

Critical Connections

Team Effort A Must for Student Success

By Tom Schuman

Andy Allen, Batesville High School principal, slides into a desk in an empty English classroom and tells the story of a top student who learned after two days of a mentorship program at the local hospital that a medical career was not for her.

“She has spent the rest of the year on the health care administration side. What a great experience for her,” Allen reveals. “And all that occurred outside our walls. She has one block of time for us, 90 minutes every other day. We say, ‘Go to the hospital and work with our great partners there.’”

Kim Ryan, a senior vice president with Hillenbrand, Inc. and president of the company’s Batesville Casket Company platform, punctuates the beginning and end of her keynote presentation to a group of educators and business leaders with the following: “Small communities will determine our futures based on the workforce we create for ourselves today.”

The requests for her accompanying PowerPoint presentation come early and often.

In Madison, the tagline of the ENVISION Jefferson County initiative is “shaping our future together.” Kevin Turner, vice president of Madison Precision Products, shares that eight local companies – with a combined 3,000 employees and \$200 million in annual payroll – came together to address the workforce challenge. In early 2013, the businesses projected the need to fill 550 jobs due to upcoming retirements; that did not account for organizational growth.

“It started with a phone call,” he recalls in a noisy school hallway conversation. “That led to meetings and discussions. We found we had a lot of common points among our industries.” The bottom line: “An available and educated workforce is mandatory.”

Ginger Studebaker-Bolinger, Ph.D., superintendent of Madison Consolidated Schools, shares impressive numbers that include overall dual credits for her district’s students. She also personalizes the conversation. In 2013-2014, her then high school senior daughter completed two internships. The first



Brett Hofer (right) describes some of the work processes at Batesville Tool & Die, where 36 presses are used in working with 39,000 tons of steel each year.



convinced her that health care was not in her future; as a result of the second at Madison Precision Products, she is now a flourishing mechanical engineering major in college.

She also cites a critical fact: Madison High School has a college and career readiness counselor charged with helping formulate a postsecondary transition plan for each student.

These four were among the presenters at the February 11 Southeast Indiana version of Postsecondary Pathways: Connecting Education to Careers for Student Success. It was the third (No. 4 followed a week later in Muncie) in a series of events organized by the Indiana Youth Institute (IYI) and a variety of partners, including the Indiana Chamber of Commerce through a grant from JPMorgan Chase.

The programs are, in part, a follow-up to the Chamber’s 2014 Employer Survey and school counseling research that identified a severe lack of college and career readiness in too many instances. They are also a byproduct of the creation of the Indiana Works Councils and the requirement to bring educators and businesses together to solve regional workforce needs.

“In Indiana, we’ve done a great job of helping students access traditional bachelor degree programs,” shares Kate Coffman, program director for college and career counseling at IYI.

“But they’re not graduating because they’re not necessarily ready for those programs. In some cases, they’re not the right programs for those kids. We’re trying to help counselors and kids understand all their options.”

All about the students

Chris Lowery is comfortable in Batesville. A 19-year veteran of Hillenbrand and its various entities, he transitioned in August 2014 to the chancellor role at Ivy Tech Community College’s newly combined Columbus and Southeast regions. You can add Region 9 Works Council chair and longtime local school board member and president to his portfolio.

While this day featured education-business connections, Lowery takes time in the high school hallway before the program begins to chat with each of the 10 students who are part of a promising advanced manufacturing co-op program. The young people spend time each week with their high school classmates, earning college credits at Ivy Tech and on the job at one of four participating Batesville industrial partners.

Lowery recognizes the 10 before the group as the “most important people in the room.” They can’t stay as long as the rest of

Business, education and community leaders from Batesville and Madison describe their efforts to best prepare students and address the workforce skills gap.



the participants as they have to head to work at 11:05 a.m.

