



Corridor

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STUDENT OUTREACH IN NORTH IOWA

CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN STUDENTS AND BUSINESSES are essential for the region's future, according to Hunter Callanan of the North Iowa Corridor EDC.

"It's important to retain talent in North Iowa," Callanan says. "This investment won't help hiring woes now, but if we don't impact students, we miss that chance to connect with them so they know the opportunities here."

As Workforce Specialist at the Corridor, Callanan works with schools and business leaders to make these conversations possible. It's also important to help schools offer opportunities for young people to identify their interests and build skills.

Activities include job readiness and interest inventories, presentations by employees of local companies, visits to actual business sites, job shadowing, and more.

For instance, a Discover Day program held in past years at North Iowa Area Community College gave students the chance to identify their interests and traits and pairs them with different careers in North Iowa that fit their individual profiles.

The Corridor lines up employees of local businesses to come talk with students about their jobs and how students can prepare themselves for that work. It's a way for young people to find out that opportunities exist right here, if they wish to stay or come back after further education.

The past two years have been challenging for maintaining many of these outreach programs, according to Callanan. The COVID-19 pandemic has prevented large gatherings, and presenters from local businesses are often too busy due to staffing shortages.

To be flexible, virtual options have been used to make these connections, such as mock interviews online. This alternate platform presents its own advantages for learning.

"It's a time-saver to conduct virtual interviews, and a lot of business people are utilizing that now," Callanan says. "It's a new twist on things students will have to prepare for." Callanan points out virtual interviews require different skills. "It takes a higher level of energy to project yourself virtually. It's all-around harder to portray yourself when on screen. The interviewer can't see your body language. It takes more elaboration of answers. Facial expressions come across differently on screen than in person."

The responsibility for career readiness does not rest solely on schools. Callanan emphasizes to businesses that it's in their best interests to talk to young people in our schools. Getting involved in NIC's outreach to students at all grade levels is an important way for local companies to guarantee success in the future.

North Iowa is not alone in the U.S. with the problem of finding enough workers to fill positions. Callanan says, "It's more important than ever that businesses interact with schools and help students see how their decisions now impact their lives post-high school. It's a strategy in retaining our population. The key is exposing them to opportunities in North Iowa."

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