The Dalton-Whitfield Archway Partnership and its Education Steering Committee recently hosted an education progress luncheon that featured Georgia First Lady Sandra Deal and State School Superintendent John Barge at the Whitfield County Career Academy. With over 150 local leaders from education, business, government and the community, the event highlighted the progress being made to improve education from birth to work.

Brian Cooksey, a Shaw Industries executive who serves on the Archway Education Steering Committee, made the presentation and shared seven initiatives developed from input from the “birth to work” taskforces. He also highlighted some of the programs that have come out of the committees’ work. A panel of students and community leaders represented the beneficiaries of some of these programs and took questions from the audience.

Making the right technology available to students is one of Archway’s seven education initiatives. Coahulla Creek High School student Jon O’Quinn, one of the panel members, said he was given an electronic tablet when the school opened last year that allowed him to research school projects instantly and not be forced to wait in the school’s media center for a free computer. "The technology around the world is changing around us," O’Quinn said. "The technology in our school needs to change with the rest of it, or else our schools will be left behind."

Another education initiative is expanding pre-kindergarten opportunities for students. Currently, statistics show that Dalton-Whitfield needs around 200 additional slots to serve every 4-year-old. Statistics show that students who attend pre-kindergarten are more likely to be on grade level in reading and math; less likely to be retained or placed in Special Education; and are more likely to graduate from high school and college.

Much work has already been done in the area of college and career readiness, another Archway initiative, and has resulted in several projects including a Design, Engineering and Manufacturing (DEM) Camp held last summer. Eastbrook Middle School sixth-grader Emileigh Earley decided to be a carpet designer when she grows up after attending the camp. "I thought they just ordered a rug and they just shipped it," said Emileigh. "I didn't realize there [were] so many different materials and so many different feelings and so many designs."

The other education initiatives discussed at the event include educating the community on nutrition and healthy lifestyles and their impact on learning; encouraging the Board of Regents to approve more bachelor’s degree programs and phase in an MBA program at Dalton State College in place of the Kennesaw State program; further developing relationships and articulation agreements between high schools, Georgia Northwestern Technical College, and Dalton State College so that students can move seamlessly between the systems; and forming an on-going, community-wide education consortium so the community will have a forum where they can discuss emerging education issues.

**Advancing Community Priorities:** Since November 2010, almost 200 volunteers have been involved in Archway work groups focused on improving education along the birth to work pipeline in Dalton-Whitfield. While the work is far from done, the luncheon served as a milestone for sharing information with community stakeholders and celebrating the successes of the projects completed thus far.