At Ivy Tech, he outlines three roles: “Making sure everybody is aligned; (asking the question) are we engaging – serving students and workers?; and advancing along a demand-driven curve.” He adds, “We have a saying around here that if you’re going to move forward, people need to be in the room and at the table.”

But not necessarily in those sometimes less-than-comfortable chairs in the high school classrooms.

Asked who needs to lead the way in creating meaningful partnerships, Allen responds, “Some of it starts with the school system. We have not done a very good job over the years of letting people outside our doors. We’ve got to let go of some control.”

Allen speaks generally as Batesville (he is in his second year as principal and has spent 12 of the last 14 years in the system) has employed a mentorship process of engaging students in business opportunities for 15 years.

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- **Two out of five employers** rate high school graduates as “deficient” in their preparation for entry-level jobs.
- **Three out of five employers** foresee hiring more four-year college graduates.
- **Half of employers** plan to hire more two-year college/technical school graduates.



Breaking New Ground

By Tom Schuman

The good news is that the Postsecondary Pathways events (Page 24) are not the only opportunities for educator-business connections.

Among the other recent or ongoing programs:

- A variety of Noble County efforts that have led to the formation of the Manufacturing Education Alliance
- A four-stop Radius Indiana program that brought together representatives of regional Career and Technical Education districts and manufacturers in Bedford, Bloomfield, Jasper and Salem
- An OrthoWorx one-day, four-stop Technical Careers and Beyond initiative focused on orthopedic manufacturing in the Warsaw area
- A Construction Advancement Foundation tour that featured various apprenticeship programs in Northwest Indiana. It was the second such event in the last three years and included approximately 60 people in 2014

Missing piece

Surprisingly, some of these connections have not been made previously.

“For some of the public school people, it was the first time they had experienced what the workforce requirements really are,” says Amy Lore, marketing and communications specialist for Radius Indiana. “And they thought it was really an eye-opening experience.”

Mike Tippery, assistant superintendent of technology and curriculum with Loogootee Community School Corporation, agrees after his visit to Metal Technologies in Bloomfield.

“The most surprising thing is that there was that type of high-tech, important work going on in small town Indiana,” he admits. “The one big takeaway I got is that with a business like that, it really just takes hard work, dedication, show up and work hard – and you have a chance to advance up the ladder. If you just have those basic skills, a lot of businesses are willing to work with you, train you, invest in your abilities.”

James Stewart, general manager of Busche (in Albion in Noble County), notes that his company participates in a number of local and regional initiatives. But beyond those programs, educators (outside of Central Noble High School) have not come calling. And they need to, “because the factory of my father’s generation is not the factory of my generation. It’s not the same.

“As far as other schools in the area using us as a resource, they don’t because I think they’re still trying to prepare kids for a four-year program.” Stewart adds that some who have visited appear to suffer from outdated curriculum and technology – in CNC machining as one example – which he terms “kind of disheartening.”

In Tippery’s area, the Martin County Workforce and Education Council meets monthly to try and develop stronger relationships. While the internship coordinator at the school brings information from those gatherings back to colleagues, Tippery acknowledges it would be better if more staff could see firsthand what businesses are doing in order to “give them a better perspective on what they need to do to better prepare their students.”

Brad Bishop, executive director of OrthoWorx in Warsaw, believes it helps to have an organization such as his play that convening role and taking care of the logistics. “It depends on the community and the degree to which they have had workforce issues as to whether they have been motivated to do (these type of events) in the past.”

Rick Sherck, executive director of the Noble County Economic Development Corporation, offers: “For the most part, industry and education knew they needed each other. But they didn’t know how to go about forming that relationship. Sometimes it’s been an adversarial relationship. You hire someone out of high school and you complain about the educational system because they didn’t prepare them. It’s not industry’s fault and it’s not education’s fault. We just need to work together to find solutions and positive ways to engage youth.”

Past Educator Externship and Noble County On the Grow tours, among others, didn’t generate complete buy-in, according to Sherck. Thus, the new Manufacturing Education Alliance that brought five school corporations and 22 industries to the initial meeting.

