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Key findings and recommendations provide guidance on bolstering Allen County's CTE offerings

Concerns raised around preparedness for growth projections in advanced manufacturing

FORT WAYNE, IND. (April 2, 2024) – The Don Wood Foundation, dedicated to the growth and strengthening of the manufacturing industry in northeast Indiana, and Ambassador Enterprises, a Fort Wayne-based private equity firm committed to cultivating a better community, today released findings from a comprehensive research study on the career and technical education (CTE) ecosystem in Allen County.

The two organizations partnered with Indianapolis-based national consulting firm TPMA to assess how CTE programs align with employer and community needs within Allen County. The study focused on the benefits of technical education in equipping students with employability skills, technical knowledge, and necessary training for current and future workforce demands.

“We are encouraged by the great start we have in Allen County, but we have much more to do to support and grow interest in career and technical education for students,” said Patrick Buesching, vice president of strategic initiatives, Don Wood Foundation, and co-lead for the Allen County CTE study. “It’s no longer just a hunch, which is reassuring. We now have concrete evidence showing the gaps and opportunities we must focus on to develop tomorrow’s workforce today.”

The key findings highlight strengths and challenges in Allen County’s current CTE ecosystem and are listed below.

1. **Creating or expanding initiatives that develop a comprehensive career path for high school students** attending the school districts in Allen County feeds the progress of CTE programs.
2. **The Fort Wayne Career Academy has capacity constraints that limit the variety of offerings available**, particularly as Graduation Pathways have increased the demand for such opportunities. Formerly known as Anthis Career Center and part of Fort Wayne Community Schools, the academy serves about 6 percent of high school students in the county.
3. **Manufacturing courses account for only 1.9 percent of the total student enrollment in CTE programs** despite a sizable manufacturing sector in Allen County.
4. **Economically disadvantaged students represent only 2.2 percent of current CTE students, which suggests the need for more outreach to cultivate awareness of the opportunities available** for one of the county’s key industries and provide students with relevant skills for employment.
5. **The innovative employer partnership between Fort Wayne Community Schools, Southwest Allen County Schools, and Northwest Allen County Schools and the Plumbers and Steamfitters, and HVAC Service Technicians of Local 166 represents an excellent example of effective collaboration** in the CTE ecosystem to offer students hands-on training and work-based learning experiences.
6. **Local employers prioritize industry-recognize credentials over dual credits earned through CTE courses.** High school dual credits do not always translate into desired college credits or employer skills.

(MORE)



“With Allen County’s existing partnerships, we have a tremendous opportunity to make manufacturing training a foundational pillar of our community’s future,” said Sherry Grate, senior vice president of public impact, Ambassador Enterprises, and co-lead for the Allen County CTE study. “Grow Allen’s initiative is a game-changer, providing students with empowering pathways, including in technical education. By building a strong, skilled workforce for the high-wage, high-demand careers in advanced manufacturing, we’ll unlock significant growth and prosperity for our entire region.”

Additionally, the study offered recommendations to provide guidance, including:

- Prioritize industry-recognized certifications over college credits in CTE courses.
- Increase enrollment capacity for CTE students outside of the FWCS system.
- Provide students with career coaching to help them select a pathway that matches their goals and interests, preparing them for enrollment, employment, or enlistment.
- Actively involve employers in the CTE ecosystem.
- Implement youth apprenticeship programs.
- Equip students with future-ready skills.
- Embrace collaborative decision-making.

Research about CTE offerings at all Allen County public high schools began last September, including quantitative and qualitative data collection. More specifically, the qualitative data was gathered from nearly 40 interviews with employers, higher education leaders, K-12 administrators, community organizations, as well as eight focus groups with students across Allen County public school districts, and one private high school.

The full Allen County CTE ecosystem study can be found and downloaded on the Don Wood Foundation website at donwoodfoundation.org.

About Don Wood Foundation

The Don Wood Foundation is a private foundation established in 2018 by Don Wood, founder of 80/20, Inc., that serves and supports innovators, leaders, collaborators, and skilled workers with the potential to create and sustain opportunities in manufacturing. The Foundation partners with non-profits and educational institutions to provide sustained investment that supports the development of a diverse workforce through exposure, education, and training to create strong communities rooted in the advancement of manufacturing.

About Ambassador Enterprises

With corporate headquarters in Northeast Indiana and affiliate companies across the U.S., Ambassador Enterprises invests in for-income and for-impact markets, pursuing financial, cultural, and eternal returns, resulting in better people, communities, and lives. With a workforce exceeding 4,500 employees and annualized revenue surpassing \$2 billion, Ambassador Enterprises remains steadfast in fostering a legacy of impact through relational investments defined by compassion and purpose. Our unwavering commitment to faith and values serves as a guiding light toward a brighter future for all.

About TPMA

TPMA is a national consulting firm that works at the intersection of workforce development, economic development, education, and community impact. The firm empowers organizations and communities through strategic partnerships and data-informed solutions that create positive, sustainable change. TPMA envisions a world that thinks strategically, works collaboratively, and acts sustainably. Working toward that vision, TPMA has provided clients with a range of services to design, develop, evaluate, and implement effective plans and programs.