ICCB Workforce Education Strategic Planning Project

Report on the Regional Forums

Community-Based Strategic Planning   *August, 2015*

Submitted to:

Illinois Community College Board

Illinois Community College Board
www.iccb.org

and

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

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I. INTRODUCTION: THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS, PROJECT GOALS AND REGIONAL FORUMS

The Illinois Community College System is the third largest community college system in the nation and covers the entire state with 48 colleges and two multi-community college centers in 39 community college districts. Community colleges serve nearly one million Illinois residents each year in credit and noncredit courses and many more through their public service programs.

As the largest provider of public workforce training in the state, the community colleges ensure that all Illinois residents have educational and training opportunities leading to high wage and high growth employment. Responding to the needs of the community is a core mission of the Illinois Community College System.

The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) is engaged in a strategic planning process designed to ensure the community college system remains a leader in the complementary fields of workforce training and education, and becomes ever more responsive to changing employer and student needs throughout the state. This plan will expand and enhance Illinois' ability to attract, retain, and grow businesses and develop educational opportunities to support students' success in the workforce. It will also enhance the community college system's ability to accommodate the economic and workforce shifts occurring over the past two decades and into the future.

> **VISION**
> Utilize the overall strategic planning and related processes to achieve alignment of the community college system and the state's workforce development system with economic development directions and workforce needs, thereby creating a talent pipeline that fuels economic growth and creates career pathways for all citizens of Illinois.

Specifically, the strategic plan for workforce education will:

- Ensure education and economic competitiveness for the system at the local and state levels;

- Strengthen business and Industry relationships;

- Maximize employer engagement in the development of relevant programs that will lead to jobs and careers that offer family-sustaining wages;

- Enhance education and training at all levels of the community college system including adult education, business and industry, career and technical education, and continuing education; and

- Provide integrated options for students to move quickly into career pathway programs/Programs of Study (POS).

To help inform the planning process, ICCB, along with its partner, the state Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), engaged Maher & Maher to facilitate a community discovery and involvement process to inform development of a set of strategic directions that will become the foundation for the plan. This effort consisted of two primary activities:

- **Steering Team** – Convening a Steering Team comprised of high-level representatives from the various stakeholder groups. The Steering Team's role is to provide leadership – to contribute formal and social power as leaders in and users of the state's broader

education/workforce/talent development system. Among other roles, the Team will review, refine as needed, and accept the recommendations for strategic directions.

- **Regional Forums** – Convening and reporting on a series of eleven Regional Forums designed to gather key input and insight from stakeholders – most critically, employers – regarding priorities for ICCB and the community college system based on the economic, educational and employer landscape in their region; and also to ensure broad understanding and validation of the vision for a talent development system and role of the community college within that system. Forums were held in each of the state's 10 economic development regions – two for the Chicago area – and Forum attendees included secondary and post-secondary educators, workforce and economic development managers and staff, and employers.

> **PROJECT MISSION**
> To develop a comprehensive set of recommended strategic directions to guide the full development and implementation of the Illinois Community College Board's (ICCB) five-year Workforce Education Strategic Plan; and will be used to inform the state's first Unified Strategic Plan for core programs under the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA).

The Forums provided the opportunity for ICCB and the colleges to look "outside of their walls" for input, partnerships, and alignment with stakeholders; and for stakeholders to share their needs and ideas for innovative solutions to workforce education challenges. A key objective of the Forums was to identify potential strategies for ICCB to enhance the alignment of its programs and services with the needs of employers in critical industry sectors, other partners in education and workforce and economic development, and students and workers themselves.

The Forums have also provided - ICCB with the opportunity to partner with DCEO and the Illinois community college system to develop strategies that further align education and workforce partnerships at the state, regional and local levels, which supports the process of regional planning under WIOA.

The process of each Regional Forum was uniform across the state and included a(n):

- Overview of project and Regional Forum purpose and goals from ICCB and DCEO;

- Review of an environmental data scan that provides critical baseline information about the region's economy, talent pipeline and status of the regional workforce;

- Examination of critical community college related data for credit and non- credit education and training programs, career and technical and adult education programs.

- Facilitated employer panel comprised of regional industry representatives who provided insight into their company's and industry's immediate and long-term workforce priorities, needs and challenges;

- Regional Forum participant engagement in one of three key breakout groups (employer engagement, talent development system alignment and education system alignment.) The groups were charged with using the information provided through the data scan and employer panel, as well as their experience in the field, to identify priority needs, challenges and opportunities for the system as well as strategic directions designed to address those issues.

- Report-out from the breakout groups' discussions to capture key themes for the strategic plan and to use this information as a starting point for ongoing collaboration in each region.

This report next provides a Summary of the input received through the Forum process, organized along the lines of critical themes and challenges as elucidated by the participants. That section is followed by a detailed report on each of the eleven Forums, and two Appendices:

➢ A – Forum registrant information by region; and

➢ B – Chart of employer skill needs by region and specific industry represented at the Forums.

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II.   SUMMARY OF REGIONAL FORUM REPORTS

The Forums were designed for the community college system to hear local perspectives about challenges that employers have in building their workforce and in engaging with community colleges and the broader workforce system. The consultants' role in completing the Summary was to organize the themes heard most often across the Forums into a series of challenges for ICCB to address in its strategic plan. The themes/challenges therefore represent participants' perceptions about the community colleges' role within the workforce system. Each of the challenges also contains a number of ideas and solutions proffered by the participants to deal with those challenges. This Summary presents an organized account of the proceedings, and *does not contain perceptions or opinions of the Forum facilitators or the report's authors.*

The Forums were organized along the geographic lines of the state's ten economic development regions. Forum participants mentioned many industry partnerships, public partner collaborations and innovative training models that already exist among community colleges, specific industry employers, and the workforce and economic development systems. Some of these cross multiple jurisdictions. However, knowledge and replication of the best elements of the successful models is not at all widespread. ICCB and DCEO have roles to play in identifying, scaling, and disseminating these promising practices, models and approaches.

More broadly, these Forums represent an expansion of the existing workforce education collaborations and the beginning of a new, more organized, regionally-based collaborative process. The Forum discussions revealed five critical challenges that were prevalent across each of the regions, and which should be considered in the development of the ICCB Workforce Education Strategic Plan.

A. Connections Among Public Partners

There is a clear need to develop strategies that will strengthen each region's connections between and among community colleges, adult education, career and technical education, K-12 systems, and the workforce and economic development systems.

Across the Forums, employers and others expressed a need for workforce, economic development, and educational systems to better coordinate their strategies and efforts. Employers generally feel public partners' efforts lack sufficient coordination and collaboration in relation to their needs.

Employers expressed frustration with having to navigate multiple, non-integrated systems, and are not accessing the services and support they need in a consistent manner. ICCB and DCEO, as well as local community colleges and workforce boards, have the opportunity to continue developing a more streamlined process to engage current and new employers more effectively as well as to provide resources to industries to address future workforce challenges and opportunities. State agencies and regional partners need to cultivate intentional and sustained industry partnerships; integrate business service delivery; and become more agile, nimble, and responsive.

Better communication among community colleges, workforce, and employers is needed to ensure public partner responsiveness to the rapidly changing workforce and business dynamics. Community colleges

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and employers need to build new and renewed relationships with each other in order to meet emerging talent needs.

Examples of Solutions Proposed During the Forums:

- There are innovative initiatives underway or being developed within pockets in the regions. There is a need across regions to initiate a broader focus on these efforts and to collaborate and combine resources to address needs of industry. The regions can begin by identifying replicable initiatives occurring within the region, and then expanding their perspectives to explore surrounding regions as well as models from other states.

- Engage the "60 by 25" Network. Illinois community leaders have come together with the goal of ensuring that 60% of adults have a college or career credential by 2025. This initiative is based on the fact that all high school graduates will need some type of post-secondary training to meet employers' needs.

- Utilize the community college business and industry centers as liaisons with employers.

B. Public Partners' Engagement and Alignment with Business

Partnering with education and training providers, and with economic and workforce development, needs to be easier and more seamless for employers, and must provide more value.

Education and training partners are generally perceived as not keeping pace in terms of their responsiveness and therefore need to do things differently in order to meet employers' workforce needs. Employers state that silos among partners continue to be an issue, and in several Forums it appeared that partnerships, especially between colleges and workforce officials, don't appear strong. Partners need to build enhanced, more leveraged relationships with one another in order to begin to meet evolving talent needs.

While several employer panelists indicated that they have successful training partnerships with area community colleges and the public workforce system, others described information flow from and outreach efforts by public partners as confusing and difficult to navigate. They framed this as a client relationship management issue, indicating that they often are called on by multiple community college and workforce development representatives who do not appear to be coordinating their efforts either internally or between organizations. In particular, some employers on the panel reported challenges in working with the public workforce system, noting that partnering with this system is good in theory but less so in practice.

This presents an opportunity to provide enhanced education and workforce services to students and jobseekers and simultaneously meet industries' supply needs. While the educational and workforce systems need to enhance outreach, employers continually expressed that there should be a coordinated approach between partners, in order to streamline communication, create a consistent message, and ensure that all relevant information is presented in easily understood terms.

Employers expressed the desire to have colleges come to them with examples of innovative programs, thereby demonstrating a positive return on investment. Providing specific examples of community

college programs where other invested employers have seen direct success in fulfilling their talent needs would help additional employers see the value. Employers expressed the need to have this information presented to them in an understandable manner.

Examples of Solutions Proposed During the Forums:

- Employers need to clarify and communicate their workforce needs to the community colleges and workforce partners so that responsive and innovative training options can be developed.
- Employers need defined opportunities to express their collective workforce needs. Administrative support to facilitate these on-going conversations should be provided by workforce partners that organize and convene industry, education, and workforce entities. Industry also needs increased support from public partners to identify and expand implementation of innovative initiatives and programs.
- Community colleges and workforce systems could work with employers to develop customized training for incumbent workers that leads to advancement opportunities within their firms. This approach benefits both the employee by providing higher skills and wages and also the employer by retaining good employees who contribute to their bottom line.
- Community college (and other system) staff need to visit employer sites, tour facilities and gain an in-depth understanding of the skills needed and the demands of the jobs.
- Community colleges should strengthen the Business Advisory Committees by including additional employers that are active and encourage employers to advise on curriculum development. Colleges need to ensure that employer expertise is fully acknowledged and leveraged, and communication loops are tight.
- Provide employers with easy-to-understand information about occupational programs and career pathways in the community colleges. Many employers noted that companies and community colleges speak different languages; developing a common language will support better information exchange.

C.   "Soft" and Occupational Skill Needs

Employers want workforce and education systems to expand the pool of qualified applicants. They uniformly noted significant deficits in workers' (particularly young workers') "soft" or essential skills and also want the workforce partners to specifically address the sector and occupational needs of industry.

Across the state, employers expressed great difficulty with finding enough qualified people locally. This often forces employers to expand recruiting efforts beyond their region and sometimes outside of the state. Employers noted the specific issues below to further define the challenge:

- ***Lack of Soft Skills***: Employers at every Forum cited a lack of "soft" skills – what they prefer to call essential skills – and/or work ethic as a major challenge to hiring, retaining and advancing workers. When hiring, employers encounter a lack of professional demeanor and communication skills, exemplified by error-filled resumes, answering cell phones during interviews, a lack of questioning by the interviewees, and attire with drug paraphernalia, etc. In regard to retaining or advancing their incumbent workforce, employers cited various unprofessional behaviors such as inappropriate attire, failing to call in when late or absent, a lack of understanding as to how to receive and respond to feedback, etc.

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Examples of Solutions Proposed During the Forums:

➢ Embed job readiness and job interviewing skills in all training curricula at the community colleges.
➢ Bring employers into junior high, high school and community college classes to talk about the importance of soft skills.
➢ Develop temp-to-hire programs.
➢ Implement "success coaching" within community colleges, with faculty/staff and employer volunteers serving as the coaches to teach essential skills needed to be successful on the job.

- *Lack of Technical Skills, Critical Thinking & Communication Skills:* Many job candidates and incumbent workers lack the technical skills employers need as well as the ability to apply those skills. Particular essential skill gaps include problem-solving, interpersonal skills, and face-to-face and other forms of communication. Companies are in many cases operating in national and international contexts and workers need to have a basic level of global awareness and to be able to understand and appreciate cultures other than their own. Some employers noted this lack of awareness persists regardless of the level of the applicant/employee's education.

Skills that seem to be in particularly short supply include math, technology and other STEM-based skills, as well as critical thinking and the ability to effectively communicate technical aspects of the work. Employers expressed a need for workers who not only understand the technical requirements but also comprehend cause and effect and have the ability to communicate with co-workers, clients, and other members of the supply chain.

One employer representative also discussed the new skill sets required in the "maker" community, including teamwork, quality and quality improvement focus, and individual and team-based innovation. While these various skills are difficult to teach and difficult to measure, they are critical; having industry-recognized credentials is not enough if these skills are not present.

Examples of Solutions Proposed During the Forums:

➢ Illinois needs to establish more vocational/technical programs in high school and incorporate better technology in schools to support effective training. Currently, legislative mandates at the K-12 level limits elective course work.

➢ We need to "peel back" some of those requirements to allow time for hands-on training, internships, co-op education, etc. One approach might include development of a model "vocational education high school" on community college campuses that could serve as a feeder to the community college such as now exists at Danville Area Community College.

➢ Continually examine programmatic offerings to align with industry needs. One approach could include a vocational instructor practicum so instructors stay current regarding what's going on in the field and merge that material into their instruction.

➢ Increase internship, apprenticeship and other work-based learning opportunities.

> Expand initiatives where community college occupational training programs are tied together with work-based –learning opportunities, as some community colleges already do; clinicals are a good model.

> Provide credentials at the high school level, and encourage youth to identify career directions early so they can gear their secondary education to attain relevant skills.

> Engage in the High School to Work Program. In this model, high school freshmen declare a career cluster, and gain work-based experience in the cluster while in high school to help them determine their interest and aptitude before they enter post-secondary education and training.

- *Employer Needs By Industry*: Below are the challenges, organized by industry, as expressed by employer panelists at the Regional Forums. Some industries were represented at most or all of the Regional Forums while others were only represented at one or two Forums, depending on the regional economy and availability of panelists. (Please see **Appendix B** for a chart that shows employers' specific skill needs by region and industry.)

  > *Healthcare –* Employer representatives from the healthcare industry commonly cited an era of unprecedented change due to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) as the most pressing issue facing development of their workforce. ACA, coupled with a focus on four year degree attainment, has left the industry with both vacancies for key positions and skill gaps among existing employees. Upskilling around customer service and technology is critical to retention and representatives from this field specifically cited their focus on developing career pathways to meet their short- and long-term workforce needs.

  > *Manufacturing –* Manufacturing industry representatives are facing high levels of vacancies due to both expansion of the industry and retirements among the existing workforce. Unfortunately, the industry is finding few interested applicants with the required soft, critical thinking and technical skills. Employers expressed that the problem seems to be the result of dual issues – a decline in soft and technical skills as well as a negative perception among youth regarding the opportunities and working conditions offered in manufacturing.

  > Manufacturing representatives expressed interest in work-based learning, apprenticeship and career pathways, overall, to upskill the current workforce. They are also interested in working with K-12 and post-secondary systems to address the negative perception of the industry. Manufacturing representatives also expressed a need for the education and workforce systems to build a better understanding of their positions and skill needs.

  > *Call Center/Customer Service –* There was only one representative from the call center/customer service industry, who cited a need for both soft and technical skills, as well as improved capacity by younger workers to accept constructive criticism.

  > *Business and Professional Services –* Representatives of staffing agencies noted a strong need for customer service skills and company-specific skills, such as medical billing and coding. Because they have to satisfy very specific skill needs depending on their employer clients, the industry would like to partner with community colleges to develop shorter-term on-line training programs. Other representatives of business and professional services identified vital skill need areas include computer skills, problem-solving, math,

communication, and global awareness. Many companies are working with a global consumer base, and it is necessary for the workforce to have an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures.

➢ *Information Technology (IT) –* The IT panelists noted a consistent need for technical skills (e.g., Java developers, data analytics, cyber security), in addition to other skills such as strategic thinking, agility, problem-solving, communication and the ability to collaborate virtually.

➢ *Public Sector (General) –* The representative from a public sector organization noted a struggle with employee retention, as they find it difficult to compete with private sector companies. A specific need for waste water operators to be recertified on new technology was cited along with the desire to have the community college support development of short-term, fast-track training in this area. (It should be noted that faster-track training was a commonly-identified need across industries and occupational areas.)

➢ *Public Sector (Utilities) –* The panelist representing the public sector utility company noted extensive training needs for new hires including lab technicians, customer service and billing personnel. The industry would like to see additional technical skills around STEM, computer software, electronics, and critical thinking, as well as soft skills such as verbal development and an overall willingness to learn. A panelist noted that his company is always looking for key industry recognized credentials when hiring.

➢ *Transportation, Distribution & Logistics (TDL) –* The TDL panelists noted high attrition among skilled workers in their companies and difficulty in filling vacancies, in part due to a negative perception of the industry. They would like flexible training options provided on-demand and support with educating youth regarding the opportunities they have to offer.

D. Education and Training Program Needs

Employers continuously emphasized their perception of a disconnect between what they need and the training and other services being provided by the education and workforce systems. Employers want education and training to be better aligned to their needs, standards and expectations, and would be enthusiastic participants in effective collaborations focused on achieving that. Employers noted the following specific issues to help define the challenge:

- The need to specifically address the sector and occupational needs of industry, including career pathways and work-based learning.
- The need for public systems to move at the speed of business.
- Disconnects in credentialing.