Strong impetus

Today’s needs are evident. Stewart, an Indiana native who has worked with or for the owner of Busche for 30 years, reports that he can find the one or two workers needed for certain slots, but the company’s growth requires 50 workers or filling multiple shifts at a time.

“The company invested in a city in Alabama to try and tap into that labor pool down there. Everybody is experiencing it (worker shortage). Finding skilled workers is hard.”

Sherck offers a strategy. “We have to get industries into schools, not only in high school but middle school as well. We have to market manufacturing as a career, talk about career development, career readiness. Give educators an opportunity to learn from industry on how a concept they’re teaching in the classroom connects to a job.”

The consequences of not doing so are clear, Bishop states.

“Manufacturing in general has significant workforce needs, but orthopedics because it’s growing, the processes are technologically

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Educators go on-site to see business at work in Northwest Indiana (left) as part of the Construction Advancement Foundation tour and in Noble County at Robert Bosch LLC.

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to our classroom discussion), but that's only one part of our kids' seven academic blocks. What does the rest of the day look like? We have kids going out in the community. We tell them you can leave here at 11:00 but you have to be back at 1:00 ... they always come back."

What does it mean for the educators and the work they do? "This is where we become relevant again," Allen concludes.

Business and community

Ryan, the Hillenbrand executive and daughter of two educators, came to Batesville 26 years ago and has never left. Of the various figures she reveals, two that stand out are the average tenure (23 years) and age (53) of the 26-member maintenance department at Batesville Casket. (Her director of plant operations discloses later that the numbers are actually even higher).

"I can't find workers who can test in to apply for these positions," she says. A number of initiatives – she cites mentorships, apprenticeships, dual credit, SAT sponsorships, college application support and more – are possible to provide a boost. Mistakes are going to be made, Ryan adds, but that should not deter efforts.

Referring to the workplace challenges, "We can change this," she tells the audience with conviction.

In Madison, discussions started by the eight businesses led to a 30-person steering committee, a community summit and open house. Nathan Hadley, executive director of the Jefferson County Industrial Development Corporation, notes 400-plus participants and more than 1,500 public comments in the formation of the strategic vision.

Turner reports that Madison Precision Products is one of the top two North American engine parts' suppliers for Honda (the other is its sister plant in Ohio). When the company's most recent expansion was announced, the Madison facility had to compete against other locations.

"We have to create more of these partnerships so we have a future in the community," he admits, "and we're not one of those companies that has to move someplace else to have their human resources needs met."

RESOURCES: Postsecondary Pathways events at www.iyi.org/conferences/postsecondary-pathways.aspx | Andy Allen, Batesville High School, at batesvilleinschools.com/bhs | Kim Ryan, Hillenbrand, at www.hillenbrand.com | Kevin Turner, Madison Precision Products, at www.madisonprecision.com | Chris Lowery, Ivy Tech Community College, at www.ivytech.edu

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advanced and require a certain skill level – if we don't continue to focus on that, these jobs will go someplace where the companies can find those skill levels," he says. "It's in our community's best interest and our state's best interest to continue to focus on building this workforce pipeline."

Lore adds that Radius is trying to turn that into a positive with the strategic plan for an 11-county region in Southwest Indiana.

"Part of the wonderful thing that came out of these visits is we've been working on some outside promotional material that we can use to prove that, 'We know that workforce development is the number one thing businesses need to see when they're looking at where they're going to locate. We're working on it and it's our top priority.' "

RESOURCES: Amy Lore, Radius Indiana, at www.radiusindiana.com | Mike Tippery, Loogootee High School, at www.loogootee.k12.in.us | James Stewart, Busche, at www.busche-cnc.com | Rick Sherck, Noble County Economic Development Corporation, at www.noblecountyedc.com | Brad Bishop, OrthoWorx, at www.orthoworxindiana.com