



## MC CAN, A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT TO INCREASE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

**MASON CITY CAN, A TEAM** representing local organizations and businesses, is collaborating to increase the education and skill level of our citizens.

"In 2015, NIACC was approached by Iowa College Aid to start a local network to look at resources and barriers that exist to getting people to post-secondary education," says Anne Boyer, project coordinator for Mason City CAN. "We've been reaching out to different sectors, reviewing data, what's happening in the community, and how to combat issues."

The task force includes educators, both K-12 and higher education professionals, local employers, government officials, workforce and economic development, and people representing social services.

Mason City CAN wants to increase by five percent each year the percentage of Mason City citizens who hold a post-secondary degree or career-related credentials. This contributes to an Iowa Governor's Office goal to arm 70 percent of Iowans with a post-secondary degree by 2025.

Based on 2015 available data, the local task force reports that 40 percent of Mason City citizens have a high school diploma or less; 24 percent have some post-secondary experience; 16 percent have an associate degree; and 21 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. The team will be examining updated data this fall.

"It's about measuring how many go to school after high school, but it's also about creating a more vibrant community," says Boyer. "What does it take to build a healthy economy? Education is critical to that. We want a workforce capable of entering the jobs available. And we also want to entice jobs here and have the workforce available for those jobs."

A report prepared by The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce says "In 1973 only 28 percent of U.S. jobs required education beyond a high school diploma; by 2025, almost two out of three jobs in the nation will require at least some post-secondary education or training."

Boyer says Mason City CAN is defining its scope based on local needs. Three main objectives are to connect education to employment; reduce barriers that interfere with success; and make education and career development a family and community driven endeavor.

The team is currently focused on increasing the completion rate for FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). The FAFSA is the gateway to getting financial aid for post-secondary education. The FAFSA completion rate at Mason City High School dropped from 77 percent in 2014 to 49% in 2015.

"People can be surprised to find there are resources available to help them," Boyer says about FAFSA completion.

"As that percentage increases, so does the number who actually go to college. We're creating more education about what FAFSA does and where the resources are for helping complete the application."

Mason City CAN also wants to acquaint parents and students with the varieties of education available, according to Boyer. "Post-secondary might not be a two-year or four-year degree. It might be a certification or diploma or apprenticeship."

The group is rolling out a mock-interview video that lets students record themselves and review their performance. It also is connecting students with professional community members working in the student's area of job interest.

"We're not here to create new programming, but to communicate what is already here," Boyer says. "We're not re-inventing the wheel, but connecting people to how to fix a problem and use the resources we have here." For instance, educating local citizens about the United Way 211 resource hotline can help students work through barriers to higher education, such as finding childcare services.

Boyer says, "We're a very engaged group. There are so many people who care and want to be part of the conversation. That makes it easier to feel change can really happen."

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