

# THE THOMASVILLE TIMES

2015-06-11 / School

## THS COOP boosts Thomasville's economy

By Carolyn Drinkard

THS COOP Program boosts Thomasville's economy the state of Alabama has notified Kay Larrimore, coordinator for the Thomasville High School Cooperative Education Program, that her Work- Based Learning students had a local economic impact of over a quarter of a million dollars for the year 2014-2015. This year's class had 35 students, working in 30 businesses throughout the Thomasville area.

"The value of the statement is in how much one local High School class, of less than 50 students, could impact the local community," said Mike Rutledge, State Coordinator for CTE/Workforce Development. Rutledge praised Larrimore's successful program: "I am proud of what you accomplished this year."

To determine economic impact, the State uses a formula based on students who worked 10 hours a week for minimum wage. However, many THS students worked more than 10 hours per week, and some earned wages higher than the federal minimum; therefore, the real total economic impact for THS may actually be much higher. In the next few weeks, Rutledge said that he would have the data from all the WBL schools, and he would be able to give a total state impact.

The THS Cooperative Education Class has two components: Apprenticeship and Internship. The Apprenticeship Program offers paid work-based opportunities for eligible 11th and 12th grade students where experiences, hours worked, and wages are monitored and documented by the employer and the coordinator. The program is very popular and usually has a waiting list. Currently, over 30 businesses participate in this program.

For students, the program gives them many an opportunity to earn an income and become financially literate. COOP allows students to receive specific school and work-based training while still in high school, which helps to improve the transition from school to work. The work experiences reinforce academic competencies and help to develop responsibility, individual maturity, job competency, and decisionmaking.

The program also has advantages for both the employer and the community. The employer is involved in the total school program while participating in the development of a workforce that meets labor market demands. Employers make the school aware of the training needs for their businesses or industries so that curricula can be tailored to better prepare students. Finally, the earnings of the students impact their local community in a mutually beneficial way, adding to the tax base and paying for vital community services.

"I am so thankful for the buy-in from the community," explained Larrimore. "Because our local businesses are so willing to hire our students and participate in this program, they have played a major role in boosting our local economy."

The other area of Workbased Learning is the Internship Program, which offers unpaid work experiences for eligible juniors and seniors. Experiences and hours are monitored and documented by the supervisor/mentor and the coordinator.

The students in this program gain excellent on-the-job experience. In 2015, eleven students participated in this program. Rutledge explained the importance of Alabama's Cooperative Education classes in this manner: "I think/hope the story for all of the WBL programs will not be the total numbers enrolled, but the economic impact on the community and state.

Currently we are a small class. What could the impact be if we were double the size?"

Learn more about Workbased Learning at [www.thomasvilleschools.org](http://www.thomasvilleschools.org).