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November 21, 2008

The Honorable Timothy Kaine
Governor's Office
Patrick Henry Building, Third Floor
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Governor Kaine:

In accordance with §2.2-2674.01 of the Code of Virginia, it is my distinct pleasure to transmit to you on behalf of the Virginia Workforce Council an initial report of findings regarding the creation of a Work Ready Community Certification Program in the Commonwealth.

I hope that you will find this research and the promising practices to be enlightening as the Council continues to explore implementation possibilities for the state. We welcome your feedback and support in the coming months.

Yours truly,

Dr. Robert P. Leber
Chairman, Virginia Workforce Council

RPL:psd

Cc: The Honorable Terry Kilgore, Chair, House Committee on Commerce and Labor
The Honorable Robert Tata, Chair, House Committee on Education
The Honorable Richard Saslaw, Chair, Senate Committee on Commerce and Labor
The Honorable Edward Houck, Chair, Senate Committee on Education and Health

Enclosure: Work Ready Community Certification Program

**Findings on the Investigation of the Creation of
A Virginia Work-Ready Community Certification Program**



**Prepared for
The Virginia General Assembly
By the
Virginia Workforce Council
November 2008**

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Executive Summary

Chapters 243 and 679 of the 2008 General Assembly asked the Virginia Workforce Council to investigate the creation of a work-ready community certification program in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The study examined two topics: (1) existing work-ready community certification programs in the United States and (2) the implementation of a work-ready program in the Commonwealth.

Highlights of Study Findings

Currently, Georgia and Oklahoma are the two states implementing work-ready community certification programs. Georgia was the first state to implement a program in 2007, followed by Oklahoma, a state which is operating pilots and has plans to expand. Both states view the work-ready program as a new economic development tool. To define a community as work-ready, Georgia and Oklahoma examine data related to:

- ◆ High school graduation rates, and
- ◆ Successful completion of the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC).

Concerning the potential creation of a Virginia Work-Ready Community Certification Program, sources in Georgia, Oklahoma and Virginia suggested that consideration should be given to the following:

1. Explore criteria in addition to high school graduation and Career Readiness Certification, to increase value to businesses and to encourage cooperation among education and economic development sectors,

2. Customize criteria for communities rather than having standardized criteria across the state,
3. Communicate the main program goal as workforce preparedness in direct support of economic development marketing,
4. Provide grants to certain localities to increase participation,
5. Establish pilot programs to test alternative methods of implementation, and
6. Measure outcomes in terms of business recruitment, expansion and employment related to implementation of the work-ready community program.

Conclusion

Study findings suggest that further investigation is necessary to ensure that the program design of a Virginia Work-Ready Community Certification Program will both be viable and valuable, should the Commonwealth choose to implement it. Any designated design team or workgroup should include representatives from education (K-12, community college, four-year universities), workforce development and economic development and other areas that can offer local- and state-level perspectives.

Purpose and Background

The Virginia Work-Ready Community Certification Program Report is a study mandated by the 2008 General Assembly to investigate the creation of a work-ready program in the Commonwealth of Virginia. A report to the Governor, the House Commerce and Labor Committee, House Education Committee, Senate Commerce and Labor Committee and Senate Education and Health Committee is due December 1, 2008 (Appendix A).

Methodology

The method for collecting the information for the report consisted of contacting representatives in Georgia and Oklahoma, and meetings and email exchanges with individuals who have knowledge about work-ready programs. The study was completed in summer 2008 with the assistance of a graduate student, Beatrice Yarney, at the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Social Work. The student collected information from representatives at various organizations including the Virginia Community College System, the Virginia Workforce Council, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the state-level workforce development administrations in various other states (directly or through the National Governors Association) and WorkKeys®-related businesses (ACT and Worldwide Interactive Network), among others. The student also analyzed extant articles, policies, websites, working papers, marketing materials and other sources that illuminated the topics of work-readiness and economic development marketing.

Findings: Work-Ready Programs

There is no standardized definition of work-ready; organizations and states across the country are defining and measuring it differently. The following sections describe the criteria and certifications in use for work-ready programs on the individual and community levels.

Work-Ready Programs for Individuals

Trained or trainable, “ready for on-the-job training for entry level positions that do not require a four-year college or university degree” can safely sum up the meaning of work ready for an individual.

“Virginia's Workplace Readiness Skills,” developed by Virginia Beach Public Schools Career and Technical Education, provides an idea of the desired work-ready skills. The list of skill areas are based on 1997 Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service interviews of more than 500 Virginia employers, who revealed that for jobs that required less than a 4-year college degree, they wanted jobseekers to have hard skills, including reading, math, writing, speaking, computer and problem solving. Employers also desired employees with soft skills, such as “understanding the ‘big picture’, work ethic, a positive attitude, independence and initiative, self-presentation skills, attendance and teamwork.” These skills are integrated into Career and Technical Education curricula in Virginia Beach City Schools.

Virginia Beach’s program is one example of how work-ready skills for individuals are taught or coached. These programs generally teach work-ready skills to individuals and then validate the presence of those skills by administering different assessments, in an effort to provide employers with validation that individuals meet minimum skills and educational levels for continuing education or entering the workplace. Rhode Island United Way surveyed a number of work-

ready programs: the Workforce Skills Certification System in California, the Work Certified Program out of Florida, WAGE Certification in Arkansas, the National Work Readiness Credential promoted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Career Readiness Certificate based on ACT/WorkKeys®. The various programs teach, test and assess hard and soft skills, require portfolios and even require internships for individual work-ready certification (Appendices B and C).

The Commonwealth of Virginia offers the Virginia Career Readiness Certificate Program for individual validation of work-readiness. The basis for the CRC program is the ACT-developed skill database, which contains over 15,000 detailed job profiles. ACT-trained profilers analyze jobs with the help of subject matter experts (employees successfully doing their jobs and their management) to define the tasks and skills needed to perform the job successfully.

To earn the certificate, one must score adequately on three WorkKeys® foundational assessments that test hard skills in applied mathematics, locating information and reading for information. The state awards a gold, silver and bronze level certificate to each individual based on the scores.

The program offers targeted remediation or enhancement training to address weak areas discovered during testing. The Virginia CRC guidelines describe work readiness training offerings, which focus on foundational (i.e. “core employability”) skills in the areas of communication, problem-solving and interpersonal skills. KeyTrain, WorldWide Interactive Network, PLATO and other vendors contract with the state to provide targeted remediation. When individuals score satisfactorily on the WorkKeys® assessments and present their scores to employers, employers can match the scores to job profile information to make decisions about hiring, training and program development needs.

The Work-Ready Community: Georgia and Oklahoma

Just like a work-ready certification for individuals, such as the CRC, the purpose of a work-ready certification for communities is to validate that a community has a trained or trainable workforce in place to meet current and future workforce needs. Georgia, the state that created and first implemented a Work-Ready Community Certification Program, uses two criteria. A community must demonstrate a commitment to improving its high school graduation rates and certain percentages of targeted adult populations (existing workers, local technical college graduates, unemployed adults, GED earners and high school graduates entering the workforce) must earn a CRC. Georgia also has a second level of community certification, where a community can become a Georgia Certified Community of Excellence if it reaches a 70% high school graduation rate. Oklahoma, a state that is running pilot programs based on Georgia's program, also requires certain percentages of the same target adult populations to earn a CRC. Furthermore, the high schools in the participating Oklahoma community must average an 82% graduation rate or 82% CRC attainment rate. In Georgia, each community meets customized benchmarks based on the county population and other factors, whereas in Oklahoma, the standards are uniform for the two participating pilot communities.

Implementation

In both Georgia and Oklahoma, the programs are voluntary. In Georgia, the communities are defined as counties. In Oklahoma, the communities are allowed to "self-define." Local implementation teams formed from economic development, education, and government entities (workforce investment boards, chief local elected officials, etc.) apply for their communities to

participate in the program. The local implementation team applications from Georgia and Oklahoma consist of Chief Local Elected Officials, school superintendents and leaders from Chambers of Commerce, school boards, higher education (including community and technical colleges), Career and Technical Education, local Workforce Investment Boards, local One-Stop Career Centers, businesses and local economic development agencies. The communities are given time frames of anywhere from one to three years to achieve the criteria. To assist the communities in attaining certification, the state provides technical assistance and opportunities to share best practices through conference calls and other meetings.

Program Costs

In Georgia and Oklahoma the program cost varies. In Oklahoma, the cost of the program has been low, mostly limited to technical assistance. In Georgia, the state has used public funds and funding from the Georgia Chamber of Commerce to pay for administration of Career Readiness Certificates, a work-ready website and community grants to help accelerate the certification process, reducing the target time-frame from three years to 18 months. Georgia's program began in May 2007 with 72 counties volunteering to participate. In July 2007, 24 counties were awarded \$35,000 each to accelerate their certification process, and in July 2008, 20 more counties received the same amount. As of July 2008, 106 counties in Georgia were participating in the work-ready community certification program, and 16,500 Georgians have earned CRCs since January of 2007.

Findings: Considerations for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Telephone interviews, meetings and email correspondence with a variety of sources uncovered the following responses to the potential creation of a Virginia Work-Ready Community

Certification Program:

- ◆ **High School diplomas and Career Readiness Certificates should be minimum goals for a community's workforce.** Here are suggestions for criteria from a variety of sources:

Hands-on work experiences in middle and high school, internships, Advanced Placement classes, International Baccalaureate and dual enrollment classes, high school diploma (advanced versus standard), presence of career coaches in high schools, career fairs in high schools and completion of workforce development courses or curricula, soft skills assessments, apprenticeships and co-ops, post-secondary certificates, post-secondary licensures, associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctorate degrees, degrees in high demand programs, including STEM areas, and quality of life criteria (such as access to healthcare and transportation).

- ◆ **Consideration should be given to customizing criteria based on community characteristics.** Differences in occupational demand and overall community goals could also shape program criteria. To be even more valuable to businesses, a Virginia Work-Ready Community Certification Program should focus on setting criteria that will help the primary, secondary, career and technical education, community college and four-year institutions in a given area work together to meet business needs in a given community or region.