1. **Addressing sector and occupational needs -** Employers noted the specific issues below to further define the challenge:

- **Development of Career Pathways:** Program and career pathway information needs to be organized and presented in a manner that makes it easy and valuable for employers to access, and for all partners to coordinate presentation of gainful career pathway opportunities to the emerging workforce and their parents. Moreover, the connections between target industries,

career pathways and employment opportunities, both now and in the future, need to be made very clear for all parties. Employers noted that it is important for employers and educational/workforce entities to cooperate in encouraging students to explore regional industries and to help students gain understanding of the opportunities available to them.

Examples of Solutions Proposed During the Forums:

➢ Adopt a unified career pathway system for Illinois. Protect, enhance, and incentivize students' exploration of and advancement along career pathways; need state to clarify policy and provide support for this (e.g. around dual credit).

➢ Employers emphasized their need for community colleges and K-12 education to strengthen collaboration and alignment efforts in building career pathways with stackable credentials, helping students understand entry-level opportunities and required qualifications, and how additional education will help them advance along pathways. This outreach should also help the individual answer important questions such as "What can I aspire to?" and "How can I get there?"

➢ It is essential to help students and parents understand that, in their communities, there are gainful employment opportunities that do not require the completion of a 4-year degree. One alternative is to complete programs with stackable credentials which not only provide the student with a quicker entry into the workforce but also with opportunities for advancement by means of obtaining higher education.

➢ Employers expressed a need to connect with the emerging workforce and to encourage post-secondary education as a pathway for the employee's advancement.

➢ The system should reach out those who unsuccessfully attempted post-secondary programs and have returned to the workforce without credentials. This population was cited as a potential target for reconnecting to career pathways and additional skill development. Such outreach could be a joint effort between colleges and their workforce partners serving out-of-school youth.

➢ Employers urged the community college system to continue to adopt more flexible class schedules and develop accelerated training programs to better meet the needs of working students.

- ***Expanding work-based learning options***: As alternatives to traditional semester-based education, employers want work-based training opportunities that are focused not only on academic skills, but also applied skills; are competency-based; and are more compressed, stackable, and modular.

Several employers noted the importance of on-the-job training models that allow participants to receive real world work experience, and to practice academic skills in a related work setting. Several employers across regions noted that they have developed their own on-the-job training models for new hires due to continued lack of critical skill sets possessed by new hires with seemingly related academic credentials. Incorporating expanded work-based learning models into academic programs aligned with industry needs can facilitate students gaining critical skills earlier in the process and aid them in becoming fully prepared to succeed in the job market.

Examples of Solutions Proposed During the Forums:

➢ Diversify training options to include all modalities of work-based training; new training models need to be developed by college/workforce/industry partnerships, implemented and scaled.

➢ Expand and scale existing programs, such as Accelerating Opportunity, that allow students to enroll in both WIOA Title II and CTE. Additional coordination is needed between high school equivalency attainment and occupational training. Adopt models that integrate adult education into training programs, allowing students to dual enroll in WIOA Title II and CTE.

➢ The health care industry has established several successful models across the ICCB system in the state. Other industry programs and employers might look to adapt those models that require work-based experiential learning to meet their specific industry needs.

➢ Provide more credit and non-credit options with stackable credentials. Community colleges and employers should work together to identify the curriculum and type of training that best meets the employers' need in the industry. This may be credit or non-credit, depending on the specific situation.

➢ As is often done through the Business and Industry Centers, community colleges should continue to find creative ways to work with employers to identify experienced trainers, accelerate training, and create opportunities for work-based learning.

2. **Moving at the speed of business -** Employers want education and workforce systems to be more flexible and agile in seeking to meet their training needs. Many employers expressed a strong need to upskill their incumbent workforce in order to move their employees into critical technical and leadership positions. While numerous employers have had success partnering with Illinois community colleges to develop effective training, others feel that the scheduling restrictions of community colleges and the perceived lack of understanding of their respective businesses limits their ability to partner with the education system.

Examples of Solutions Proposed During the Forums:

• More Community colleges should commit to open-entry/open-exit training – Employers are seeking flexible class times and schedules to meet the continuing education needs of working students as well as more stackable, modular training options. Training tied to semesters and/or the financial aid calendar does not meet the real-time needs of their employees who are juggling, work, home, and school.

• New training models need to be developed, implemented and scaled. Many of the employers emphasized the importance and value of non-degree credentials and non-credit training programs. They also advocated for fast-track, intensive, and work-based training vs. traditional semester-based training. "Earn and learn" training programs for college students (e.g. at UPS) were noted as having been successful.

3. **Disconnects in credentialing -** Many employers are not aware of existing work readiness credentials such as Work Keys or NCRC, or do not find them meaningful. Also, some employers find that many technical credentials do not align with the competencies needed on the job.

E. Earlier Career-Related Education and Exposure

Students need to be exposed to careers, on-the-job learning, and work much earlier. There was a clear consensus that career exposure, exploration, and work experience needs to start earlier, at the K-12 level, and optimally at the elementary school level. Community colleges, adult education, career and technical education, and K-12 partners have a significant opportunity to expand collaboration and strategic efforts and to ensure that clear and consistent career pathways are adopted statewide and intentionally pursued on a continuum from the K-12 to community college level (and beyond).

Several employer panelists noted that in Europe, students know by their mid-teens what they want to do career-wise. In Germany, 60% of high school students are engaged in internships while also in school, compared with only 5% here in the U.S. Employers feel strongly that internships, apprenticeships, and other forms of work-based learning – aligned to employers' articulated needs – need to be greatly expanded for students. There was a strong feeling that if students' career aptitudes and passions are discovered earlier, commitment and work ethic will follow, thus helping to solve the significant "soft" skill challenges noted earlier. At the same time, there is also a need to avoid tracking students onto career paths too early in their educational process. However, embedding basic and workplace skills while teaching subjects the students are interested in *at that point in time,* has been shown time and again to enhance learning. They may or may not retain the specific career interest but, either way, it is more likely they will have learned the basic and workplace skills that employers are most concerned about.

Employers feel that many young adults have a negative perception regarding the opportunities and working conditions available in key industries such as manufacturing and trucking. Employers stressed how difficult it is to convey to the public that advanced manufacturing is now a clean, automated, high-tech field that employs highly-skilled workers, pays middle class wages and provides career pathways. Employers noted that it is important for employers and educational/workforce entities to cooperate in encouraging students to seek opportunities in existing industries and to help students gain understanding of the opportunities available to them locally. It is essential to help students and parents understand that there are gainful opportunities in their communities not requiring the completion of a 4-year degree.

Examples of Solutions Proposed During the Forums:

- Expand career exploration at high school and middle school levels. In addition to understanding different careers, we should help the individual answer important questions such as "What can I aspire to?" and "How can I get there?"

- Develop an "industrial liaison" in high schools for various industrial sectors. This representative could promote consistent messaging and outreach to students and parents.

- Expand work-based learning opportunities in the K-12 and higher education system to develop career pathways for the emerging and incumbent workforce.

- Host manufacturing expos to provide youth and their parents with the opportunity to learn about the current manufacturing environment.

- Illinois needs to establish more technical programs in high school and better technology in schools to support effective learning and training. Currently, legislative mandates at the K-12 level limits elective course work. We need to peel back some of those requirements to allow time for hands on training, internships, co-op education, etc. One approach might include development of a model "vocational education high school" on community college campuses that could serve as a feeder to the community college.

III. REGIONAL FORUM REPORTS

Workforce Education Strategic Planning Project: *Regional Workforce Education Community Planning Forum*

Central Region Forum Summary Report

Forum Date: March 19th, 2015

Forum Location: Central Region, Hilton Hotel, Springfield, IL

Central Regional Forum Participants: A list of registered participants is provided in Appendix A.

Central Employer Panelists:

The following representatives from the business community provided insight into their company's workforce priorities, needs and challenges through an employer panel:

- Alicia Sparks, Memorial Medical Center

- Kristy Stolter, Continental Carbonic

- Brian Lockwood, Express Employment Professionals

- Anastasia Lingle, TCCi Manufacturing

- Steve Zarndts, Re-Bath of Illinois

Central Employer Panel Comments by Critical Themes:

1) Employers are struggling to fill a significant number of positions.

   All of the employers on the panel identified staffing shortages in positions that are critical to the success of their business. The reasons behind the shortages vary by industry and position, and include changes to the industry's environment, increased demand for their products and a severe lack of interested and qualified applicants.

2) Employers view investment in training to upskill staff (which supports movement into higher positions within the organization) as an effective retention strategy.

   Representatives from both manufacturing and health care noted an interest in providing career ladders to employees to sustain their engagement with their organization thereby limiting turnover and reducing recruitment/hiring costs.

3) Employers are not aware of work readiness credentials and find that many technical credentials do not align with the competencies needed on the job.

Most of the employers on the panel expressed a lack of familiarity with career readiness and industry certifications as well as misgivings that those certifications fully align with the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to meet their specific job requirements. They understand that business will need to collaborate further with the education system to ensure that credentials have direct application in their workplaces.

4) Employers expressed strong concern about a lack of education and understanding by young people in the following areas:

  ➢ The availability of meaningful, well-compensated employment in manufacturing or trades positions that do not require a four-year degree but are important to the growth of our economy.

  ➢ The basic requirements for being successful on a job, as well as having realistic expectations for compensation and advancement.

5) Specific Needs by Industry:

Employers on the panel represented many of the key industries in the region. Below are their comments specifically regarding their skill needs organized by industry and employer.

  ➢ Healthcare:

    ▪ Our greatest challenge right now is an unprecedented environment of change due to implementation of the Affordable Healthcare Act (ACA). We are working through the changes now to identify the impacts on our workforce.

    ▪ Recruitment is also a challenge, including:

      o Recruitment of RNs which is 20% of our workforce. We are trying to work with community college programs to bridge students to Bachelors' Degrees.

      o Surgical technologists and assistants are in higher demand in our new preventative environment.

      o Replacing the large percentage of staff overall that are scheduled to retire in the near term. We are trying to support knowledge transfer from veteran staff to less seasoned staff. We need to identify or establish programs to replace those skills.

      o Retention at some entry-level positions is also a key priority. We are trying to keep that group engaged and employed so we can upskill them to move up in our organization. Nurse burnout is very real, particularly among new nurses who have to take the night jobs. We are working on doing a better job of helping prospective and current students understand what the role is and the ladder opportunities to grow in the organization. We are also working with students in high school to expose them to the various roles in health care by allowing them to speak to our staff, see the equipment, and talk about the schedule and educational requirements.

- We are trying to figure out how to align development of our workforce with our organization's strategies. We are working with leaders across organizational divisions to identify workforce needs moving forward and develop plans to meet those goals.

- We have a strong relationship with Lincoln Land Community College and are currently working with them on the development of a sterile processing technician program.

➢ Manufacturing (Continental Carbonic):

- It is difficult to be a wage leader in our highly competitive market, and we need employees who are ready immediately to make a contribution. In fact, we can see where developmental needs are internally but we don't have the time and resources to take truck drivers off the road to go through training or to train others.

- We have a significant number of unfilled positions, both in our organization and as an industry. In Decatur, there are 5,000 truck driving job postings and only 811 applicants. Also, there are 411 maintenance positions open in Decatur and only 45 resumes looking for work.

- State laws require that drivers must be twenty-one years old to get a CDL and drive across state lines. We need help keeping people engaged with the organization and industry until they turn twenty-one.

- Upskilling and retention are also key challenges. For example, how do we take a person in production and upskill them to a maintenance tech to keep them in the organization so we don't have to keep recruiting?

- We also want to keep skilled people in Decatur, and we feel that community colleges can keep people bought into the community. That said, we don't have a partnership with our community college and have never been approached by them. We have used interns out of the community college system before and had great success. I'm very busy, and not consistently thinking about how to partner, so more help with engagement/communication would be really helpful. Email is by far the best way to reach me.

- Critical that people understand the demands and sacrifices of a job before they get into a specific training program, and it's critical that workforce development understand the requirements before they train or refer participants. For example, we can't employ someone as a driver who has multiple tickets or someone in billing who has a theft charge on their record. We also do a personality exam for applicants when hiring to provide awareness of individual strengths, challenges and needs. Those tests are critical for planning the appropriate support for new hires.

➢ Manufacturing (TCCi Manufacturing):

- Our organization employs several companies under a Decatur umbrella, and we are expanding quickly. We need a lot of Human Resources support to hire new people. We currently need more programmers (due to the addition of a big new client), engineers, and we are always looking for people in CNC that are skilled to work on

bigger machines. Also, much of the machinery is old so we always need machine maintenance staff.

- We really don't require a college degree, we're more interested in good workers that have some sort of skill set and can train themselves. We do try to upskill our workforce by taking entry-level staff and moving them from working with small parts to bigger parts.

- We are investigating if it might make sense to no longer out-source but rather distribute ourselves. Richland Community College has a good logistics program that may support our efforts. We will also hire for HVAC, and will work with Richland Community College to develop internship programs and training.

- Many of our new customers really want us to do Six Sigma, so we are pursuing moving that into Decatur.

- We already work with our community college to address recruiting needs and curriculum development for CNC. We are also interested in working with them to develop an HVAC program and expand upon an existing logistics program.

➢ Manufacturing (Re-Bath of Illinois):

- We are a small employer (about twenty-five people) and have served on our Local Workforce Investment Board (LWIB) for 10 years.

- We need carpenters/tradespeople, sales staff and office staff. We strongly believe that workforce programs need to include sales training since they are critical to the success of the business.

- We have jobs available and want to make it known to people that our organization wants to employ and train them. High school may no longer offer shop classes, but we still need those positions and will train to them. The reality is we are fighting a culture that only values jobs with a four year degree, even with the huge amount of student loan debt. Our lives would change dramatically without the practical jobs that are really needed in our communities. If our culture keeps pushing to four year education, we are doing a huge disservice to those students and our economy. We are trying to engage people through ads, but we could use help with that too.

- We would like to have a closer collaboration with the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) to ensure that people on Unemployment Insurance go through training. Also, the educational system needs to help students understand that the less romantic jobs are still jobs critical to our economy and vitality as a country.

- I currently do not have any programs with the community college where I can grab available people. We would really like to see community colleges develop and train in sales and customer service. We also really need carpenters and there are not any training programs out there. We also see an opportunity for educating students and job seekers about the opportunities out there in trades.

> Temporary Employment Services

- We see a wide cross-section of job openings and talk to a lot of applicants. In 2013, we interviewed about 900 people.

- We do more permanent and long-term placement than many staffing agencies and sometimes run across positions that are difficult to fill. Typically, this situation arises when clients are looking for specific skill requirements. Most clients, however, just want basic math, writing, comprehension, thinking skills, etc. Welders, CDL drivers in all classes, machine and facilities maintenance, and people with high Microsoft Office and data entry skills are always in demand.

- Our primary challenge now is applicant flow and recruiting. Our new applicant pool is down by almost 50% this year even though Decatur has highest unemployment rate in the state. This problem is made more challenging by increased employer expectations. Employers want new staff who can contribute right away.

- We also need to educate students earlier (high school and middle school) that there are quality jobs out there that are fulfilling and pay well and do not require a four-year degree.

Central Breakout Reports

The following tables present the priority needs, challenges and opportunities presented by each break-out group along with the corresponding strategic direction offered to address the issue:

Employer Engagement

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Businesses are results-driven and resource-constrained. They need help to understand how community colleges can work with them to build programs that do not require a tremendous amount of time from the employer and can be self-sustaining.	Data about positive results is very compelling to business. Community colleges should consistently share that data in a way that speaks to business.
Employers are challenged with finding the right education contacts that expedite the relationship.	Education and workforce need to visit and get to know the employers.
Transparency between business and the community college system is vital. We need to figure out a way to be honest and transparent with one another to build the understanding that drives partnerships.	Advisory Committees need to bring together education, economic development and workforce and be held accountable. The group needs to work with employers to improve "signaling" of needs so the community college and workforce systems can be more responsive.

Talent Development System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Job applicants lack critical basic/soft skills.	Currently, legislative mandates at the K-12 level limit elective course work. We need reduce some requirements to allow time for hands on training, internships,, etc.
We need to market career and technical trades to build understanding and interest in those fields.	We should continually examine programmatic offerings to align with industry needs. One approach could include a vocational instructor practicum so instructors stay current regarding what's going on in the field and merge that material into their instruction.

Education System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Employers have jobs and not enough applicants overall and those that do apply lack soft skills or essential technical skills.	We need to look at this as a K-20 issue with a focus on soft skill development in high school. We need to better inform K-12 about the skills needed for employment and overall career awareness.
We need better partnerships between education and workforce providers as well as with employers.	We need to get the right people to the table, build the initiatives and then empower locals to make it work in their areas. WIOA places a huge emphasis on partnership which should support this effort.

Conclusion

This provided an opportunity for stakeholder discussion that resulted in feedback for ICCB consideration as it moves forward with its strategic plan development. The most cogent points::

- Employers are facing significant recruitment challenges for key positions and are interested in partnerships with the community college and workforce systems to develop a pool of qualified labor that is ready to make an immediate contribution on the job.

- Employers are interested in support from the community college and workforce systems with providing training that leads to advancement opportunities for current employees within their firms. This approach benefits both the employee by providing higher skills and wages and also the employer by retaining good employees that contribute to their bottom line.

- Employers expressed a willingness and desire to collaborate with the community college system ensure that certifications translate into employer job classifications and requirements.

- Employers are interested in working with the K-12 and community college systems to strategically educate students about current employment opportunities in manufacturing and the trades that do not necessarily require a four-year degree, as well as the requirements, skills and expectations that need to be in place to ensure employee success on the job.

Workforce Education Strategic Planning Project:
Regional Workforce Education Community Planning Forum

East Central Region Forum Summary Report

Forum Date: April 1, 2015

Forum Location: East Central Region, Parkland College, Urbana, Illinois

East Central Regional Forum Participants: A list of registered participants is provided in Appendix A.

