

By Cory Ahlersmeyer

WORK ETHIC SIGNAL

Schools, Businesses Create PRIDE Indicator

The skills gap, the difference between what employers need from an employee and the abilities the workers have to offer, is multi-faceted. Not only is there often a lack of abilities in hard skills (computer programming, mathematics and more), but also soft skills such as communication, working in teams and strong personal character.

Of the more than 530 Indiana companies responding to the 2014 Indiana Chamber Employer Survey, over 54% stated that a lack of work ethic is the most pressing issue in their hiring process, followed by communication and attendance.

“Employers are teaming with schools to better relate academic concepts to workforce needs,” says Amy Marsh, Indiana Chamber director of college and career readiness. “Businesses are looking for employees that are ready to work on day one.”

According to the survey, more than 39% of businesses had vacancies related to underqualified applicants. To make matters more difficult for employers, more than half of businesses indicated plans to expand their workforce in the next year.

“This is not a sustainable model for moving Indiana forward,” Marsh states. “Ultimately, we want workers across the employment spectrum to be able to have a long, sustainable career that contributes to the strength of the Indiana labor force.”

Team effort

Stakeholders in Southeast Indiana believe they have a partial solution.

The program, called PRIDE, is a pilot established by Greater Clark County Schools (GCCS), the Region 10 Works Council and an advisory board of 70 local community leaders from postsecondary education, workforce entities and local government. PRIDE stands for

persistence, respectfulness, initiative, dependability and efficiency. Each trait was outlined by the board as desirable qualities for graduating GCCS students.

Students are required to demonstrate these character qualities throughout their senior year. Measurements take place through criteria such as attendance, grade point average and recommendations by teachers and community members.

The program is backed by GCCS teachers and staff, says superintendent Andrew Melin, Ph.D. He notes that local business owners can be assured that students earning the certificate are strong representatives of both the school and community.

“We want to produce kids of great character who also possess the hard skills necessary to be successful,” Melin explains.

Students that receive the certificate earn much more than a piece of paper. Ivy Tech is weighing the possibility of waiving select first-year courses for PRIDE recipients.

But that isn’t all, Melin says.

“You have employers that will guarantee an interview if there is an opening,” he says. “Others will start them at a higher rate of pay.”

Business participation

Motivation to implement the program came from an industry forum hosted by the Region 10 Works Council in January 2014. Industries – including automotive manufacturing, business services and construction – overwhelmingly expressed concerns with work ethic-related issues.

The council, combined with Melin’s board of community leaders, developed strong buy-in from local businesses to develop a solution.

“Dr. Melin had an extremely successful implementation of this program when he was at East Allen County Schools,” offers Paul Perkins, president of Amatrol in Jeffersonville and chair of the Region 10 Works Council. “We already knew it could work based on his prior experience.”

Andrew Melin, superintendent of Greater Clark County Schools, says, “Our mission is to make sure every student graduates to a postsecondary opportunity.”





Manufacturers and other employers say they will recognize the value of the work ethic certificate.

One of the most important aspects of the program for both Melin and Perkins was to set a firm standard that was not easily obtained and focused on observed behaviors over a long period of time.

“Students have to demonstrate consistent work ethic behaviors over an entire year,” Perkins maintains. “Students do not just get a check mark for being in a class.”

Early progress

The program has already displayed success in modifying student behavior.

“It motivates students to show up every day and demonstrate behaviors that are not only good for the workplace but are also helpful in the school system,” states Perkins, who also serves as chair of the State Workforce Innovation Council.

Perkins contends that this initiative can pay for itself and is not simply “one more program” school administrators have to implement.

“We are already hearing students are making conscious decisions to show up to school on a day when they might not have gone otherwise because they were tired or not very motivated. We have been hearing that they have been telling their friends, ‘Hey, I don’t want to lose my chance for that certification, so I’m going to be in school today.’”

The pilot was originally intended to compile lessons learned at GCCS for this first school year and extend the program to others in the region. The Scott County School District, however, was impressed from the get-go and started its own initiative just six months after the GCCS pilot began.

The hope is that will be the first of many expansions.

“Our goal in implementing this was to not only create a template that will allow other school districts in our region to implement it,” Perkins declares. “Our goal is to help get a successful model in place that could be used in other parts of the state.”

RESOURCES: Andrew Melin, Greater Clark County Schools, at <http://gcs.k12.in.us> | Paul Perkins, Amatrol, at www.amatrol.com

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