness of dashboard and community scorecard to track program metrics; and 6) overall impact of the program elements on improving the quality of the regional workforce, the economic and socio economic status of the region, and the marketability of the communities to attract new business and realize a greater competitive advantage for the region.

Comparative Analysis

Comparative statistics were calculated using Chi-square for each statement to test if there was a statistically significant reason to believe that a relationship exists within team affiliation and the results were not due to chance at the .05 level of significance.

Based on the data gathered from the survey instrument and the computed Chi-square value, twenty-one of the thirty-six (58.33%) statements/questions have a computed Chi-square or *p*-value equal to or less than .05. Overall, these findings indicated that the computed *p*-value was significant, when analyzed by team affiliation, to Statements 5, 20, 25, 27, 30, 33, 34, 28, 7, 12, 22, 29, 35, 38, 32, 6, 9, 31, 26, 18, and 37. The range of *p*-values for the statements above across the total number of respondents was .000 to .050, indicating a relationship exists within these statements and was not due to chance. As these items represent over one-half of the total survey instrument statements, were all relative to program elements, and *p*-value is not an indicator of relational strength; content analysis of the statements revealed that no one common theme existed between the statements. Team membership was a factor for the difference of perceptions for the following themes: 1) identification of common training needs; 2) recognition of positive results by industry; 3) support for legislation and the establishment of an Industry Network 501(c)(3); 4) marketability of the region with regard to advanced manufacturing; 5) business and industry linkage of education to workforce; 6) engagement and participation of stakeholders in productive meetings; 7) ability of the program to increase graduation rate; 8) accountability of leadership team as identified through performance metrics; 9) ability of workers to demonstrate skills; and 10) public awareness and partnership is the foundation for success.

The remaining fifteen statements had a computed *p*-value greater than the .050 level of significance (see Appendix E). Thus, it can be determined that the relationship between these statements, analyzed according to team affiliation, was not statistically significant at the .050 level and could not negate the outcome was due to chance.

Further analysis was used to test the remaining two demographic sectors of the survey respondents. Again, Chi-square was used to test if there was a statistically significant reason to believe that the results of county affiliation were not due to chance at the .05 level of significance.

Based on the data gathered from the survey instrument and the computed Chi-square value, 24 of the 36 (66.67%) statements/questions have a computed Chi-square or *p*-value equal to or less than .05. Overall, these findings indicated that the computed *p*-value was significant when analyzed by county affiliation to Statements 28, 31, 32, 33, 35, 5, 7, 9, 27, 25, 20, 26, 16, 40, 13, 30, 10, 23, 14, 37, 38, 29, 34, and 15. The range of *p*-values for the statements above across the total number of respondents was .000 to .050, indicating a relationship exists within these statements and was not due to chance. As these items represent over two-thirds of the total survey instrument statements, were all relative to program elements, and *p*-value is not an indicator of relational strength; content analysis of the statements revealed that no one common theme existed between the statements.

County of residence was a factor for the difference of perceptions for the following themes: 1) identification of common training needs; 2) recognition of positive results by industry; 3) the programs ability to attract new business and industry and become a competitive advantage; 4) support for legislation and the establishment of an Industry Network 501(c)(3); 5) marketability of the region with regard to advanced manufacturing; 6) business and industry linkage of education to workforce; 7) engagement and participation of stakeholders in productive meetings; 8) ability of the program to increase graduation rate and open doors to new opportunities in advanced

manufacturing; 9) accountability of leadership team as identified through performance metrics; 10) ability of workers to demonstrate skills; and 11) promotion, public awareness, and partnership is the foundation for success.

The remaining twelve statements had a computed *p*-value greater than the .05 level of significance (see Appendix F). Thus, it can be determined that the relationship between these statements, analyzed according to county affiliation, was not statistically significant at the .050 level and could not negate the outcome was due to chance.

Chi-square was used to test the remaining demographic sector of the total respondents. Comparative analysis was used to test if there was a statistically significant reason to believe that the results revealed when the respondents were assessed by level of participation were not due to chance at the .050 level of significance.

Based on the data gathered from the survey instrument and the computed Chi-square value, 13 of the 36 (36.11%) statements/questions have a computed Chi-square or *p*-value equal to or less than .050. Overall, these findings indicated that the computed *p*-value was significant when analyzed by participation level to Statements 32, 23, 29, 8, 17, 19, 35, 40, 22, 5, 26, 7, and 33. The range of *p*-values for the statements above across the total number of respondents was .000 to .050, indicating a relationship exists within these statements and was not due to chance. As these items represent over one-third of the total survey instrument statements, were all relative to program elements, and *p*-value is not an indicator of relational strength; content analysis of the statements revealed that no one common theme existed between the statements.

Level of participation was a factor for the difference of perceptions for the following themes: 1) identification of common training needs; 2) counties becoming Work Ready Certified Communities will strengthen economic growth opportunities; 3) recognition of positive results by industry; 4) support for legislation and the establishment of an Industry Network 501(c)(3); 5) engagement and participation of stakeholders in productive meetings; 6) ability of the program to increase graduation rate and open doors to new opportunities in advanced manufacturing; 7) accountability of leadership team as identified through performance metrics; 8) ability of workers to demonstrate skills; and 9) promotion, public awareness, and partnership is the foundation for success.

The remaining 23 statements had a computed *p*-value greater than the .050 level of significance (see Appendix G). Thus, it can be determined that the relationship between these statements, analyzed according to county affiliation, was not statistically significant at the .050 level and could not negate the outcome was due to chance.

Qualitative Analysis

Three open-ended questions were employed to gather specific suggestions of the stakeholders to support future improvements and sustainability. Very few responses (N = 15) were received from the questions, taking into account the total number of survey respondents. With this in mind, no disaggregation was used to divide the data by team, county, or level or participation. The data was compiled in an effort to identify themes or trends relative to the responses and pinpoint continuous improvement areas.

Question 39: What specific suggestions would you offer to increase levels of participation in the program? The following comments were provided by the survey respondents:

"Publicity of the benefits and effectiveness. Heightened public awareness."

"Encourage partners to bring guests to help promote the efforts of the organization."

"Georgia Work Ready is a great tool that is underutilized by employers and job seekers. It is a pull system. If employers require a certain score to get a job, job seekers will enroll in school, perform gap training or do whatever to elevate their score."

"Thoroughly communicate results of participating companies. Encourage those companies participating to tell other companies and to report back that they have done so."

"Increase efforts to engage additional employers."

"Need more awareness of the programs to general public."

"Use formative and summative data to show trends in Work Ready students' employment retention versus non-work ready certified students. Other data such as attendance, job advancement etc…would be helpful to educators and employers."

"Greater support from Grant Facilitators/Leadership Team."

"There might be more participation if there were conference call meetings occasionally instead of a physical meeting. This would enable those who are operating on limited travel budgets to become more active and participate."

