

Education and Workforce Committee
“3-minute Presentation”
THINC COLLEGE AND CAREER ACADEMY
July 25, 2018

Kathy Carlisle, CEO

Introduction

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott and Members of the Education and Workforce Committee, thank you for the holding this hearing today.

I come before you today to highlight an innovative educational model in small-town Georgia that has demonstrated proven success. As the CEO of THINC College and Career Academy, I welcome the opportunity to share our experiences and expertise with the committee.

THINC exists in one of the most rapidly growing economic development regions in the state of Georgia with over \$1 billion in committed economic development in 2017 alone. Our region is forecasted to require an additional 6,000 new jobs in the next five years. This is in addition to an average hire rate by existing business and industry of over 1,600 employees annually.

THINC College & Career Academy is a public charter school program and a Georgia nonprofit corporation, located in LaGrange, Georgia. Created by a diverse, public-private partnership in 2012-13, THINC opened the 2015-16 school year with 500 students and is on track to enroll over 800 high school students for the 2018-19 school term. THINC uses waivers granted by its charter to deliver creative and innovative career tech STEM, Healthcare, Business and Marketing programs, as well as academic course.

Results beyond high school:

Unlike traditional high schools, THINC is held accountable for student success long after graduation. The school’s administration and governing board focus on systems to ensure that students execute career plans beyond high school. At the core of our model is the student, wrapped in a multitude of innovative supports, stimulated by a learning environment and culture of business. The profile of a THINC student has four elements: a plan for postsecondary education, a continuum of career experiences, engaged locally, connected globally and is an “articulate, driven, ready” leader. Multitudes of supports are used to accomplish the student profile. What is different?

Financial and Budgeting

Led by the THINC board, community, and employers, the college and career academy non-profit has collected over \$10 million in grants and private donations from over 60 individuals, companies, and/or foundations. Private funds are used to supplement the FTE dollars for each student, an average of \$1000 per student. A few examples of how private funds are used:

- Professional Development opportunities for faculty and staff
- Support for student organization competitions
- Technology such as computer carts in almost every classroom, a math lab with wall to wall active smart walls, and 3-D technology for math and science
- Funds for a state of the art science and math lab with over \$800,000 in renovations and equipment
- Over one million in mechatronics and engineering equipment
- Hands-on-learning budgets for all career instructors

Personnel

In partnership with the school system, THINC has used flexibility to hire industry experienced, instructors in career classes. These instructors bring a real-world experience to the classroom and the ability to engage industry in teaching and learning. In addition, THINC and the TCSS developed a competitive salary rubric for high-demand instructors such as mechatronics and healthcare.

Curriculum

THINC use non-profit funds to hire consultants to train teachers in project-based learning. Each semester over 15 real-world student led projects are put into action. These projects require the engagement of a community partner must solve or investigate a real-world problem, with presentations judged by community leaders. After the first round of critique, projects are rebuilt or reimaged to produce a final high-level presentation.

THINC recently used flexibility to develop the first International Business Pathway in the state of Georgia. This supports the “engaged locally and connected globally” arm of the student profile.

Thirty percent of a THINC student’s grade is based on 13 soft-skills, which were recognized as a critical need by over 200 employers. As a result, THINC has a 98% attendance rate and less than 2% referrals to the office.

Student organizations such as SkillsUSA, FBLA, DECA (Marketing), and Healthcare are strongly encouraged at THINC. THINC students have competed nationally in SkillsUSA, bringing home bronze award for the first female mechatronics team in the nation, and 5th place in Humanoid Robotics and Advanced Manufacturing.

THINC is strategically placed within West Georgia Technical College. Dual enrollment has grown from 50 students prior to the opening of the academy to over 150 in the second year. All 10th graders receive tutoring and testing support for the technical college entrance exam. It is the goal of the academy for all students to graduate with completion of at least one college course. Only 25% of adults in Troup County have a college degree, which means that most of our students are first-generation college students. As a former college administrator, I have first-hand experience with the struggles of this at-risk population. THINC students are not afraid of the college environment, they thrive in it. Transportation is not a problem, Tuition barriers are removed, and students connect career aspirations to college graduation. It is a win-win.

Employer Engagement

As a college and career academy, THINC is led by employers and responsive to workforce demands. Over 60 employers participate in advisory groups for each pathway and are engaged in a number of “business wrap-around services” such as:

- Employer Welcome Back – 20 employers greet students at the door, throw confetti, and welcome students back to school.
- THINC FAST – a “speed dating game” style of interview, which involves 60 volunteers interviewing over 400 students in 7-minute increments. This is when student begin to connect the dots between soft-skills, career and employment.
- Career Focus – over 200 student visit industries, healthcare, and other businesses
- THINC AHEAD – career fair, with a twist – employers play games with students while talking about their business
- THINC Expedition – newly launched manufacturing consortium committed to hiring 16 and 17 year-olds. This month 7 companies will interview over 30 students who are ready to go to work in manufacturing.
- Work Based Learning is offered through THINC for all three high schools in Troup county. Our goal is to align career aspirations with a real-world work experience.
- LIFT – LaGrange Industrial Fellowship for Teachers, a teacher externship program to introduce teachers and counselors to manufacturing. Over 40 have participated in the week long program
- SLAM – Students Learning Advanced Manufacturing summer robotics camp

These are just a few examples to give you a flavor of the THINC culture and the power of innovation. If you visit THINC, you will find students busy with hands-on projects, moving from classroom to classroom with no bells; placing orders for smoothies and cookies at their student operated coffee shop, which are delivered to their classroom. You will find students observing employers in the boardroom who are conducting customer service or strategic planning meetings. The key difference is a culture based on a commitment to outcomes that go beyond the “graduation check-box.” It is the magic of connecting the dots between academics, career aspirations, employers, and college that is changing lives at THINC College and Career Academy.