

ACCE Education and Talent Development Case Study

Longview Chamber of Commerce

Introduction and Overview

The Education & Talent Development (ETD) Division – a Division of the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) – seeks to improve the capacity of chambers to engage their business communities to support improved education attainment and talent development outcomes.

From 2016 to 2019, Harder+Company Community Research conducted a comprehensive evaluation to document and gauge the impact of the ETD Division's work. Over the course of the evaluation, Harder+Company interviewed 26 chamber executives. Interviews in years 1 and 2 revealed that ETD Division-supported chambers play varied roles in their communities. In year 3, we took a case study approach to better capture the ways in which ETD-supported chambers grow into and/or strengthen their leadership roles.

Each case study draws from interviews with two chamber staff members and one community partner working with the chamber. The case studies share insights, successes and lessons learned about chambers' education and talent development work, how the ETD Division supported chambers, how chambers worked with community partners, and the trajectory of ongoing and future chamber work.

Thanks to the case study participants:

Kelly Hall
President/CEO, Longview Chamber

Misty Amaya
Education and Workforce Manager, Longview Chamber

Ron Hutchinson
Chairman of the Board, Network IP

The Longview Chamber of Commerce makes education a priority because they believe investing in students to be college- and career-ready supports a healthy workforce and economy. Through their Every Child Has Access collective impact effort, the Chamber collaborates with and connects business and education stakeholders to work together on education and talent development efforts in Longview, Texas.

“Successful students turn into successful employees.”

–M. Amaya

This case study draws from interviews with two Chamber staff members and one community partner working with the Chamber. The case study details the trajectory of Longview's ongoing and future education and talent development work; shares insights, successes and lessons learned from Longview Chamber's collaborative education and talent development work; and describes how the ETD Division supported the Chamber along the way. Participants include:

Kelly Hall, President/CEO, Longview Chamber. Hall has been at the Longview Chamber since 2005. Hall has a long history working in education, and she initiated and set the strategic direction for the Chamber's current education and talent development work.

Misty Amaya, Education and Workforce Manager, Longview Chamber. Amaya has been at the Chamber for two years; she manages the education and talent development work full time in Longview.

Ron Hutchinson, Chairman of the Board, Network IP. Hutchinson has been living and working in Longview for 30 years. He is on the board of the Longview Chamber, where he is also the Vice-Chairman for Education. His company has a long history of volunteering in Longview schools.

Longview's Education and Talent Development Background

Unlike some chamber executives participating in the ETD fellowship, Hall had a prior history working in the education space. Before joining the Longview Chamber, she participated in an Annie E. Casey Foundation Fellowship with U.S. Chamber in the 1990s.

She also started an afterschool student outreach program at a previous chamber that morphed into a year-round program adopted by the local school system, which eventually informed changes at the state level. So by the time she got to Longview, she had a sense of how chambers could work across the business and education sectors to bring about systems change.

As she described her first forays into this work, “I found that work to be very rewarding because it wasn't just programs. It truly was transformation, where we took the information and we applied it. We connected dots, and we started seeing systemic change.”

When Hall arrived in Longview, the Chamber was involved in education work, but as she describes, it was “very programmatic.” In 2015, shifts in the political and funding landscape resulted in the Longview Chamber losing about \$800,000 in government funding. The sudden challenge required reflection and new directions. If not for this shock, Hall asserts that Longview “would not have put the focus in education like we have today.”

Hall was involved with the ETD at the time, and the ACCE ETD fellowship program provided invaluable information and guidance during the organizational transitions.

Laying the Foundation for Education and Talent Development Work

The ETD fellowship helped Hall understand potential education and talent development roles a local chamber could play, supported Hall to identify first steps and eventually enabled the Longview Chamber to shift from a programmatic to a systemic orientation. As Hall described it, the “ETD really helped me gain clarity on the role of the chamber and what steps need to be taken to get from point A to point B.”

The ETD fellowship was not like her previous learning experiences, “This one has more [...] what I call ‘meat.’ It wasn't just a bunch of people telling stories. They were bringing real-life examples to the table [along with] coaches. [...] They don't try to fix me or my program. They just helped me open my eyes to go learn and see if there are better ways to accomplish what we need to accomplish.” Importantly, the ETD Division also provided guidance about how to fundraise and staff the work.

Fundraising – Chamber Foundation and Total Resource Campaign. As part of her engagement in ETD, Hall visited the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, where experienced individuals in the field walked her through fundraising approaches and lessons, as well as provided a consultant to support the Longview Chamber's fundraising work. Based on this input, Longview established a foundation for the education work and embarked on a Total Resource Campaign to raise funds for their education and talent development work. Hall described a key lesson she took from the ETD that helped make this a successful campaign, “I took everything from a system's perspective that I needed to accomplish, the organization needed to accomplish, and made it look like programs because [...] the program is what sells to companies.”