The analysis of the data with regard to suggestions that might increase participation suggested efforts should be made to increase awareness and communication of the program and its promotion, utilization, and distribution. Each of these statements make mention of one or more of these items. These findings show that improvements can be made to the programs marketing and delivery efforts in the Wiregrass Work Ready region in order to increase levels of participation.

Question 41: What specific improvements would you suggest to strengthen the program and support future action? The following comments were provided by the survey respondents:

"Formula funding for the counties involved."

"Representation on the leadership team from each county."

"Closer ties between business and the educators. They did not meet together very often to discuss common needs."

It becomes apparent through the analysis of the comments with regard to specific improvements and strengthening the program that a theme exists around equal representation from the counties involved and the methods in which monies are distributed to the respective communities. Each of the statements specifically identifies an area of improvement and mentions of one or more of these items. These results show that to strengthen the program and support future action improvements can be made to the programs distribution of money and to the organizational structure by which the Wiregrass Work Ready program operates.

Question 42: What specific suggestions would you make to enhance sustainability efforts of the program? The following comments were provided by the survey respondents:

"Only one way…industry has to require it."

"Get more businesses to require the assessment."

"More employers requiring the exam and get the word out."

"Funding from business and industry as they see the importance and acknowledge the return on their investment."

The analysis of data with regard to specific suggestions to enhance sustainability efforts reveals a theme exists around business and industry adoption and ownership. Each of the statements makes mention of the need for business and industry to either embrace the program, require the program, or make investment in the program through financial commitment. These findings show, according to the survey respondents, that sustainability of the program lies in the hands of the Industry Network Team's buy-in and utilization of the Wiregrass Work Ready program tools.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

The researcher conducted the descriptive study to determine the perceptions of stakeholders of the economic and socioeconomic effectiveness and benefits of the Wiregrass Region Georgia Work Ready Program. There were 96 program participants identified from a list of stakeholders updated on January 1, 2011. The researcher's report was based on 58 respondents who completed and returned the survey instrument.

This study was a descriptive study and the researcher used both quantitative and qualitative research methods in determining the perceptions of stakeholders of the economic and socioeconomic effectiveness and benefits of the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program. The researcher calculated descriptive statistics for 36 questions/statements regarding the perceptions of the program. A qualitative section of the survey included three open-ended questions about improvements and sustainability efforts of the program. The resulting study participants (N = 58) represented a 60.42% successful return rate. These data collected by researcher were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 17. Descriptive statistics were used to report demographics of the stakeholders of the program. Cross tabulation was used to report percentage responses for each statement and were analyzed to determine if trends/themes existed between the responses with regard to population demographics. A Chi-square analysis was conducted to determine the likelihood that a relationship existed

between groups.

To draw conclusions, the researcher then analyzed the findings of each question on the basis of drawing conclusions from the survey responses. Each question was analyzed to determine what topics/themes/program elements were most positively perceived by each stakeholder group. Questions were then analyzed on the basis of which topics/themes/program elements were most negatively perceived by each stakeholder group. Finally, each question was analyzed to determine which topics/themes/program elements were differently perceived by the stakeholder groups. Each of the analysis was disaggregated to draw conclusions about the perceptions of the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional program and the perceptions with regard to human capital theory. These conclusions were then used to report the researcher's recommendations with regard to program improvement and sustainability.

Conclusions

These data collected by the researcher were analyzed to provide and answer to the following three research questions: 1) What are the perceptions regarding the degree of effectiveness which the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program has achieved the goals set forth by the program as related to each stakeholder team; 2) What specific suggestions are made by each stakeholder to support future improvements and sustainability; and 3) Does a relationship exist between the overall perceptions of the three stakeholder teams, participation levels, and county of representation? The responses received from the survey instrument were reported in the findings of the study (Chapter 4). The researcher used the findings related to each survey question to test the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between team affiliation, county of residence,

and level of participation with regard to the overall perceptions indicated by the survey responses.

Questions 1 through 3 reported the demographic data of the survey participants. The researcher concluded that the perceptions of the participants were likely to be valid of the stakeholders because the majority of respondents rated their level of participation at 50% of greater. The researcher concluded that, as was the participation in the program, participation in the survey instrument was consistent. Based on the survey results, it can be concluded that each team and county was represented in the survey results. Additionally, the respondents were representative of active participants in the program. These facts, combined with a 60.42% response rate, indicated results that should be representative of the region stakeholders. In addition, the survey results indicated that the Industry Network had the greatest number of respondents, although the population was evenly distributed. All seven counties covered by the regional grant were represented, while the larger counties had the greatest number of respondents, which was expected due to an uneven distribution of representative stakeholders participating in the program.

Statements 4 through 38 and question 40 were the perception based inquiries aimed at revealing the degree of effectiveness with which the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program has achieved the goals of the program. The perceptions were analyzed overall and with regard to team affiliation consistent with the research questions. Based on the findings, conclusions were drawn from the data to report themes/trends that existed and areas where recommendations for improvements might be made with regard to program elements.

According to the data the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional effort achieved its overarching goal of engaging community, educational, and industry leaders. In general, the overall scores/percentages reflected by the survey instrument were positive and therefore it can be concluded that all three stakeholder groups felt that the leadership team had been successful in engaging the stakeholders of the program. While it should be noted that there was a slight difference in the scores/percentage of positive responses among the three groups, it was concluded that the participants felt that engagement was effective and successful.

The researcher concluded that each of the stakeholder groups positively perceived the outreach efforts by the program. Outreach efforts were successful in creating awareness, promoting the program, and attaining certificate goals. Core and home respondents indicated the most positive response. This can be attributed to the Core and Home Team's exposure to this element of the program. The Core and Home Teams were actively engaged and held accountable in each of their communities for the attainment of certificate goals, while the Industry Network had very little exposure to this element of the program.

The data revealed that each of the three stakeholder groups felt that the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional program had the potential to strengthen economic growth opportunities. This is supported by the program achieving its goal of having six of the seven counties in the region become Certified Work Ready Communities. Additionally, it can be concluded from the findings of the study that the three stakeholder groups agreed that industries within the Wiregrass Region will find the Work Ready Certificate and job profiling process useful and reliable in their search for employees and matching the right

people to the jobs. Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed that each of the three stakeholder groups felt that Georgia Work Ready will help the companies find quality employees through improved hiring practices and that the effort benefits the workers by providing them an avenue to learn and demonstrate workplace skills to current and potential employers. Very little disparity was indicated in the findings among the three groups and their perception responses to above statements.

The researcher found that each of the stakeholder groups has accepted the elements of the program as a positive means of improving economic development efforts of the region. Each of the three stakeholder groups agreed that business and industries who participate in the program will promote the program to other business and industry and that the program has the support of stakeholders with regard to sustainable legislation for continued Work Ready efforts in their communities. Also, the program was successful in its efforts to demonstrate the value of the Work Ready Certificate and program elements to business, industry, and community stakeholders. The researcher concluded that each of the three stakeholder groups felt that the partnerships created through the regional program were the program's foundation for success. In each of the above program elements, when analyzed by group affiliation, the perceptions were all positive; thus the researcher concluded that the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional program was successful with regard to the above areas.