- ◆ **Consideration should be given to providing acceleration grants to certain localities.** Economically distressed areas may have more trouble achieving certification criteria that are standardized across the state. Increased attention, such as grants to those

communities that do not immediately achieve the criteria, may decrease economic disparities among various communities.

- ◆ **Community expectations for a Virginia Work-Ready Community Certification Program should be tempered.** The Virginia Economic Development Partnership ran a similar program in the late 1980's and early 1990's that focused on various aspects of local economic development preparedness, called the Virginia Community Certification Program. Communities should be aware that, although a certification program may foster increased business leads, community certification programs are primarily meant to help the localities be better prepared to improved productivity, expand businesses and recruit new businesses *when business leads do come*. **The main goal of communities should be to better prepare themselves to attract and retain employers. Communities must temper expectations that certification will result in new business leads.**
- ◆ **Consider pilot programs.** A rural community, a metropolitan area, an economically distressed community and an economically strong community would be good places to pilot potential styles of implementation.
- ◆ **Focus on data collection and evaluation.** If Virginia were to start a program, it should implement means of measuring any improvements in business recruitment, expansion and employment related to the work-ready community program.

Questions for Further Exploration

After researching possibilities for program design and implementation of a Work-Ready Community Certification Program in Virginia, three significant questions emerged:

- 1) **Feasible and Meaningful Certification Criteria.** What criteria would be both feasible for data collection by the state and local entities implementing the program and valuable for promoting the expansion of businesses and introduction of new businesses to a community?
- 2) **Defining Community.** How should Virginia define its communities: by cities, counties, local Workforce Investment Areas, Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Planning District Commissions, Virginia Community College System regions? Should Virginia allow communities to self-define, like Oklahoma? And how would the definition affect the ability of the educational systems to meet business needs?
- 3) **Standardized or Customized Criteria.** Should the criteria for certified communities be uniform across the state or customized by community to take into account such factors as regional workforce, economic development and educational goals, population density and economically or otherwise distressed community situations?

Input from representatives in education (K-12, community college, four-year universities), workforce development, economic development and other areas that can offer local- and state-level perspectives to address the above questions and others relating to program design should lead to the creation of a Virginia Work-Ready Community Certification Program that will be both be viable and valuable, should the Commonwealth choose to implement it.

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**Appendices: Findings on the Investigation of the Creation of
A Virginia Work-Ready Community Certification Program**



**Prepared for
The Virginia General Assembly
By the
Virginia Workforce Council
November 2008**

Appendix A: Authorizing Legislation for the Investigation

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 2008 SESSION

CHAPTER 679

An Act to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 2.2-2674.01, relating to creation of the Virginia Career Readiness Certificate Program; report.

[H 1526]

Approved March 27, 2008

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 2.2-2674.01 as follows:

§ 2.2-2674.01. *Virginia Career Readiness Certificate Program.*

A. There is created the Virginia Career Readiness Certificate Program (the Program) to certify the workplace and college readiness skills of Virginians, in order to better prepare them for continued education and workforce training, successful employment, and career advancement.

B. The Program may be offered through public high schools, community colleges, one-stop centers, technical centers, vocation rehabilitation centers, the Department of Correctional Education, institutions of higher education, and any other appropriate institutions as determined by the Virginia Workforce Council.

C. The Program shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. A nationally recognized multilevel Career Readiness Certificate and related pre-instructional assessment tool to quantify an individual's level of proficiency in the following measurable work-ready skills: (i) reading, (ii) applied math, (iii) locating information, and (iv) any additional skills necessary to meet business and industry skill demand;

2. Targeted instruction and remediation skills training to address those work-ready skills in which the individual is not proficient as measured by the pre-instructional assessment tool designed to meet identified specific skill needs of local employers;

3. A Career Readiness Certificate awarded to individuals upon successful attainment of work-ready skills as documented by the assessment tool; and

4. A statewide online data system to serve as the repository for Career Readiness Certificate attainment data. The system shall (i) serve as the administrative tool to administer and help promote the Program; (ii) incorporate online services that enable employers to search individual Career Readiness Certificate data to determine skill levels and locate certified individuals in the state or a region; and (iii) incorporate online services that offer individuals tools for career exploration, continued education opportunities, job-readiness practice, and job search capabilities. The Virginia Workforce Council shall seek to ensure the confidentiality of individual Career Readiness Certificate recipients. This shall include provisions for individuals, except for employer-sponsored individuals, to opt-in and opt-out of the statewide online data system at any test occurrence. Additionally, the provisions of §§ 2.2-3800 through 2.2-3803 shall be considered in individual confidentiality protections adopted by the Virginia Workforce Council.

D. The Council, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, shall develop policies and guidelines necessary to implement and administer the Program.

E. The Council shall report Program outcomes to the Governor, the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee, Senate Education and Health Committee, House Commerce and Labor Committee, and House Education Committee of the General Assembly by December 1 of each year. The report shall make recommendations for improving the program, including funding recommendations.

2. That the Council shall investigate the creation of a Work-Ready Community Certification Program and report its findings to the Governor, the House Commerce and Labor Committee, House Education Committee, Senate Commerce and Labor Committee, and Senate Education and Health Committee of the General Assembly by December 1, 2008.

3. That funding for the provisions of this act shall be based on a budget approved by the Virginia Workforce Council and shall come from funds made available under the Workforce Investment Act, or from other sources as shall be made available, in an amount not to exceed \$1 million.

Source: <http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?081+ful+CHAP0243>

HB 1526ER/Governor: Acts of Assembly CHAP0679 (identical to SB 756ER/Governor: Acts of Assembly CHAP0243)

Appendix B: Responses from States across the Nation (National Governors Association)

At the request of Paula Dehetre, Workforce System Administration and Finance Manager from the Virginia Community College System Office of Workforce Development, the National Governor's Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices distributed an email to all fifty states, requesting that states who were working on initiatives similar to the work-ready communities program provide Virginia with any information that might help the investigation. Eight states responded.

From: Simon, Martin [<mailto:MSimon@NGA.ORG>]

Sent: Tuesday, July 01, 2008 10:45 AM

Subject: [workforce-liaisons] Virginia Inquiry on "Work Ready" Communities

Greetings,

Virginia has successfully implemented the career readiness certificate in the Commonwealth and is now exploring the possibility of establishing "work ready" communities in which the issuance of career readiness certificates is one of several indicators. They are interested in finding out what other states are working on with similar

initiatives. If your state is, please share whatever information you can by sending it directly to Paula Dehetre at

paula.dehetre@governor.virginia.gov and copy me.

Thank you for your assistance.

Martin

Martin Simon, Director

Workforce Development Programs

NGA Center for Best Practices

444 N. Capitol Street, NW, Suite 267

Washington, DC 20001

P- 202-624-5345

F- 202-624-7829

msimon@nga.org

| State Representative | Summary of Response |
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| <p>Ron Snead, Deputy Director Arkansas Department Of Workforce Services Email: ron.snead@arkansas.gov Phone: (501) 682-2033</p> | <p>“We have not gotten to the point of having ‘work ready’ communities but that is of course our goal.” - Ron Snead Identified point of Contact for CRC: Joe Franklin , DWS Administrator [mailto:Joe.Franklin@arkansas.gov]</p> |
| <p>Local Workforce Investment Boards in California:</p> <p>David Eder Staff, City of Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board (California) City of Los Angeles Community Development Department Email: david.eder@lacity.org Phone: (213) 744-7216</p> <p>Jan Vogel, Executive Director South Bay Workforce Investment Board (California) Email: jvogel@sbwib.org Phone: (310) 970-7700</p> | <p>“The City of Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and its Youth Council has partnered with the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce to develop and promote the Chamber's Work Readiness Certificate for young job seekers, ages 16-24. This certificate was rolled out in summer of 2006. Current number of young job seekers attaining the WRC is nearly 1,500. The City of LA's WIB has not yet explored implementing or participating in a "Work Ready" community.”</p> <p>“We are not a work readiness community however, we are implementing a nationally recognized work ready certification system through Workkeys in conjunction with our Blueprint for Workplace Success Program.” July 1, 2008</p> |

| State Representative | Summary of Response |
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| <p>Elaine M. Craig, Executive Director Madera County Workforce Investment Board (California) Email: ecraig@maderacoe.k12.ca.us Phone: (559) 662-4586</p> | <p>“The Central California Workforce Collaborative has also implemented a regional Work Readiness Certificate with WorkKeys as the assessment tool.”</p> |
| <p>Barbara K. Griffin, Acting Executive Staff, Workforce Services State of Florida Agency for Workforce Information Email: Barbara.Griffin@flaawi.com Phone: (850) 245-7130</p> | <p>“We have not taken similar actions.”</p> |
| <p>David Brennan , Skills Enhancement Services Director Kansas Department of Commerce Workforce Services Email: dbrennan@kansascommerce.com Phone: (785) 296-7715</p> | <p>“We have implemented the CRC but are not (yet) establishing “Work Ready” Communities – we would certainly be interested in the information compiled through this process – thanks, David.”</p> |
| <p>Robert J. McGrail Director of Special Projects Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development Email: Rj.Mcgrail@state.ma.us Phone: (617) 626-7104</p> | <p>Planning to pilot a basic skills program based on Workkeys for its one stop customers: “<i>Program Elements</i>”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment System (Paper and On-line testing) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Career Readiness Assessment, includes Career Readiness Modules (3 -Reading for Information*, Applied Math*, Locating Information*) • Learning System (On-line) |