East Central Employer Panelists:

The following representatives from the business community provided insight into their company's workforce priorities, needs and challenges through an employer panel:

- Donnie Robinson, ThyssenKrupp

- Vicki Haugen, Vermillion Advantage

- Tom Neal, Danville Metal Stamping

- Corriene Hillard, HL Precision Machining

- Tracey Pettigrew and Adam Shanks, Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District

- Kim Lytle, Champaign-Urbana Sanitary District

East Central Employer Panel Comments by Critical Themes:

1) The current workforce is aging; where is the pipeline of new workers?

   Employers noted there is a small pool of new candidates with the right skills. Some of the experienced workers' skills are out of date, as well. The Sanitary District indicated 60-70% of the agency's workforce will be retiring in the next five to 10 years.

2) New job candidates lack many of the skills employers need

   The skills that new entrants to the workforce possess do not meet the needs of employers. Skills that seem to be particularly in short supply include mechanical aptitude, math skills, the ability/willingness to learn, and soft skills. It is vitally important that new workers be open to learning and taking direction from more senior employees. Getting up to speed for complex jobs can take as long as two years.

   Multiple employers noted that they look to the community college system to produce their job candidates, as new high school graduates aren't ready and lack many of the skills listed above.

3) It is important to connect with youth to help determine career directions.

Employers noted that it can be difficult to find candidates that want to be in their lines of work (machining, manufacturing, transportation). The marketing process should begin with encouraging youth to enter training in these fields. This will help develop interest in these lines of work, as well as building the skills necessary for workplace success.

Another related point was the recommendation that communication be enhanced between employers and the education/workforce systems. Specifically, program and career pathway information needs to be organized and presented in a manner easy for employers to access. The Illinois Pathways model was cited as a successful approach to enhance communication.

Specific Needs by Industry:

Employers on the panel represented the region's manufacturing and public sector industries. Below are their comments specifically regarding their skill needs organized by industry and employer.

➢ Manufacturing:

- Developing OJT, apprenticeships, internships and involving high school students to build excitement for entering this field.

- ThyssenKrupp has developed a program for high school students where they concurrently attend the community college, thereby attaining an industry credential when they graduate from high school. This approach helps youth accept workplace mentoring. It is important to select the right mentors to work with the youth. It is also necessary to identify the critical skills and competencies needed for various jobs in the company and to communicate these to the education system. ThyssenKrupp developed a competency model with detailed skills, goals and timeframes to make the process go more smoothly.

- HL Precision puts potential mentors through leadership courses at Parkland College. This helps technical workers become better mentors and understand how to lead others.

- ThyssenKrupp is working on a learning management system to track in-house training provided. The employer suggested that such a system could be aligned with community college curricula so that employees and Human Resources could look at training needs and stackable credentials. The President of Danville College said the college would be interested in exploring this with the employer.

➢ Public sector (county) agencies:

- The Mass Transit District is challenged by employee retention, as they find it difficult to compete with private sector transportation companies. They have developed a summer program for high school students where they are exposed to transportation jobs. They have also developed internships to teach ISO 9000 and 9001 certification. The agency cannot hire individuals until they are 21 years of age but they can prepare them for good positions prior to that time.

- The transit agency has worked with Parkland College to develop bus operator training that results in a certificate plus college credits.

- Short-term, fast-track training is needed. As Rick Maher said in the video, focus on the precise skill gaps and provide that training.

- The agencies need technically-savvy employees and expect to provide continuing education for their employees. They are currently expanding their engagement with Parkland College to ensure continuing skills enhancement.

- The Sanitation Department indicated that they will need waste water operators to be recertified on new technology. They would love for the community colleges to provide these courses. The Department is also developing pre-treatment programs with large employers and will need trained workers in this area.

- Ms. Haugen of Vermillion Advantage, a non-profit intermediary that supports economic development in several industry sectors, noted that there is a lack of trained workers for Kronos. They will need 350 well-trained individuals within the next three years.

➢ The education and workforce systems were encouraged to reach out to employers and identify:

- Real-time skill needs

- The number of workers they need trained in different skills

- In what areas of the region these employees will be needed

- What does the education system want employers to know?

- Awareness of the Fast Track Program, which includes academic credit courses

- Understand the value of establishing partnerships so employers' needs can be met

- The state has applied for a talent pipeline management grant from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. This grant would use a supply chain model to identify workforce needs and how to meet them.

- There will be upcoming sessions in the area on the development of regional sector partnerships.

East Central Breakout Reports

The tables on the following pages present the priority needs, challenges and opportunities as discussed by each break-out group, along with the corresponding strategic direction offered to address the issue:

Employer Engagement

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Enhancing math skills, work ethics among workforce	Use model from the Workforce Innovation Fund Accelerated Training for Illinois Manufacturing initiative (ATIM) Use intermediaries, such as Vermillion Advantage, to connect employers' needs and education system response Consider ACT Work Keys to demonstrate competencies Link employer competencies to industry credentials
Building workforce interest in the manufacturing field	Increase exposure to current mfg. environment (e.g. industry tours) Start exposing youth to this industry (e.g. job shadowing, service learning) Promote the industry – media, celebrating successes
Reaching and serving job seekers with barriers, including under-skilled, underemployed individuals	Short-term, fast-track training Provide credit for prior learning Seek integrated educational options Use the Accelerated Opportunity Program Work with employers to develop work-based learning strategies that result in industry-recognized credentials
Coordinating outreach to employers across K-12, community colleges, other public partners	Develop industry liaisons, work with associations and economic development entities
Addressing aging workforce	Strong partnerships to provide talent pipeline development

Talent Development System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Addressing skills gaps	Increased flexibility under WIOA should provide additional opportunities for work-based training Develop stronger partner coordination to help employers attain the skilled workers they need through just-in-time models, internships, articulated education models
Enhancing the branding of manufacturing and other industries	Increase the understanding of parents, youth, and counselors to promote the valuable opportunities available in these industries The College Express program can be used for dual-credit programs of study Use social media to promote branding
Basic skills gaps and lack of soft skills	Increase contextualized learning Increase curriculum flexibility at the secondary level so kids

	learn work ethics Embed essential skills into post-secondary programs (LLC/NAL model)

Education System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Employers and educators speak different "languages"	Use Advisory Boards to clarify roles and improve communication with businesses Revamp Learning Exchanges to enhance communication
Need for companies to have reasonable expectations	Education doesn't have the funding to say yes to everything Companies' human resource departments need to help educators understand company needs
Building the future worker pipeline	Emphasize essential skills early in education system and define student expectations in soft skills areas at the K-12 level Develop internships, especially for younger people Consider faculty internships so they fully understand business competencies needed Ensure mentoring programs are aligned & meaningful

Conclusion

The East Central Regional Forum provided an opportunity for stakeholder discussion that resulted in some clear feedback for ICCB consideration as it moves forward with its strategic plan development. The discussion provides information for DCEO to consider as well. The most cogent points are:

- Provide employers with easy-to-understand information about occupational programs and career pathways in the community colleges

- Forum participants, especially employers, repeatedly mentioned items that stand out as preeminent parts of the process, and benefits of, sector strategies and industry partnerships. For example:

- Continue to build relationships with employers so that college curriculum can be aligned to industry needs.

  ➤ Program and career pathway information needs to be organized and presented in a manner easy for employers to access. Moreover, the connections between target industries, career pathways and employment opportunities, both now and in the future, need to be made very clear for all parties.

  ➤ Marketing of career opportunities, especially in manufacturing, need to begin in secondary school, at the latest. Public institutions and agencies can support employers in this effort.

  ➤ Credentials should be linked directly to employer competencies.

  ➤ Work-based learning opportunities should be expanded; this is one real way to improve public/private communication on skills and other needs.

  ➤ Companies need to help educators understand company needs.

> Training and education institutions should develop industry liaisons and work with industry associations.

Following the session, the employer representative from ThyssenKrupp provided a summary of his thoughts. These are listed below:

- Educators and businesses are not speaking the same language regarding skills competencies and a common language needs to be developed among the parties.
- Learning styles among older generations are very different from the current, more collaborative style of knowledge transfer. This needs to be taken into account by mentors during on-the-job training for youth and other new employees.

Workforce Education Strategic Planning Project:
Regional Workforce Education Community Planning Forum

Northern Stateline Region Forum Summary Report

Forum Date: May 1, 2015

Forum Location: Northern Stateline Region, Rock Valley College, Rockford, IL

Northern Stateline Regional Forum Participants: A list of registered participants is provided in Appendix A.

Northern Stateline Employer Panelists:

The following representatives from the business community provided insight into their company's workforce priorities, needs and challenges through an employer panel:

- Karen Brown, OSF Saint Anthony Medical Center

- Sarah Heidemann, Woodward, Inc.

- Eric Black, Servicom

- Frank Rotello, Alpha Controls and Services

Northern Stateline Employer Panel Comments by Critical Themes:

Three of the panelist noted that they are community college graduates.

1) The most pressing workforce need among panel members is soft/workforce readiness skills:

Each of the four panelists talked about thinking and communication skills being in short supply among young workers. They also would like to see the following skills strengthened in new hires: successfully negotiating conflict; problem-solving; timeliness; professionalism; attitude; and willingness to work extra hours, when necessary. It was stated that, given the rapid pace of technology, many companies have to train workers on technical skills; however, companies need new workers to come in with solid workforce readiness skills.

2) The area is experiencing workforce shortages:

Three of the panelists talked about current and anticipated workforce shortages. They discussed the difficulty in finding qualified individuals with technology (digital), industry-specific and soft skills. They urged collaboration as the best way to share information and maximize worker resources.

3) The importance of partnerships:

Two of the panelists serve on the local workforce board, known as the Northern Illinois Workforce Alliance. Other local organizations with whom these employers work to attract qualified workers are Rock Valley College, the HR Collaborative (provides online training for incumbent workers) and the Rock Valley Manufacturing Academy.

It was noted that a lot of businesses are not aware of workforce system services and the panelists urged stronger connections with employers. They recommended that workforce training be focused on the industries and occupations with the greatest needs. Employers can help the workforce system understand their needs.

One panelist urged attendees to strengthen the "hand-off" from schools to businesses and from workforce partners to business. Employers can help the workforce system understand on which industry sectors to focus training opportunities.

4) Panelists urged community colleges to be flexible:

They cited the need for community colleges to be flexible in working with businesses to meet their needs, especially to develop flexible class times and schedules to meet the continuing education needs of working students. One panelist used the example of the Rock Valley Manufacturing Academy as a flexible partner that adapts to companies' changing needs.

5) Each of the panelists spoke about the importance of accountability and ownership of careers:

At Woodward, every employee is a stockholder in the company. Precision is an absolute requirement, and a sense of commitment is vital. Having that accountability promotes attention to detail and quality results.

The St. Anthony Medical Center's current campaign is "I see to it," meaning that each employee should have personal accountability to address whatever needs to be done. This helps build a sense of ownership among employees.

Alpha Controls and Services views employees as their number one asset. As a small business, they are committed to creating a culture of company ownership among employees. Employees hold each other accountable for their work and help the company recruit to fill vacant positions. This helps Alpha Controls compete effectively against larger companies to attract talent.

Servicom has established an attendance program, through which employees are paid more if they have 100% attendance and on time behavior. Mr. Black stressed that company leaders have to set the tone and standard for desired behavior.

Specific Needs by Industry:

Employers on the panel represented key industries in the region, including health care, manufacturing, an energy control (mechanical and electrical) provider and a call center. Below are their comments regarding their skill needs, organized by industry and employer:

➢ Hospital company:

- Critical workforce needs include RNs, lab professionals, physical therapists, nurse practitioners, behavioral health specialists and coding system staff

- The company values its partnership with Rock Valley College; they are currently working with the community college to develop a training program for the Patient

Account Department. Ms. Brown also expressed appreciation for the ways the local WIB (Northern Illinois Workforce Alliance) has supported health care and promoted residents' attainment of the GED. The WIB has provided funding for the HR Collaborative, which provides online training for incumbent workers.

➢ Manufacturing:

- Workforce readiness is the key need. Youth are struggling to be successful in the workplace, as their essential skills are weak. Key traits needed include:

  - Arriving at work on time

  - Teamwork

  - Willingness to work extra hours when needed

  - The company relies on OJT and continuing education to keep workers' skills in line with technology advancements. Ms. Heidemann requested that community colleges offer flexible class times and schedules to accommodate working individuals.

➢ Mechanical/Electrical Control company:

- Need workers to possess accountability, communication skills, the ability to working teams, problem solving, judgment and thinking skills

- The company has established an apprenticeship partnership with the local WIB to provide electricians and other skilled positions. A lot of the knowledge base is leaving through retirement; the company needs workers with strong skill sets.

- Building analytics and expertise with the cloud are very important. It is a long process for workers to be fully trained, and from there, they receive additional training and credentials throughout their career.

➢ Outbound call center:

- Their challenge is to find workers with the right combination of customer service and technical skills.

- Younger workers may have the technology skills but lack professionalism, attitude, communication and people skills, and attendance and other soft skills.

- In the customer service environment, workers need to be able to accept constructive criticism and improve.

Illinois Community College Board
Report on the Regional Forums

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Northern Stateline Breakout Reports

The following tables present the priority needs, challenges and opportunities presented by each break-out group along with the corresponding strategic direction offered to address the issue:

Employer Engagement

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Paperwork associated with work-based learning is extensive; make it easier for employers	DCEO indicated they would work with DOL to find ways to streamline the process for employers working with the local WIB regarding work-based training
Community college curriculum is not aligned with employers' needs in the areas of technical and essential skills	Provide accelerated training programs and be more responsive to the immediate needs of businesses. Model the health care collaborative's response to identifying employers' current needs and forecasting future training needs.
Training programs should be certified faster and in alignment with employers' needs	Bring employers to the table to ensure curriculum meets their needs. Provide range of non-credit to credit programs to upskill incumbent workers.
Community college advisory boards are not always aligned with businesses' needs.	Have a decision-maker/leader that is in alignment with local businesses.
The community college doesn't seem to know whether their graduates are employed	The metrics to track that are not yet in place. Build these metrics, as employers will invest in community college workforce training if results can be demonstrated.
Industry-recognized credentials need to be updated in community colleges and the workforce system	Employers need to define these so colleges can design appropriate curriculum
May need a certificate program in Customer Service training	ICCB to explore; work with companies across industries to develop the right content leading to certificate
All parties need to be aware of the jobs and opportunities in the pipeline	Bring economic development to the table and ensure continuous engagement with business
Consider providing customized training to meet employers' needs	

Talent Development System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Work readiness skills are a key challenge	Define them, call them **essential skills** and align employers, education and training to develop standards. Employers need to quantify what constitutes the "gold standards" for these skills
Stephenson County has developed an employability certification. They provide mentors and sponsors to work with youth to build these skills.	Include technology skills in this set of essential skills and align processes to evaluate, certify and teach these skills throughout the region
Encourage students to develop multiple skill sets. Diversified skills promote quality employees.	School systems need to incentivize double majors through multiple entry points, flexible scheduling and flexible enrollment.
Career ladders that demonstrate upward career mobility are needed	WIOA legislation should enhance flexibility to synthesize training for incumbent workers and new hires. Enhance offerings of stackable credentials, learning exchanges and adult learners in basic ed. services
Employers need succession planning and knowledge transfer, especially where ongoing turnover and retirements are a challenge	There is an opportunity for the workforce system to develop a business service package around this issue. It was also noted that the workforce system itself needs to engage in succession planning.
Develop more reality-based learning opportunities for students	Strengthen work-based learning options and work with employers to clarify their technical and soft skill needs. Would be valuable to have an automated system that could manage an area's work-based learning opportunities (e.g. tracking internships, work experience, etc.) to follow up and match newly skilled workers to employers' needs

Education System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Integrate essential skills/21st century workforce skills into classrooms. They are not currently included in curricula.	Offer part-time employment opportunities at the high school level. Would help build basic work skills. Also provide job shadowing, mentoring and exposure to training in different fields.
We need to do a better job preparing high school students for the next phase (employment and/or education	Need a consistent interpretation of dual credit policy across all regions of the state.
How can we reduce the amount of developmental education needed at the community college level?	More bridged activities
Need a flexible work and learning environment for working adults	Greater flexibility in community college schedules to meet the needs of working students

Conclusion

The Northern Stateline Regional Forum provided an opportunity for stakeholder discussion that resulted in some clear feedback for ICCB consideration as it moves forward with its strategic plan development. The employers in this group expressed strong concerns about the level of workforce readiness among new hires. The most cogent points are:

- Soft skills/workforce readiness skills were the predominant need of employers on the panel.

  - ➢ These skills seem to be in short supply in the workforce.

  - ➢ Thinking and communication skills, as well as flexibility and professionalism, are traits many workers in the region do not seem to possess.

- Digital skills are also vital and should be stronger among current workers and new workforce entrants.

- Employers urged the community college system to better meet the needs of working students.

  - ➢ Adopt more flexible class schedules

  - ➢ Develop accelerated learning programs

- Communication among partners at all levels should be strengthened.

  - ➢ The workforce system needs to understand the critical workforce issues facing employers to ensure that the services provided meet businesses' needs.

  - ➢ Seek input from all parties to ensure this region can thrive into the future.

  - ➢ Community colleges should ensure training offered addresses critical industry and occupational priorities in the region.

  - ➢ Community colleges should certify training programs faster to meet employers' rapidly changing needs (e.g., health care, technology).

Illinois Community College Board
Report on the Regional Forums

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Workforce Education Strategic Planning Project:
Regional Workforce Education Community Planning Forum

North Central Region Forum Summary Report

Forum Date: March 18th, 2015

Forum Location: North Central Region, Heartland Community College, Bloomington, IL

North Central Regional Forum Participants: A list of registered participants is provided in Appendix A.

