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BBRED study measures economic impact of high school non-completion

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When Georgians do not finish high school, they are not the only people affected. The economy of the entire state is impacted.

Georgia Southern University has completed a study that estimates just how much of an effect that the failure to obtain a high school education or its equivalent has at the state and regional levels.

Conducted by Georgia Southern's Bureau of Business Research and Economic Development (BBRED) at the request of the University System of Georgia, the study reveals that the rate of high school non-completion among Georgia citizens age 25 and older cost the state \$24.5 billion in gross output and income in 2005. High school non-completion also deprived the state's economy of nearly 200,000 jobs.

According to the study, 17.23 percent of Georgians age 25 and older do not have a high school education or its equivalent. The rate of high school non-completion in that age range for the entire U.S. is 15.76 percent, which leaves Georgia 1.47 percent behind the national average.

The 1.47 percent difference cost Georgians \$1.5 billion in direct income in 2005. That works out to \$1,873 for every man, woman and child in the state.

On a positive note, the study noted that Georgia has made significant progress in closing the high school non-completion gap in recent years. There was a 4.32 percent difference between the state and national averages in 1990.

"The enormous benefit to be gained from further reduction in the rate of high school non-completion makes policies directed toward improving educational attainment vital toward the state's economic development agenda," said Jeremy Hill, the assistant director of BBRED and the author of the study.

Titled "Updated Economic Impact of High School Non-Completion in Georgia: 2005 Estimates," the study represents the latest edition of previous reports conducted by BBRED in 1995 and 2003. The new study relies on data from the American Community Survey as well as data from the Current Population Survey conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Census and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In addition to statistics for all of Georgia, the study has separate numbers for each of the state's 12 service delivery regions.

According to the study, Georgia's improvement in the high school non-completion rate is due in large part to migration from other U.S. states. Data not available in previous studies shows that

people who move to Georgia from other states have much lower rates of high school non-completion than those found in Georgia's population.

The study also takes a peak at into the future of the state's job market through the year 2050.

'Since the majority of the Georgia's high-educational attainment jobs are created in urban communities, there is a strong potential for a growing disparity between low rates of high school non-completion in metropolitan and urban counties, and the high rates of high school non-completion in rural counties,' Hill said.

In addition, the study predicts which occupations will have the most growth and the least growth over the next 40-plus years.

'The forecast for the state economy shows that Georgia will continue to lose jobs in low-skilled, low-education occupations such as textile production, agriculture and agricultural processing,' Hill said.

'The losses in these sectors will generally be offset almost one-to-one by low-skilled, low-education service jobs.'

However, by a 2-to-1 margin, Georgia's economy is expected to produce more high-skilled, high-education jobs than low-skill, low-education jobs.

'Again, the high-skilled, high-educational attainment jobs will be concentrated in metropolitan and urban areas of the state,' Hill said. 'This suggests that tremendous regional disparities in the rate of high school non-completion will remain well into the future unless there is an intervening policy.'

'Addressing the needs of rural schools and building an economic development strategy that encourages the creation of higher-quality job in rural communities will be essential to the goal for one Georgia.'

To view the complete report on the economic impact of high school non-completion in Georgia, visit http://www.livingoak.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=93&Itemid=48.