| State Representative | Summary of Response |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Keytrain* (Designed specifically for WorkKeys) and Worldwide Interactive Network (WIN) (WorkKeys scores “place” student in WIN)” |
| <p>Douglas Reamer, New York State Department of Labor Email: Douglas.Reamer@labor.state.ny.us Phone: not provided</p> | <p>“In response to a request from Martin Simon at NGA about states experience with work readiness activities, New York's experience has been heavily influenced by involvement with five other states in the development of a National Work Readiness Certificate. This project www.workreadiness.com was an outgrowth of work done by the National Institute for Literacy. In New York we are piloting the assessment test with a number of stakeholder groups to make sure it meets the needs of users and applicants. Once refinements to the test have been completed we will be encouraging its use among a number of workforce programs.”</p> |
| <p>Terry Watson, Director Workforce Solutions Oklahoma Department of Commerce Email: terry_watson@okcommerce.gov Phone: (405) 815-5206</p> | <p>“Oklahoma is initiating a Certified Work Ready Communities program as part of the implementation of the strategic plan of the Governor’s Council for Workforce and Economic Development. One of the criteria for becoming a Certified Work Ready Community is percentage of Career Readiness Certificates issued. Oklahoma now has over 20,000 individuals that have a Career Readiness Certificate and several high schools have started to issue this certificate in conjunction with the high school diploma. The guidelines for Oklahoma’s program are attached. Our first two pilot communities, Chickasha and Pryor, will receive their Work Ready designation later this summer. To find out more, you can go to</p> |

| State Representative | Summary of Response |
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| <p>From “Overview of Oklahoma’s Certified Work Ready Communities Project” (Appendix J)</p> | <p>http://www.okcommerce.gov/workforce and scroll down to the 6th story. Please feel free to call if you have any other questions.”</p> <p>“The steering committee has selected two pilot areas to measure a quick success and evaluation of the program. Mayes county (initiated by Barbara Hawkins, Director of Pryor Chamber) and Grady county (initiated by Superintendent Jim Glaze of Chickasha public schools) were selected and have supplied the necessary letters of support from their local leadership. It is anticipated these pilots will achieve an accelerated certification due to their early commitment and appear to be ready to meet the challenge of maintaining their certification status.”</p> <p>For more information on Oklahoma, also see Appendix G, titled “Oklahoma Department of Commerce - Interview Response.”</p> |
| <p>Susan K. Cowden, Administrator Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development Division of Workforce Development Email: susan.cowden@state.tn.us Phone: (615) 741-3874</p> | <p>“Tennessee went statewide with the Career Readiness Certificates in January of this year and are not quite far enough along to implement ‘Work Ready Communities.’ I do, however, think this is a great idea and may propose it as part of our Three Star initiative with the Department of Economic and Community Development. It is a certification process for counties in their efforts to expand.”</p> |

Appendix C: Work-Ready Programs and Assessments across the Nation

Career Readiness Certification: To earn the certificate, one must score adequately on three foundational assessments that test hard skills in applied mathematics, locating information, and reading for information. The test takers receive a platinum, gold, silver and bronze level certificate based on their scores.

States implementing the CRC (also known as the WorkKeys® Career Readiness Certification) as a statewide initiative: Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wyoming (source: <http://www.crcconsortium.org/state-news.htm>, and email correspondence with Kansas, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Arkansas)

School/Local/regional implementation of the CRC: California, Colorado, Nebraska, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Washington, and West Virginia (source: <http://www.crcconsortium.org/state-news.htm>, and email correspondence with New York and California)

States gathering information on the CRC: Arizona, District of Columbia, Minnesota, and North Dakota (source: <http://www.crcconsortium.org/state-news.htm>)

States considering Statewide Implementation of CRC: Minnesota, Nebraska, and Illinois (source: <http://www.crcconsortium.org/state-news.htm>)

States using other WorkKeys® Assessments that CRC: California LA Literacy Project and Illinois (source: <http://www.crcconsortium.org/state-news.htm>)

National Work Readiness Credential: The credential, backed by the United States Chamber of Commerce, is awarded for passing four computer-based modules that test nine work readiness skills areas. A Rhode Island Survey of Selected Work Readiness Certificates notes that it “has often been compared to WorkKeys® with an expanded soft skills assessment.”

National Work Readiness Credential Assessment Sites (with number of sites): Connecticut (3), District of Columbia (12), Florida (5), Illinois (5), Indiana (1), Kentucky (1), Massachusetts (3), Maine (1), Michigan (2), Minnesota (7), Missouri (1), Mississippi (1), North Carolina (1), New Jersey (8), New York (statewide initiative - 14), Ohio (2), Pennsylvania (1), Rhode Island (1), Tennessee (3), Texas (3), Washington (8) (source: <http://www.workreadiness.com/images/AssessmentSites2.pdf>)

VTECs, a Consortium for Innovative Career and Workforce Development Resources: In 1991, Illinois and VTECs gathered employers together to identify workplace skills. They identified 98 and grouped them into 13 areas. VTECs offers software, electronic reports, and instructional materials to help work-ready educators.

VTEC Member States and Agencies: Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia (through Virginia Department of Education Career and Technical Education), Wyoming, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Navy (source: <http://www.vtecs.org/members.htm>)

Virginia Workplace Readiness Skills Project: Hampton Roads Workforce Development Board, Opportunity Inc, contracted with Virginia Beach Public Schools to develop a workplace readiness curriculum and teach it to Virginia Beach high school career and technical education students VA Beach Career and Technical Education then worked with National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) to develop assessments for each of the 13 Virginia's Workplace Readiness Skills areas. In May of 1996, VA Beach Public Schools completed the project, comprising of 156 lessons to teach Virginia's WorkPlace Readiness Skills. (sources: <http://www.nocti.org/StudStateVirginia.cfm>, and http://www.nocti.org/PDFs/Workplace_Readiness-VA_Blueprints.pdf).

Work Certified Program: This is a hard and soft skills training course with final comprehensive exam to attain "employee certification." Managed by the Treasure Coast Workforce Development Board in Florida, it has expanded to Illinois, Texas, and Pennsylvania. (source: "A Survey of Selected Work Readiness Certificates," January 2007, Prepared by Jobs

for the Future for Skill Up Rhode Island, a Project of United Way of Rhode Island:

<http://www.jff.org/~jff/Documents/WorkReadiness.pdf>)

Workforce Skills Certification System (WSCS): System provided by CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System) out of California. Involves passing standardized literacy tests (Certification Assessment Battery), and completing work-experience based portfolio project (Certification Assessment Portfolio). (source: “A Survey of Selected Work Readiness Certificates,” January 2007, Prepared by Jobs for the Future for Skill Up Rhode Island, a Project of United Way of Rhode Island: <http://www.jff.org/~jff/Documents/WorkReadiness.pdf>)

WAGE Certificate Program: Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy developed this job readiness program for state of Arkansas. Administered by Arkansas Department of Adult Education, involves achieving specific scores on Test of Basic Education (TABE) and demonstrating proficiency in a hard and soft skill areas based on feedback from Arkansas employers. (source: “A Survey of Selected Work Readiness Certificates,” January 2007, Prepared by Jobs for the Future for Skill Up Rhode Island, a Project of United Way of Rhode Island: <http://www.jff.org/~jff/Documents/WorkReadiness.pdf>)

Appendix D: Work-Ready Community Certification Summary Powerpoint Presentation

Virginia Certified WorkReady Community Program Investigation

October 23, 2008

Presentation to the Business Services Committee

Beatrice Yarney, MSW

Junior Policy Analyst



Problem and Proposal

Problem:

- Skills Gap

Proposal:

- Certified Work Ready Community Program
-

Research Questions

- What could a work-ready community certification program look like in Virginia?
 - What are the important questions/facets to consider if implementing such a program?
-

Investigative Sources – A Sampling

- Simon Martin, Workforce Development, National Governors Association
 - VCCS Workforce Development Services
 - Virginia Workforce Council
 - Senator Frank Ruff
 - Delegate Kathy Bryon
 - Georgia Office for Workforce Development
 - Oklahoma Department of Commerce
 - Liz Povar and Rob McClintock, Virginia Economic Development Partnership
 - Secretary of Health and Human Resources
-

What is Work Ready?

- Answer: Ready for on-the-job training in an entry-level position
 - Examples of Work Ready Skills:
 - hard skills
 - reading, math, writing, speaking, computer and problem solving
 - soft skills
 - understanding the “big picture,” work ethic, a positive attitude, independence and initiative, self-presentation skills, attendance and teamwork
-

What is a Work Ready Community?

- Georgia
 - Must meet customized benchmarks towards improving high school graduation rate
 - Target Percentage of the incumbent or existing workforce must have a CRC (target based on county population size)
 - Target percentage of available workforce must have a CRC (target based on county population size)
 - A community can become a Certified Work Ready Community of Excellence if they also achieve 70% HSGR
 - Oklahoma
 - 3% of the incumbent or existing workforce must have CRC
 - 25% of the workforce not currently employed but looking for work must have a CRC
 - The school system must graduate 82% of its high school seniors or 82% of its high school seniors must have a CRC.
-

Suggestions for Potential Criteria

- Early Childhood Development
- Primary School Field Trips
- Hands on Experiences in Middle and High School
- Internships
- Advanced Placement Classes
- International Baccalaureate Classes
- Dual enrollment in high school and community college
- High School Diploma (advanced vs standard)
- Presence of career coaches in high schools
- GED
- Career and Technical Education
- Community College to Four-Year College Transfer Rate
- CRC
- CRC+
- Soft Skills Assessments (WorkKeys)
- Apprenticeships
- Co-Ops
- Post-secondary certificates
- Post-secondary licensures
- Associates Degrees
- Bachelors Degrees
- Masters Degrees
- Doctorate Degrees
- Diversity Measures
- Degrees in high demand in STEM areas
- Career Fairs in high schools
- Completion of Workforce Development Courses or Curricula

Findings

- Cost – Oklahoma vs Georgia
- CRC/diploma/GED as the minimum standard
- Disparities between communities
- Marketing to community leaders, businesses and economic developers
- Need for increased collaboration
- No evaluations of program currently available
- Focus on data collection
- Potential for expansion
- Planning committee (E.D., W.D., Ed) could develop program details

Follow-Up Questions

- What additions, deletions, or other changes would you make to the potential criteria list?
 - How should we define “community”? (city, county, LWIA, MSA, PDC, VCCS)
 - Should the criteria for each region be standardized or customized?
 - What other partners should be involved in this discussion?
-

Questions?