Staffing. Through the ETD's case studies and peer connections, Hall saw that a key component of chambers' education and talent development success was having a dedicated staff member to work on these issues. The initial Campaign raised well over \$60,000 and, along with a grant from the local utility company, allowed Longview to hire Amaya to manage their education and talent development work.

Key ETD Lessons and Takeaways



Possible chamber roles and approaches



First steps to establish local connections



How to leverage relationships and spur collaborative action (e.g. quick wins; collective impact and compact models)



How to fundraise and sustain the work



Look like a program; act like a system

Longview Chamber's Role and Approach to Education and Talent Development

The Longview Chamber coordinates their education and talent development activities through their Every Child Has Access collective impact approach, which emerged from ETD Fellowship lessons. The fellowship helped Longview understand the local situation and identify the most appropriate role for the Chamber in education and talent development work: "While many were and are working on education and workforce issues within their organization," Hall said, "there was no organization acting as the collaborative convener. The Chamber has extensive experience in this role and is in a position to take the lead in this arena."

Amaya has continued in this tradition and has a clear sense of the role the Chamber is playing: "For me, it was seeing how we as a chamber could be the problem solver, but also the convener, the connector, getting the right people together to solve these issues. I mean that's what we do every day as a chamber, but deeper than that to me was seeing how when you invest in today's students how it improves tomorrow's workforce." Amaya describes Longview's approach as, "identifying the problems, finding the solutions, and convening the people to get the work done. [...] We're selling the journey that we're on and letting others dream with us because then they're going to invest in the work and they'll make it happen. That's what we're seeing happen in Longview."

Following the fellowship, the Longview Chamber's education and talent development efforts exploded into multiple strands of work and wins.

Superintendent Forums. One of the key questions around education presented to Hall during the fellowship was, "Do you really know your school superintendents? What relationship do you have? How can you align so that when things are hard, you've got those relationships in place?" Hall immediately set about bringing the local superintendents together along with business and community leaders. Initial meetings were "bristly," but resulted in quick wins. Only one district had dual credit opportunities at the time, for example, but within six months, all three districts had implemented dual credit. Hall noted that, "It was just so easy. There were already systems in place between our colleges and junior colleges for these pathways on high school certification program to two-year, four-year colleges but there was no dot connector. [...] It's just getting these people in the room to have these conversations and the employer saying, 'This is what I need.' That was one of the quick victories. Getting people in the room, identifying that low-lying fruit of what we can do."

Resource Guide. Another quick win that resulted from the superintendent forums was the annual resource guide put out by the Chamber. Superintendents said that their districts needed a resource guide to support schools, teachers and parents to identify appropriate resources for kids and families. The Longview Chamber hired an intern, got sponsors to underwrite the magazine, and has published three guides since 2016. They are available on the Chamber website, they publish 10,000 a year and, according to Hall, "they're gone within three days because the schools fight over them."

Partners in Education Conference. The superintendent forums help address an articulation and communication challenge. Amaya describes this as one of the major challenges Longview faces when engaging education and business institutions, "The education world and the business world speak two different languages and then also they move at two different speeds." As much as you want to tell the businesses that they need to be involved in order to make real change or

"This is all because of the ETD. ACCE's work in this field has opened my eyes like never before."

–K. Hall

to help make change,” she continued, “you also have to tell the schools why it is important.” So while the superintendent forum is a closed discussion not open to media or press, the Partners in Education Conference is a celebration, highlighting the collaboration and successes between business and education stakeholders.

Examples of Education and Talent Development Collective Impact Work

The education and talent development work has taken multiple forms since its inception,¹ but two efforts in particular clarify Longview’s collective impact approach: the East Texas Advanced Manufacturing Academy and the Career Ready Plus Campus Certification piloted at Ware Elementary.

East Texas Advanced Manufacturing Academy. The Academy provides High School students an opportunity to obtain training in Instrumentation and Electrical Technology and Precision Machining Technology. It is a partnership between manufacturing industries, Regional Independent School Districts (ISDs), Kilgore College, and Texas State Technical College meant to equip students with the manufacturing skills necessary to fill current and future job openings for the East Texas industry base and attract more industries to the East Texas Region.

The Academy is the culmination of a long effort to gather enough data to understand the education and talent development situation in Longview. First, the Chamber worked with East Texas Baptist University to look at reading and math scores for Longview students. Second, they surveyed the top 100 employers in the county to understand the desired skills and qualifications needed, which identified specific skills gaps. Third, the Chamber used that information to justify the Academy. The foundation board took it on, and just over a year later, it was open.

In that timespan, the Longview Chamber coordinated the efforts of multiple business and education stakeholders:

- The Economic Development Corporation granted \$1.4 million to retrofit the building with equipment
- Four ISDs and local colleges offered dual credit courses and pay per-student instruction, retrofitting and lease costs
- \$600,000 in private dollars were committed during this first three years
- The Chamber foundation and ISDs continue writing grants
- Employers train, teach and provide internships for students

Given all these moving parts, Hutchinson described the one-year turnaround as “a freaking miracle.” “From anybody’s perspective,” he said, “that was an amazing feat.”