The researcher concluded that the program created positively perceived value-added benefits to the region. This conclusion is supported by some common themes that existed within elements that were most positively perceived. Disaggregating the elements of the previously indicated positively perceived statements/questions across all teams, the

researcher concluded that each of the items had some common elements. The most positively perceived statements/questions included elements regarding overall program design, components and tools of the program, and engagement and outreach efforts of the program. Each of these components all relate to human capital theory and the components of value added benefits of the communities, employees, educators and employers; thus, it is the conclusion of the researcher that these perceptions led to their likelihood to promote the program.

An analysis of the data with regard to the perceptions by individual team affiliation led to the conclusion that the Industry Network Team perceptions were extremely positive toward elements that were of their own interest. This team's perceptions seem to be congruent with the theoretical framework of human capital theory that is posed as the framing theory of this study. The quality of the workforce, human capital, is an important framing issue for this team. Perceptions were positive toward the program's ability to identify common industry training needs. Also, perceptions were positive toward the companies' ability to recognize positive trends in turnover and training costs, as well as, the importance of education and training relative to the workplace. The researcher further concluded that perceptions of the individual teams could very well be elevated if they were exposed more to this element of the program. As the other two groups indicated a more neutral perception, the researcher concluded that the Industry Network was the primary stakeholder with this program element and thus more likely to have an understanding and appreciation of the item.

Following this trend, it can be concluded that the Industry Network Team had an extremely strong positive perception level, as compared to the Core and Home Team, regarding regional meetings about strategic planning, resource allocation, and identifying needs of the communities. The findings indicated the same type results regarding the appointment of a Wiregrass Region representative to serve on the State Work Ready Region Board of Directors. As the researcher was not privy to the agenda of each of the team's meetings and only that the Core and Home Team meetings were always joint meetings, it is with great confidence that the researcher can conclude that the Industry Network Team met exclusively.

Analysis of the findings with regard to the perceptions by individual team affiliation to the statements/questions revealed that the Core Team perceptions were extremely positive toward the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional effort focus and awareness for improving community high school graduation rates, decreasing drop-outs, and targeting at-risk students. While both Home and Industry Network Team's perceptions were on a positive level, the Core Team indicated an extremely positive response level. One aspect of Human Capitol Theory of the value of formal education's contribution to one's competency and performance seems to be at work here. As mentioned in the team demographics, the Core Team is comprised primarily of educators. Following the previously indicated trend, the researcher concluded that while each team had a positive response toward this item, the Core Team's response was probably due to their involvement with the program item and their familiarity with the formal education aspect of human capital theory. The findings indicated the same results about the use of "Scorecards" and metrics to provide information, measure progress, identify gaps, and

document accountability in program areas. These are all familiar terms used in the educational environment and could have led to the higher positive perception levels. It was therefore the conclusion of the researcher that perception levels might be increased by educating all stakeholders about program results, the use of metrics, and accountability measures regardless of team affiliation, and therefore re-emphasizing the need for joint meetings of all three teams.

Analysis of the findings indicated the areas in which the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional effort least positively perceived program elements across team affiliations. The findings indicated that there were no elements identified as being negatively perceived by all three teams. As it is of major importance of this study to determine areas of improvement, it is the conclusion of the researcher that while themes may exist, each of the negatively perceived elements should be analyzed on its on merit by team affiliation and a conclusion formulated to address each issue.

The Industry Network Team had the least number of negative perception level responses as indicated by the findings. The researcher concluded that one statement/question might have been misread by the majority of the Industry Network Team respondents. The Industry Network Team indicated a negative perception of the Georgia Work Ready program's ability to provide a significant benefit to companies by helping them to find high quality employees through improved hiring practices. The researcher could not conclude from the findings as to whether the feelings were based on actual outcomes of using the program or whether the Industry Network Team was not aware of the program benefits with regard to the search for quality employees and improved their hiring practices. It should be noted by the researcher that this

statement/question was posed in a negative context. Furthermore, following statements/questions placed in a positive context that was related to the same program elements: reduced turnover, matching employees to the job, and other company benefits resulted in a high perception response level by the Industry Network Team.

The findings indicated that the Industry Network Teams' response was negative toward the identification and implementation of plans to improve high school graduation rates. Once again, this is an area that was focused on with the Core and Home Teams as they had significantly more accountability with regard to this element of the program. It can, also, be concluded from the findings of the study that efforts should be placed on awareness of the Industry Network Team about the program elements with regard to improvement of high school graduation rates. This conclusion was based on the fact that each of the seven county high schools met their overall graduation requirement goals for the achieving Certified Work Ready Community status. Given this, the researcher concluded that the negative response to this statement by the Industry Network Team must be relative to a lack of understanding and education on its achievements. The researcher concluded that the perceptions of this program element would be improved through communication of the results of this program element to all stakeholder teams and further indicating the need for joint meetings of all stakeholders.

The findings indicated that the Core Team's overall response was negative toward the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional efforts role in educating the state's emerging workforce and creating a linkage between education, job seekers, and employers. The researcher concluded that the "emerging" workforce was identified as high school seniors and college graduates. Also, the Core Team indicated a negative perception towards the

program's ability to open doors to job training opportunities and opportunities for career change and advancement. It was further noted that the Core Team negatively perceived the program's efforts to provide a greater understanding of the value and importance of education and training relative to the workplace to regional business and industry. As the Core Team was primarily composed of educators, there is a strong indication each of these items are inter-related and thus identify an area of improvement with regard to the Core Team members. The researcher concluded that Core Team lacked assurance that the program made an impact on the above items, thus affecting the workforce development aspect of human capital theory, and therefore efforts should be made to improve the linkage between business, industry, and educators. Bringing each of these entities together in a collaborative effort is strongly suggested by the researcher.

The findings indicated that the Core Team held a negative perception toward the role of the Department of Labor in the regional effort. As the Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL) representatives were identified as members of the Core Team, efforts should be made to determine the engagement and participation of GDOL in the program. Perhaps, GDOL might co-host job search events throughout the region to demonstrate a commitment to the effort and its stakeholders. The researcher concluded that should further study indicate a lack of participation by the GDOL representatives, efforts should be made to replace these representatives or seek out alternative representation by another agency.

