



MID COAST EDUCATION & INDUSTRY ALLIANCE MEETING

February 24, 2022



Summary

On February 24, 2022, the Matagorda Economic Development Corporation, the Bay City Chamber of Commerce, and the Bay City Community Development Corporation in partnership with Workforce Solutions, hosted local employers, school districts, and post-secondary institutions, to explore approaches to workforce development, discuss implementing new programs aimed at upskilling the existing local workforce, and exploring ways to build a talent pipeline for the future.

Matagorda County Judge Nate McDonald presided over the discussion and was joined by the Mayor of Bay City Robert Nelson. Workforce Solutions Director Mike Temple presented information to help facilitate student-focused career exploration and development initiatives, as well as remarks from Mark Guthrie, Chairman of the Gulf Coast Workforce Board. The conversation was moderated and led by Mitch Thames, President and CEO of the Bay City Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture. Also represented were:



Tidehaven ISD



Matagorda Economic
Development Corporation



Van Vleck ISD



Lyondell Basell



Palacios ISD



STP Nuclear Operating Company



Matagorda ISD



Tenaris



Wharton County Junior College



Bay City ISD



Phillips 66



OQ Chemicals

“Conversation is at the heart of economic development.”

A wide-ranging conversation followed centered on developing career pathways for junior high and high school students that could lead to workforce credentials in key industries. Critical areas for discussion included how to develop new apprenticeships, pre-and post-secondary education opportunities, encouraging more women and students of color to consider and pursue industry and technical careers, as well as scholarship opportunities and financial supports available from Workforce Solutions to help students and workers develop their technical skill sets.

The gathering also identified several challenges including the so-called “brain drain”, where workers and graduating high school and junior college students relocate to areas with better employment opportunities even as many local employer’s struggle to fill skilled labor openings.

The discussion concluded with agreement that next steps should include an aggressive campaign to educate local students about available career opportunities and the potential for future growth and opportunities, and a continued focus on strengthening partnerships between industry, education, and local agencies to better address the concerns identified.



SUMMARY OF KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

Community Partners & Apprenticeship Programs

Building career pathways and apprenticeship programs are **key for developing a robust talent pipeline**.

Creating a Post-Secondary Pipeline

"We want kids to have a pipeline for getting a good paying job as soon as they graduate or when they are given a pathway to a junior college."

"It's not just at the school level, you have to do a community campaign that connects the classroom to careers pathways"

Developing the first piece of an ongoing talent pipeline for Matagorda County begins with bridging the knowledge gap, among students and their parents, on the availability and *desirability* of high skill high growth career pathways in the area. This begins by creating interest among middle school students to take maximum advantage of Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes offered by local school districts.

Developing **career awareness and providing CTE programs starting in middle (or even elementary) school was discussed**.

- Implement a program such as *Powerset* and expand STEM career programs in middle schools and encourage participation.
- Regardless of a student's success with STEM, they should be helped to understand that their other skill sets are critically valuable and can translate into other marketable job skills.
Introduce Workforce Solutions career exploration curriculum beginning at the elementary level to get students thinking about their future career path and offering CTE courses and programs in middle and high school tailored to the needs of the local employer base.
- Establish mentorship and other experiential programs that provide guidance and insight into job opportunities that are 'right here at home'.
 - Ex. Tours of facilities, providing speakers for Q&A sessions, and mentorships with role models from industry, and other experiences that connect and resonate with students.
- Establish partnerships with and between school districts to share knowledge about what job occupations students are interested in, which will allow for more targeted course selection and career counselor involvement. This also serves to establish a pathway to a good paying job as soon as they graduate.
- Building a community campaign on why staying in the area is a great way to start a career aimed not only at schools but the whole community (I.E.: "Why you should stay in Matagorda County").



Women in Industry

"It's hard for women to look at an industry that's male-dominated and think that that's something they should do."

Diversifying the talent pool of candidates was also discussed. Developing greater awareness of existing job opportunity to bring more women into technical careers begins by engaging female students. One model of success discussed was *PowerSet* – a program sponsored by Tenaris that brought young women from Van Vleck ISD to the Tenaris plant to familiarize them with career opportunities. Workforce Solutions also shared information about its successful programs to bring more women into the construction industry.

- A program like Powerset would help to introduce students to career paths for women.
- More scholarships per year that could attract female workforce for paid internships.
- Expand scholarships for female students.

Scholarship Programs

"80% of our students are economically disadvantaged, they have to have support to be successful"

"We never have enough people applying for the scholarships, so we end up having some left over..."

It was discussed that many available scholarships for job and career training are not being utilized and that applications are low, and especially low for female applicants. Scholarships can be used to provide financial supports for students while they pursue training, internships or other career training opportunities. A representative from Tenaris noted that there are full and partial scholarships available that go unused because students are not aware of them and therefore not applying for them. Closer partnerships between ISDs and industry to create awareness about financial aid and scholarship opportunities was also discussed.

- An increase in communication about the scholarships could help.
- Increasing awareness among students and parents about the career program and college application process, how to get grants and scholarships/loans
- Extending scholarship opportunities to 8th and 9th graders who want to take CTE courses but lack financial support to pursue it.
- More Industries could offer advanced (workplace) contracts to students to encourage students to stay local and have a job when they return from college elsewhere or other opportunities in other areas.



FORECASTS & NEXT STEPS

Campaign

"Unity, Collaboration, & Growth in your Matagorda County."

Build a local campaign based on the career path opportunities found in Matagorda County, that will bring together employers, schools, community leaders and legislators. The campaign should promote why living and working in Matagorda can provide benefits for individual students, their families, local businesses, and overall community, both now and in the future.

- Develop a community campaign based around the theme of taking advantage of local opportunities to start your career path, not just for schools but the whole community.
 - The central theme of the campaign answers the question *"Why should I stay in Matagorda County?"*
 - Components should include a digital campaign to develop and share brief videos of facilities, interviews, mini documentaries, "5 questions" with industry leaders, current employees, and others, posted on YouTube and TikTok.
 - Create hashtags and themes that resonate with students and STEM programs at school.
- Build a STEM program and/ or STEM adjacent career program for schools tied to the local job market and jobs of the future.
- More aggressively schedule and promote opportunities for experiential learning about the jobs in the area, such as pop-up stands at parks, sporting events, etc. and coordinate with local "community calendars" maintained by local groups.
- A STEM Career Day in partnership with industry and schools. Could include pop-up stands about local STEM careers jobs, mind-boost math games, robotics competition, popsicle stick buildings, and other age-appropriate games and competitions.

Conclusions

As Matagorda County continues to experience the challenges of an aging workforce combined with an acute labor shortage, industry, education, and workforce development leadership will need to continue evolving potential solutions that encourage students and working age adults to pursue training and careers in critical industries, and then to provide the resources and supports necessary to complete them.

