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NEW REPORT HELPS GUIDE FUTURE FUNDING FOR REGIONAL CTE PROGRAMS

The Don Wood Foundation, a private foundation in Fort Wayne that is dedicated to the advancement of manufacturing, entrepreneurship, and related education in the region, recently collaborated with Inspire Success of Westfield, Indiana to publish an annual data dashboard report to measure the success of career and technical education students and programs, and the satisfaction of employers in the area. Keeping the economic engines of northeast Indiana's business humming requires a continuous stream of skilled and ready-to-work employees.

With the help of Matt Fleck of Inspire Success, the Don Wood Foundation established an annual data collection process and set of annual surveys of northeast Indiana regional employers, directors of skilled trades programs, and student of these programs to assess where needs and gaps exist to find out if the preparation of potential employees is getting better or worse.

"These annual surveys shed light on what employers in northeast Indiana need from students and what students think about the programs that are preparing them for future work. It's rather unique to ask the future workforce what they're interested in and then adjust accordingly," said Inspire Success Executive Director Matt Fleck. "I credit the Don Wood Foundation for being very intentional about discovering what's working and what's not, and using these results to inform grantmaking."

Inspire Success is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization focused on advancing what works to elevate student success. Inspire Success works specifically with Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, career and college readiness initiatives, comprehensive school counseling programs, and whole school improvement efforts using a vision to action process that results in measurable student success in school and improved student readiness for success after school.

"We're excited to partner with Inspire Success for this snapshot into the future workforce and aspirational outcomes from what to expect in CTE programs and the students they serve," said Don Wood Foundation President and CEO Laura Macknick. "Because of this data, each year we will be able to narrow down which areas of the student-to-employee pipeline need to be improved upon. It's our mission to advance manufacturing in the northeast Indiana region and this report will help make sure that the work we're doing with area CTE programs is making a difference and preparing students for careers in manufacturing and engineering."

The data from the 2021 school year shows optimism across the board with students knowing of more postsecondary options existing aside from college and making informed decisions of next steps planned after high school. Other findings from the report were that directors increased the number of students enrolled in career pathways and programs with the highest occupational demand. The data also indicated that most employers were somewhat to highly satisfied about the preparedness of high school students with the skills needed for open positions.

Although the surveys won't be made public, the annual data dashboard results will help educators and businesses pinpoint where challenges exist in the current talent pipeline as data is compared yearly and trends begin to emerge, expanding the report's value and importance over time. This report will help program leaders and grantmakers identify root causes and discuss which actions should be taken to address any challenges that are critical to ensuring the continued viability of the northeast Indiana economy. The Don Wood Foundation believes that sharing this data will help build awareness of the many efforts the organization gives to support workforce development.

To view the data dashboard with results from 2021 students, CTE program directors, and employers, go to DonWoodFoundation.org.

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Pictured is Don Wood Foundation staff with CTE program staff at Area 18 CTE Cooperative who participated in the study.