Analysis of the findings indicated that the Home Team perceptions were negative toward the program's success in creating an understanding of the value and importance of education and training relative to the workplace by high school students

and teachers. This appears to be another area relative to creating a linkage among business, industry and educators and further emphasizes that efforts should be placed on joint meetings of the three teams. After disaggregating the data, it can be concluded that more work should be done with Home Team regarding students and teachers understanding of education and training relative to the workplace. Also, the findings indicated over half of the respondents felt that the program did not increase the region's economic and socio economic status and marketability as an Advanced Manufacturing region, nor did it serve as a valuable tool to attract new businesses to the region, as perceived by the Home Team. Additionally, the Home Team expressed negative perception toward the use of the dashboard metrics and score card reporting. The researcher concluded, as the Home Team was primarily composed of economic developers, city council members, mayors, county commissioners, and high level stakeholders, that perceptions were based solely on immediate outcomes of the program. As outcomes of the program/performance metrics did not indicate jobs created, company expansions, new business announcements, employment levels, etc…the Wiregrass leadership team should place an emphasis on measurement and reporting with regard to these program elements.

Statements and questions 39, 41 and 42 were aimed at revealing the specific suggestions made by each stakeholder to support future improvements and sustainability. The results were analyzed without regard to team affiliation consistent with the research questions. Based on the findings, conclusions were drawn from the data to report areas where improvements might be made with regard to program elements and administration.

The research findings indicated that in an effort to increase levels of participation in the program improvements should be made to the Wiregrass Work Ready programs marketing and delivery efforts. Also, the researcher concluded that improvements in the way in which the organization distributes the money would strengthen the program. Additionally, the researcher found that opportunities exist to strengthen the program by making changes in the organizational structure and program administration. Sustainability of the program lies in the hands of business and industry. The data revealed that efforts should be made to convince business and industry to take ownership in the program by utilizing the Georgia Work Ready Program tools and through financial commitment of the regional effort.

The findings indicated that the Industry Network had the most positive perception toward the benefits and effectiveness of the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional program. In contrast, the findings indicated that the Home Team has the least positive perception of the program. The researcher took an overall look at each of the trends/themes that surfaced from the analysis of the survey instrument responses. From this data, the researcher concluded that the demographics of the Industry Network Team facilitated their positive perception level. The major portion of the goals from which the survey was constructed was based on programmatic procedures, structure of the program, marketing, education, and human capital development. These are areas that would be more familiar to the Industry Network Team and thus be more positively perceived. In contrast, the Home Team demographics are primarily economic development, county commissioners, and elected officials. Only one goal of the program addresses regional employment and economic development in the areas of advanced manufacturing. Since unemployment

throughout the region is still at an all-time high, one can surmise that there has been no increase in manufacturing jobs, company announcements, and/or expansions; thus, the researcher concluded that this may the source of the most negative perception level of the teams. The Home Team had limited familiarity with the vast majority of the program elements, thus responded neutrally, while the one element of familiarity was viewed in a negative context.

Chi-square analysis was used to disaggregate statements and questions four through thirty-eight and question forty in an effort aimed at revealing if a relationship exists between the overall perceptions of the three stakeholder groups; namely, team affiliation, county of representation, and level of participation in the program. The perceptions were analyzed overall across the data set and conclusions were reported about the likelihood that a relationship exists.

The researcher found, based on the data gathered from the survey instrument and the computed Chi-square (*p*-value), that a relationship exists between team, county, and level of participation with regard to their perceptions that the Wiregrass Work Ready Region met its goal of identifying common industry training needs. Also, a relationship existed between the three groups and their perceptions about the linkage between business, industry, and education; outreach and promotion of the program and the programs ability of the workers to demonstrate their workplace skills. The researcher concluded that across all three groups there was indeed a relationship to these items and this relationship probably did not happen by chance; thus, opportunities exist across the entire population for explanation, education, and training on these program elements.

Analysis of the data gathered from the survey instrument and the computed Chi-square (*p*-value), indicated that a relationship exists between Team and County affiliation with regard to their perceptions about that the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional program elements to improve the regional workforce through human capital development, the economic and socioeconomic status, and the marketability of the communities to attract new business and industry and realize a competitive advantage. Also, a relationship exists among the three groups and their perceptions about the linkage between business, industry, and education; and the programs ability to positively transform the workforce to have a competitive advantage through reduced unemployment levels, greater job training and opportunities for future jobs and careers. The researcher concluded that across the two groups there was indeed a relationship to these items and this relationship probably did not happen by chance, thus; opportunities exist within these groups for further explanation, advancement, education, and training on these program elements.

Based on the data gathered from the survey instrument and the computed Chi-square (*p*-value), the researcher found that a relationship exists between county affiliation and level of participation with regard to their perceptions about promotion of the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional program and the ability of the program elements to positively impact high school graduation rates, alignment of career pathways to critical jobs, and the understanding of workforce education and training and the linkages between business, industry, and education for training. Also, a relationship exists between the two groups and their perceptions about the linkage between business, industry, and education; and greater job training and opportunities for future jobs and careers. The researcher concluded that across the two groups there was indeed a relationship to these items and

this relationship probably did not happen by chance, thus; opportunities exist within these groups for further explanation, advancement, education, and training on these program elements.

The researcher concluded, based on the data gathered from the survey instrument and the computed Chi-square (*p*-value), that a relationship exists between team affiliation and level of participation with regard to their perceptions about the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional program and the distribution of dollars for the region to support high school graduation rate improvements. The data indicated that across the two groups there was indeed a relationship to this items and this relationship probably did not happen by chance, thus; opportunities exist within these groups for further research into the formula in which funds are distributed to the communities and explanation as to how the formula was devised.

Recommendations for Practice

Findings and conclusions resulting from this study led the researcher to make recommendations to improve the overall effectiveness of the program and enhance sustainability:

1) The researcher recommends that joint meetings should be held with each of the three teams. The findings and conclusions indicated that many of the negatively perceived statements/questions were most likely due to the team's lack of knowledge about the program element. In retrospect, the most positively perceived areas were represented by the teams that were most familiar with the subject area. Joint meetings would serve to bridge the gap between what is known versus unknown and familiar versus unfamiliar; thus, providing each of the teams a mutual understanding and respect

for the overall program.

2) An effort should be placed on identifying and soliciting input from each of the stakeholder teams about the Work Ready program process, team representation, strategic planning efforts, goals, benchmarks, and measurement and reporting metrics. It is recommended that the leadership team engage key community leaders in each of the communities to be a part of the program design in lieu of attempting to hold the teams accountable for performance standards set by a small group representing a small sector the total region.

3) Significant efforts should be made to address the disconnect that exists between business, industry, and educators. According to the findings and conclusions, it is believed by the researcher that joint meetings will help to minimize this disconnect but will not serve as a panacea for the situation. A mutual respect and understanding must be created with regard to these individuals and the respective roles they play in workforce development. It is, therefore, the recommendation of this researcher that a focus group be conducted to work together to bridge the gap between business, industry, and educators. Work ethics and the development of career pathways to sustainable jobs should be of major importance. As was identified in the study, sustainability lies in business and industries ownership and financial support of the program. The Industry Network responded most positively to statements/questions relative to a perceived benefit. Future sustainability of the program relies on the ability of the community efforts to identify "what's in it for business and industry."

