

## Critical Issues Forum: Closing the Higher Education Attainment Gap

### Recap/Summary

**The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education** Critical Issues Forum yesterday brought together more than 100 education stakeholders representing a variety of perspectives to learn about closing the attainment gap in higher education. Georgia Partnership Board Chair Kevin Greiner (President and CEO of Gas South) and Partnership President Steve Dolinger kicked off the forum by celebrating recent successes, including the national Flashlight Award from the Data Quality Campaign, several communications awards from the Georgia School Public Relations Association, and positive feedback from the 2015 stakeholders' survey.

**Before the program began, Mr. Rich Johnson**, representing AT&T, presented Kevin and Steve a donation check for \$25,000 that will be used to further the Partnership's work improving student achievement in Georgia. Thank you AT&T!

**Chancellor Hank Huckaby**, University System of Georgia, provided a big picture of attainment in higher education. In outlining the importance of access to education from a Jeffersonian perspective, Chancellor Huckaby presented two imperatives that higher education must meet: an economic imperative to provide students with skills needed to be successful in the workforce and a civic imperative to equip students with the critical thinking necessary to be a responsible member of the community. He cited the responsibility and strength that collective impact, particularly the collaboration between the University System of Georgia, Technical College System of Georgia, and the Alliance for Education Agency Heads, brings in changing traditional education models in order to meet these imperatives. [Here is an article](#) by the Morris News Service's Walter Jones that provides more detail on Chancellor Huckaby's comments.

**The panel discussion that followed** featured **Gretchen Corbin**, Commissioner of the Technical College System of Georgia; **Dr. Cheryl Dozier**, President of Savannah State University; **Dr. Kyle Marrero**, President of the University System of West Georgia; and **Dr. Gail Thaxton**, Interim President of Athens Technical College. The panel, moderated by the University System of Georgia's Chief Academic Officer **Dr. Houston Davis**, shared their vision and success in making their institutions work for their students and for Georgia.

**Overall, the panel described a shift** toward putting students first. Programs, like Move on When Ready and strategic advising, are focusing on the needs of students to create a college pathway that makes sense for each individual. Data systems can be utilized to guide students toward courses and programs that better fit their interests and performance and to help make strategic changes within the course programming. Adding more personalized touch points for administrators to learn about students provide information that is influencing decisions on financial aid, student life spaces, and course scheduling patterns. Finally, meaningful investment is being made in strategic partnerships with Georgia businesses to make sure students are employable when they graduate and that jobs are being filled by our students.

**The Forum audience left with a stronger sense** of how Georgia's post-secondary institutions are updating and individualizing the opportunities offered to students. They focus on high-demand job fields, realize the value of strategic partnerships with local businesses, and emphasize completion through increased financial aid and academic support. This is the collective impact that will allow Georgia to meet the growing need for college-educated citizens in a changing and increasingly technological economy.

*(Georgia Partnership summer intern Laura Margaret Burbach provided this report. She is a senior at Georgia Tech majoring in public policy.)*