



# Meeting Summary

## Economic/Workforce Development

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### High School Diplomas No Longer Enough

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If you could do one thing to better connect education and the workforce, what would it be?

Responding to this question posed by moderator former Governor Jeb Bush, Governor Phil Bredesen said he would find the best way to explain “just how much the world has changed” to people who grew up in a world where graduating from high school led to a good career. Beginning next school year, the Tennessee Department of Education will implement the Tennessee Diploma Project. Students will follow a common path with increased graduation requirements and a focus on the skills needed for college and the workforce. Gov. Bredesen asserts that by having one track to a diploma, as opposed to multiple tracks, all students will have the opportunity to continue their education after high school, whether to a postsecondary institution or a modern manufacturing company.

Gov. Pawlenty answered the question with one word: “alignment.” He went on to emphasize that before we can expect education to align with the workforce, [the] education [system] must first be aligned within itself.” Gov. Pawlenty views technology as a key to better alignment and finds “great hope” in e-learning.

Last year, Minnesota’s state colleges and universities accepted Gov. Pawlenty’s challenge to deliver 25 percent of their credits online by 2015. He maintains that while e-learning should not replace the traditional classroom learning experience, most students already live in a web-based world. Gov. Bush suggested that many dimensions of the high school experience are difficult to capture online, such as problem-solving in small groups — a skill that many companies look for in employees today.

During the discussion on how to adapt job training to the 21st century, Gov. Bredesen stated that in his opinion, “students at all levels need to be much more connected to real world employment” by funding programs to train students in real workplace situations. Gov. Bush agreed, adding that Florida requires ninth graders to choose a “major of interest” and then take four yearlong courses in that subject area during their high school careers in an effort to provide students a lesson in real life and keep them interested in school.

Gov. Pawlenty stressed that the job training system itself first must be simplified. In his view, rather than funding certain education programs and “asking education to chase the economy,” we should fund the economy and ask that those funds be distributed to education institutions only if the institutions meet certain change requirements. Gov. Bredesen agreed with this distribution system, noting that companies coming to Tennessee are most interested in “what training money [the state] can give them.”

— Molly Ryan

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