4) Formula funding should be used for distribution of funds to the respective counties. This formula should be based on graduation class size for education related

funds and the standard industrial classification for the identification of manufacturing jobs per capita in each community. This will provide equal opportunity based on a tangible formula and each entity will have an idea of what resources will be available for program operation. Furthermore, this should be incorporated with a request for proposal process to give the leadership team a form of control and scrutiny to assure program goals and objectives are addressed with the dollars allocated. Additionally, this will seek to solidify stakeholders' engagement in the program and the process.

5) The Governor's Office of Workforce Development should develop a best practices manual for regional grant administration based on successes from all the regional efforts across the state. There have been three rounds of regional grants completed thus far, each hosting approximately six regional efforts. This could serve to provide a valuable means to enhance to program results, effectiveness, and sustainability.

6) Program goals/objectives should be representative of the stakeholder teams. The researcher noted that the Home Team might have limited knowledge and experience with many of the program objectives.

7) Future emphasis should be placed on program visibility and results to identify with a "what's in it for me" approach to future programs.

Recommendations for Further Research

Findings and conclusions resulting from this study led the researcher to make recommendations for further research into the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional effort. It was the conclusion of this researcher that further research should be conducted in the following areas:

1) A study should be conducted to determine why the Industry Network Team indicated much more positive levels of perception as compared to the Home Team respondents.

2) A study should be conducted to refine the program elements to more specific variables, thus, pinpointing exact areas of positive perception and likewise areas for improvement.

3) An economic impact study should be conducted on the entire region to determine a benchmark in which to gauge the overall impact of the program into the future.

4) As many of the program elements are not of immediate result, further studies of this type should be conducted on this region to measure future success and document results.

5) Future studies should be conducted to include elected officials in the survey population as sustainability through legislation will be most likely be of great importance to program continuation.

6) A study should be conducted across the State of Georgia and the regional efforts to determine if there is a relationship between this study and other regional areas.

7) Focus groups should be conducted to draw more open ended candid responses relative to program improvement and sustainability.

8) Survey Instruments relative to future studies should be more concise and devised based on disaggregated elements of the program and its goals.

9) A study should be conducted to determine the effectiveness and benefits of each stakeholder team on program success/implementation.

10) A study should be conducted to determine if the goals/objectives of the program are perceived as important to regional success by the stakeholders.

11) A study should be conducted to determine what the factors are that are influencing the groups' perceptions.

Final Significance

Human capital theory was the theoretical framework or lens through which to view the findings of the study. The Wiregrass Work Ready Regional program was perceived as having contributed to the development of human capital throughout the region. The study revealed that the overall perceptions of the program were positive by the respondent stakeholders representing the Core, Home, and Industry Network Teams. The conclusion of the researcher was that the stakeholder teams positively perceived the current and potential impact of the program on human capital development throughout the Wiregrass region. Each of the stakeholder teams seemed to hold a different view of human capital theory with regards to workforce development. The Industry Network Team's responses corresponded very well to issues of worker development, performance and productivity. The Core Team's responses corresponded to the formal education element of workforce development. Using human capital theory to help understand the patterns of responses by team was very useful.

This study has value in the fact that the results can be used for continuous improvement efforts throughout the Wiregrass region. How the stakeholders perceived each of the program elements can help to establish new procedures thus impacting the overall program effectiveness. Furthermore the positive implications can provide support for sustainability legislation and thus insure the future of the program. The study has

produced a list of recommendations for practice and further research in the area of human capital development and can provide a mechanism for framing the design, goals, and objectives of future programs throughout the counties, regions, and/or state.

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APPENDIX A:

Core and Home Team Members

Wiregrass Work Ready Region
Core & Home Team Members

Leadership Team	Atkinson County (Sandra Morris)	Bacon County (Cherry Rewis)	Ben Hill County (Philip Jay)	Coffee County (JoAnne Lewis)	Irwin County (Hazel McCranie)	Jeff Davis County (Keith Carter)	Wilcox County (Carla Parks)	Multiple Counties
Christy Cobb	Nell Ford (Atkinson County) – H	Cherry Rewis (Alma/Bacon Co Development Authority) - C	Andrea Fletcher (ECTC) – C	Al Walker (DOL) - C	Stanley Bussey (DOL) - C	Keith Carter (JDA) - C	Kay Cornell (WCHS) - C	Chrisite Cook (ECTC) - C
Tony Powell	Tommy Guthrie (Atkinson County) – C	Judy Hesters (OTC) - C	Becky Gay (CIS) - C	Terrell Jacobs (City) - C Charlie Davis	Betty Sue Stripling (BOE) - H	Christy Norris (JDHS) - C	Carla Parks (Family Connections) - C	Christine Cook (ECTC) - C
Brandy Wilkes	Don Spence (BOE) – H	Kate Bussey (OTC) - C	Philip Jay (County) – C	Brad Riner (CHS) - C	Ginger Thompson (ICHS) - C	Debbie Hobbs (JDHS) - H	Maxine Peebles (WCHS) - C	Sylvia Lockett (ECTC) - H
JoAnne Lewis	Paul Daniel (ACHS) – C	Andy Brannen (OTC) - C	John Flythe (JDA) - H	Dr. Joy Perren (BOE) - C	Hazel McCranie (Chamber) - C	Bonnie Hulett (JDA) - H	Reba Van Meter (WIA) - H	Lavonia Stepherson (ECTC) - C
	Laverne Carver (ACHS) –	Cindy Eblin (SGRC) - C	Cam Jordan (City) - C	Keith Newell (SGC) - C	Joey Whitley (County) -	Hank Hobbs (ATC)	Curt Nicholls (Chamber) –	Lisa Tomberlin (ECTC) -

	C				C	- C	H	C
	Brenda Stone (BOE) – H	Roberta Lovett (SGRC) - C	Betsy Giddens (Chamber) - H	Kelly Waldron (SGC) - H	Stacie Marsh (ICHS) - C		Steve Smith (BOE) - H	
	Tracy Mizell (BOE) – H	Danny Taylor (BCHS) - H	Nancy Whidden (BOE) - H	Dr. Virginia Carson (SGC) - H	Dr. Proctor (ICHS) - C		Nathan Gibbs (WCHS) - H	
	Sandra Morris (Atkinson County) – C		Derinda Lewis (Chamber) - H	Steve Wilmoth (BOE) - H	Lamar Royal (City) - H		Arnie Bryant (WCHS) - H	
			Mark Sutton (FHS) - C	Stanley Lott (DOL) - C			Donna Durrence (WIA) - H	
			Isom Harmon (FHS) - H	Chera Ganger (CHS) - C				
			Randy Garrett (FHS) - H	Sonya Ross (CHS) - H				
			Stephanie Couch (FHS) - H	Greg Tanner (CHS) - H				
				JR Charles (Chamber) - H				