North Central Employer Panelists:

The following representatives from the business community provided insight into their company's workforce priorities, needs and challenges through an employer panel:

- Colleen Kannaday, Advocate BroMenn Medical Center

- Mary Liz Steinbrueck, State Farm Insurance

- Ben Vanzante, Pella Windows

- Gina Vassallo, Caterpillar

- Cathy Worlow, CityLink

North Central Employer Panel Comments by Critical Themes:

1) Build partnerships that leverage the Community College system's area of expertise - training:

   All of the employers on the panel cited difficulty with finding sufficient numbers of skilled workers or developing the skills of their existing workforce, and all of the employers expressed interest in establishing partnerships with organizations that can support them with developing their talent pipeline. In fact, multiple employers noted that their expertise is running their business – not training – and they need help from partners who offer learning as their core competency.

2) Business moves fast and that pace drives their training needs:

   The employer panelists agreed that things in their world tend to change quickly, partly due to rapidly developing technology that often requires a new way of training. They need community colleges to be more responsive and adaptive to provide the training they need when they need it.

   One employer noted an internal effort to speed up employee development. Her company has spent the last two years establishing competencies for every job in their supply chain with a goal of tying those competencies to industry-recognized credentials.

3) The strategy for learning cannot be one-size fits all (i.e. we cannot expect everyone to go through the same training and get the same results):

The panelists raised the need for Community Colleges to shift away from time-based training and toward competency-based training. One panelist also noted the benefits of on-the-job training as a tool to ensure development of skills relevant, not only to the industry and occupation, but to the particular employer.

4) Employers need high quality candidates with both soft skills and technical skills:

The full panel agreed that it is critical to their business to have the right number of people that possess the right knowledge, skills and abilities. Several employers stated that the current pipeline is deficient in basic skills. In fact, one employer noted that her company has rejected many people with great technical skills because they could not effectively communicate or work on a team.

5) Employers recognize the need to reach back further into the K-12 Pipeline:

Most of the employers noted that they would like opportunities to reach students earlier (no later than middle school) to drive interest and skill development. State Farm, in an effort to drive brand awareness with youth, has set up internships for both high school and college students.

6) Specific Needs by Industry:

Employers on the panel represented many of the key industries in the region. Below are their comments specifically regarding their skill needs organized by industry and employer.

➢ Transportation ():

- We feel our new hires are lacking social skills. We have asked many of our employees if they have taken classes in communication, team-building, etc. and are finding that they have not. We are currently working with community colleges to set up these classes for employees on a volunteer basis.

- Another challenge we face is to enhance the skills of our current employees. We would like to build a career path within the company to help people move into mechanic or other specialized jobs. Right now can't do that because local programs require full-time in education.

➢ Healthcare

- The Affordable Care Act is bringing major change to our industry. We are asking everyone to practice at the top of their license. For example, physicians will now manage a care team that will focus on overall well-being of patients. In this environment, it's also very important to look at upskilling all associates to Registered Nurse.

- Another change will be a shift to care in an outpatient setting. Also, the need for medical assistants in physician's offices will grow because it is a less costly way to meet many patient needs.

- Central Sterile Technicians is an entry-level position but also one of the most complex. We want to keep these technicians engaged and climbing the ladder rather than moving out into another area to start over with retraining.

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- Building communication and critical thinking skills is our top priority. We have to train all of our associates to engage in difficult conversations, as well as adeptly navigate the context of patient safety.

- We are thinking globally to focus on partnerships as care moves to the outpatient setting. We are working with skilled nursing facilities, home care, hospice, etc.

➢ Manufacturing (Pella):

- We expect to see moderate growth and are looking to hire motivated and talented team members for manufacturing and service teams. We also have many people nearing retirement and have struggled to find skilled people to replace them. We utilize internal training programs when we can which is helping but it is not a short process to develop them internally so they perform at an adequate level. We are concerned that as the economy grows we will not have the internal capacity to adequately train.

- We really rely on training in welding, machining, equipment and maintenance, quality control and continuous improvement.

- We extend an invitation to the group to come see our facility to understand how the face of manufacturing has changed. We are also interested in developing partnerships to develop skills and also attract students into the programs.

➢ Manufacturing (Caterpillar): We see two primary challenges:

- A skills gap – we are not adequately preparing and upskilling our workforce; and

- The image of manufacturing – we need to make sure that young people understand that manufacturing is still relevant and essential to a healthy economy.

➢ Insurance:

- We want students to see a clear pathway from high school to a State Farm career.

- In terms of technical skills, we are looking for Java developers, data analytics, cyber security. Additional key skills for us include strategic thinking, agility, problem-solving, communication and virtual collaboration skills, as well as being self-driven and an agent for change.

North Central Breakout Reports

The following tables present the priority needs, challenges and opportunities presented by each break-out group along with the corresponding strategic direction offered to address the issue:

Employer Engagement

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Two-way communication between partners to provide real-time data so colleges and workforce development can react quickly to meet employer needs	Employers join Advisory Committees, and CCs ensure that employer expertise is fully acknowledged, leveraged, and communication loops are tight.
Employers can't wait for their workers to get trained and the traditional school calendar limits enrollments to only twice a year	Schools commit to building flexibility into calendars and scheduling
Programs need to offer trainers with real-life experience	Community colleges work with employers to identify experienced trainers
Employers are overwhelmed and confused by multiple contacts from system partners	Adopt a unified regional business services approach so each partner is not independently calling on employers one after another

Talent Development System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Job seekers and some employer workers lack the soft skills needed to be successful on the job.	• Bring employers into classes to talk about the importance of soft skills • Implement success coaching in colleges with faculty/staff and employer volunteers serving as the coaches • Recognize the need for and offer a credential for soft skills that will be recognized by employers • Back up programs to focus on the basics before moving onto technical training

Education System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Lack of soft skills and career readiness among students	Start teaching soft skills in middle school to lay a foundation and build upon those skills through high school
Unfilled jobs due to heavy retirements and insufficient numbers in the pipeline	Bring employers into K-12 to help dispel the myths about manufacturing and drive interest from a young age
A mismatch of student availability (often winter due to lay-offs) and availability of training due to the mandated time periods for enrollment and financial aid applications (which often lead to six months of no training activity)	Colleges explore an open-entry/open-exit model for training and consider not tying calendars to the financial aid schedule

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Conclusion

The North Central Regional Forum provided an opportunity for stakeholder discussion that resulted in some clear feedback for ICCB consideration as it moves forward with its strategic plan development. The most cogent points are:

- Employers need community colleges to be more responsive and adaptive to provide the training they need when they need it. They recognize that doing so requires a partnership where they bring critical information to the table, but they also want more flexibility in scheduling and content development from the community college system.

- Employers find that a significant number of new hires and applicants lack the soft skills and career readiness needed to be effective on the job. They are interested in community colleges helping to solve this problem. In fact, one company, CityLink, is currently working with their local community college to offer classes on communication and other soft skills for their workforce on a volunteer basis.

- Employers recognize the need to reach students at a younger age with information about what their companies have to offer, what work is really like, and what skills they need to develop to be successful. They are interested in partnerships, perhaps with the K-12 system, to reach students as early as middle school.

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Workforce Education Strategic Planning Project:
Regional Workforce Education Community Planning Forum

Northeast Region Morning Session Forum Summary Report

Forum Date: May 5th, 2015

Forum Location: Northeast Region, Moraine Valley Community College, Palos Hills, IL

Northeast Regional Forum Morning Session Participants: A list of registered participants is provided in Appendix A.

Northeast (Morning) Employer Panelists:

The following representatives from the business community provided insight into their company's workforce priorities, needs, and challenges through an employer panel:

- Mike Alagna, Schaumburg Business Association (and former COO of Nation Pizza Products)

- Lew Coffin, Werner Knaack

- Bob Greaney, Rota Skipper

- Terry Iverson, Iverson & Company

- Mike Madsen, Principal Manufacturing Corporation

- Marianne Stanke, Deloitte Services

Employer Panel Comments by Critical Themes

1. **Employers uniformly noted significant deficits in workers' (particularly young workers') "soft" or essential skills.** Particular essential skill gaps include problem-solving, interpersonal skills, commitment and work ethic, and face-to-face and other forms of communication. A need for global awareness was also cited; companies are in many cases operating in national and international contexts, and workers need to understand and appreciate cultures other than their own.

2. **Students need to be exposed to careers, on-the-job learning, and work much earlier.** Several employer panelists noted that in Europe, students know by their mid-teens what they want to do career-wise. In Germany, 60% of high school students are engaged in internships while also in school, compared with only 5% here in the U.S. Employers feel strongly that internships, apprenticeships, and other forms of work-based learning – aligned to employers' articulated needs – need to be greatly expanded for students. In a realized vein, there was a strong feeling that if students' career aptitudes and passions are discovered earlier, commitment and work ethic will follow, thus helping to solve the significant "soft" skill challenges noted above.

3. **Education and training must be better aligned to employers' needs, standards, and expectations.**
Many of the employer panelists felt that education and training partners do not understand companies' needs, and do not get out of their offices and classrooms enough to meet with employers to better understand their needs. As a result, many students and training participants are graduating from programs with credentials, but employers indicate that they are not work-ready and lack the actual "real-world" competencies to perform their jobs effectively and to employer standards. Education and training partners must ensure that their programs are driven by and aligned to industry and employer needs, and that the credentials those programs confer reliably indicate not only academic competence, but also true work readiness and technical competence.

4. Partnering with the education and training providers needs to be easier and more seamless for employers, and must provide more value. Providers are not consistently meeting employers' expectations. While several of the employer panelists indicated that they have successful training partnerships with area community colleges, others also described information flow from and outreach efforts by public partners as "a maze," "convoluted," and "inefficient." They framed this as a client relationship management issue, indicating that they often get called on by multiple community college and workforce development representatives who are not coordinating their efforts. In particular, some employers on the panel reported less-than-positive interactions with the public workforce system, noting that partnering with this system is good in theory but less so in practice and execution. There is a sense that Workforce Investment Boards don't fully understand companies' needs, that workforce system programs are difficult to navigate, and that the workforce system is not responsive or timely enough. One employer noted that workforce system representatives seem eager to "sign employers up," but then follow-through, engagement, and activity falls off rather quickly.

Specific Needs by Industry

Employers on the panel represented many of the key industries in the region. Below are their comments on specific needs organized by industry and employer.

1. General: Schaumburg Business Association (representative previous COO of Nation Pizza Products)

   ➢ We tend to know what "hard" skills are lacking. On top of the focus on developing hard skills, a focus on building "soft," interpersonal, interviewing, and communication skills is vital.

   ➢ Better identifying students'/workers' career passions is a critical need. Identifying their passion earlier will create later success.

   ➢ Information is so important. It's often not clear that public partners truly understand employers' businesses, their needs, their pay, etc. Kids are also not aware of the incredible career opportunities in manufacturing.

   ➢ While with Nation Pizza, Mike Alagna actively promoted continuing education for incumbent workers, in a training partnership with Harper College. This successful model focused on both hard and soft skills training.

   ➢ Dave's Killer Bread Company example: A third of the workers are ex-convicts. How are public partners in this region working to engage the formerly incarcerated? If ex-offenders are not meaningfully engaged in the workforce, they are likely to re-offend repeatedly.

> It's important to put "the numbers" around manufacturing job loss in context. While there has been some loss, a lot of that had to do with needing to get competitive with the rest of the world in terms of wage levels and increased skill requirements.

2. Manufacturing

> Iverson & Company

  ▪ Iverson & Company sells to manufacturers in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana and works with many colleges.

  ▪ The employer stressed the importance of marketing manufacturing careers to young people and to influencers. Manufacturers have done a poor job of being advocates for the industry and its careers, but the industry leads the way in investing talented employees. Manufacturing Day has not yet fully blossomed, but is an opportunity to bring parents and students into facilities, highlight incumbent workers' careers, and change the culture/perceptions to revitalize interest in manufacturing.

  ▪ We need to find a match in aptitude and passion. If this match can be found, then the work ethic and commitment to learning will follow suit. The American culture does not foster a method that allows for the matching of career interests/passions early on. The European model allows for students to begin exploring careers and starting on a career path far earlier. Interests, aptitudes, and passions have to be identified before college.

  ▪ Career changers: Older adults have a dramatic advantage because they are willing and able to engage with employers and with people and have well-established interpersonal skills. This is an important talent pool to tap.

  ▪ We need more integrated hands-on training for students. For example, Wisconsin's GPS model: High school students participate in both academic instruction and concurrent paid job placements on-site at hosting companies' locations, rapidly building soft and hard skills and accelerating advancement along career pathways.

> Principal Manufacturing Corporation

  ▪ Students lack realistic expectations about entry-level jobs. Students immediately expect a wage, job type, or lifestyle that entry level does not make possible. More realistic expectations need to be set – an opportunity for better coordination with colleges.

  ▪ The company has had a hard time with some of the interns sent by local colleges. Expectations, requirements, and quality of internships need to be defined by employers and standardized, so that employers can trust the quality of interns coming out. Currently, internship experiences for each student can vary widely. Working with employers to define and standardize internships could help align internship experiences and better meet employer needs and expectations.

  ▪ The employer has tried to work with the workforce board and DCEO before to try to set up programs; they tend to start out strong, but interest, activity, and candidate referrals fall off. Follow-through and responsiveness are not ideal; board staff

turnover adds to this challenge. Workforce programs can be difficult to partner with, and referred candidates often don't meet requirements. It is difficult to build workforce system relationships that work well in practice.

➢ Werner Knaack

▪ The company works with McHenry County College and others, and has positive partnerships with the colleges. It works with colleges and high schools to do internships, scholarships, and career fairs to attract workers. It partners with colleges to provide basic skills, cultural context, and leadership skills development training. There is also a pocket of manufacturers working together with colleges to set up worksite-based incumbent worker training and continued education.

▪ The company's relationship with the workforce board is new; they are working with the board to establish an internship. The company noted that they often get called upon by multiple representatives from the area's workforce development and community college systems, which is not ideal.

▪ The company wants to promote from within and will invest in training to get workers credentials. It has invested in lots of automation, which creates higher skill needs.

▪ The company sees internships as an opportunity area to engage schools, build relationships, and offer paid work experiences to students.

➢ Rota Skipper

▪ The company has partnered with many colleges and universities, including South Suburban College, Prairie State, and other colleges for interns and business cooperatives. Nothing happens without a dialogue. It's important to meet employers in the manufacturing environment – in the workplace. Get out of office and classroom and meet with employers to build trust and understanding of student base.

▪ There is a need for truly work-ready interns, particularly welders, drafters, and machinists. People have never been exposed to the modern manufacturing environment. Students may have had academic training, but have not had enough skill-based training to be ready to go on the job. Students are not getting enough hands-on training in college programs ("tools vs. screens"). The company has had to teach journey workers to work with interns – colleges could be of assistance in this area.

▪ Employers need to open themselves for plant tours. Kids don't understand clean manufacturing and the modern plant environment. It's not a dirty job.

▪ Some schools are restarting industrial arts programs. This is an opportunity to reach out to manufacturers and build relationships. Work with Chambers of Commerce and manufacturers' associations to connect with companies.

3. Business and Professional Services (telecommunications technology and media sectors): Vital skill need areas include computer skills, problem-solving, math, communication, and global awareness. Many companies are working with a global consumer base, and it is necessary for the workforce to have an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures. Workers have to understand contexts outside of the U.S. in order to help grow business.

   ➢ Need to get students hands-on experience (internships, apprenticeships, etc.) much earlier. Only 5% of American students have an internship, as opposed to 60% in Germany. Students need business knowledge and the ability to understand academic learning in business contexts. This would benefit both students and companies: students gain real-word experience and a competitive edge, and companies gain new ideas and talent-driven innovations.

   ➢ Employers' expectations are not being met by public partners. Outreach and information flow is a maze, and there are client relationship management issues. If the information flow could be reorganized, many of the issues may be resolved. We have to have a better way of working together.

Northeast (Morning) Break-Out Group Reports

The following tables present the priority needs, challenges, and opportunities presented by each break-out group along with the corresponding strategic direction offered to address the issue:

Employer Engagement

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
There is a lack of integration and collaboration among partners (colleges, the public workforce system) in reaching out to and serving employers.	ICCB and DCEO should move toward integrating business services. They should incentivize collaboration in the delivery of regional/local employer services. There needs to be a single point of contact for employers, seamlessness on the front end for employers, and better back-end collaboration among public partners.
Need to expand and standardize "earn and learn" programs, e.g. internships. Need increased flexibility and nimbleness in academic programs, and need to ensure they are relevant to employers' needs.	ICCB should provide incentives for colleges to collaborate and fast-track and curriculum (both credit and non-credit) so that colleges are not reinventing the wheel (e.g. INAM curriculum under the TAACCCT grant).
Need to develop a common language among employers, community colleges, and job seekers. Need to better understand the credentials required for hiring. Facilitate mutual learning between colleges and employers, e.g. around hiring criteria and job descriptions, etc.	ICCB and DCEO should help facilitate better and deeper, authentic relationships and dialogue between educators and employers both within colleges and in the workplace.

