

Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce

**Task Force to Study the Impact of School System
Organization
on Economic Development in Our Community
October 24, 2008**

Few people will disagree that economic development is the fuel which propels the growth of a community. The availability of top-notch education is a major component of the engine which drives economic growth. The Task Force for the Study of School System Organization on Economic Development in Our Community is charged with studying the relationship between economic growth and the impact local school organization has on our community's economic development potential.

It is not our mission to make a decision, render an opinion or influence the citizenry with respect to issues involving the structure of our local school systems. Our mission is to facilitate a study to determine the impact of school system organization on economic development. To this end, our operations will be transparent, our approach balanced and our members will be accessible to the public.

Our tasks include the facilitation of data collection by third parties who will provide information related to school system organization. We hope to ensure the free flow of information between those charged with the collection of data and the citizens and businesses in our community. In undertaking our tasks, we realize many citizens may see our charge as being school consolidation. ***For this committee, to consolidate or not to consolidate is not the question; neither is it necessarily the answer.*** We seek to advance our community through a genuinely balanced scientific survey to determine whether or not our present educational systems will enhance our community's economic growth and development.

History of the Study

- During many of the 11 meetings conducted in the summer and fall of 2006 to develop the IMPACT 2012 Business Action Plan, several of the 72 business, government, and education leaders who participated brought to the group the issue of our current school system organization (i.e., two separate systems) and its possible impact on community development patterns and our community's ability to recruit, retain and expand certain types of businesses.
- These leaders discussed often and at length their consensus that the Chamber was the only organization in the community that should and could lead a study of the economic impact of school system organization; further, they indicated that such a study should not focus on the financial considerations of school system consolidation, but rather should focus on the Chamber's mission of business and

economic development, and how the current organization of school systems impacts business and economic development.

- After much discussion, the group recommended that the Chamber Board include a study of school system organization as one of several important Business Action Plan goals of IMPACT 2012.
- The group also recommended that this study should be “Job #1” of the Chamber as the Business Action Plan is implemented; specifically, the group recommended that the Chamber Board begin the process in January 2008.
- Finally, the group specified very directly that the Chamber Board should commit to taking action on the recommendations of the Task Force, whatever the outcome of the study. The Chamber Board adopted the Business Action Plan in 2007 and has committed to work diligently to meet or exceed every goal established in IMPACT 2012.

Current Status

- At the Annual Planning Retreat in January 2008, the Chamber Chairman of the Board appointed the following to serve on the Task Force to Study the Impact of School System Organization on Economic Development in Our Community
 - Rusty Griffin (Griffin Corp.), Chairman
 - Minister Leroy Butler (Woodlawn Forest Church of Christ)
 - Roy Copeland (Copeland, Haugabrook and Walker)
 - Joe Cordova (Retired Georgia Power executive)
 - Carolyn Eager (SmithBarney)
 - Walter Hobgood (Express Personnel Services)
 - Rev. John Manning (John’s Body Shop)
 - J.C. Riley (Riley Church Pew Company)
- The Task Force has met a number of times since Feb. 13, with this mission and these objectives:

Mission:

“An independent study will be conducted to determine the impact of school system organization on economic development and quality job growth with appropriate action taken once the study is completed.”

Objectives:

- To commission an independent, objective, scientific study of the question, “Does school system organization impact economic development in our community?”
 - To select an independent, objective expert to conduct the study
 - To determine the scope and methods of the study
 - To provide oversight for the completion of the study, ensuring that the study is credible, objective, and balanced
 - Upon completion of the study:
 - To provide advocacy for the results, and
 - To provide the Chamber Board with a recommendation for appropriate action
- After careful consideration and upon the recommendation of the Task Force, the Chamber has contracted with the Carl Vinson Institute and the Fanning Institute of the University of Georgia to conduct the study.

Scope of Work

1. Identify the degree to which professionals in business site selection consider school system organization as a factor in business location.
2. Identify the degree to which business executives considering relocation to a community consider school system organization as a factor in choosing employment opportunities.
3. Identify the issues in school consolidation efforts.
4. Identify the relationship between school system organization, school performance, and economic development.
5. Identify the potential relationship between the organization of school systems and residential demographic patterns, and economic development.

Timeline

1. Status report received in June 2008
2. Final report received October 8, 2008

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