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Appendix E: Education and Workforce Development Collaboration - Michigan

Direct excerpt from CRC Consortium website: <http://www.crcconsortium.org/state-news.htm>:

“The Council for Labor and Economic Growth unanimously approved the MI NCRC Implementation Plan in their June 9th meeting. The MI NCRC will be delivered through the Michigan Works! system in partnership with the K-12 educational system, community colleges, economic development agencies, employers, business associations, and other local partners. School Aid Senate Bill 1107 passed the Senate on March 26th and the House on June 11th. This bill adds the third WorkKeys® test, Locating Information, to the Michigan Merit Exam beginning March 2009. Review item #26 in the [Summary](#). Every high school student in Michigan will have the opportunity to earn an NCRC next year. Michigan is the first state to provide all students with two tickets to the future: a set of ACT college readiness scores, and a National Career Readiness Certificate. Michigan has leaped ahead of other states by being the first state to have a common skills credential in use in both the public school system and the workforce development system. This is an unprecedented level of alignment between high schools and workforce development agencies.

Leadership contacts for Michigan are:

Cindy Leyrer, Chair of the Michigan NCRC Advocates, cleyrer@inghamisd.org, 517.244.1338

Rachael Jungblut, Executive Director, Michigan NCRC Advocates, rjungblu@grcc.edu,
616.234.3623

Bill Guest, NCRC WorkKeys® Innovation Champion, WIRED West Michigan,
bill.guest@metricsreporting.com, 616.430.0828

Irma Zuckerberg, Mid-Michigan Innovation Team, i.zuckerberg@primacivitas.org,
517.999.3382

Visit www.michigancrc.org for more information.

Michigan has now issued 34,377 Certificates (8018 Bronze, 17,786 Silver, and 8573 Gold).

Bill Guest and his team also produce the comparative graphics for states' issuance of the CRC. These are shown in NOCC Newsletters.”

Appendix F: Education and Workforce Development Collaboration - Alaska

Direct excerpt from CRC Consortium website: <http://www.crcconsortium.org/state-news.htm>:

“Marcia Olsen in Alaska has provided the following update.

The first round of piloting the Alaska Career Ready program has resulted in issuance of 162 CRCs in a few school districts. There are now two trained WK profilers in the state. They are having trouble with the WK internet testing and ACT's reporting system. They would like feedback from any other state that is using these systems on a large scale. About 50 high schools have been set up as testing sites, and 250 are scheduled to go on-line next year.

Beginning with the 2009-2010 school year, 6th & 8th graders must take benchmark assessments in Applied Math, Reading for Information, and Locating Information by using WIN courseware placement tests, and 11th graders must take the ACT WorkKeys® assessments in Applied Math, Reading for Information, and Locating Information.

The initiative is a partnership between two state agencies--the Department of Education & Early Development in K-12 public schools; and the Department of Labor & Workforce Development at the Job Centers. The first year is being funded through Department of Labor money but it is hoped that over the next few years state money will be used.

They are making the rounds of employers to get support for the CRC. BP (British Petroleum) has used WorkKeys® for several years already in hiring some of their process technicians on the North Slope oil fields. Dorothy Hanson at the University of Alaska does the testing for them. NANA Management, which is a large Alaska Native Corporation is getting ready to use WorkKeys®. Several other large employers have expressed their support. The State of Alaska is looking into using WorkKeys® in their hiring process for a few state government jobs. Also, they issued their first 3 CRCs last week! They were presented to 3 adult job-seekers at a public ceremony by the Commissioner of the Department of Labor and the "First Dude" (Governor Sarah Palin's husband, Todd Palin).

The state web site is www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/CTE/workready.html.”

Appendix G: Oklahoma Department of Commerce Interview Response

VCCS Office of Workforce Development staff sent a questionnaire by email to Georgia and Oklahoma, the two states implements work-ready programming (Oklahoma is implementing a pilot, and Georgia, a full-blown state initiative). Georgia sent general documents and referred VCCS staff to its website, but Oklahoma responded to survey directly. Below is Oklahoma's response.

Email response sent July 1, 2008 by:

Jeane Burruss, Project Manager

Oklahoma Department of Commerce

900 N. Stiles Ave.

Oklahoma City, OK 73104-3234

Phone: (405) 815-5256

jeane_burruss@okcommerce.gov

1. What has your budget been for implementing the community work ready program? (technical assistance, grants, administrative costs)

At this point the cost has been minimal, our Oklahoma CRC project is in full implementation and awareness of our work ready program has been a joint effort with key stakeholders.

2. What have any evaluations that you have conducted of businesses reveal about the role the community work ready program is playing in the expansion, start-up, and relocation of businesses in work ready regions vs. non-work ready regions.

We are housed at the Oklahoma Department of Commerce and members of our steering committee include members of our expansion, start-up and relocation team. Since we have only recently certified two communities we cannot give empirical data only share that site selectors et.al. are very impressed with the prospect of the program that would differentiate our communities from other locations.

3. How did you first hear about the CRC? About the Community certification? How did these items get on your agenda?

The CRC was first introduced to Oklahoma by the State of Virginia, Barbara Bolin. Oklahoma embraced your success and implemented the Oklahoma Career Readiness Certificate program. We used the Georgia Work Ready Communities model and customized it for Oklahoma. Debra Lyons, Gov. Sonny Purdue's appointed person has been to Oklahoma to present to our State Council. The State Council is dedicated to addressing the worker and skill shortages and this stellar program is the only one that addresses filling the business need, upskilling the workforce and engaging the education community.

4. What kinds of non-mandated implementation team members do you have on the local level (other than the required membership)? If businesses, from what sectors, and what size company? Is there a great amount of overlap between the representation implementation teams and your workforce investment boards?

I will attach a copy of the steering committee located at the state level, local workforce investment boards are involved in the awareness and serve in most cases as drivers for the project at the local level.*

5. Would it be possible to see a sample of a plan that any of the communities have provided for achieving Community WorkReady Certified status?

We can provide when we receive one we have just rolled out the project and have not received applications or plans. Our pilots certified by submitting the request and met the criteria on the first run.

6. If you could do anything differently, or were to start over, what would you work on in regarding this initiative?

We feel the project is the first step in meeting the needs of our business, upskilling our workforce and engaging our education system while eliminating barriers to addressing the real problem Oklahoma is facing, the worker and worker skill shortage.

7. Please provide some background on your marketing efforts. If you have some sort of write-up of the marketing plan, would you be able to provide it?

Our only organized marketing effort thus far has been word of mouth, the 25 member steering committee has provided presentations thru multiple venues around the state creating such an interest we have been unable to keep up with the request for roll out.

8. Are there certain indicators you use to determine whether an individual should take the CRC or do you test everyone? How do most people end up taking the test? (i.e. through WIA or other programs?) Who pays for it?

We use the product Key Train a level 1 ACT accepted remediation product to pre-test any individual that enters our workforce development system. The Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development is the financial supporter of this project at the present, they receive their funding from the Governor's 15% WIA funds.

9. How do you choose who will receive incentive funds?

Has not been determined.

10. How do you address remediation for communities?

The steering committee has a subcommittee developing a plan, will share when completed.

11. Finally, my thought is that Virginia could start define "community" as a workforce investment area, and that potentially workforce investment boards could work together with the community college and K-12 systems in each area to implement the plan. What are your thoughts on this? Would you recommend Virginia beginning with county certification or leave the definition of "community" flexible?

We actually learned early in the design process competition is fierce unless you give the opportunity to "self define". We had mayors and county reps on the steering committee and discussions became heated. They seem to be very satisfied with being able to convene their own "community". I would throw it out for discussion. Just a note about K-12, one of our drivers is a local school superintendent. He is a believer in the Career Readiness Certificate and hands out the CRC with each diploma at senior graduation. Other superintendents have been contacted by their local economic development drivers to get engaged so they can reach certification.

*Work Ready Communities Project Steering Committee

Barbara Hawkins, CEO of Pryor Chamber of Commerce

Jeane Burruss, Workforce Solutions, ODOC

Vaughn Clark, Director of Community Development, ODOC

Hugh Doherty, Workforce Solutions, ODOC

Rob Gragg, Rural Development Coordinator

Jim Glaze, Superintendent of Chickasha Public Schools

Jo Ritcher, OESC

Lydia Johnson, Workforce Solutions, ODOC

Jon Eller, OESC

Sandy Elledge, Dept of Human Services

Scott Smith, State Dept of Career Tech

Debra Stuart, Higher Regents

Kathie Price, Southwest Workforce Investment Board

Susan Kuzmic, Workforce Solutions, ODOC

Chuck Mills, GCWED, Mayor of Shawnee

Tina Lindsay, Community Development, ODOC

Kirk Martin, Director of Programs, Community Development

Kathy McLaughlin, Director Citizen Empowerment, ODOC

Norma Noble, Deputy Sec. of Commerce

Christie Myers, Director of Prospecting Team, ODOC

Camilla Riley, Chief Officer, Guidance & Academic Services, Metro Tech

Jo Kahn, State Dept of Career Tech

Terry Watson, Director Workforce Solutions, ODOC

July 2008

Appendix H: Research Contact List

- ◆ Aryanna Khalid, Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Resources
- ◆ Barbara Brown, Vice President, Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association
- ◆ Brett Vassey, President & CEO, Virginia Manufacturers Association (member of the Virginia Workforce Council Business Services Committee)
- ◆ Carrie Douglas, Coordinator, Workforce Evaluation, Virginia Community College System Office of Workforce Development Services
 - ◆ David Sweeney, Representative, ACT
 - ◆ Frank Ruff, Senator, Virginia General Assembly
- ◆ Gloria Westerman, Director, Educational Career Transitional Programs, Virginia Community College System Office of Workforce Development Services
- ◆ Jeane Buruss, Project Manager, Oklahoma Workforce, a Division of Oklahoma Department of Commerce
 - ◆ John Legerwood, Opportunity Inc
 - ◆ Judy Begland, Opportunity Inc
- ◆ Katherine DeRosear, Strategic Policy Advisor, Worldwide Interactive Network (WIN)
- ◆ Kathy Wibberly, Virginia Department of Health, Director, Division of Primary Care and Rural Health
 - ◆ Office of Minority Health and Public Health Policy
- ◆ Rob McClintock, Research Director, Virginia Economic Development Partnership
- ◆ Robin Sullenberger, Executive Director, Shenandoah Valley Partnership (Chair of the Virginia Workforce Council Business Services Committee)
 - ◆ Teresa Chasteen, President, Worldwide Interactive Network (WIN)

