



NIACC CAREER CONNECTIONS HELPING TO BUILD THE TALENT PIPELINE

NIACC CAREER CONNECTIONS is building connections between students, teachers, and businesses in local communities, to foster a stronger workforce for North Iowa.

As Director of Work-Based Learning with NIACC Career Connections, Gayla Toebe coordinates experiences such as job shadowing, worksite tours, in-school career fairs, and other opportunities. As the liaison between 19 school districts and the businesses in these communities, she focuses on person-to-person contacts that might help students someday find work in this region and help businesses attract the workers they need.

"When working in each school, we want to focus on their communities and their businesses," Toebe said. For instance, a recent Career and College Exploration Day at Mason City High School, in which North Iowa Corridor partnered with NIACC Career Connections, brought students together with employees from local businesses. It builds career awareness and workplace readiness.

"Kids think, 'There's nothing here, I'm not staying here.' We're building a community relationship, to give students the sense that these people really care, and feel 'They want me to come back and work for them.'"

NIACC Career Connections partners with over 300 businesses in North Iowa. Toebe said, "We want businesses to understand we're trying to recruit their future workforce. The hard part is, businesses are all overworked and short-staffed. It's hard for them to find

time to work with students."

These programs help students learn about the jobs in many career paths, even the ones not immediately apparent. "In healthcare, it's not just doctors and nurses. It's accountants, office workers, lab technicians, and many others. In manufacturing, it's not just production and welding. That business needs office workers and maintenance people to keep things running."

Job shadowing sets up opportunities for individual students to spend a day observing a person on the job. "Job shadowing is a foot in the door," Toebe said.

Worksite tours recently included taking students inside the construction site for the new arena in downtown Mason City, to talk with contractors. In summer, Toebe arranges tours for teachers in local businesses, so they can take that information back to their classrooms.

For career days, she asks business people to come to the school and talk directly to students about a typical day in their jobs or what path they took to get that position.

"I talk to kids about first impressions and employability skills, like being on time, team building, and customer service. These are really important to businesses. We also do mock interviews, because everybody has to face an interview someday."

Toebe said she seeks to meet individual needs. "It's not always a four-year

degree I'm steering towards. I'm helping them find the right fit for them. I want to meet their needs. That might be a certificate, a one- or two-year degree." She mentioned areas with big workforce needs right now include health care, trades, and advanced manufacturing.

"There are a lot of natural connections between NIACC and schools," Toebe added. "But my role isn't just a NIACC hat. I want to do whatever is best for that student."

Bringing students together with real workers in their communities creates a more comfortable space for career conversations, according to Toebe. Students have told her it was great having someone to answer their questions, as they might not have phoned a college or local business.

Toebe says building these relationships across the region is very rewarding. "I feel like I'm making a difference every time. It helps the kids feel their community is behind them."

*Wishing you a
Happy
Holidays!*

*From the team at the
North Iowa Corridor*

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