Talent Development System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Employers' needs change so quickly; public partners are not currently keeping up and being responsive. Relationships with employers need to be deeper and more sustained.	Partners need to collaborate to become more proactive, agile, and nimble with employers. Need models/tools for anticipating employers' needs and responding more quickly. Need a better understanding of available training resources among community colleges, the workforce system, private providers, CBOs, etc. in order to respond more proactively.
Improve partnerships and dialogue among community colleges and the workforce system engage earlier and stay engaged. Enhance regional focus and regional planning among partners. State partners don't have a great history of working together; they work in silos. Need better coordination of policies, data, etc. at the state level.	Enhance sustained, regionally-based collaboration among partners. Will need state support from ICCB and DCEO to do this. A particular need for regional collaboration is around workforce and economic data among partners, which will also require state-level support.
Students need to understand the workplace and workplace expectations. Need to assess students' aptitude and passion earlier. Provide more work-based learning opportunities for youth at the K-12 level.	Career exploration must begin at the K-12 level, ideally in elementary school. Career pathways must start at this level, not at the college level. Increase hands-on/applied learning/earn and learn models (apprenticeship school/work model – win-win for students and employers).
Need to focus on upskilling and advancing the incumbent workforce and in the process create new backfill opportunities for more junior workers. Enhance the focus on the full talent pipeline.	Focus on addressing workforce needs all along the talent pipeline, advancing incumbent workers and creating new entry-level opportunities for less-skilled workers. Help employers with succession planning, especially in light of increasing retirements of senior workers.
Workforce system clients and community colleges students generally need to work while in training, and employers need workers now. Semester-based training does not always meet students' or employers' needs. In addition, there needs to be better collaboration between the credit and non-credit divisions in community colleges.	Implement new training models that are compressed, stackable, and modular, not just semester-based. Local partners are looking to the state for added support to establish these. ICCB needs to advance competency-based education and support prior learning assessment and credit for prior learning. A significant barrier to implementing innovative training models is the (long) length of time it take to get ICCB's approval of training programs/curriculum; this needs to be addressed. Finally, journey workers are highly-skilled but lack teaching credentials; community colleges could pair their instructors with journey workers to increase work-based learning training programs.
Participants noted the challenges that arise from workforce areas, community colleges, and other partners having different/non-aligned jurisdictional districts.	ICCB and DCEO could explore aligning community college, workforce area, and economic development region boundaries to support the coordination of resources, programs, and efforts at the regional level
Participants noted that the WIOA performance measures are new to (and may be a challenge for) community colleges and Vocational Rehabilitation.	The state needs to facilitate dialogue and education around the performance measures, and use them as an opportunity to enhance alignment among partners.

Education System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Need enhanced communication across systems, better sharing of best practices, better resource leveraging across systems, and better integration of Adult Education partners.	ICCB and DCEO should increase and incentivize intentionality of sustained partnership structures and collaboration. State policy should clarify, support, and incentivize partnerships among community colleges, the workforce system, and other entities.
Career pathways are not uniform across the state, are not always well-connected between K-12 and post-secondary, and are not optimally resourced or aligned.	Adopt a unified career pathway system for Illinois. Protect, enhance, and incentivize students' exploration of and advancement along career pathways; need state to clarify policy and provide support for this (e.g. around dual credit). Prior learning assessment and credit for prior learning needs to be a part of this effort.
Need to improve student outcomes by tracking/integrating data across systems, particularly between K-12 and community colleges.	Improve state data systems to enhance access and consistency and enable partners to better leverage data. WIOA performance measures offer a significant leverage opportunity.

Conclusion

The Northeast Regional (Morning) Forum provided an opportunity for stakeholder discussion that resulted in some clear feedback for ICCB consideration as it moves forward with its strategic plan development. The most cogent points are:

- At both the state and regional/local levels, there are obvious silos among community college, workforce development, and economic development systems. Employers are frustrated with having to navigate multiple, non-integrated systems, and are not getting the services and support they need in a consistent manner. State agencies and regional partners need to cultivate intentional and sustained industry partnerships; integrate business service delivery; and become more agile, nimble, and responsive.

- Employers want work-based training alternatives to traditional semester-based education that are focused on applied skills, not just academic skills; are competency-based; and are more compressed, stackable, and modular.

- ICCB needs to fast-track its approval of both credit and non-credit programs and curriculum; current approval wait times hinder colleges' ability to be responsive to employer needs. ICCB also should also incentivize curriculum sharing statewide, and increase the use of prior learning assessment for granting credit.

- There is consensus that career exposure, exploration, and work experience needs to start earlier, at the K-12 level, and optimally at the elementary school level. Community colleges and K-12 partners have a significant opportunity to expand collaboration and strategic efforts and to ensure that clear and consistent career pathways are adopted statewide and intentionally pursued on a continuum from the K-12 to community college level (and beyond).

- Workforce, education, and economic data need to be aligned, analyzed as a whole, and better shared among partners to improve student and job seeker/worker outcomes and support continuous improvement. State partners have a significant role to play in supporting this effort.

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Workforce Education Strategic Planning Project:
Regional Workforce Education Community Planning Forum

Northeast Region Afternoon Session Forum Summary Report

Forum Date: May 5th, 2015

Forum Location: Northeast Region, Moraine Valley Community College, Palos Hills, IL

Northeast Regional Forum Afternoon Session Participants: A list of registered participants is provided in Appendix A.

Northeast (Afternoon) Employer Panelists:

The following representatives from the business community provided insight into their company's workforce priorities, needs, and challenges through an employer panel:

- Larry Burrows, Burrows Photography

- Odette Fay, Pace Suburban Bus Service

- Gregg Glotzbach, UPS Chicago Area Consolidation Hub

- Reggie Greenwood, Chicago Southland Economic Development Corporation

- David Hinderliter, Chicago Southland Chamber of Commerce

Employer Panel Comments by Critical Themes

1. **"Soft" or essential skill gaps are a widespread challenge.** Particular essential skill gaps include attendance (a significant cause of turnover); work ethic/pride; reading, writing, and math; critical thinking; and problem-solving. One employer representative also discussed the new skill sets required in the "maker" community, including teamwork, quality and quality improvement focus, and individual and team-based innovation. While these various skills are difficult to teach and difficult to measure, they are critical; having industry-recognized credentials is not enough if these skills are not present.

2. **Education and training partners need to do things differently in order to meet employers' workforce needs.** There is some sense that the conversation taking place today is the same one partners have been having for decades, without achieving desired results. Business dynamics are changing at a rapid pace, and education and training partners are not keeping pace in terms of their responsiveness. Turf and silos continue to be an issue. Partners need to build new relationships with employers, and with one another, in order to meet evolving talent needs.

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3. **New training models need to be implemented and scaled.** Many of the employers emphasized the importance and value of non-degree credentials and non-credit training programs. They also advocated for fast-track, intensive, and work-based training vs. traditional semester-based training. "Earn and learn" training programs for college students (e.g. at UPS) have been successful. Employers also noted that the amount of time it takes to get training programs approved by ICCB is a real barrier; scaling curriculum-sharing and establishing statewide industry-based training consortia were cited as ways to address program approval delays.

Specific Needs by Industry

Employers on the panel represented many of the key industries in the region. Below are their comments on specific needs organized by industry and employer.

1. General: Economic Development/Business Organizations

   ➢ Economic Development Corporation

      ▪ Many employers really need help with evaluating their HR operations and programs. Companies need assistance finding the right people and the right kinds of training that will entice workers to stay on the job long-term and help the company succeed. Many companies in the region are having a hard time finding talent from Illinois and are having to import talent from other states.

      ▪ Training to industry-recognized certifications is not always enough. "Soft" skill gaps include the ability to team-work, innovate, improve quality, and work with others in a group to innovate. What is the most effective way to impart these skills, and how do you measure them?

      ▪ The growing "makers" community, including digital design and manufacturing, requires that workers have a new mindset and a new skill set, including how to think about an idea, evaluate, work in teams, and innovate. Maker communities require extremely skilled people as well as connections to other assets, such as the TDL industry.

      ▪ Separating veterans are a talent pool we should engage.

   ➢ Chamber of Commerce

      ▪ Get children engaged earlier. If students don't first learn the soft and work-related skills at home, no educational organization can effectively fix that later. We have to engage parents; parents are both employers and employees.

      ▪ Business world dynamics are changing rapidly – faster than education and training systems are able to change. Public partners need to improve their reaction times, bring additional partners to the table, and better engage companies' HR professionals.

2. Transportation

   ➢ Bus Service

      ▪ Pace is a government agency that provides transportation services. It has a wide range of positions and skill sets. The company works closely with Moraine Valley Community College for training and coaching.

      ▪ Over 50% of the transportation industry workforce will be retiring in the next decade, and new positions will be emerging, as well; there will be lots of jobs. Essential skills for these jobs (which are often lacking) include reading, writing, math, critical thinking, problem-solving, and soft skills. Not all positions require a degree; many require a trade school education or industry certification, and offer very lucrative career paths.

      ▪ It takes too long to get training courses/programs approved in Illinois. One solution would be to establish a statewide transportation training consortium for the state, as many other states, such as CUTR in Florida, have done. The consortium maintains an inventory of the training developed by all consortium colleges and facilitates the sharing of coursework and training. This model is a way for transit agencies and colleges to share the wealth, and is a particularly helpful approach for smaller organizations with smaller budgets.

   ➢ Package Delivery Service - Chicago Area Consolidation Hub

      ▪ UPS is dedicated to promoting from within; the company tries to hire college students who will grow with the company. It offers up to $5,250/year in tuition reimbursement for students. Employees start as package handlers while in school.

      ▪ UPS has collaborated with a number of colleges. It started offering classes on-site in 2001. It developed its plant engineering mechanics training program with Moraine Valley Community College; that program has been very successful. UPS is now also partnered with Daley and Morton Colleges for supply chain management training.

      ▪ Basic skills are a real gap. The biggest issue with turnover is attendance. Pride in work is critical.

      ▪ College and other training providers need to dedicate time and resources toward understanding employer needs and developing solutions to meet those needs.

3. Professional Services:

   ➢ Break down the silos! Partners need to be willing to give if they want to get. Often you need to give something up in order to get more; it's not just about "your slice of the pie." We have to get rid of turf and pride of ownership.

   ➢ The non-credit training side of the community college is very important. Focus on individuals who don't need degrees to be successful in their careers; we need to get over the sigma around not having a degree.

   ➢ Employers need workers right now or tomorrow, but it takes longer to train. Education and training partners should be looking out further at needs down the road, anticipating those needs, and acting more proactively.

> ➢ The feedback loop to talent development efforts is critical. If education/training is not working for employers, it needs to be changed. Are partners gathering and responding to this feedback?

Northeast (Afternoon) Break-Out Group Reports

The following tables present the priority needs, challenges, and opportunities presented by each break-out group along with the corresponding strategic direction offered to address the issue:

Employer Engagement

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Providers need to synch up their programs and resources to meet employer needs "in real time." Partners need to be flexible and responsive.	Education and workforce development systems need to become nimble and quick, able to rapidly respond to employers' needs. ICCB and DCEO should consider policies, strategies, information-sharing, incentives, and support than can enable this agility.
Partners are working in silos with relation to serving employers and are not coordinating and aligning their strategies and services.	ICCB and DCEO should support the development of integrated, holistic business services and business services teams. Relationships with employers should be coordinated and shared among all partners (economic development, community colleges, workforce development, secondary education, SBDCs, etc.). Employers need single points of contact, not multiple partners approaching them. Implement a shared customer relationship management system.
Lack of shared resources for quality, holistic assessments that will ensure better referrals and employer satisfaction.	ICCB and DCEO should investigate and share resources for better whole-person assessment and job matching.
Opportunity area: Integrated industry sector strategies and directions.	Foster the development of industry sector partnerships through sector strategies. Employers need to be at the center, and partners need to support deep and ongoing relationships to truly understand employers' needs (more than meeting once a year).

Talent Development System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Partners are operating in silos and not collaborating on a regional basis to pursue shared/aligned priorities.	There is a strong need to shift to a regional and systems focus on shared and coordinated strategies. Need to break down silos between partners.
Employers clearly feel that education and training providers cannot respond quickly enough to their needs. Public partners feel they lack the tools/skills to anticipate employers' needs and respond "ahead of the curve."	Enhance partners' ability to be nimble and to anticipate and forecast needs proactively. May require enhanced data access and analysis capacity, as well as better and more ongoing employer engagement and communication.
Employers want alternatives to traditional semester-based, classroom education. "Work and learn" models have been successful with students and should be expanded.	ICCB should address the need for more flexible training options: open-entry, online, modular, etc., not just credit/classroom/semester-based. Address tension between workforce education "side" and credit "side."
There is an opportunity for enhanced focus on upskilling incumbent workers and the full talent pipeline, entry-level to advanced.	Build the focus on upskilling incumbent workers by strengthening existing sector partnerships. (This will also create new opportunities for more entry-level workers.)
It's clear that there are "pockets" of innovation and successful models taking place, but knowledge of them is limited, which inhibits replication and scaling.	ICCB and DCEO should routinely share best practices across systems in a systematic way.

Education System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Partners need to work together to better identify student's passions earlier. There is a need for earlier career awareness and exploration activities. Career pathways need to be clearer for students.	Leverage current investments in career pathways by expanding dual-credit programming and entry-level credentialing at the high school level.
We need to expand efforts to address soft skill gaps.	Expand authentic work experiences beginning in high school to develop students' soft skills. Expand internships, work-based learning opportunities, student mentoring, and Junior Achievement-style models at the secondary level.
Additional strategies for accelerating students/workers (especially those with lower skill levels and other barriers to employment/advancement) upwards along career pathways are needed. Support services and basic/developmental/adult education need to be better integrated and accelerated.	Diversify, modularize, and integrate supportive services systems and accelerated "bridge"/developmental education with career-focused training (simultaneous vs. prerequisite). Expand mentoring for individuals in need; this may be an opportunity to partner with CBOs.
ICCB's program approval process is too lengthy and inhibits colleges' ability to be responsive to employer needs.	ICCB should streamline the program approval process. Expanded use of prior learning assessment and competency-based education could also help in this area.

Conclusion

The Northeast Regional (Afternoon) Forum provided an opportunity for stakeholder discussion that resulted in some clear feedback for ICCB consideration as it moves forward with its strategic plan development. The most cogent points are:

➢ At both the state and regional/local levels, there are obvious silos among community college, workforce development, and economic development systems. Employers are frustrated with having to navigate multiple, non-integrated systems, and are not getting the services and support they need in a consistent manner. State agencies and regional partners need to cultivate intentional and sustained industry partnerships; integrate business service delivery; and become more agile, nimble, and responsive.

➢ Employers want work-based training alternatives to traditional semester-based education that are focused on applied skills, not just academic skills; are competency-based; and are more compressed, stackable, and modular. Employers want to be able to access training when they need it; they can't afford to wait for new programs to be developed, especially if they are semester- and/or classroom-based.

➢ Community colleges need to fast-track approval of both credit and non-credit programs and curriculum; current approval wait times hinder colleges' ability to be responsive to employer needs. ICCB also should also incentivize and support curriculum sharing statewide, and increase the use of prior learning assessment and competency-based education for granting credit.

➢ There is consensus that career exposure, exploration, and work-based learning need to start earlier, at the K-12 level (no later than high school). Community colleges and K-12 partners have a significant opportunity to expand collaboration and strategic efforts and to ensure that clear and consistent career pathways are adopted statewide and intentionally pursued on a continuum from the K-12 to community college level (and beyond).

➢ Forum break-out group conversations revealed several examples of strong industry partnerships, public partner collaborations, and innovative training models. However, knowledge and replication of these successful models is not at all widespread. ICCB and DCEO have roles to play in identifying, cataloguing, and sharing best-practice models and approaches.

Workforce Education Strategic Planning Project:
Regional Workforce Education Community Planning Forum

Northwest Region Forum Summary Report

Forum Date: March 31, 2015

Forum Location: Northwest Region, Illinois Valley Community College, Oglesby, IL

Northwest Regional Forum Participants: A list of registered participants is provided in Appendix A.

Northwest Region Employer Panelists:

The following representatives from the business community provided insight into their company's workforce priorities, needs and challenges through an employer panel. . All represented manufacturing employers:

- Kay Redshaw, Eakas Corporation

- Jodi Lenkaitis, Danfoss Power Solutions

- Blouke Carus, Carus Corporation

Northwest Employer Panel Comments by Critical Themes:

1) Difficulty attracting young job seekers into the manufacturing field:

Each of the panelists stressed how difficult it is to convey to the public that advanced manufacturing is now a clean, automated, high-tech field that employs highly-skilled workers, pays middle-class wages and provides career pathways. This lack of understanding regarding today's manufacturing operations has resulted in talent shortages, from entry-level positions through engineers.

Panelists urged outreach to parents, students and guidance counselors to promote interest in the field. They suggested focusing especially on moms, as the career choices youth make will be influenced by their mothers' opinions. Session participants suggested greater career exploration, at both the middle and high school levels.

It was noted that in the manufacturing sector in this region of Illinois, 5% of the workforce will need to be replaced each year through 2027. Additionally, more than 50% of Illinois Valley Community College students in the career and technical fields are incumbent workers. This means that the pool of <u>new</u> workers is even smaller than it might appear to be.

2) Manufacturing employers need workers with quality skills as they join the company:

The panelists indicated that new hires need to be skilled, especially in areas such as math, robotics, blue print reading and problem-solving. Solutions they proposed included providing credentials at the high school level, and encouraging youth to identify career directions early so they can gear their secondary education to attain relevant skills.

The panelists also indicated that, while the school systems are doing a good job, youth continue to have lots of skills gaps in the areas noted above. Some youth have difficulty with computer skills, which is hard to imagine in today's automated world. Additionally, they stated that employees need to be nimble, adapt to change and assume they will need to learn new skills throughout their work life.

Employers noted students could be more successful in high school, and graduate with better skills, if courses such as math, problem-solving and others were tied to real-world applications.

3) All workers need soft skills. Soft skills are essential skills:

The employer panel – and other employers at the session – stressed how important skills such as safety awareness, timeliness and teamwork are to successful operations. One attendee suggested that skills such as problem-solving and developing responsibility need to start at home at a very young age.

School superintendents in attendance said that new curricula provide fewer opportunities for electives; this reduces students' flexibility in taking career technical courses. However, the new standards do promote problem-solving and critical thinking.

4) Major challenge in attracting top talent:

The Carus Corporation emphasized its difficulty in attracting talent. There is a shortage of engineers locally. It is difficult to attract qualified candidates from other areas, so it would be preferable to grow talent locally. It was noted by one attendee that the rates of pay in this part of the state are lower than in some other areas. This adds to the difficulty in attracting qualified candidates. The other employers affirmed that candidates' skills do not always match the skills needed by the company.