Appendix I: State Agency Abbreviations

VCCS – Virginia Community College system

VEDP – Virginia Economic Development Partnership

VDBA – Virginia Department of Business Assistance

VDOE – Virginia Department of Education

VDHCD – Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development

VDH – Virginia Department of Health

VDOT – Virginia Department of Transportation

Appendix J: Overview of Oklahoma's Certified Work Ready Communities Project

Sent by email July 1, 2008 from:

Terry Watson, Director, Workforce Solutions

Oklahoma Department of Commerce

900 N. Stiles Ave.

Oklahoma City, OK 73104-3234

Phone: (405) 815-5206

Email: terry_watson@okcommerce.gov

Oklahoma's Certified Work Ready Communities Project is an innovative program that encourages communities to link workforce and economic development. Talent pools aligned to industry needs that support an economic strategy create a powerful economic tool that will increase the wealth of its citizens and community. By utilizing Oklahoma's Career Ready Certificate, communities will be able to document to economic development entities the work readiness of their citizens.

To participate in the program communities must develop and implement a plan to align educational institutions by adopting a curriculum that is seamless and aligned to the needs of industries through career pathways. The pathway developed should encourage lifelong learning enabling youth and adults to have access to relevant education continuously from high school to technical school, community college, or a four year university. Success will be measured by the community demonstrating a commitment to improve public high school graduation rates and achievement of a percentage of the existing and available workforce obtaining an Oklahoma Career Readiness Certificate. Criteria for success include creating industry-driven workforce development solutions that

- identify and eliminate documented skill gaps,
- improve the community's high school graduation rate,
- engage at-risk and out-of-school youth,
- and transition dislocated workers

Communities will be encouraged to apply to participate in the program. Communities will develop a strong public-private partnership with active participation from the private sector. They will be charged with identifying how their community will close the skills gap that will enhance the marketability of the workforce. Using Career Readiness Certificates, communities will develop and implement plans to ensure that

- A percentage of citizens attain Career Readiness Certificates.
- Communities provide support for job profiling of local business and industry
- CRCs are aligned with the requirements of employers.
- Training programs are developed for existing employees that are aligned with the needs of local business and industry.

Oklahoma's initiative is scheduled to kick off in late **January** with the application and process guidelines being available on the Okcommerce.gov website. The criteria and requirements for basic certification will include:

There shall be three categories of Certified Work Ready Communities. Geographic areas will be self defined by the requesting geographical area. The categories are:

- A. Certified Work Ready Community – Any City, Town or Township**
- B. Certified Work Ready County – Any area that is an entire county with the county lines as the boundary**
- C. Certified Work Ready Region – Any collaboration of contiguous counties**

Maintain at least

- **82% High School (9th graders reaching h.s. graduation) + GED completers**
Certify with a Career Readiness Certificate
- **3% of their existing workforce and**
- **25% of their available workforce.**

The application process will require letters of support and commitment from the major stakeholders involved in the defined communities, e.g. Mayors, County Commissioners, Chambers of Commerce depending . For the project, communities will be encouraged to build teams and select a Team Leader committed to obtaining the goals and has the resources available to ensure success.

The steering committee has selected two pilot areas to measure a quick success and evaluation of the program. Mayes county (initiated by Barbara Hawkins, Director of Pryor Chamber) and Grady county (initiated by Superintendent Jim Glaze of Chickasha public schools) were selected and have supplied the necessary letters of support from their local leadership. It is anticipated these pilots will achieve an accelerated certification due to their early commitment and appear to be ready to meet the challenge of maintaining their certification status.

Appendix K: Excerpts from a VCU Academic Report on Work-Ready Community Certification

The following excerpts were prepared by Beatrice Yarney, in the Virginia Community College System Workforce Development Services Division, to meet the requirements of a masters-level public policy course through Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs. The academic report provided background information as well as her suggestions for program design. The suggestions for program design were based on ideas collected from various sources during the investigation.

1. Work-Readiness and Economic Development Marketing

Workforce development is an important focal point of economic development and economic development marketing. Businesses want to know that there are enough people in an area who are qualified or trained for the positions they will offer. If communities do not effectively convey the positive qualities that their localities have, businesses may overlook them, even though the communities may be otherwise prepared to host businesses successfully. This appendix provides information on the broader context of workforce development and work-readiness within the fields of economic development and economic development marketing.

Economic Development and Economic Development Marketing

Economic development is a broad concept. The following are a few definitions of economic development: (1) a broad set of tools used to improve the economic productivity of a communityⁱ, (2) a process of influencing the economic well-being of a community through helping restructure and/or grow an economyⁱⁱ, (3) a process of improving the welfare of a community through organized planningⁱⁱⁱ, and (4) a process of increasing the standard of living of a population^{iv}. The ultimate goal of economic development is to improve the well-being of a community, but objectives that emerge include increasing a community's tax base, increasing the number of jobs, retaining and expanding existing businesses, and attracting new business.^v Additional objectives include increasing the per capita income, achieving a good business climate, helping start and maintain small businesses, and assisting those that want to be entrepreneurs^{vi}.

The diverse goals of economic development lead to diverse strategies and activities. A 1999 International City/County Management Association (ICMA) survey of local governments revealed the government's top economic development activities tended to be tax incentives, customized job training, community development loan funds for businesses, community development corporations, and micro-enterprise programs^{vii}. The International Economic Development Council identifies infrastructure improvements, construction of properties to make them ready for businesses to move in, helping businesses to choose the appropriate piece of land on which to build their facility (site selection assistance), technical assistance with the acquiring the site, and export/trade development as other activities included under economic development. Marketing the policies and programs that attract, retain, and promote the expansion of businesses also occurs^{viii}.

The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) identifies a number of current trends in economic development marketing^{ix, x}. The target of economic development marketing has shifted from manufacturing businesses to retail, service and technology firms. There has been an increase in web-based marketing, the creation of special government-sponsored economic development websites, and foreign trade missions and hosting foreign delegations to improve a region's stature globally and identify new markets. Economic development marketing has also increased its use of Geographical Information Systems to provide information on available properties, demographics, and analysis of core businesses in a given area, television ads to recruit workers to particular jobs or industries, and marketing career pathways to children and young adults in school. Those playing the role of economic developers have shifted to advertising the good qualities of an entire region, rather than focusing narrowly on a smaller community ("we are a high-tech area near Silicon Valley"). They use more private-public partnerships to fund regional marketing efforts. Finally, they try to create a community image and identity to project a high quality of life.

When communities engage in marketing, a main goal is to project a business-friendly climate^{xi}. Some common factors found to be important for businesses concern the cost of living, environmental regulations, regulations relating to permits, licenses, and reporting, cost and availability of real estate, infrastructure (facilities with utilities and internet capability as well as other telecommunications infrastructure), access for capital and financing, and incentives such as

tax breaks. Tax levels for businesses and individuals, the cost of energy, the size of the market, availability and quality of needed services and the availability of the workforce are other factors.

The IEDC identifies the following current economic development trends for achieving a good business climate: lower energy costs due to the de-regulation of utilities; tax breaks and other incentives to existing expanding businesses in an area, not just businesses that are new to an area; one-stop centers to streamline the process of obtaining business permits when businesses are getting started or want to grow; public and private sector investments in telecommunications infrastructure; a federal Internet Tax Freedom Act of 1998 to impose three-year moratorium on state and local taxes for online sales and transactions to promote growth of e-commerce; focusing on quality of life factors to attract the employees businesses seek; affordable housing; and a focus on workforce development initiatives to meet the need for an available skilled workforce, particularly with skills training in technological areas.

2. Virginia Career Readiness Certificate Program: History and Current Course

Governor Mark Warner officially launched use of the Virginia Career Readiness Certificate in October 2004. Under his leadership, state level administrators for workforce development searched for a certification to validate the presence of minimum workplace preparedness skills. They discovered the use of three WorkKeys® assessments (reading for information, locating information and applied mathematics) used for the Kentucky Employability Certificate^{xii}, and modified the test from pass or fail so that individuals could earn bronze, silver, and gold certificates^{xiii}. Also, the state developed a web-based marketing tool called the Virginia Skills Bank^{xiv}. From Virginia Skills Bank database, one can retrieve information on how many people have taken the test and the certificate earned (bronze, silver, or gold) by zip code, cities, general regions, community college service regions, workforce development regions, and planning district commission areas. Economic developers can offer this resource to employers to promote a community, and employers can directly access this resource as they decide whether to expand in or move to a new region.

The Virginia Community College System Office of Workforce Development Services administered the Career Readiness Certificates. To build on the CRC, the Office launched a CRC+ initiative. In addition to earning the CRC, individuals can take WorkKeys® assessments for hospitality and manufacturing, and there are opportunities for apprenticeships^{xv}. Though the

state continues to administer the assessments through VCCS, the CRC initiative essentially died out, perhaps from lack of marketing. A director in the Office of Workforce Development Services indicates that community colleges offer testing to employers who request it for their employees or applicants, rather than actively test each individual who comes in for workforce services^{xvi}. When Workforce Investment Board Directors throughout the state were surveyed to determine their usage of the CRC around March of 2008, and several responded that there was a lack of use because local employers were not familiar with the assessment^{xvii}.