				Bernie Evans (CHS) - H				

APPENDIX B:

Industry Network Team Members

Wiregrass Work Ready Region
Industry Network Team Members

Leadership Team	Atkinson County	Bacon County	Ben Hill County	Coffee County	Irwin County	Jeff Davis County	Wilcox County	Multiple Counties
Christy Cobb	Steve Sirmans (First String Space)	Jamie Calloway (Milliken & Company)	Tom Carver (Shaw)	Vicki Spikes (Elixir)	Gary McCurdy (Bold)	Horace Sutton (Propex)		
Tony Powell	Charlton Gillis (Langboard)	Jerry Lady (Richmond Baking of GA)	Jason Gray (Lippert)	Archie Brown (Elixir)		Chris Tanner (Propex)		
Brandy Wilkes	Larry Booth (Willacoochee Industrial Fabrics)	David Lee (D.L. Lee & Sons)	Tommy Ellington (Eaton)	Philip Smith (Elixir)		Deborah Herndon (McPherson Manufacturing)		
JoAnne Lewis			Vicki Gasque (Elixir)	Rhonda Douglas (Elixir)		Donnie Shumans (McPherson Manufacturing)		
			Byron Smith (Shaw)	Scott Smith (PCC)		Jimmy McLeod (Beasley Forrest Products)		
			Ross McRoy (Envirolog)	Sandy Sharpe (Leviton)				
			David Garrison (Southern Veneer)	Buck Chambers (MarCraft)				

				Adrian Lewis (Premium Waters)				
				Dave Bauereis (Premium Waters)				
				Bobby Boone (Coats & Clark)				

APPENDIX C:

Survey Instrument

Wiregrass Work Ready Region

A Survey to Determine the Perception of Stakeholders of the Economic and Socioeconomic Effectiveness and Benefits of the Wiregrass Region Georgia Work Ready Program

Wiregrass Region

*** 1: What team do you represent?**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Core Team
- ☐ Home Team
- ☐ Industry Network Team

*** 2: Which county do you represent?**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Atkinson County
- ☐ Bacon County
- ☐ Ben Hill County
- ☐ Coffee County
- ☐ Irwin County
- ☐ Jeff Davis County
- ☐ Wilcox County

*** 3: How would I rate my level of participation in the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional program.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ 75+% Participation
- ☐ 50 - 74% Participation
- ☐ 25 - 49% participation
- ☐ Less than 25% Participation

*** 4: The Wiregrass Work Ready Region leadership has successfully engaged community, educational, and industry leaders.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree

- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 5: Common Industry Training needs were not successfully identified through Industry Network meetings.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 6: Outreach efforts (flyers, signs, blitz weeks, guest speaker opportunities, etc…) have been significant factors in creating awareness and attaining Work Ready Certificate goals.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 7: Regularly scheduled meetings with Core, Home, & Industry Network Team members have proven instrumental in strategic planning, identifying needs, and leveraging resources for regional efforts.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 8: Meeting the goal of the Wiregrass Work Ready Region to have at least six of the seven counties to become Certified Work Ready Communities will strengthen our region's economic growth opportunities.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree

- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 9: Area high school students and teachers have a greater understanding of the value and importance of education and training relative to the workplace resulting from this initiative.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 10: Georgia Work Ready's creation and use of Work Ready Regions has been essential in transforming our region's workforce into our number one competitive advantage.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 11: The "Be Work Ready" initiative and incentive is helping unemployed citizens in the Wiregrass Region jump start their job search while gaining confidence and a competitive advantage in the marketplace.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 12: The Wiregrass Work Ready Regional effort played a significant role in educating the state's emerging workforce for exciting careers in cutting-edge technology by creating linkage between education, job seekers, and employers.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ No Opinion

*** 13: The Wiregrass Work Ready Regional effort produced results through profiling strategic industry jobs, ensuring counties reach Work Ready Certificate goals, closing the skills gap, increasing public high school graduation rates, developing career pathways aligned to critical occupations, ensuring the education community graduates enough new talent, and building an Industry Network to lead the effort.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ No Opinion

*** 14: The partnerships that the Wiregrass Work Ready Regions developed with Departments of Labor representatives have been an integral part of the region success.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ No Opinion

*** 15: The Wiregrass Georgia Work Ready Regional effort opened the doors to the workforce by identifying valuable job training opportunities, and opportunities for career change and advancement.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ No Opinion

*** 16: The Wiregrass Georgia Work Ready Regional effort did not prove to benefit communities as a valuable tool to attract new businesses to their areas.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ No Opinion

*** 17: Industries within the Wiregrass Work Ready Region will find the Work Ready Certificate useful and reliable in their search for good employees.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ No Opinion

*** 18: Regional business and industry leaders who are participating in the Wiregrass Georgia Work Ready initiative will promote Work Ready by recommending participation to other companies.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ No Opinion

*** 19: Utilizing Georgia Work Ready will not provide a significant benefit to companies by helping them to find high quality employees through improved hiring procedures.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ No Opinion

*** 20: Companies in the Wiregrass Region will recognize positive trends in reduced turnover and training costs as a result of utilizing Georgia Work Ready tools.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ No Opinion

*** 21: Employers in the Wiregrass Region who utilize the Work Ready system of certificates and job profiles will be more effective when matching the right people to the right jobs.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ No Opinion

*** 22: Regional funding to identify and implement action plans for the improvement of the High School Graduation Rates (HSGR's) was unsuccessfully demonstrated throughout the Wiregrass Work Ready Region.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ No Opinion

*** 23: Stakeholders and partners have a heightened awareness and focus for improving community HSGR's, decreasing high school drop-outs, and targeting at-risk students after participating in the Wiregrass regional efforts.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 24: The regions Industry Network's ability to identify critical jobs led to the successful documentation of career pathways aligned to the same jobs in regional high schools and technical colleges.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 25: I support Legislation which attempts to ensure the sustainability of Georgia Work Ready and the opportunity for continued Work Ready efforts in our communities and region.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 26: Georgia Work Ready Regional Industry Network, Inc. (GWRRIN), a 501(c)(3) organization, established to promote and support productivity and competitiveness of Georgia's strategic industries, will provide ongoing sustainability to our participating regional industries.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 27: The appointment of a Wiregrass region representative to serve on the GWRRIN board of directors solidifies the commitment of the regions Industry Partnership to support future workforce development strategies.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree

- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 28: Many stakeholders and partners from education, community and business leaders, economic developers, and other interested partners will remain engaged based on confidence gained during the Wiregrass Work Ready Region initiative.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 29: The use of the "Dashboard & Scorecards" metric reviews was not an effective means to provide information, measure progress, identify gaps, as well as document accountability for all areas relative to Wiregrass regional goals and benchmarks.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 30: The Wiregrass Work Ready Regional effort has not significantly increased the region's economic and socioeconomic status and thus, marketability, as an Advanced Manufacturing Region.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] No Opinion

*** 31: I am satisfied with the benefits my community has derived from the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional effort and will support and work towards sustaining efforts to maintain Work Ready Certification in my county and the Wiregrass Region.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ No Opinion

*** 32: The partnerships created in the Wiregrass Work Ready Region among businesses and industries, economic development authorities, chambers of commerce, local workforce investment boards, Georgia technical colleges, local boards of education and high schools has been the foundation for success.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ No Opinion

*** 33: Training Needs Surveys were instrumental in identifying common training needed throughout the region.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ No Opinion

*** 34: Regional business and industries have a greater understanding of the value and importance of education and training relative to the workplace resulting from this initiative.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ No Opinion

*** 35: The Wiregrass Georgia Work Ready Regional effort benefits workers by**

providing them with basic workplace skills and the ability to demonstrate skills to current and potential employers.

