

CREATING AND REPLICATING HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

A GUIDE FOR BUSINESSES AND SCHOOLS

CASE STUDY

Great Promise Partnership

Providing Experiential Learning Opportunities to At-Risk Students across Georgia



Carl Vinson Institute of Government
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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A work-based learning program is helping at-risk young adults in Georgia recognize the connection between real life and school. The Great Promise Partnership (GPP) helps at-risk high school students in Georgia school districts gain job experience while encouraging them to graduate high school. GPP is modeled on Southwire's successful 12 for Life program, which provides at-risk students in Carrollton, Georgia area school systems jobs, mentoring, and academic support to help them graduate high school and prepare for postgraduation success.

GPP specifically targets students at risk of dropping out of high school. According to Lori Heemann, GPP's executive director, the work-based learning program "connects doing well in school with getting paid and getting more opportunities in your career or outside life." Not only does the program benefit students and employers, but it provides stability to classroom teachers because they know who to expect in their classroom each day: If students do not go to school, then they cannot go to their jobs.

These are often the students that need to work because they are homeless or have unstable family situations. They are not just saving up for a car or other luxury; many of the young adults in the program become the primary wage earners in their families. Similar to other work-based learning programs, they must maintain their grades and attendance at school to continue working, but because the students are at risk of dropping out, there are no specific grade requirements when they start in GPP. They are not required to be enrolled in a Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education pathway (for example, marketing, manufacturing, health care). In fact, it is hard for many of these students to complete a pathway because of the instability of their home lives impacting their academic progress.

To qualify, students must be at least 16 years old, have legal authorization to work, and qualify for free or reduce-priced meals at school. So far, only 2% of the participating students have dropped out of school and the program. They work in manufacturing; office environments, such as the Department of Community Affairs and the Georgia Department of Revenue; local governments; and private companies, such as HON, Caterpillar, and the Athens Land Trust. GPP has or is developing partnerships in 38 communities from as far north as Dalton to as far south as Valdosta.

