



Corridor

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EMPLOYER EDUCATOR SUMMIT

SCHOOLS WANT STUDENTS TO BE successful after graduation, and Iowa businesses are hungry to find employees with essential job skills. The first-ever Employer Educator Summit in November brought both parties together to explore how they might cooperate for the future benefit of North Iowa.

“The aim is to get key business partners, educators, and administrators to talk about ways businesses can partner with schools,” said Hunter Callanan. “Businesses would like students to have certain skills when they come out of school, but don’t always know how to engage with the schools.”

About 150 people attended the “Rock’n the Future Workforce” event at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake. The North Central Iowa Alliance of economic developers from the seven-county region partnered with IowaWORKS North Iowa to present the summit, modeled on similar events that have been held elsewhere in the state.

Attendees were seated strategically at tables with a mix of school and business people from different regions, according to Callanan, to start conversations from different viewpoints.

Several schools presented about current efforts to bridge the gap between school and career. For instance, West Fork, Hampton-Dumont, CAL, and NIACC have formed the West Fork Industrial Academy to offer high school students opportunities to develop career focus and earn college credit while still in high school. The Britt Health Careers Academy gives students access to a combination

of college level classes that deal directly with the health care field.

Other presentations included information on Registered Apprenticeship programs, the state’s Future Ready Iowa initiative to build the talent pipeline, and other schools with programs that give students exposure to real workplaces and local opportunities.

Mason City High School sent a 12th grade counselor, two Career Technical Education teachers, and several students to the summit, according to Principal Dan Long.

“It reinforces a lot of things we believe in,” Long said. “Forging partnerships with business leaders, organizations, and community leaders are essential next steps to set up our students for success. We got a chance to hear how others are making this happen. We want to promote awareness so students know the real opportunities right here in the region and can see what the pathway looks like to get the certification or degree they need.”

Long said they heard about internship relationships that enable students to explore interests within a real workplace; programs that involved students working on a specific project with a business; and ways to foster leadership and communication skills needed in the workplace.

“We hope to take back some of what we learned and build a model for our high school,” Long said. “Part of the beauty in Iowa is that we can personalize employers with a name and face, so students aren’t lost in the pipeline but

can see those opportunities face to face. I’m excited with the interest of people at all levels wanting to have this conversation. It’s an exciting time with people genuinely interested and invested in seeing what comes of this.”

Jennifer Andrade, formerly with IowaWORKS and now executive director of Mitchell County Economic Development, said businesses attending represented manufacturing, professional services, financial, healthcare, heavy equipment operation, and more.

“We want to expand students’ horizons and show them the opportunities here, that they can have a great career without a lot of student debt. They can establish great relationships with employers and maybe even get assistance with education. It’s good for students to see what goes on in the businesses they drive by.”

Andrade said all parties involved know about the workforce shortage here, the aging population, the Baby Boomers retiring. “We need a pipeline of younger students to move into these careers. Seeing all the examples at the event hopefully gets schools and employers thinking about other options, what partnerships might look like for them.

“I’m just excited for the future of North Iowa,” she added. “In a year, I hope to look back and say we’ve got this many more partnerships involved and the impetus to more success for North Iowa.”

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