The next Governor, Tim Kaine, also saw value in CRC. He listed increasing the use of the CRC annually by 10% beginning in 2007, as well as increasing resources to upgrade skill deficiencies for adults as an action item in his January 2007 Workforce Development Strategic Plan^{xviii}. In October 2007, the Virginia Workforce Council, the Governor's main advisory body for workforce development, formally established the Virginia Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) as the instrument that regional Workforce Investment Boards use to measure workforce readiness. Then in January 2008, the Council added a 5% CRC attainment as the 18th measure for its Workforce Investment Board Incentive Awards. During the 2008 Virginia General Assembly Session, legislators passed a bill formally creating the Virginia Career Readiness Certificate Program, and authorizing an investigation of the creation of a community-level certification program for work-readiness. Mostly recently, on June 27, 2008, the Virginia Workforce Council approved a budget to reimburse workforce investment regions for the testing up to 5% of the participants in the WIA Adult Program. The budget also includes funds for restructuring and updating the database and website, administrative support, and licenses for remediation programs. It also includes funds for marketing and outreach activities to create awareness of and demand for the CRC. The hope is to provide a boost to the number of individuals validated as career ready in the workforce.

To provide an idea of the potential impact of these recent policies, the budget to invigorate Virginia's CRC Program is \$3,170,250 over four fiscal years^{xix}: \$225,000 on marketing, and \$1,109,250 on assessments, which at about \$45 per test^{xx} means close to 24,650 people will receive certificates. If each individual is as a result able to get a job paying a minimum of \$1200/month, then after four years, the group will be earning \$3,544,960,000 annually. That amounts to a 1000-fold increase over the initial investment.

3. Political Context: Work-Ready Community Certification on the Agenda

Chapters 243 and 679 of the Virginia Acts of Assembly 2008 Session create the Virginia Career Readiness Certificate Program and authorize the investigation into the creation of a community-level work ready certification program. The Career Readiness Certification Program had been on the administrative agenda for some time when the proposal surfaced to investigate the creation of a community work-ready certification program. Thus, it was not actually part of the original legislation establishing the Virginia Career Readiness Program^{xxi}. This section discusses how the investigation made it on to the government agenda.

The work-ready community-level certification concept originated with Debra Lyons, the Director of the Governor's Office of Workforce Development in Georgia. Representatives from ACT and Win, companies that provide CRC assessments and training respectively, worked with Debra Lyons to develop a plan for the Georgia Work Ready Initiative that unfolded in three phases after its August 2006 launch^{xxii}. The first step was to establish the Work Ready Certificate Program, which is based on Virginia's Career Readiness Certificate Program. The second part was implementing Certified Work Ready Communities (CWRC), a voluntary initiative for communities (defined as counties) to show they had a "validated, skilled workforce needed to fill current and future jobs."^{xxiii} Currently, Georgia is in the third phase of implementation, moving from establishing work-read communities in terms of counties to work-ready regions.

The work-ready community certification concept made its way to the Virginia Workforce Council through a Career Readiness Consortium held during the summer of 2007^{xxiv}. Katherine DeRosear, of Worldwide Interactive Network, along with several members of the Virginia Workforce Council Business Services Committee (Brett Vassey, Tony Rigali, Robin Sullenberger, and Jim Underwood) all receive credit for playing major roles in crafting, proposing and lobbying for the legislation to include the investigation of the program^{xxv}. In the Virginia House of Delegates and the Senate, Frank M. Ruff, Jr. and Kathy J. Byron respectively were chief patrons of the identical bills that established the Virginia Career Readiness Certificate and authorized the investigation of the creation of a Virginia Work-Ready Community Certification Program^{xxvi}.

Overall, the bills experienced positive reception. The Virginia Career Readiness Program addresses a well-recognized problem already on the agenda: the lack of available skilled

workers. Therefore, the current administration already supports increase the use of the CRC (see discussion in prior section). Furthermore, Governor Kaine also has a top Education goal to improve the statewide rate of high school graduation from 74 percent in 2005 to 80 percent by 2010^{xxviii}. The two main criteria used in the existing certified work-ready communities programs align with the Governor's goals, indicating general support of the bill already existed in state government. Support of the Virginia CRC program by the Virginia Community College System and the Virginia Workforce Council also foster an environment where work-ready community certification is an acceptable option to consider. Finally, private businesses also had a vested interest in the passage of any legislation that promoted an increase in the use of the CRC. ACT (formerly American College testing), for example, designed the WorkKeys® assessments used for the CRC, and Win, provides training targeted toward improving assessment scores. There was enough support for and little opposition (if any) to the bills.

4. Possible Work-Ready Community Certification Program Alternatives

Data collected from meetings, interview and other correspondence could suggest four options for a work-ready community certification program in Virginia. One option is always non-action, but it is not necessary to discuss this option, since the report has already provided information on Virginia's current course as it relates to economic development marketing using the work-ready concept. Thus, the first policy option, excluding non-action, is to follow Georgia's model with a few adjustments for state culture and preferences. For example, Georgia uses Workforce Investment Act Discretionary funds to pay for every individual who wants to take the CRC assessment to do so. Virginia would rather have businesses and individuals demand and pay for the assessments themselves. Also Virginia might change the definition of community to something other than counties and use or create its own systems to judge target levels for high school graduation and CRC attainment rates. The report refers first alternative as the "basic model." A second option is to add more criteria specific to workforce development, what this report will refer to as the "Expanded Workforce Development Model." Criteria concerning soft skills or "employability", earning college credit towards certificates or degrees in high demand areas during high school, dual certification programs for health professions, apprenticeships, and internships would comprise the additional standards for the second model. A third option expands on the expanded model by adding extra quality of life criteria, relating to

access to healthcare, affordable housing, and transportation. This is the “Commonwealth Performance Model.” Please see Appendix L for more information regarding the criteria.

Evaluation criteria for the policy alternatives relate to increasing market exposures, maximizing benefit of market exposures, support for achievement of criteria, addressing disparities, cross-agency collaboration, and duplication. This report assumes that any increases in high-wage, high-growth jobs will be in proportion to an increase in the number of exposures of businesses to community marketing materials. It assumes that the more positive factors reported, the better the outcomes. The chart below summarizes information on the evaluation results. Please see Appendix M for a more in depth evaluation.

5. Application of Evaluation Criteria to Work-Ready Related Economic Development Marketing Policy Options^{1,2}

| | Basic Model | Expanded Workforce Development Model | Commonwealth Performance Model |
|--|---|--|--|
| Market Exposures | + | + | + |
| Extent to Which Program Maximizes Benefit of each Market Exposure | + (baseline) | +++ (additional criteria should yield better outcomes) | +++++++ (additional criteria should come better outcomes) |
| Extent to Which Program Supports Improvement of Quality of Life | + (addresses weaknesses in CRC testing areas, provides work readiness training through community colleges, technical assistance for local | +++ (additional criteria should yield better outcomes) | +++++++ (additional criteria should yield better outcomes) |

¹ See Appendix I for a list of agency abbreviations use in this chart

² The symbols in this chart are relative to each evaluative category (horizontally), rather than across categories (vertically).

| | Basic Model | Expanded Workforce Development Model | Commonwealth Performance Model |
|--|--|--|---|
| | implementation teams, provides planning grants and implementation grants) | | |
| Extent to Which it Addresses Disparities | + (Baseline CRC funding for the first 5% of WIA Adult participants to take CRC. Furthermore, can address disparities with technical assistance for local implementation teams, and planning and implementation grants targeted to those not achieving the criteria within 1 - 3 years) | +++ (Baseline CRC funding for the first 5% of WIA Adult participants to take CRC. Furthermore, can address disparities with technical assistance for local implementation teams, and planning and implementation grants targeted to those not achieving the criteria within 1 - 3 years) | ++++ (Baseline CRC funding will be present. Furthermore, can address disparities with technical assistance for local implementation teams, and planning and implementation grants targeted to those not achieving the criteria within 1 - 3 years. If VDHCD is included, a main objectives of the agency is to address disparities between communities) |
| Extent of Cross-Agency Collaboration Required | + (VCCS, VEDP, VDBA, DOE, P-16 Council, Education Panel) | + (VCCS, VEDP, VDBA, DOE, P-16 Council, Education Panel) | +++++++ (VCCS, VEDP, VDBA, DOE, P-16 Council, Education Panel, VDHCD, VDH, VDOT) |

| | Basic Model | Expanded Workforce Development Model | Commonwealth Performance Model |
|----------------------------|---|---|--|
| Cost | + | ++ (more time/money spent on a program with more criteria: technical assistance and data collection) | ++++ (more time/money spent on a program with more criteria: technical assistance and data collection) |
| Avoids Duplication? | + (Could be Purview of the P-16 council and Education Panel, if addressed as an issue of K-12 reforms, rather increasing testing) | + (Could be Purview of the P-16 council and Education Panel, if addressed as an issue of K-12 reforms, rather increasing testing) | + + + (Same issue as tailored and expanded model. Also, VA Performs will have some of this information on their website) |

In evaluation of the program alternatives, the basic question should not be, “will this program attract businesses and desirable jobs to Virginia Communities,” but how much more will it attract businesses? Interview data suggests that high school graduation and basic employability skills are good, but employers are more excited by career ladders and specialized training. Findings suggest that at minimum, the Virginia Community College System pursue activities that help strengthen this area, whether through the Expanded Workforce Development Model of the community-level work-readiness program, or some other program. Pursuing a plan such as the Commonwealth Performance plan will be good for the overall common-wealth of Virginia’s citizens; however, it may be a challenge to foster collaboration between such a variety of agencies to achieve the desired ends.

6. Implementation Plan

Based on the programs in Oklahoma and Georgia, **the work-ready certification program is not mandatory**. The state advertises to communities and economic developers the

opportunity to become a work-ready community. **Communities desiring to participate voluntarily form local implementation teams**, consisting of leaders from education, business/economic development, and government, specifically: chief local elected officials, city managers, or local governing council members, presidents of local chambers of commerce, school boards, and community colleges, chairman of the regions workforce investment board (or the organizations/agencies that support their work), representatives from local departments of economic and/or community development, business representatives, high school guidance counselors, and other individuals deemed necessary. To apply for the voluntary program, **each member of the implementation team has to write a letter of support and tangible commitment** (time and/or funds) to achieving certified work-ready community status.