Another occupation of concern to the employers on the panel is mechanical welders. Many candidates cannot pass the company's internal welding class, and better preparation is needed in this area.

5) Solutions that employers have adopted to address these challenges:

- Engaging interns and college students to learn skills critical to the company

- Collaborating with local school system and workforce staff, using the Pathways to Prosperity model

- Managing the talent pipeline like a supply chain (e.g. using a business model)

- Hosting manufacturing expos to provide youth and their parents with the opportunity to learn about the current manufacturing environment

- Developing a Temp to Hire program. The James Hardie Company has implemented a 60-day program through which a temporary employee learns the business and gains manufacturing experience. At the end of the trial period, all parties determine whether the worker should continue on a permanent basis.

6) How can the education and workforce systems help businesses with their workforce challenges?

- Market the quality training provided by Community Colleges. Multiple employers noted that the Community College system has been an excellent resource for providing trained workers. They suggested hosting Open Houses and inviting local businesses to tour campuses. This will help employers understand the programs and courses available.

- Educate employers on the Community College and workforce services available. Publicly-funded programs are difficult for employers to navigate on their own.

- Work more closely with high schools to promote work-based learning for <u>all</u> students. This would enhance the real-world skills that youth bring to the workplace.

- Promote post-secondary training of some type for all youth.

- Engage the "60 by 25" Network. Illinois community leaders have come together with the goal of ensuring that 60% of adults have a college or career credential by 2025. This initiative is based on the fact that all high school graduates will need some type of post-secondary training to meet employers' needs. 60 by 25 is an initiative of Advance Illinois.

- Start workforce readiness and training opportunities at the middle school level, especially exposure to STEM and robotics.

- Visit employers. Learn what types of training they need and the skills they need workers to possess. Show how Community Colleges are closing the skill gaps.

- Engage in the High School to Work Program. In this model, high school freshmen declare a career cluster. They gain work-based experience in the cluster while in high school.

- Don't forget about working-age people. Many of them need additional skills to add value for manufacturing firms.

Northwest Breakout Reports

The following tables present the priority needs, challenges and opportunities presented by each breakout group along with the corresponding strategic direction offered to address the issue:

Employer Engagement

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Employers have dramatic workforce needs – they need the partnership of the education and public workforce systems	A good foundation is in place among the college, workforce, and economic development systems. Continue working together to help employers meet their needs for qualified workers.
As employers' needs change, the Community College system needs to change as well	The Community College system must be willing to be flexible and nimble to meet employers' needs.
There is currently a lack of effective, coordinated outreach so that parents, youth and guidance counselors understand that manufacturing can be a rewarding field	Develop an "industrial liaison" in high schools for various industrial sectors. This could promote consistent messaging and outreach. Also, bring all parties to the table, clarify roles and work on more effective outreach.
Insufficient vocational education options in high schools	Develop a model "vocational education high school" on a Community College campus that could serve as a feeder to the Community College
Need additional work-based training and apprenticeships	Work-based training will be even more important under WIOA
Need shared goals and strategies	Outline a collective strategic plan
Workers lack essential (soft) skills	Include job readiness and job interviewing skills in all training curricula

Talent Development System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Resources exist but employers aren't necessarily aware of them.	Use the Collective Impact model for parties to agree on solutions using shared data.
Need to start preparing the workforce for new fields that will be in place by 2025.	Use the Advance Illinois approach to ensure the future workforce is properly trained. Don't forget about short-term training programs – can be a collaboration between Community Colleges and the workforce system. We need to explore the skills needed in the future and ensure training institutions are prepared to teach these skills.
We need to engage students in determining career directions at an earlier age	The state 4-H system is a valuable partner as well as Junior Achievement. Seek foundation support to provide "Career Cruising" programs for all students K-12. The United Way may be able to assist in this endeavor.

Education System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Educate middle school parents	Articulate career pathways and education pathways. Improve communication and emphasize career and college readiness to parents and students.
Additional coordination needed between GED attainment and occupational training	Improve integration of GED into training programs and place an emphasis on attainment of basic skills. Dual enrollment of students in WIOA and CTE.
Testing is a challenge: Do we test what we value and do we value what we test?	Use the competency skills model. Integrate project-based learning across the curriculum spectrum.
Re-educate dislocated workers to enhance their skill levels	Increase internship and apprenticeship opportunities

Conclusion

The Northwest Regional Forum provided an opportunity for stakeholder discussion that resulted in some clear feedback for ICCB consideration as it moves forward with its strategic plan development. The most cogent points include:

- Collaborative outreach strategies are needed among all stakeholders to convey to parents, students and guidance counselors that today's manufacturing jobs are a good choice for workforce entrants.

- Stronger communication linkages should be built among employers, education and the workforce system to ensure job candidates are fully prepared with the skills employers need.

- It is of vital importance to employers that youth learn soft skills – at home and at all levels of education and workforce engagement.

- Additional coordination is needed between GED attainment and occupational training. It was suggested that integrating GED into training programs might be a model to pursue, with students able to dual enroll in WIOA and CTE.

Workforce Education Strategic Planning Project:
Regional Workforce Education Community Planning Forum

Southern Region Forum Summary Report

Forum Date: April 16, 2015

Forum Location: Southern Region, Rend Lake College, Ina, Illinois

Southern Regional Forum Participants: A list of registered participants is provided in Appendix A.

Southern Employer Panelists:

The following representatives from the business community provided insight into their company's workforce priorities, needs, and challenges through an employer panel:

- Tom Blythe, St. Mary's Good Samaritan

- Rex Cusumano, Cusumano & Sons

- Julie Drake, Magnum Steel

- Angela Holmes, National Railway

Southern Employer Panel Comments by Critical Themes:

1) Employers expressed an across-industries challenge of lack of work ethic within the workforce.

   Industry encouraged community colleges to incorporate attendance accountability into programs. Employees do not understand the basic professional norms of communicating an absence (or tardiness) to their supervisors, or associate consequences due to the lack of their proactive actions.

2) Employers continue to see a disconnect between education and the workplace, although each entity is really working hard towards same goals.

   Employers need to interact more with those students and invite both educational professionals, along with these students, more often to the companies' campuses. It is important to increase the work-based learning components across educational levels to create career pathways.

3) Across industries, employers are facing the challenge of currently filling vacancies due to large outflow of retiring employees.

   Industries are not only finding it difficult to recruit talent in Southern Region talent pools; they are facing the same difficulties in other regions and states. This also takes into consideration pay-scale differences between urban vs. rural areas within the same industries.

4) It is difficult to find talent within the existing talent pool that possess the needed technical skills.

    Even when employers go through the local IBEW training programs, they receive participants who lack basic math and science skills.

    o   Other employers in the audience expressed that they face similar challenges, including a lack of technical skills in Information Technology.

5) The educational and workforce systems need to increase outreach to employers, through a coordinated and collaborative effort.

    It is important to build partnerships with individual partners and regional representatives of industry to further potential innovative initiatives and work-based learning, which will continue the dialogue started today. Because employers are inundated with emails, some have hired specific positions to address this workforce issue. Bringing together industry, economic and workforce development, and educational partners will allow opportunities to better understand what resources are available and what opportunities exist to leverage these resources.

Specific Needs by Industry:

Employers on the panel represented the region's transportation/distribution/logistics, manufacturing, and healthcare industries. Below are their comments specifically regarding their skill needs organized by industry and employer.

➢   Healthcare:

  ▪   Nursing is following the trend set by pharmaceuticals and physical therapy – the lengthening of the typical two-year program to a four-year program. This 12-18 month extension that these potential healthcare workers face due to additional educational requirements has become a barrier to employers as the potential workforce is transitioning into the longer programs.

  ▪   Healthcare industry faces challenge of on-boarding individuals who believe they want to be in the medical field, but leave once faced with the reality of the challenges of the profession (e.g. working with blood, patients who are violent).

  ▪   Healthcare has typically promoted the person with the best technical skillset; however, they often lack leadership and communication skills. There is an opportunity for the educational and workforce system to help employers address this need.

  ▪   The national healthcare model is changing, where services are focused on customer satisfaction, due to federal policies of reimbursement rates to health providers. This creates changes in the environment services are provided (whether they are being provided in a hospital or expand to the patient's home); and, this also changes the critical skillset healthcare professionals must possess, including communication and customer service.

  ▪   Technology is consistently becoming more innovative, and employees must have capacity to learn and act independently with new equipment.

- Healthcare industry has entry-level staff who survive on each paycheck. How does the industry help them develop their skills so they can grow into additional opportunities within hospital or the community?

- Healthcare industry does get the majority of their talent supply through work-based learning programs with educational systems. The employer is set to hire 200-300 nurses over the next five years. Yet, there is a need to expand the types of programs and increase programs engaged at K-12 educational levels, along with an older workforce who are transitioning to new careers.

- It was noted that employers have to do things differently and be more innovative in their approaches. An audience member who was a former healthcare professional suggested they learned more during night shift clinical hours because mentors had more time to teach varying range of skills.

➢ Transportation/Distribution/Logistics:

- Employees range from truck loaders, drivers, to office and sales personnel. Employer faces difficulty competing with urban bases and industry competitors regarding pay scale for similar positions.

- An industry representative also serves in an economic development agency and local workforce board. When talking to additional employers in the region, the primary issue identified was work ethic.

  - They worked to establish a program with stakeholders which identified 12 attributes of a world-class workforce (attendance, appearance, attitude, teamwork, loyalty, life-long learning, continuous improvement, etc.) and developed a training curriculum "Jefferson County World Class Workforce."

- The industry faces issues convincing potential talent to come to Southern Illinois. There was encouragement to do a better job in promoting all the region has to offer (e.g. hunting, fishing, beautiful scenery, short commutes to work, two hours away from several metropolitan areas).

➢ Manufacturing:

- Magnum Steel is experiencing difficulty in finding experienced talent to fill its talent pipeline; it is especially difficult to find certified machinists. They have to go out of the area to find talent, even though this is the highest-paid position.

- Magnum Steel interacts with several high schools and career fairs. It finds students who can perform basic welding mechanics. However, these students still need additional skills: metric system conversions and the ability to complete a welding job according to the blueprints specifications provided by specific clients. Additionally, it is important for every position within their shop to possess these skills.

- Magnum Steel expressed a large challenge with absenteeism and work ethic. They encouraged the community college to implement attendance accountability into their programs.

- National Railway faces technical skills shortage in both positions that manufacture locomotives and office settings (accountants, drafters). When new employees arrive, they have credentials but are still not work-ready. The employer has developed internal trainings to address, and recruits individuals with previous work experience/internships. Would like to continue to find ways to work with educational systems to expand work experience/internships/job shadowing.

- Likewise, National Railway faces work readiness skills shortages across generations (e.g. being on time, absenteeism, attitude, being ready to work, team work, customer service, communication).

- National Railway expressed encountering the challenge of getting talent to stay in Mt. Vernon area while recruiting. The company expressed a need for assistance from economic and workforce developers to send a message to potential employees concerning the best that the area has to offer, and a message that shifts the focus away from any local-area negatives.

Southern Breakout Reports

The tables on the following pages present the priority needs, challenges and opportunities as discussed by each break-out group, along with the corresponding strategic direction offered to address the issue:

Employer Engagement

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Work-based learning/apprenticeship skills	Need specific skill sets, on-the-job training at entry level
Responsibility of vendors in training	- Need to embed basic skills development and work readiness - Colleges will provide basic training even though they can't provide machines - Lack of community college funding to buy state-of-the-art equipment
Regional issues and collaboration: Employers collaboratively identify needs and then connect to partners to communicate needs and get support	- Employers need colleges to come to them - Give examples of promising models - Employers engage with all levels education—starting with primary school
Community colleges need to refocus on vocational education	Start with regional alliances and collaborate across districts to assess employers' needs and foster collaboration among colleges and employers in the region

Talent Development System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Workforce readiness skills—difficult to teach once individual is at the college level; those problems already exist prior to college and continue to the workplace.	Focused work ethic training as part of all training (CTE, certification, degree, transfer, etc.)—as well as at high schools and middle schools and even earlier. The earlier the better.
Communication – between employers and educational training, between levels of talent development, etc.	Develop relationships with employers in order to specifically define their needs (including what workforce readiness skills they require)
How to develop work opportunities in areas that many not have a large number of job opportunities or initiatives to address skillsets needed across industries?	"CEO" Program: An "entry-level" program that helps students develop skills (including "soft skills") to start and develop their own business—and example of a type of program that moves in a strategic direction towards "soft skills" development.
Oncoming WIOA performance training requirements for community colleges – along with existing program review requirements – will make the talent development system less able to quickly respond to employer needs.	Need to make the system more nimble as it moves towards an employer-centric, certification-based process (rather than a credit-hour-class-degree system).
How to ensure that business with technical skill needs (CNC operators.) can consistently find talented workers?	Systemic change needs – requires the system to respond to employers' needs. Talented individuals need to be identified and encouraged by middle school and appropriate training opportunities need to be available – and those training opportunities might require expensive equipment purchases or the pursuit of hard-to-find trainers. Also requires employer partners and state-provided funding.

Education System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
• Significant soft and workplace skill gaps; lack of critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills • Also, it is a challenge to bridge the generational gap between new workforce entrants and their managers	• Need to embed workplace readiness skill development in education and training programs. Work-based learning programs may also help address. Students need real-world workplace problems in classroom curriculum. We need to think more holistically about skill sets, not just discrete tasks or competencies; think about interconnected competency and behavior sets. • How can ICCB and DCEO help employers address communication and other generational gaps between young workforce and managers? Promising approaches that could be shared or technical assistance that could be provided?
• Need more robust and strategic relationships among employers, workforce development, and education – beyond the scope existing college advisory councils • Employers are not aware of the resources available to them, and/or are skeptical, "have tried it all before" • Employer participants indicated that accessing public partners' resources and programs is cumbersome	• Coordinated, multi-partner industry sector partnerships focused on delivering mutual value/results • Public partners need a better understanding of employers' needs and expectations (soft and technical skills, jobs available, etc.) • Have to map and better link a diverse pool of resources for employers • How to make accessing public resources/support easier and more streamlined for employers? • Must communicate value and ROI to employers; share benefits and success stories
Need more work-based learning opportunities and "real-world" career exposure for students (and start this earlier) and a more clearly-articulated learning pathways	• Build education/training pathways from more informal job shadowing to internships to formal registered apprenticeships and certificate and degree programs, aligned to regional job needs/opportunities • State should provide funding for teacher externship programs to help develop relationships with employers and increase knowledge of industry and skill needs
Students lack student success and study skills, which complicates middle school → high school → college → workplace transitions	• Strategies for embedding student success skills training into high school and college curriculum • Increase mentorship of students

Current education and workforce development systems are bureaucratic, not agile, and do not anticipate or respond to employers' needs quickly enough (connects back to employers' skepticism of the value of working with these systems). Length of time for ICCB approval on new curriculum and curriculum changes too long.	• Major "hoops" to get new training programs (for credit) approved through ICCB: 18-month process, typically. Need to fast-track approval process to accommodate employers. • Very difficult to do short-term training and meet ICCB's requirements • Partners need more administrative flexibility from ICCB, more flexibility in training design • Can develop non-credit programs while waiting for ICCB approval on for-credit programs (ICCB has a 30-day turnaround for non-credit programs)
Need better strategies for defining career pathways and upskilling and advancing workers – articulating career paths as a retention strategy for entry-level workers in particular	• Show workers graphic career path maps that demonstrate the link between increased education and higher positions/pay • How can partners better link and leverage their resources (as well as employers' resources) to facilitate continuing education and advancement for workers?
Challenges related to passing the GED exam (raised by Adult Education): Many Adult Ed students can successfully obtain an industry certification but cannot pass the test to get a GED, and a high school diploma or GED is typically required for most entry-level jobs. Real barrier to employment and advancement for this population.	Explore with employers whether a GED is really a necessity for entry-level jobs – any flexibility?

Conclusion

The Southern Regional Forum provided an opportunity for stakeholder discussion that resulted in some clear feedback for ICCB consideration as it moves forward with its strategic plan development. The discussion provides information for DCEO to consider as well. The most cogent points are:

• Forum participants, especially employers, repeatedly mentioned items that stand out as preeminent parts of the process, and benefits of, sector strategies and industry partnerships. For example:

• ICCB needs to address length of time in approval process for curriculum changes to fast-track changes for employers.

• Industries in the region are facing the crucial challenge of recruiting/retaining talent with critical and soft skills. This presents both education and workforce systems with the opportunity to better meet talent pipeline supply needs.

- There are innovating initiatives underway or being developed within small pockets of the region.

  ➢ There is a regional need to initiate a broader focus on these efforts and to collaborate and combine resources to address needs of industry. The region can begin by identifying replicable initiatives occurring within the region, then expand to explore surrounding regions and throughout the nation.

- Employers expressed their wish to have colleges come to them to bring examples of innovative programs. Workforce and educational systems can serve as the conveners in bringing industry, economic development, education, and workforce systems together in a continued conversation to identify potential opportunities for collaboration.

- Continue to build relationships with employers so that college curriculum can be aligned to industry needs, career pathways can be identified and articulated, and work-based learning opportunities can be expanded.

  ➢ Program and career pathway information needs to be organized and presented in a manner that makes it easy and valuable for employers to access, and for all partners to coordinate presentation of gainful career pathway opportunities to the emerging workforce and their parents. Moreover, the connections between target industries, career pathways and employment opportunities, both now and in the future, need to be made very clear for all parties.

  ➢ The local workforce board and community colleges have opportunities to better express the services they have available to industry. Examples of successful initiatives that have met employer needs should be collected and shared. Services and resources for employers need to be made less cumbersome to access.

  ➢ There is an expressed need for workforce, economic development, and educational systems to better coordinate their strategies and efforts. Employers, who serve on workforce investment boards and colleges advisory councils (and who especially attend the meetings of these entities), expressed a desire to hear about similar goals and needs across systems, and feel public partners' efforts lack coordination and collaboration.