Career Ready Plus Campus Certification at Ware Elementary. The Chamber is piloting the effort at Ware Elementary in order to develop replicable programs for elementary campuses. The Chamber adopted the Ware campus for a minimum of three years with the ultimate goal of improving literacy levels and scores in core subjects, increase parent engagement in education and advance post-secondary career-readiness. The project means to show how business-education partnerships

Longview’s Collective Impact Approach



Engage and facilitate connections between business and education stakeholders



Identify issues and support solutions



Systematize and sustain the work

¹ In addition the strands detailed on page 2, the Chamber education and talent development work also includes a 13-week parent academies delivered to nearly 100 parents; teacher training at the Ron Clark Academy; policy and advocacy work on the state-level school finance structure; and HealthyVIEW – a new community health collective impact project.

can make a difference. Amaya describes the Career Ready Plus effort as Longview's "most aggressive work thus far." Hutchinson echoed this sentiment, saying, "I think it's the most important and it's the most impactful. [...] This is going to be easy to measure and the emotional side of it is much more compelling."

In order to accomplish their ambitious goals as part of this demonstration project, the Chamber works to support education actors as well as funnel and coordinate business resources at the school level. They meet with the principal and agencies already involved on the campus three times during the year. They first discuss the district and campus context, including demographics, test scores, attendance rates and goals. Further discussions identify how the agencies and organizational can collectively address the goals and opportunities to move the needle in that year.

They provide a 13-week parenting workshop focused on helping parents raise healthy, caring, and responsible children. And they connect businesses to the campus through multiple avenues, including:

- Classroom volunteers/mentors. Volunteers from local businesses spend at least one hour per week in the classroom to support teachers and act as a positive role model and motivator for students.
- Campus Incentive Store. Students earn store dollars by unlocking achievements in reading and other core subjects. The store is a more than \$30,000 joint effort funded by Hutchinson's contribution via the Chamber and supported with in-kind donations from Texas Bank and Trust, VeraBank, Southside Bank and Texas Bank.
- Teacher appreciation. Businesses provide teachers with supplies, developmental opportunities (e.g. Ron Clark Academy) and recognition (e.g. Holiday Party).

Longview Chamber Coordinates and Sustains Longview's Education and Talent Development Efforts

An important component of the case study interviews is to better understand how, if at all, chamber involvement supports diverse community stakeholders to engage with and work on education and talent development issues.

The Longview Chamber effectively brings together and aligns education and business resources. Hutchinson described the important role the Chamber plays in sustaining education and talent development work in Longview, "It's a big effort and it takes an organization with staff like the Chamber that really have dedicated staff over our education initiatives. Somebody's got to be an owner of it." His experience volunteering with local schools taught him that "if you're doing it all alone, you're going to do great for a while, but you can't sustain it and what I'm excited about is I believe the Chamber is an organization that could sustain an effort like this." Hutchinson sees the Chamber as an integral partner in the work, able to engage businesses and support sustainable efforts. "The Chamber is the most effective aggregator of business resources," he said, "and that's why this can be sustainable."

The Chamber changed how they work in the community – Hutchinson saw more activity and community engagement from the Longview team as they undertook the education and talent development work – and by showing the success and communicating how companies can get involved, the Longview Chamber is supporting collaboration, increasing engagement from the business community on education and sustaining the work. Companies give an increasing amount to the work each year, and even those that are not heavily involved in the collective impact work still find opportunities to join in – making, for example, one-time

Current-Future Directions

The Longview Chamber is working to **sustain and scale the Ware demonstration project**. Longview ISD plans to hire someone to continue the program after the Chamber's 3-year adoption ends. And even though the Chamber is still in the middle of the demonstration project, other schools are reaching out to implement the program already. Amaya is already in the process of working with other campuses to help get them started.

HealthyVIEW is a new collective impact project Longview is working on. The Chamber is engaging partners to create a culture of health in Longview.

"We're showing that the chamber is absolutely relevant to the community. We're doing something positive and by showing success, we're getting the word out to other businesses about what we're doing at Ware Elementary, and there's a lot of buzz."

–R. Hutchinson

donations to support the parent workshops or financing a school-based community garden.

The demonstrated success inspires and energizes businesses to engage in the work. The success of the Ware demonstration project, for example, has resulted in Longview ISD planning to hire someone to continue the program after the Chamber's 3-year adoption ends. And even though the Chamber is still in the middle of the demonstration project, other schools are reaching out to implement the program. Amaya is already in the process of working with other campuses to help get them started.

The Chamber's coordination of cross-sector education and talent development work has supported and leveraged unique partnerships in Longview, and through their education and talent development work, the Chamber has increased its visibility and relevance in the community. Companies are willing to support the work because Hall and Amaya have connected education and talent development issues to their long-term workforce concerns, and the Chamber has demonstrated impact and generated excitement about collaboratively working to advance education and talent development issues.