

CareerSource SW Florida EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY CONSORTIUM QUARTERLY REPORT

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

Report quarter: 2nd Quarter

Date of meeting: April 23, 2026

Report prepared by: Yolanda Flores

Local Workforce Development Board contact: Peg Elmore

B. ATTENDANCE

Name	Organization	Industry or Education	Contact Information
Angela Tackett	E2 Companies	Industry	8901 Quality Road Bonita Springs, FL 34135
Ariel Pechokas	Collier County Public Schools	Education	3702 Estey Ave. Naples, FL 34104
Tifarah Purdue, Kelly Thawley	Florida Gulf Coast University	Education	10501 FGCU Boulevard South Fort Myers, FL 33965
Jennifer Thayer	Lee Health	Industry	6630 Orion Drive, Suite 101 Fort Myers, FL 33912
Blanca Beauchamp	Conditioned Air	Industry	3786 Mercantile Avenue Naples, FL 34104
Whitney Rhyne	Florida Southwestern	Education	8099 College Parkway Fort Myers, FL 33929
Tatum Walker	Lee County Economic Development	Industry	2201 Second St., Suite 500 Fort Myers, FL 33901

B. SUMMARY REPORT

The Education and Industry Consortium meeting was held on April 23, 2026. The meeting focused on the role of artificial intelligence (AI) literacy in workforce readiness and on opportunities for education and industry partners to collaborate as AI changes workplace expectations across sectors.

Jennifer Thayer provided an overview of the AI Literacy Framework, emphasizing that AI literacy is becoming an essential workforce-readiness skill. She noted that AI is affecting nearly every industry, reshaping entry-level positions, and changing the skills employers expect from new hires. As the use of AI tools becomes more integrated into daily workplace practices, students and job seekers will need to understand how to work effectively and responsibly alongside AI.

The framework is intended to help education, workforce, and community partners move beyond general awareness and identify practical strategies for implementation. Its objectives include understanding the workforce implications of AI, aligning educational preparation with employer expectations, identifying partnership opportunities, and developing actionable ideas to incorporate AI literacy into programs and services.

Jennifer also shared examples of how AI is already transforming major industries. In healthcare, AI is being used for diagnostics, personalized medicine, drug discovery, and robotic surgery. In finance, AI supports fraud detection, risk management, customer-service chatbots, and personalized financial guidance. Manufacturing companies use AI for supply-chain optimization, predictive maintenance, quality control, robotics, and Internet of Things production systems. AI is also influencing transportation through autonomous vehicles, route optimization, demand forecasting, and logistics management. In agriculture, AI tools are increasingly used for crop monitoring, soil-health analysis, predictive analytics, and automated planting and harvesting.

Employer Perspective Discussion

Employers were invited to discuss how AI is affecting workplace practices and hiring expectations. Discussion prompts included:

- Where is AI already being used in the workplace?
- What skills are missing in new hires?
- What mistakes are employees making when they use AI?

Tatum Walker with Lee County Economic Development Council some of the work that the Small Business Development Bureau is doing to help businesses and industry partners incorporate artificial intelligence into their operations. Training opportunities are tailored to specific sectors, including homeowners associations navigating Structural Integrity Reserve Study requirements and builders seeking to use AI for marketing and project management. SBDC also provides AI-focused training and consulting for small and medium-sized businesses in areas such as automation, customer service,

predictive analytics, robotics, drones, and the Internet of Things. These services are intended to help local companies improve efficiency, remain competitive, and strengthen innovation within the region.

Tatum Walker also shared information about Q-UP a community-based business accelerator that combines postsecondary training, mentorship, and AI-powered business systems to support nonprofits and entrepreneurs in Southwest Florida. The initiative focuses on arts and education, mental health and wellness, events and hospitality, and food and culinary ventures. It prioritizes communities with high unemployment and low postsecondary attainment, while also serving veterans and aging adults transitioning into entrepreneurship. Through accelerator services, wellness retreats, and quarterly marketplace events, Q-UP helps organizations strengthen their strategy, branding, marketing, fundraising, team development, and long-term sustainability.

Jennifer Thayer shared information about an Industry Immersion for Career Influencers event scheduled for June 12, 2026. The initiative is designed to help educators and other career influencers better understand regional employers, career pathways, workforce changes, and opportunities to build sustained partnerships between education and industry.

Education Perspective Discussion

Education partners were invited to identify opportunities and challenges related to incorporating AI literacy into instruction and career preparation. Discussion prompts included:

- Where does AI fit into the curriculum today?
- What barriers exist?
- What support is needed?

Education Updates

Florida GulfCoast University

Tifarah Pardue highlighted several AI-related education and business-support efforts:

- SanCap AI Efforts, led by Mark Bole, provides AI training for businesses on Sanibel and Captiva.
- An AI Business Summit is being developed with SBDC, along with a Student Summit.
- The AI Academy with Dr. De Castro provides an additional resource for AI education and engagement.

Additional information about the FGCU AI Academy is available at: [FGCU Dendritic Institute AI Academy](#)

Florida SouthWestern State College

Whitney Rhyne provided an overview of its AI-Ready Professional Learning Pathway, which emphasizes a human-centered approach to AI readiness and includes an AI-Ready Professional course series and certificate. Offerings include:

- AI for Confident Communication: Sharpen Your Message and Impact
- Smart Mentorship: Using AI for Feedback, Coaching, and Self-Development
- Present Like a Pro: Enhancing Presentations with AI Tools
- Insightful Decisions: AI-Powered Research and Strategic Thinking
- AI-Driven Project Leadership: Plan, Track, and Report with Confidence
- Data Demystified: Collaborating with AI to Analyze, Visualize, and Act

FSW also offers customized corporate training and an AI Innovation Retreat to help organizations build practical AI-readiness strategies.

Next Steps

- Continue cross-sector dialogue.
- Explore potential collaborations.
- Build future quarterly themes together.