Workforce Education Strategic Planning Project:
Regional Workforce Education Community Planning Forum

Southeast Region Forum Summary Report

Forum Date: April 15, 2015

Forum Location: Southeast Region, Lake Land College, Mattoon, Illinois

Southeast Regional Forum Participants: A list of registered participants is provided in Appendix A.

Southeast Employer Panelists:

The following representatives from the business community provided insight into their company's workforce priorities, needs and challenges through an employer panel:

- Bonnie Moore, Hydro-Gear

- Joe Forbes, Versatech, LLC

- Paul Smith, RR Donnelley

- Larry Yargus, Yargus Manufacturing, Inc.

Southeast Employer Panel Comments by Critical Themes:

1) Employers are experiencing difficulties with the incumbent workforce and the emerging talent pool needing key critical and soft skills.

   Employers encounter a lack of professional demeanor and communication skills (e.g. typo-filled resumes, answering cell phones during interviews, a lack of questions by the interviewees, attire with drug paraphernalia). Upon hiring a new employee, employers have difficulty retaining them due to unprofessional behavior (e.g. attire, failing to call in when late or absent, a lack of understanding as to how to receive feedback). The Hydro-Gear representative mentioned possible programs to address these issues at Marshall High School and Lake Land College; such programs are in place or are being developed. Admittedly, while these programs are attempting to provide key skills (soft skills, safety skills, work readiness, etc.), they are only being used in isolated pockets across region.

2) Employers need assistance in communicating potential career pathways to the talent pool. Such assistance includes reaching out those who unsuccessfully attempted four-year programs but have returned to workforce without credentials.

   Employers emphasized their need for community colleges to reach out to K-12 education to coordinate efforts in building career pathways with stackable credentials. This outreach should

show where an individual may connect with an entry-level position. Additionally, it should demonstrate specifically how work experience and obtaining increasing levels of higher education credentials can enable the individual to progress throughout a career. This outreach should also help the individual answer important questions such as "What can I aspire to?" and "How can I get there?"

3) Industries are adjusting their "promote from within model" due to lack of incumbent workforce retention and a lack of critical, technical, communication and leadership skills. Industry needs assistance from the education/workforce system to address their incumbent workforce challenges.

One employer related that during the last year, that employer's company hired 300 employees to fill its 900-person workforce. However, by the year's end, that company had lost 300 employee due to a lack of critical skills, poor work ethics, or having employees leave to work for competing employers.

Full-time employees face barriers in attending higher education programs for the purpose of completing their credentials (which they had only partially earned). Once they returned to full-time employment (because they needed to support their families), many found that they lacked the time needed to complete their education programs. Employers have attempted to address this issue by providing boot camps, training, and apprenticeships. Industries would like to further explore partnerships with community colleges to formalize and include academic requirements. Manufacturers are also interested in establishing a regional technical-training center, not only for high schoolers but also for 2nd or 3rd shift employees.

4) Employers within the region are constantly spending resources to compete with other employers for potential employees. A more effective approach would be to combine resources and efforts in attracting employees and in preparing the region's emerging workforce.

Specific Needs by Industry (All Manufacturers):

Employers on the panel represented the region's manufacturing industry and a variety of that industry's sectors. Below are their comments specifically regarding their skill needs organized by industry and employer:

➢ Manufacturing:

➢ Hydro-Gear expressed an immediate need to find a talent pool with the basic skills needed to be hired and retained in employment. Potential employees do not demonstrate a professional appearance or demeanor during the interview process or after being hired.

➢ Working with Marshall High School and Lake Land College to attempt to address these issues (in isolated programs).

➢ Hydro-Gear expressed concern for educators since the educational system is facing a funding shortage. Instead of teaching for the needs of the workforce, educators are reportedly teaching so that students can pass a test. In addition, vocational and arts elements, as well as sports, are being cut from educational programs. Employers understand all of this to be detrimental to the workforce because such programs are often used, early in education, to teach soft skills (e.g. critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, etc.).

➤ Hydro-Gear and RR Donnelley indicated that they had encountered a poor public perception of manufacturing while recruiting from the talent pipeline. Hydro-Gear has had some success by inviting educators and guidance counselors into the plant, but would like to see these externship opportunities expanded regionally.

➤ Hydro-Gear has an issue in retaining employees. Last year, out of its 900 employees, they had 300 new hires but also 300 who left the company's workforce. Their "promote from within" strategy is no longer effective. The company has a critical need for educational/workforce entities to provide united efforts in preparing the emerging and incumbent workforce with critical skill sets. The company believes that educational/workforce entities should supply the talent pipeline and also work with with economic development to promote communities as great places to live and work with gainful opportunities.

➤ Yargus Manufacturing, Inc. is having to be ultra-competitive to attract a workforce but has been unable to find adequate talent in the region.

➤ Worked regionally with other employers on lean manufacturing panel to recruit specific occupations. The employers could not find skill sets in the region, and for this reason, they collectively went to Indiana to find the talent needed.

➤ Initiated a 401k and a "gain to share" program to help employees; thus, the company attempted to compete with Fortune 500 companies for the same talent pool.

➤ Expressed a need for education and a workforce to assist with marketing to the emerging, regional workforce opportunities for employees to allow them to stay in their communities. Encouraged community colleges to reach out to high schools to align messaging of employment opportunities available in the community through educational pathways.

➤ RR Donnelley faces barriers regarding employer- and-employee shared values.

➤ A lack of employees with a solid work ethic. RR Donnelley knows the emerging workforce values personal time, and does not universally see the value in overtime or even a 40-hour work week. The company has tried to adopt internal policies to address these expectations, but realizes that this this still presents issues in an industry where production relies heavily upon an on-site workforce.

➤ This generation wants to feel engaged, important, and valued for its labor contributions. Hydro-Gear shows employees they are valued and does this by providing the biggest population of their employees, operators and machinists, with this direction: "To go to the next level you have to do this – get this education, and you will make this much."

Southeast Breakout Reports

The tables on the following pages present the priority needs, challenges and opportunities as discussed by each break-out group, along with the corresponding strategic direction offered to address the issue:

Employer Engagement

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Lack of Qualified Talent Pool • Basic skills to attain/retain are essential Measurement/reading needed at high school level	1.) Pre-employment math screening at adult education 2.) More required classes/aspects at high school
Access to flexible non-semester based training/classes	Adopt educational models that provide flexibility for workforce to complete in a timely manner while leveraging resources with employers. Include opportunities for 2nd and 3rd shifts.
Need supervising/leadership, job relations skills to address succession planning	1.) Succession planning for operators 2.) Increased mentorship opportunities 3.) Family referrals and financial incentives for new & current employees.
Get educators/counselors from schools into employer sites	Involve counselors • Employers need to understand the value of opening doors • Include Adult Education into tours • Career/workplace readiness
Improve Transparency	1) Manufacturers to educators 2) Government outreach in coordinated/streamlined way to employers 3) Colleges need to shift process for Outreach, Funding and Communication
Work with staffing agencies & Adult Education to teach pre-qualifier skills classes (work-based learning)	1.) Employers must ask staffing agencies 2.) Workforce Boards must assist staffing agencies to train employees 3.) Regional technical/training centers
Employer/education partnerships with apprenticeship programs	1.) Share costs 2.) Know and communicate when funding opportunities are available 3.) Employers need help to accredit their training program leading to certificates 4.) Keep paperwork simple & allow employers to customize programs to meet their needs 5.) Need manufacturing skill certificates standard that can transfer to other manufacturers 6.) Identify organizations that have apprenticeships and expand to other employers
Key Theme: Communication & Collaboration	1.) Needs to be employer-led 2.) Industry-recognized certificates are easiest to fund at a state level for workforce boards

Training & Timing	1.) A 6-month training for on-the-job training programs
• Busy season of manufacturing impacts this • There is a misunderstanding about funding available through the local workforce board	2.) Further define ways/methods to educate employers about programs available through local workforce board
Key Theme: Communication & Collaboration	1.) Needs to be employer-led 2.) Industry-recognized certificates are easiest to fund at a state level for workforce boards

Talent Development System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
How do we connect everyone, especially under the new constraints & opportunities of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)? Education, workforce, employers. The local workforce board mentioned the WIOA programs just recently moved to the community college, which has presented enhanced opportunities to be aware of partner offerings. Example: The local workforce board gained knowledge of Adult Education offerings.	Networks have started that attempt to make these connections, but manufacturers and communities need to broaden their participation and change their culture to expand knowledge and communication. Also, programs need to be more proactive.
Enhancing the perception of manufacturing	Increase the understanding of parents, youth, and counselors to promote valuable opportunities available in these industries. Produce visual aides to narrate the opportunities beginning with entry level, but increasing based on experience, skills, and educational requirements. (Examples: re-incentive high school guidance counselors; "Success in the New Economy" video available on YouTube).
Recruiting and maintaining workforce and talent	Increase efficiencies through means of work-based learning (job shadowing, mentoring, apprenticeships, work experience, regional training centers for emerging workforce and incumbent employees). Employers need to come together regionally to address these issues collectively and be a leading force in initiatives. Employers can help ensure the effectiveness of training programs by actively engaging programs such as Adult Education with guest/part-time instructors. Relationships, such as the partnership with Adult Education, can be enhanced by industry human resource professionals connecting to Adult Education programs in their communities to refer individuals who may benefit from bridge programs.
How to engage those who "haven't learned the way we teach"? This may be high school dropouts or graduates who have not completed any additional degree or certification.	Better information-sharing among various training entities, but also more opportunities for "hands-on" learning such as internships, on-the-job training, etc.
Employers are not always aware of services at community colleges and DCEO (local and statewide).	State and local ICCB, DCEO, community colleges and local workforce boards present a streamlined promotion of services. Engage with employers to identify ways resources can assist employers in planning for changes in industries.

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Education System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
There are examples of strong partnerships and innovative strategies in the region (e.g. Marshall County education/employer partnerships), but they are in "pockets," not systematized, and not fully at scale across the region. • Partners need to do a better job of sharing and soliciting needs/challenges.	Industry/employer, education, and workforce partnerships (on an industry sector basis?) need to be regional, intentional, scaled, and sustained. Need to help industry recruit and retain employees through developing the talent pipeline. Regular meetings of these partners (like today) can help foster buy-in, support, and sustainability. The group liked the notion of "coopetition" (vs. competition and "turf"). Noted the need for a regional convener. Public partners should also be more active in engaging with employers on-site in workplaces.
Resources in the region are not optimally aligned, and there may be duplication taking place	Conduct asset-mapping across all regional partners to understand resources and gaps and better align investments to shared goals and strategies. This will also help foster long-term sustainability.
There appears to be a "crack" in the secondary-to-postsecondary pathway; opportunity for high schools, colleges, and employers to better articulate and link steps on pathways. Better connect high school programs and community college programs. As general connections are made, build to include more specific skills training earlier in the process (critical thinking, etc.).	Need to enhance and replicate secondary-to-postsecondary pathways: Dual-credit, pre-apprenticeship programs, etc. Foster sharing and alignment among high schools and community colleges to promote clear career pathways and educate the community as a whole on the potential within each pathway.
Need to help lower-skilled and disengaged adults better access career opportunities and pathways	Need to create secondary-to-postsecondary bridge programs (see models like I-BEST in Washington state and Accelerating Opportunity), leverage Adult Education
Need to define what success looks like and aim for it; have not done that systematically	Regional partners should come together and concretely define what success would mean; as-is state vs. desired future state? • Need to share successes and promising approaches for replication and scaling
Job and college graduate losses to other states are a major challenge for employers and of real concern to partners	Need to explore this issue more fully, understand dynamics, and develop strategies to address
The group identified challenges similar to those identified by the other groups, particularly related to enhancing students'/employees' basic skills, communication skills, critical thinking skills, etc.	Need to explore strategies to enhance these skills by embedding them in education/training and the secondary and postsecondary levels and offering more experiential/work-based learning opportunities

The group identified several challenges that they feel need state-level attention from ICCB and DCEO:	ICCB and DCEO should consider how they could help address these challenges through their strategic plans
- Inadequate resources to address all these needs and opportunities; ICCB and DCEO need to invest - State licensure requirements for industrial training programs can be a barrier – how to streamline? - Increasing the certification requirements for teachers of dual credit courses has reduced the number of teachers available and has negatively impacted the ability to expand dual credit offerings	

Conclusion

The Southeast Regional Forum provided an opportunity for stakeholder discussion that resulted in some clear feedback for ICCB consideration as it moves forward with its strategic plan development. The discussion provides information for DCEO to consider as well. Forum participants, especially employers, repeatedly mentioned items that stand out as preeminent parts of the process, and benefits of, sector strategies and industry partnerships. For example:

- Industries in the region are facing the crucial challenge of recruiting/retaining talent with critical and soft skills. This presents both education and workforce systems with the opportunity to better meet talent pipeline supply needs.

- Innovative programs are underway or being developed within pockets of the region. There is a regional need to focus these efforts more broadly to collaborate and combine resources to address industry needs. Primarily, these efforts will address the expressed absence of qualified employees in the talent pipeline which creates a competitive environment, but does not sustain industries' ability to adequately sustain their workforce and production.

- Employers are committed to leading the conversation to express and meet their collective needs. As a result, industry needs increased administrative support to organize and convene industry, education, and workforce entities to continue implementing innovative initiatives and programs through on-going conversations.

- Continue to build relationships with employers so that college curriculum can be aligned to industry needs, career pathways can be identified and articulated, and work-based learning opportunities can be expanded

- Program and career pathway information needs to be organized and presented in a manner that makes it easy and valuable for employers to access, and for all partners to coordinate presentation of gainful career pathway opportunities to the emerging workforce and their parents. Moreover, the connections between target industries, career pathways, and employment opportunities, both now and in the future, need to be made very clear for all parties.

- The local workforce board has the opportunity to better express the services it has available to industry and educational partners.

Workforce Education Strategic Planning Project: *Regional Workforce Education Community Planning Forum*

Southwest Region Forum Summary Report

Forum Date: April 14, 2015

Forum Location: Southwest Region, Lewis & Clark Community College, Godfrey, Illinois

Southwest Regional Forum Participants: A list of registered participants is provided in Appendix A.

Southwest Employer Panelists:

The following representatives from the business community provided insight into their company's workforce priorities, needs and challenges through an employer panel:

- Chris Johnson, Phillips 66 Wood River Refinery

- Mark Kratschmer, Wegman Electric

- Ajay Pathak, OSF St. Anthony's Health Center

- Karla Teasley, American Water

Southwest Employer Panel Comments by Critical Themes:

1) Employers forecast a critical need over the next five to 10 years, due to retirements, to reinvigorate the workforce with new employees with critical skills.

   Employers, noting that the nature of their industries (primarily manufacturing), want to create a system where employees are retained for long periods of time. Human resource processes have evolved to the point where employers feel that they are able to identify the best talent out of the pool. However, the on-boarding process can be an extensive 6-months with multiple assessments and interviews. Employers noted difficulties in finding potential employees possessing enough critical skills to pass the STEM skills assessment and enough interpersonal skills to dress and act professionally.

2) New job candidates lack many of the skills employers need.

   The skills that new entrants to the workforce possess do not meet the employer needs. Skills that seem to be particularly in short supply include STEM-based skills. Employers across industries noted the importance of critical thinking and communication skills. A workforce is needed that not only understands the technical skills required but which also comprehends cause and effect and has the ability to communicate with co-workers, clients, and other members the supply chain.

Multiple employers noted that they depend on the community college system to produce their job candidates, as they require new entrants to have previous education and work experience. Employers emphasized the need to continue and expand opportunities for work-based learning, apprenticeships, and other work experience partnerships.

3) Industries are experiencing new hires who lack a work ethic and a commitment to company.

Multiple employers noted employees' general lack of commitment to show up on-time and also struggle with employee absenteeism. Employers are encouraging educational programs to build work culture and accountability into program requirements. They are also searching for ways to be flexible and innovative with millennials as most of the positions which they need to fill on-site face critical staffing shortages.

4) Employers expressed a need to connect with the emerging workforce and to encourage higher education as a pathway for the employee's advancement.

Employers noted that it is important for employers and educational/workforce entities to cooperate in encouraging students to seek fields, in the region, in existing industries and to help students gain understanding of the opportunities available to them. It is essential to help students and parents understand that, in their communities, there are gainful opportunities not requiring the completion of a 4-year degree. One alternative is to complete programs with stackable credentials which not only provide the student with a quicker entry into the workforce but also with opportunities of advancement by means of obtaining higher education.

Specific Needs by Industry:

Employers on the panel represented the region's manufacturing, healthcare and public sector industries. Below are their comments specifically regarding their skill needs organized by industry and employer:

➢ Manufacturing:

▪ Philips 66 Wood River Refinery has a trend of retaining employees for their career life cycle. One employee has been there for 50 years. The employer had a large hiring influx in the 1980s; however, those longtime employees are now retiring. For this reason, the company has a crucial need to find those qualified with both critical and soft skills. Their 6-month on-boarding process has proven to be inadequate in finding those who cannot only pass critical skills assessments, but who also possess the interpersonal skills needed for successful interviews.

▪ Phillips 66 Wood River Refinery noted that, in addition to critical thinking and STEM skills, they have a dire need for new workforce entrants to have the ability to comprehend the importance of on-the-job safety.

▪ According to the panel, there is an extremely important need to market manufacturing as a viable, safe, clean part of industry to attract the emerging workforce. Both manufacturing representatives indicated that they participate in job fairs and educational programs to engage with students. Also, they would like to see a more extensive coordinated marketing process among employers and education/workforce entities.

➢ Construction and Maintenance:

▪ Wegman Electric noted it has been successful in working with the community college regarding apprenticeship programs, including a program where apprenticeship completers can obtain an associate's degree by completing a few additional credit hours. They noted the need to expand these programs into high schools through dual credit while exposing students to opportunities and providing work experience.