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ No Opinion

*** 36: Utilizing Georgia Work Ready will help companies find high quality employees through improved hiring procedures.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ No Opinion

*** 37: Companies in the Wiregrass Region will recognize positive trends in increased productivity of the workforce as a result of participation the program.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ No Opinion

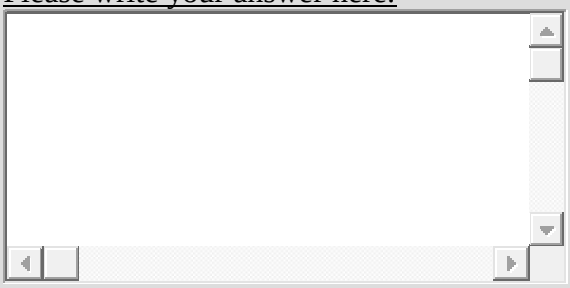
*** 38: Companies in the Wiregrass Region will recognize positive trends through higher employee morale as a result of utilizing Georgia Work Ready tools.**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ No Opinion

39: What specific suggestions would you offer to increase level of participation in the program?

Please write your answer here:



*** 40: How likely am I to promote and use this program and the components of this program to help my community grow and prosper?**

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Very Likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Unlikely
- ☐ Very Unlikely
- ☐ No Opinion

41: What specific improvements would you suggest to strengthen the program and support future action?

Please write your answer here:

42: What specific suggestions would you make to enhance sustainability efforts of the program?

Please write your answer here:

Submit Your Survey.

Thank you for completing this survey. Please fax your completed survey to: .

APPENDIX D:

Survey Matrix

Survey Matrix

Research Question	Survey Question
Demographics	1, 2, 3
What are the perceptions regarding the degree of effectiveness which the Wiregrass Work Ready Regional Program has achieved the goals set forth by the program as related to each stakeholder team?	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40
What specific suggestions are made by each stakeholder group to support future improvements and sustainability?	39, 41, 42
What is the degree of congruency exists between perceptions of the three stakeholder groups, participation levels, and county of representation?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40

APPENDIX E:

Total Team

Total Team

Statement	*p*-value	df
5	.000	4
20	.000	6
25	.000	6
27	.000	6
30	.000	6
33	.000	4
34	.000	6
28	.001	6
7	.003	6
12	.003	6
22	.003	6
29	.005	6
35	.009	4
38	.010	6
32	.011	6
6	.013	4
9	.017	6
31	.020	6
26	.021	6
18	.028	6

37	.038	6
36	.053	6
24	.084	6
23	.094	6
13	.101	6
14	.101	6
11	.102	6
15	.102	6
4	.126	2
16	.181	6
21	.185	4
17	.459	6
8	.467	6
10	.475	6
40	.477	2
19	.547	6

.05 Level of Significance

APPENDIX F:

Total County

Total County

Statement	*p*-value	df
28	.000	18
31	.000	18
32	.000	18
33	.000	12
35	.000	12
5	.001	12
7	.001	18
9	.001	18
27	.001	18
25	.002	18
20	.004	18
26	.005	18
16	.007	18
40	.007	6
13	.008	18
30	.017	18
10	.019	18
23	.025	18
14	.031	18
37	.035	18

38	.039	18
29	.043	18
34	.048	18
15	.049	18
24	.059	18
8	.067	18
11	.068	18
36	.080	18
18	.093	18
19	.108	18
17	.126	18
12	.195	18
21	.270	12
22	.341	18
4	.423	6
6	.777	12

.05 Level of Significance

APPENDIX G:

Total Level of Participation

Total Level of Participation

Statement	*p*-value	df
32	.001	9
23	.002	9
29	.002	9
8	.005	9
17	.007	9
19	.008	9
35	.009	6
40	.027	3
22	.032	9
5	.034	6
26	.034	9
7	.035	9
33	.047	6
24	.054	9
38	.084	9
31	.099	9
13	.104	9
14	.115	9
20	.120	9
4	.125	3

6	.149	6
25	.153	9
21	.161	6
18	.177	9
15	.178	9
30	.179	9
11	.196	9
34	.197	9
36	.228	9
37	.289	9
27	.309	9
12	.334	9
16	.338	9
9	.381	9
10	.437	9
28	.530	9

.05 Level of Significance

APPENDIX H:

Introduction Email

From: Hobbs, Hank
Sent: Tuesday, July 26, 2011 10:14 AM
To: Powell, Tony; Tracy Mizell; Development Authority; Philip Jay; JoAnne Lewis; ocillachamber@windstream.net; Keith Carter; fc@wilcox.k12.ga.us; Andy Brannen [ABrannen@okefenokeetech.edu]; AJohnson@okefenokeetech.edu; Kate Bussey; Cobb, Christy; Nell Ford; lcarver@atkinson.k12.ga.us; bstone@atkinson.k12.ga.us; apollard@atkinson.k12.ga.us; rfussell@atkinson.k12.ga.us; Danny Taylor; Darrell Boatright; rllovett@sgrc.us; 'camjordan@mchsi.com'; 'Becky gay'; 'derindalewis@mchsi.com'; 'Betsy Giddens'; 'John Flythe'; Sutton, Martin; Couch, Stephanie; 'Harmon, Isom'; 'Alfalene Walker'; 'Tjacobs@cityofdouglas.com'; Stanley Lott; 'Keith Newell'; Brad Riner; Joy.Perren@coffee.k12.ga.us; CDavis@cityofdouglas.com; Wilkes, Brandy; 'Chera Ganger'; Sonya Ross; ataylor@douglasga.org; 'Betty Sue Stripling'; ocillachamber@windstream.net; 'Starling Bussey'; Ginger Thompson; 'irwinco@windstream.net'; Dennis Proctor; Christy Norris; dhobbs@jeff-davis.k12.ga.us; Jeff Davis Chamber of Commerce; 'Maxine Peebles'; 'Regina Kay Cornell'; jbolton68@gmail.com; Gibbs, Nathan; davism@wilcox.k12.ga.us; donna_durrence@hotmail.com; Tomberlin, Lisa; Fletcher, Andrea; Stepherson, Lavonia; Cook, Christie; Cook, Christine; Giddens, Gail; Lockett, Sylvia; Greenway, Lidell; Thomas, Christi; Schmidt, Penelope; Warren, Roy; Steve Sirmans; wbennett@cadybag.com; Stacey Weaver; Jamie Calloway; Tom Carver; Jason Fuqua; Tommy Ellington; David Garrison; Jason Gray; Archie Brown; Vicki Spikes; Philip Smith; Rhonda Douglas; csweat@elixirind.com; Rick Bradner; Ron MANCIL; Gary Evans; Sandy Sharpe; Vivian White; Al Horner; Adrian Lewis; bchambers@marcraftinc.com; Scott Smith; Donna Popp; Deborah Herndon; Donnie Shumans; Horace Sutton; Chris Tanner; Kevin Ingram; srodriquez@thompsonhardwoods.com