At minimum, **implementation of the program requires state-level collaboration** between the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP), the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the Virginia Department of Business Assistance (VDBA), and their appropriate advisory councils, such as the Virginia Workforce Council, supported by the Virginia Community College System Workforce Services Division. There are also independent councils, such as P-16 Education Council, and the Adult Learning Panel (see Appendix N), whose purpose aligns with goals of the Virginia Work-Ready Community Certification Program. For the Commonwealth Performance Model, state agencies such as the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (VDHCD), Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). With the framework for the program already defined, these **groups will mainly be the state sources of technical information for local communities who wish to attain work-ready community status**.

Since the **Virginia Community College System** has expertise in teaching/facilitation, it can appropriately as the **main contact for the localities**. VCCS can provide the technical assistance face of the program and help facilitate interaction between the local implementation teams and the state agencies. The local letters of support and program application would go through them, and VCCS could arrange for orientation to the program, assist with individual community concerns, and schedule conference calls and in-person meetings to provide technical assistance, guidance, and opportunities to share best practices. Technical Assistance would center on strengthening relationships between the local implementation team and their governing

state agency, as well as assistance providing helpful information from other sources. A technical assistance team could comprise of representatives from each of the agencies mentioned.

In terms of actual **marketing of the product**, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the economic development marketing agency for the state, would be a necessary partner, along with the Virginia Department of Business Assistance (VDBA), the one-stop agency for businesses in the state.

Regarding **compliance** with the program, one to three years is the current cut-off for local implementation team program participation for Georgia and a similarly designed work ready pilot program in Oklahoma^{xxviii}. A concern in implementing this program is that it perpetuates disparities. Just as with Georgia's grants to various localities that helped them speed up the certification process, if economically distressed communities in Virginia want to participate but do not have the minimum resources to do so, planning grants can be issued, and then grants to help them implement the plans. The issuing agencies could be any of the agencies involved in provided technical assistance. As described in the "History and Current Course" section, the return on such as investment is phenomenal, especially if it makes lasting changes in the educational system.

Regarding a **program budget**, the Virginia Community College System Workforce Service Division may need additional funding for staff positions to review applications to the program, review grants, and provide technical assistance. Grants to communities for planning how to achieve the criteria or for implementing their plans would also require funding. Funding could come from Workforce Investment Act dollars, state agencies collaborating to achieve common goals, and private-public partnerships, such as with the Virginia Chamber of Commerce or from a large company that often uses the CRC, such as the Inova Health System in Northern Virginia. The Virginia Career Readiness Program has finances for marketing planning and implementation in its budget. It may be possible to add the work ready communities concept to current marketing efforts at little additional cost.

7. Evaluation Plan

An evaluation plan will help determine the impact of the Virginia WorkReady Community Certification Program. The goal of any activity related to economic development is to improve the well-being of a community. However, it is difficult to operationalize or measure

“improvement of well-being.” Economic development measures for well-being can relate to per capita income, tax base, and the quantity and quality of jobs (Are the jobs in high demand high growth fields? Are there opportunities for advancement?). It also may be comprised of factors affecting economic well-being, such as educational attainment (high school diploma or equivalent, certifications, and credentials). Other factors separate from individual skill level or job characteristics include access to health care, transportation, affordable housing, and really a variety of other factors.

Regarding evaluation of the program specifically as an economic development marketing tool, the outcome objective of the Virginia WorkReady Community Program would be to increase the exposure of businesses to relevant and positive information about Virginia communities. Thus, important elements would include tracking and/or quantifying the marketing pieces, whether they are press releases, mentions in newspaper articles or the media, presentations, television ads, direct mail pieces, and developments on websites to gauge the frequency of exposure to the WorkReady Community Certification Program. A supporting outcome objective for creating the positive information to report is to provide adequate technical assistance to help communities achieve the certification standards. It would be necessary to determine through customer service surveys whether the local implementation teams received proper technical assistance. One could also measure before and after differences in the achievement of the workready community criteria itself to indicate the effect of technical assistance (a summative evaluation). (Please see Appendix L for information on the criteria.)

If one established the overall goal of the program as increasing the number of jobs in a community, especially high-wage, high growth industry jobs, it would be necessary to collect information from new and existing businesses in communities not only on the number of new jobs created, but also on the relative importance of the community certification program in job creation. The evaluator would survey random businesses in communities that were part of the certification program and communities that were not, asking for their industry information, the number of new positions they created during a given period, the wage levels of those positions, and judge how heavily the certification program influenced their decision making process to create new positions. The survey would ask if the company was new to the area, and ask the business to judge how heavily the certification program influenced their decision to move or expand to the area, on a scale of one to seven. In addition to the community certification

program, the survey would list business-climate indicators such as specialized workforce training, tax levels, cost of energy, size of market, environmental regulations, regulations relating to permits, licenses, and reporting, cost and availability of real estate, infrastructure, access for capital and financing, and incentives. It would also list quality of life indicators such as affordable housing, public transportation, commute times and distances. The businesses would ask to just the influence of each factor on a scale of 1 to 7, one being not influential, seven being the most.

8. Findings/Conclusion

Thus far, the WorkReady Communities report has attempted to review extant programs and literature relating to and applying the work-ready concept, provide the history and context for the emergence of the workready community concept in Virginia, propose and compare alternatives for program design of a Virginia WorkReady Community Certification Program, outline plans for implementation and evaluation, and now offers overall findings concerning the creation of the program.

The premise of implementing a Virginia Certified WorkReady Communities Program is that it will draw employers to an area, encourage them to expand, or increase opportunities for employment or promotion. Implementing a Work-Ready Community Certification Program should also mean increased media exposure to the labor pool and to business, and thus an increase in skills level of Virginia's citizens who take the CRC or get their GED as a result of marketing effort. Ultimately, the work-ready community certification program expands the "usefulness" of the CRC for economic development marketing, at a time when the governor wants to increase the use of the CRC, and it promotes an increase in the high school graduation rate, which is also of interest to the governor. The added criteria in the Expanded Workforce Development Model (soft skills, career ladders/pipelines, internships, apprenticeships, college credit while in high school, and dual certifications for high wage, high demand positions) will support goals that are already in place for Virginia's workforce development system, essentially aligning the needs of businesses (economic development) with the skill levels of workers (workforce development). The added criteria in the Commonwealth Performance Model (healthcare, transportation, and affordable housing criteria) will promote a better overall quality of life for Virginia's workers, attracting them to communities and increasing their availability to

businesses. It will also convey to businesses that if they expand in a given community, they will be able to recruit workers to that area. However, after a review of the data presented in this report, the report offers following findings:

1) Successful implementation of the program will require collaboration between Workforce Development and the Education System. Groups must be prepared to overcome governmental silos. For example, there may be potential competition between the CRC and Workplace Readiness/NOCTI Assessments. The Virginia Department of Education Career and Technical Education Office administers the NOCTI assessments. How could the groups create a relationship that would foster achievement of work ready community certification?

2) The Work-Ready Community Certification Program is a means to promote education reform.

Extensive focus on the Virginia Career Readiness Certificate begs the issue of collaboration between economic development, workforce development and the K-12 educational system. All three have a vested interest in preparing individuals for college and the workforce. In its report, the P-16 Council cited an ACT study that showed that individuals who wanted to be able to support a small family without a four-year college education still needed the same level of skills as a person entering college^{xxix}. A program like this will mean increased collaboration between the Community College System, as administrators of the CRC, the Virginia Department of Education, and the P-16 Council to help improve the education system.

3) If career readiness certificate attainment and high school graduation rates are the only criteria use, the program will actually meet the minimum standard for work-readiness.

Interviews with representatives from the economic development organizations and health care organizations reveal that career ladders for their jobs (available training for specific occupations) are more attractive to businesses than CRC and GED attainment alone. A statewide survey of businesses may be a good direction to take to determine the usefulness of a program that would solely advertise the high school graduation and CRC attainment rates of a community. A good format could be based on the third evaluation method discussed in the “Evaluation Plan” section.

4) The marketing of a work-ready community program should target community leaders, not just businesses and economic developers. As administered in other states, the program is voluntary. Marketing to communities will be important to secure participation, especially regarding forming local implementation teams.

5) The WorkReady Community Certification Program will need to promote, not perpetuate, economic disparities. Communities unable to achieve WorkReady Community Certification in a timely manner may receive less attention from businesses, potentially causing an even greater increase in economic disparity. Grants for planning and implementation for communities in economic distress should address this issue. Also, consideration should be given to how to balance any incentives provided with remediation for given communities.

6) Implementing work-ready community program models with expanded quality of life criteria (akin to the Commonwealth Performance Model) necessitates increased cross-agency collaboration in setting and achieving the certification standards. The Virginia Department of Health's Office of Minority Health and Public Health Policy, the Virginia Department of Transportation, and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development must play a role in developing any criteria concerning access to healthcare, transportation and affordable housing.

7) The Commonwealth Performance Model of the Certification Program (or similar models with expanded quality of life criteria) must also include collaboration with the Council on Virginia's Future. The Commonwealth Model will be overlap with some efforts of the Council on Virginia's Future, especially with regard to Virginia Performs, the online report card for the state of Virginia. Virginia Performs collects measurements of key indicators surrounding health, transportation, and the economy^{xxx}. Thus, in design and implementation, one must pay careful attention to collaborate with this Council.

Appendix L: Three Tiers of Possible Work-Ready Community Criteria from VCU

Academic Report

This pyramid was developed as part of an academic report, to meet the requirements of a masters-level public policy course through Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs.

Attain affordable housing criteria, based on (1) percentage of individuals who are spending more than 30% of their income for housing (VDHA performance measure), or (2) demonstrated commitment to improving that rate by meeting customized benchmarks. Target goals can be adjusted based on size/characteristics of community.

