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REPORT LAUDS GTCC PROGRAM

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GTCC is a community college that effectively helps unemployed and underemployed people train for better jobs, according to a nationwide report released Thursday by the Workforce Strategy Center.

This report, "Building a Career Pathways System," looks at how well community colleges are helping poor people work their way out of poverty. It also looks at how state policy-makers work with community colleges to move low-income job seekers onto a better-paying, long-term career path.

Specifically, the report cites GTCC's Highways to Success career-training program as an example for others to follow.

"We've come leaps and bounds, and I'm very happy about it," said Tanya Herring, GTCC's director of basic skills. "We care so much about the students."

The Workforce Strategy Center, a nonprofit management-consulting group, dedicated a full page to GTCC and mentioned other state efforts throughout the 47-page report.

Based in San Francisco and New York, the Workforce Strategy Center has as its main goal helping public- and private-sector leaders improve work force development.

"We know that education pays," said Julian Alssid, a report co-author. "There's a direct correlation between educational attainment and earnings."

But the economy is changing, companies are restructuring, and welfare time limits are taking effect. That is why community colleges are so important in creating career pathways, he said.

A team of center authors and researchers spent a year looking at community colleges nationwide and talking to education policy-makers. The center also focused on schools in North Carolina, Florida and Washington as examples of "noteworthy career pathways systems."

"We found that (North Carolina) has shown some innovative partnerships and leadership with the community colleges," Alssid said.

GTCC's Highways to Success program is just one example, the report said.

The GTCC program began in March 2000 as a product of Herring's doctoral studies. She wanted to help former welfare recipients, the unemployed and people re-entering the work force train for new careers.

The 12-week program prepares students to become medical office specialists or computer office specialists. The first phase takes place in the classroom. The second phase - the last four weeks of the program - pairs students with local business for internships.

The third phase takes place every two to three months with skills-maintenance workshops, in which students pinpoint areas where they still need help.

In the past two years, 194 of the 218 participants enrolled have graduated. More than 96 percent of the graduates found work, and most started jobs earning more than \$20,000 a year.

“We've been very fortunate,” Herring said. “Guilford Technical Community College has an excellent reputation for working with the community. It was the right formula at the right time.”

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To view the full report, visit www.workforcestrategy.org/publications.html

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