Subject: RE: Perception of the Wiregrass Work Ready Region effort

I hope each of you are having a great Tuesday morning. As introduced in the email below from Tony Powell, my name is Hank Hobbs and I have been and remain an active member of both the Core and Home Teams for Wiregrass Regional effort. I have recently completed all the course work and am working towards the completion of my dissertation for my Doctorate Degree in Adult and Career Education at Valdosta State University. As part of the requirements for completion of this advanced degree, I have chosen to do a study of the Wiregrass Work Ready Advanced Manufacturing Region.

As members of the Wiregrass Work Ready Region Core, Home, or Industry Partnership teams, I would greatly appreciate it if each of you would take a few minutes to complete the survey instrument entitled "Perception of Stakeholders of the Economic and Socioeconomic Effectiveness and Benefits of the Wiregrass Region Georgia Work Ready Program".
The survey can be accessed by clicking on the link: http://www.jeff-davis.k12.ga.us/survey/index.php?sid=16178&newtest=Y

I realize how important your time is, however, I believe that the time you take to fill out this survey will be particularly valuable to the sustainability efforts of our region and communities. Please remember that all responses are anonymous and will be automatically tabulated upon survey completion. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this survey, please feel free to contact me via email or at 912-375-5480. I thank you in advance for your time and efforts towards this survey and your dedication to the Wiregrass Region.
Regards,

Hank

APPENDIX I:

Follow-up Email

From: Hobbs, Hank
Sent: Tuesday, August 02, 2011 1:52 PM
To: 'Powell, Tony'; 'Tracy Mizell'; 'Development Authority'; 'Philip Jay'; 'JoAnne Lewis'; 'ocillachamber@windstream.net'; 'Keith Carter'; 'fc@wilcox.k12.ga.us'; 'Andy Brannen [ABrannen@okefenokeetech.edu]'; 'AJohnson@okefenokeetech.edu'; 'Kate Bussey'; 'Cobb, Christy'; 'Nell Ford'; 'lcarver@atkinson.k12.ga.us'; 'bstone@atkinson.k12.ga.us'; 'apollard@atkinson.k12.ga.us'; 'rfussell@atkinson.k12.ga.us'; 'Danny Taylor'; 'Darrell Boatright'; 'rllovett@sgrc.us'; 'camjordan@mchsi.com'; 'Becky gay'; 'derindalewis@mchsi.com'; 'Betsy Giddens'; 'John Flythe'; 'Sutton, Martin'; 'Couch, Stephanie'; 'Harmon, Isom'; 'Alfalene Walker'; 'Tjacobs@cityofdouglas.com'; 'Stanley Lott'; 'Keith Newell'; 'Brad Riner'; 'Joy.Perren@coffee.k12.ga.us'; 'CDavis@cityofdouglas.com'; 'Wilkes, Brandy'; 'Chera Ganger'; 'Sonya Ross'; 'ataylor@douglasga.org'; 'Betty Sue Stripling'; 'ocillachamber@windstream.net'; 'Starling Bussey'; 'Ginger Thompson'; 'irwinco@windstream.net'; 'Dennis Proctor'; 'Christy Norris'; 'dhobbs@jeff-davis.k12.ga.us'; 'Jeff Davis Chamber of Commerce'; 'Maxine Peebles'; 'Regina Kay Cornell'; 'jbolton68@gmail.com'; 'Gibbs, Nathan'; 'davism@wilcox.k12.ga.us'; 'donna_durrence@hotmail.com'; 'Tomberlin, Lisa'; 'Fletcher, Andrea'; 'Stepherson, Lavonia'; 'Cook, Christie'; 'Cook, Christine'; 'Giddens, Gail'; 'Lockett, Sylvia'; 'Greenway, Lidell'; 'Thomas, Christi'; 'Schmidt, Penelope'; 'Warren, Roy'; 'Steve Sirmans'; 'wbennett@cadybag.com'; 'Stacey Weaver'; 'Jamie Calloway'; 'Tom Carver'; 'Jason Fuqua'; 'Tommy Ellington'; 'David Garrison'; 'Jason Gray'; 'Archie Brown'; 'Vicki Spikes'; 'Philip Smith'; 'Rhonda Douglas'; 'csweat@elixirind.com'; 'Rick Bradner'; 'Ron MANCIL'; 'Gary Evans'; 'Sandy Sharpe'; 'Vivian White'; 'Al Horner'; 'Adrian Lewis'; 'bchambers@marcraftinc.com'; 'Scott Smith'; 'Donna Popp'; 'Deborah Herndon'; 'Donnie Shumans'; 'Horace Sutton'; 'Chris Tanner'; 'Kevin Ingram'; 'srodriquez@thompsonhardwoods.com'
Subject: RE: Perception of the Wiregrass Work Ready Region effort

Just a reminder that the survey instrument will close out on August 5, 2011 at 5:00 p.m. If you have not completed the survey, please try to complete it by this time. Thanks again for your time and effort towards this worthwhile project.

Regards,
Hank

APPENDIX J:

IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-02705-2011 **INVESTIGATOR:** Henry Hobbs

PROJECT TITLE: The perceptions of stakeholders of the economic and socioeconomic effectiveness and benefits of the Wiregrass Region Georgia Work Ready Program

DETERMINATION:

☑ This research protocol is exempt from Institutional Review Board oversight under Exemption Category(ies) 2. You may begin your study immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

☐ Exemption of this research protocol from Institutional Review Board oversight is pending. You may not begin your research until you have addressed the following concerns/questions and the IRB has formally notified you of exemption. You may send your responses to irb@valdosta.edu.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS:

Although not a requirement for exemption, the following suggestions are offered by the IRB Administrator to enhance the protection of participants and/or strengthen the research proposal. If you make any of these suggested changes to your protocol, please submit revisions so that IRB has a complete protocol on file.

Barbara H. Gray Date: 7/21/11
Barbara H. Gray, IRB Administrator

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

cc: Department Head & Advisor – Dr. R. Martinez