Attain transportation criteria, based on (1) an average commute distance and/or time, (2) access to public transportation criteria as measured by trips numbers of elderly, disabled and low income people in Virginia (VDOT performance measure), (3) or demonstrated commitment to improving the other two criteria by meeting customized benchmarks.

Attain access to healthcare criteria, based on two measures: (1) presence of dual certification and career ladder programs for the highest demand/decidedly crucial healthcare positions, (2) target ratio of healthcare provider to population based on categories of communities (rural, urban, and various mixes) for primary care physicians, pediatricians, Ob/Gyn, dentists, and specialist. For nurses, it is better to focus on turnover or vacancy rates.

Tier 3 Criteria
(For the Commonwealth Performance Model)

Tier 2 Criteria
(For the Expanded Workforce Development Model)

Attain Soft Skills Career Readiness Criteria.
Attain College Credit While in High School Criteria.
Attain career ladder criteria, based on a measure that reflects the presence of training programs (CRC+, internships, apprenticeships, dual certifications) for high-growth, high-demand jobs in a given community.

Tier 1 Criteria
(For the Basic Model)

Attain high school graduation rate (HSGR) criteria, based on (1) attaining customized target rate for size/characteristics of community, or (2) meeting customized benchmarks demonstrating commitment to improving HSGR.
Attain Career Readiness Credential rate criteria.
Attain GED/High School Drop-Out Recovery Rate criteria.
Attain criteria for rate of attainment of post-secondary certificates, licensures, credentials, and degrees.
Attain early childhood development measures criteria.

Appendix M: In-depth Evaluation of Three Policy Alternatives from VCU Academic Report

The following excerpts were prepared by Beatrice Yarney, in the Virginia Community College System Workforce Development Services Division, to meet the requirements of a masters-level public policy course through Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs. The academic report provided background information as well as her suggestions for program design. The suggestions for program design were based on ideas collected from various sources during the investigation.

Evaluation criteria for the policy alternatives relate to increasing market exposures, maximizing benefit of market exposures, support for achievement of criteria, addressing disparities, cross-agency collaboration, and duplication. This report assumes that any increases in high-wage, high-growth jobs will be in proportion to an increase in the number of exposures of businesses to community marketing materials. It assumes that the more positive factors reported, the better the outcomes.

The Current Course as a Baseline

If Virginia continues on its current course, it will indeed **increase the exposure of businesses to information concerning Virginia's communities**, specifically career readiness certificate and high school graduation rate attainment. However, these are only two criteria that indicate a community is "work-ready." **Programs with more criteria would likely have a greater impact.**

A second question is **whether the current policy route increases the quality of life of Virginians** as measured by funding in place to help with achieving the criteria. Educational and workforce skills attainment is a quality of life indicator. The Virginia Career Readiness Program offers training to help individuals improve assessment scores. The Virginia Community College System administers the program, which facilitates life-long learning for those who use the VCCS service. Except as part of the P-16 Council, which is the state advisory board that brings together pre-school, primary, secondary, and post-secondary educators to align goals and pursue common initiatives, VCCS does not have direct involvement in increasing the attainment of GEDs and high school diplomas; it is more the direct purview of the Virginia Department of

Education. However, the legislation creating the Virginia Career Readiness Program mandates that the Virginia Workforce Council work together with the Virginia Department of Education to implement the program, so there is potential for influence there as well. VCCS could address remaining quality of life issues such as access to healthcare, housing and transportation, at best indirectly.

The Virginia Career Readiness Certificate Program **does not specifically address disparities** between communities. Each community college throughout the state offers the assessment, but until recently, no financial incentives were in place encourage its use; the state has pursued a demand-driven model where they desire that businesses demand and pay for the testing of their employees and applicants. This means that communities that, so far, communities that already have a lot of businesses that are able and willing to use the tests, will be using the tests more. However, thanks to the approval of the new budget, each workforce investment region in the state will receive money to pay for up to 5% of the Workforce Investment Act Adult Program participants to be tested.

The **cost** of not implementing the Virginia Work-Ready Community Certification Program is zero. However, the budget to invigorate Virginia's CRC Program is \$3,170,250 over four fiscal years: \$225,000 on marketing, and \$1,109,250 on assessments, which at about \$45 per test means close to 24,650 people will receive certificates. If each individual is as a result able to get a job paying a minimum of \$1200/month, then after four years, the group will be earning \$3,544,960,000 annually, a 1000-fold increase over the initial investment.

The program **does not directly duplicate efforts of other organizations**, except for the question of why employers are not addressing work readiness as a K-12 education issue, rather than creating a new certificate for work readiness in the first place.

Evaluating the Basic Model

This version of the Virginia Work-Ready Community Certification program does what current administration efforts will accomplish plus some. There **would likely not be much increase in exposure to businesses**; the state would likely combine marketing for the community certification with the CRC marketing efforts at little additional cost (and little additional result). The **increased benefit manifests itself in the additional criteria, the high**

school graduation rate information that the government could package then and provide to businesses and economic developers.

The Certified Work Ready Communities model of Georgia **does provide technical assistance to address achieving the work-ready criteria, which supports improving the overall quality of life for Virginians to a great extent that non-action.** Virginia could create additional positions for this, or use current staff. The **technical assistance can be customized to address disparities** between communities. Those communities that are having a more difficult time achieving the criteria would receive more technical assistance. The elephant in the room is that the issues are often less a matter of technical assistance, and more matter of lack of funding (staff, time, planning etc) to achieve the stated goals. For this reason, this report suggests grants for planning and implementation of plans to meet certification standards.

In terms of **costs** to the program, Georgia has granted \$840,000 to counties, and \$3.5 million to regions committed to becoming work ready since the community certification program began (almost two years). Providing grants would increase media exposure, which would attract more businesses to invest (create jobs). Even considering any costs for press releases and administration of the grant program, assuming an even great number of individuals earn CRCs and are able to find well-paying jobs, providing such grants and increasing the level of work readiness of individuals throughout the state would bring even greater returns in income than not providing the grants.

The issues mentioned in following Virginia's current course apply here as well, regarding **duplicating** efforts of other organizations. The CRC is proposed as an alternative measure of work and college preparedness, because of its focus on work skills and alignment to skills profiles of existing jobs^{xxxi}. However, it appears to take attention away from primary and secondary education. Should those institutions not be making adjustments to achieve those goals? Well, by the addition of the high school graduation rate criteria, the Virginia Work-Ready Community Certification Program will help to align K-12 education to better prepare students to enter college and the workplace. Because this is the kind of work that the P-16 council is trying to achieve, there is some duplication. However, it does strengthen efforts to achieve important goals common to business, education, and workforce development. Also, because the program is gathering data that these organizations have already collected to "repackage it" the costs will be lower. The Department of Education also currently provides

measures of high school graduation rate by county, and the Virginia Employment Commission retrieves arranges and releases it as Virginia Labor Market Information. This information may also exist on the VEDP website.

Evaluating the Expanded Program Model

Given the same amount of funding, the expanded program would achieve as many market exposures as the basic program. The difference, however, is that with each exposure would come more criteria, essentially providing a more expansive product to the community, economic developer or business. **Assuming that more information that is positive brings better outcomes than less information that is positive**, the expanded program should yield better results in terms of attracting business attention than non-action, or implementing the basic program.

In terms of judging the support for improving quality of life, the expanded model will also provide technical assistance: facilitating the process of representatives from the appropriate local organizations and agencies to come together, plan, and implement their plans and local teams throughout of the state to share best practices. Just as with the basic, model, technical assistance can be customized to address disparities between communities, and planning and implementation of plans can help communities meet certification standards.

The Expanded Workforce Model will require **more cross-agency collaboration** between the Department of Education and the Virginia Community College System, in the design of career ladders, and high school programs that facilitate achievement of skills sets for high demand, high wage occupations (internships, college credit during high school, hands-on activities in applied fields for a wider group of students, or other work experience).

The **cost** of the expanded program will be more than the basic program; however, the benefits will exceed those of the basic program, since interview data suggests that career pipelines are of more interest to employers than basic career readiness.

Evaluating the Commonwealth Performance Model

Given the same amount of funding and **assuming that more information that is positive brings better outcomes than less information that is positive**, the expanded program should yield the best results of all the options discussed in this report. It also **supports**

improvement of the quality of life for Virginia citizens to the greatest extent, touching on basic workplace readiness, career ladders and related specialized training, and other quality of life factors including health, transportation and housing. Implementing the Commonwealth Performance Model would require collaboration with the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, an agency for whom addressing **disparities** between communities is a main objective. This leads into cross-agency collaboration. Among the policy alternatives discussed in this report, administering the Commonwealth Performance Model requires collaboration between the most agencies and the most diverse group of agencies. The collaborating agencies would include the Virginia Departments of Transportation, Housing and Community Development, Health, Education, Business Assistance, as well as the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, and the Virginia Community College Systems, not to mention other boards and councils.

The **funding level** may need to increase if there are additional agencies and representatives that will be involved in the process, with regard to technical assistance, planning and implementation grants since they would providing a wider span of services.

Overall Observations

The basic question should not be, “will this program attract businesses and desirable jobs to Virginia Communities,” but how much more will it attract businesses? Interview data suggests that high school graduation and basic employability skills are good, but employers are more excited by career ladders and specialized training. Report findings suggest that at minimum, that the Virginia Community College System pursues activities that help strengthen this area, whether through the Expanded Workforce Development Model of the community-level work-readiness program, or some other program. Pursuing a plan such as the Commonwealth Performance plan will be good for the overall common-wealth of Virginia’s citizens; however, it may be a challenge to foster collaboration between such a variety of agencies to achieve the desired ends.

Appendix N: Adult Education Panel Memo

Memo Sent Monday, August 04, 2008

“In response to Executive Order 61, Secretary Morris has convened a panel of state and national experts and stakeholders to develop a plan for addressing the education, skill and workforce needs of adults without a high school diploma or equivalent.”

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Endnotes

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