▪ Wegman Electric noted that there is a need to be proactive and to stay ahead of the changing markets of each industry. They noted several initiatives by the community colleges to proactively address this need. One of these proactive ventures involved the solar industry, while another studied the effects of the great North American river systems. Wegman Electric urged that the workforce system take a more proactive approach and help industry get out in front of new trends.

▪ Wegman Electric noted that critical thinking skills was the hardest skillset to find in the potential talent pool. It is important to train the emerging workforce in the comprehension of critical skills, but it is also equally important to train that workforce to critically assess certain situations. Some of these situations are: "What caused it to happen?" "What happened leading up to that?"

➢ Healthcare:

▪ In the region, St. Anthony's hospital employees around 900, and the community colleges are the largest supplier to their talent pipeline.

▪ Healthcare industry is a micro-organism requiring all industries to keep hospitals operating, although its largest constituency is nursing. Changing environment of federal regulations (Affordable Care Act, Medicaid, etc.) is forcing the healthcare industry to be more customer service-based. As reimbursement rates are now dependent upon the ratings customers provide, the healthcare industry needs nurses and other medical professionals to not only have clinical skills, but also interpersonal skills to be able to communicate and enhance patient experience. Employers need educational training programs and workforce system to assist in preparing future talent pipeline.

▪ The healthcare industry is rapidly changing due to new regulations and technology. The future jobs, five to 10 years from now, have not been created, but will include much more mobile services and home care. Training programs must keep apprised of the changes and provide students with technology skills to solely operate increasingly technologically-advanced machinery.

▪ Industry representative noted that the barriers to entering higher education have been lowered, but employers and educational/workforce partners still need to work together to gain buy-in from students the importance of obtaining higher education.

▪ Industry representative noted the importance of educational programs incorporating the values and work culture of individual industries/employers as they are providing a large portion of the talent pipeline. Encouraged increased work-

based learning, and changes to educational programs to incorporate culture and accountability to address issues such as absenteeism.

➢ Public Sector (American Water):

- ▪ Hiring multiple positions, including lab techs, union employees, customer service, and billing and looking for key industry-recognized credentials.

- ▪ Science, math, computer software, electronics, control strategies, critical thinking, and verbal skills were each identified as key skills American Water looks for. Industry representative emphasized the need for additional key skills, such as leadership, seeing the bigger picture, eagerness to learn, and willingness to change as industry is always adopting modifications. The ability to deal with the stress of change was highlighted as a key skill set that was lacking from current and emerging workforce.

- ▪ American Water expressed a crucial need to implement a learning management system to capture institutional knowledge prior to mass retirements. The employer suggested that such a system could be aligned with community college programs to expand work experience programs and include students capturing the knowledge they learn for the company.

- ▪ What does the education system want employers to know?

- ▪ It would be helpful to have frontline staff come to forums and other convening of employers, educators and the workforce system to help facilitate deeper relationships and hear more detailed accounts of skills gaps they see when new staff are on-boarded.

- ▪ There will be upcoming sessions in the area on the development of regional sector partnerships.

Southwest Breakout Reports

The tables on the following pages present the priority needs, challenges and opportunities as discussed by each break-out group, along with the corresponding strategic direction offered to address the issue:

Employer Engagement

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
How to connect employers and educators/trainers? Insufficient understanding of industry and employer needs, and employers don't typically "market" to the community.	Continue the dialogue and include frontline industry staff, educators, and training providers. Partners need to be aligned to shared targets. Need comprehensive, coordinated industry sector strategies that are employer driven/led and supported by workforce and education partners.
How and when to communicate what employers have to offer (open communication with young people) and set an expectation for realities of each industry?	Opportunities for co-op/work experience/ summer internships/job fairs/shadowing and other opportunities to partner. Start earlier than high school.
Clarifying the essential skills (e.g. soft skills, flexibility, communication)	Opportunities for mock trainings, teacher externships, and other opportunities to integrate work culture into training programs
Mindset of youth – • Want to make a difference, don't just want a job • Shared responsibilities between education and industries to understand and change perceptions and misperceptions	Outreach/communications to help youth understand the realities of industries and careers, and concurrent efforts to help employers understand and work with this generation of workers

Talent Development System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
How do we get everyone to the table? Education, workforce, employers	Need a unified process with a designated "convener" identified to continue bringing education, workforce and education together to identify additional opportunities. Current workgroups and initiatives at the community colleges were discussed, but not all participants were aware. WIOA was also mentioned as a resource for the workforce board to contribute to the convening.
Enhancing the branding of manufacturing and other industries	Increase the understanding of parents, youth, and counselors to promote the valuable opportunities available in these industries. Increase work-based learning (apprenticeships, OJTs, job shadowing, internships, etc.) opportunities on-site at employers, beginning as early as secondary school.
Basic skills gaps and lack of soft skills, communication and critical thinking	Increase contextualized learning Increase curriculum flexibility at the secondary level so kids learn work ethics
How do we keep the emerging workforce in our area and attending our schools? Surrounding states educational entities are directly marketing to Southern Illinois students.	Address issues such as tuition, through such means as state budget and employer tuition assistance. Marketing of region as great place to live and work to retain population who are moving to larger cities and surrounding states.
Employers are not always aware of services at community colleges and DCEO (local and statewide).	State and Local ICCB, DCEO, community colleges and local workforce boards present a streamlined promotion of services. Engage with employers to identify ways resources can assist employers in future thinking and preparing for changes in industries.

Education System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Special skills needed, work ethic, critical thinking, collaboration	Use integrated models (examples: Bridge programs, "CEO Models")
Even parents struggle to create discipline factors and basic accountability	Some programs have already attempted to address, such as Raging Rivers has incorporated Disney's customer service model
Addressing the system as it is now to connect community college and high school programs. As general connections are made, build to include more specific skills training early in the process (critical thinking, etc.)	Continue enhancing opportunities for dual credit and sharing between college and high school program to promote an aligned career pathway. An aligned system can do a better job educating the community as a whole on the potential within each pathway.
Identifying and sharing successful models and programs	ICCB should play a leadership role in highlighting and supporting replication of successful approaches
Exposing students to careers and the workplace earlier, and integrating that into "academic" curriculum	More career exposure and exploration activities at the secondary level; help students understand the "real world" applications of what they're learning

Conclusion

The Southwest Regional Forum provided an opportunity for stakeholder discussion that resulted in some clear feedback for ICCB consideration as it moves forward with its strategic plan development. The discussion provides information for DCEO to consider as well. The most cogent points are:

- Forum participants, especially employers, repeatedly mentioned items that stand out as preeminent parts of the process, and benefits of, sector strategies and industry partnerships. For example:

- Industries in the region are facing the crucial challenge of finding talent with critical and soft skills due to the high rate of retirement from an aging workforce. This presents both education and workforce systems with the opportunity to better meet the talent pipeline supply needs.

- There needs to be continued building of relationships with employers so that college curriculums may be aligned to meet industry needs.

  - ➢ Program and career pathway information needs to be organized and presented in a manner that makes it easy and valuable for employers to access, and for all partners to coordinate presentation of gainful career pathway opportunities to the emerging workforce and their parents. Moreover, the connections between target industries, career pathways and employment opportunities, both now and in the future, need to be made very clear for all parties.

  - ➢ Work-based learning opportunities should be expanded; this is worthwhile way to improve public/private communication on skills and other needs.

  - ➢ ICCB and DCEO, as well as local community colleges and workforce boards, have the opportunity to better engage additional employers through a streamlined process to educate others about available services and to provide resources to industries to address future workforce challenges and opportunities.

Workforce Education Strategic Planning Project:
Regional Workforce Education Community Planning Forum

West Central Region Forum Summary Report

Forum Date: April 30, 2015

Forum Location: West Central Region Forum: Carl Sandburg College, Galesburg, IL

West Central Regional Forum Participants: A list of registered participants is provided in Appendix A.

West Central Employer Panelists:

The following representatives from the business community provided insight into their company's workforce priorities, needs and challenges through an employer panel:

- Michelle Reyburn, Smithfield/Farmland Foods

- Julie Bonansinga, Inter-Connect Employment Services

- Dave Andersen, BNSF

- Ray Whitehead, Pegasus

- Katie Schelp, Quincy Medical Group

- Casey Ragar, Sharkey Transportation

West Central Employer Panel Comments by Critical Themes:

1) Workers need stronger digital skills:

   Training in computer literacy and digital problem-solving should begin at kindergarten; there continues to be gaps in new and seasoned workers' technology skills. Several of the employers, in different industries, discussed how important a strong digital base is for job success. It was also noted that the region (largely rural) may be five to 10 years "behind" in digital capacity; they suggested that jurisdictions need to invest in infrastructure to ensure schools and homes have the digital capacity they need.

2) Job candidates often lack soft skills/essential skills:

   The majority of the employers on the panel cited a lack of soft skills as a primary challenge for attracting and retaining a qualified workforce. Thinking skills, teamwork and the ability to adapt to change were cited as key skills needed, as were customer service and the willingness to stay on a job and take on additional responsibilities – e.g., job retention (these two for the health care field). The employer panel members encouraged teaching life management skills at the high school level.

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3) The employers wished more parents, high school counselors and youth understood the value of short-term certificate training:

Too many youth, parents and school counselors believe that a four-year bachelor's degree is the only viable path for high school graduates. More individuals need to see the value of skilled trades, manufacturing and transportation as viable career alternatives where workers can earn a good living and have a stable career. Additionally, schools need to promote career planning among youth.

4) The perception of the manufacturing and trucking industries needs to be enhanced to attract new, qualified entrants.

5) Additional industry engagement by the K-12 system would benefit employers:

The employer panel advocated for more technical programs in high schools. It was also noted that high schools don't have the money for the right technology to effectively carry out training. Perhaps the state could contribute funding for this.

It was noted that at Galesburg High School, counselors conduct career interest surveys, focusing on growth industries within the region. School personnel attending the session endorsed the idea of businesses coming in to speak to high school students.

Specific Needs by Industry:

Employers on the panel represented many of the key industries in the region, including manufacturing, health care and transportation. Below are their comments specifically regarding their skill needs organized by industry and employer.

- Railroad:
  - Would like the secondary and post-secondary educational system to understand the industry's talent needs.
  - The industry representative noted high attrition among skilled workers.

- Manufacturing:
  - Lack of technical expertise in their workforce
  - Need the community college to provide computerized numerical control (CNC) training
  - All workers need foundational computer skills and many need advanced technical training (e.g. CAD, digital control operation, robotics, programmable logic controller)
  - The industry needs qualified individuals to maintain and repair complex systems

- Staffing Company:
  - Workers lack soft skills and the ability to complete quality applications for jobs
  - Schools need to teach essential (soft) skills that will serve workers in all fields, including:
  - Thinking skills
  - Team work
  - The ability to adapt to change

➢ Health Care:

- ▪ Workers lack customer service skills

- ▪ Workers are needed in specific skill areas, such as medical coding and billing

- ▪ The company is interested in having the community college partner with them to provide online training

- ▪ Employer recommended that community colleges publicize the success of students that complete short-term certificates, in addition to reporting the number of community college students that go on to receive four-year degrees. Doing so could enhance the perception of the fields in which only short-term training is needed.

- ▪ Millennials want rapid advancement up the career ladder, while patients want stability in their health care providers. The employer would like to see development of greater depth and breadth of job knowledge, to provide workers with progression while continuing in current positions.

- ▪ Community college personnel noted they have 19 different medical technology training programs. They have difficulty ensuring equipment used in training keeps pace with technological change. This makes it difficult to ensure students are trained on the equipment they will use on the job. They suggested that new solutions are needed to address this.

➢ Transportation:

- ▪ They currently have driver and mechanic shortages, with turnover for drivers at 95% in the first year

- ▪ Perception of this field needs to be enhanced so the employer can attract new entrants – there are not enough young people moving into the field. The average driver age is 58 and the average age of truck driving students is 48.

- ▪ The community college noted it has difficulty attracting students interested in over-the-road driving. They are adopting a model that couples online training with one-week driving experience. It was noted that this could be a good solution for returning veterans who often have experience driving different types of vehicles.

- ▪ The employer values community college graduates; he indicated they provide better quality candidates than those trained by private trucking schools.

- ▪ The company is working with the community college system to ensure technical positive control systems are part of the truck driving curriculum.

West Central Breakout Reports

The following tables present the priority needs, challenges and opportunities presented by each break-out group along with the corresponding strategic direction offered to address the issue:

Employer Engagement

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Certain occupations have challenges with their public perception	Need to convey to students and parents that these are career fields in which workers without a degree can make a good living
The work ethic is different with youth; they seem to lack motivation	Junior Achievement is a valuable program that builds these skills. Approach it by asking what the youth want to have in their lives and invite them to think about how they can get there. Businesses may also need to become more flexible in their approaches to how employees work.
There is a disconnect in understanding of needed skills between industry and secondary/post-secondary education	Business needs to reach out to education. Consider student-driven class models (e.g. Warsaw). Integrate college credit and workplace experience early in certificate programs.
A Market to Hire approach was suggested.	Conduct industry tours; provide internships so youth can explore daily activities of different jobs. Show new hires see the big company picture so they become aware of career opportunities. Would help companies retain workers. Use social media to promote jobs.
The Common Core curriculum leaves no time for work study or technical training	Education needs to change so more students benefit from dual credit and articulated credit programs.

Education System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Challenges in schools funding digital equipment, both in the short- and long-term	Make legislators aware of these needs.
IL education policy is disadvantageous – teacher licensure requirements need review and updating. Additionally, there are too many curricular mandates.	Results in a competitive disadvantage for IL. Policy alignment is needed at the state level among ICCB, ISBE, IBHE.
Important to find adults in need of Basic Education and provide services that align with their needs and schedules	Seek more classroom plus on-the-job training at Carl Sandburg College and John Woods College. Continue collaboration with Adult Basic Ed.
It is important to instill in students the ability to view long-term goals and see the value of long-term education and training investments	There is value in having students understand they don't all need bachelors' degrees. Re-brand educational attainment and short-term certificate "career cruising." Workplace training is valuable. John Woods is taking technical classes (e.g., welding, CNA) to the high school via dual credit programs. Post-secondary options for training are not always known by the public. Establish groups for youth, such as 4-H for career exploration.
Teacher shortages are expected. What is the education industry doing to develop its pipeline?	

Talent Development System Alignment

Needs, Challenges & Opportunities	Strategic Directions
Changes in federal regulations are driving changes in work processes	Need better support and resources to assist employers in meeting regulatory changes, especially regarding necessary training upgrades and continuing ed. requirements. Need stronger and more frequent communication between economic development and education to meet employers' needs.
Students and job changers need stronger technical and essential skills	Develop stronger alignment among school curricula, career knowledge, career pathways and workforce readiness skill training. Schools must evaluate and incentivize the development of workforce readiness skills. Pike County HS has developed a certification for soft skills that employers are beginning to consider when hiring. Use what is already being done and upgrade, expand and coordinate, rather than starting from scratch. Junior Achievement is valuable at the elementary and middle school levels.
There is an opportunity with people who grew up here, have moved away and now want to come back to raise families.	Determine how to reach out to that specific demographic (age 25-35?) and provide job and skill matching services. Improve infrastructure to enhance "talent attraction" of the region.
Ways to retain talent developed in regional education institutions so they don't leave the region when they graduate. Also need to continue to upskill existing workforce and improve alignment between employer skill needs and career paths that youth choose.	Enhance communication among counselors (HS, Community College and 4-yr college) and local employers to ensure students are aware of local employment opportunities. To reach long-term unemployed residents and under-skilled workers, develop a system to identify their skills and match them to employers' needs in a just-in-time type of system. Ohio has developed a skills-based employer matching website through grant from the Gates Foundation. John Woods College is considering using and adapting this system. Bring the media into the discussion of employer needs to reach more residents with relevant skills.
Ensure that education, economic development and workforce development staff don't overburden employers with uncoordinated strategies	Enhance coordination and communication among these parties and develop a single point of contact for businesses. Streamline the process for supporting businesses.

Conclusion

The West Central Regional Forum provided an opportunity for stakeholder discussion that resulted in some clear feedback for ICCB consideration as it moves forward with its strategic plan development. This group tended to focus largely on things that could be done to improve student outcomes and the workforce through better connections between K-12, community colleges and employers. The most cogent points are:

- There are a number of areas where K-12 changes would improve long-term workforce quality and enhance graduates' opportunities in the job market and in building careers:

  - In general, forge much closer relationships between K-12 schools and employers

  - Ensure that all schools are digitally-connected and equipped

  - Design organized approaches, including employer presentations and visits to companies, to orient students to career opportunities that do not require four-year degrees

  - Develop more technical training programs at the high school level (dual enrollment). This could allow the community to retain more new graduates and better meet employers' workforce needs.

  - Articulate college credit to advanced secondary school accomplishments and workforce experience.

  - Soft skills need to be strengthened. Junior Achievement and 4-H programs can teach these skills in the schools.

- Post-secondary training is vital for most jobs; the value of all types of post-secondary training needs to be promoted.

- There is a lack of understanding about the range and nature of workforce skills between industry and secondary/post-secondary education.

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APPENDIX A: FORUM REGISTRANTS BY REGION

CENTRAL			
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APPENDIX B: CHART OF EMPLOYER SKILL NEEDS BY REGION AND INDUSTRY REPRESENTED AT FORUMS

The eleven Regional Forums held across Illinois included employer-focused discussions assessing each region's unique industry needs and opportunities. Collectively, the insight gained at these Forums provides a comprehensive look at the talent pipeline environment across Illinois as well as information from employers on the specific industries they represent. Each of the forums provided regional employer panels consisting of four-five industry representatives from key sectors.

The individual Forum reports appearing on pages 15-79 of this report each includes a section entitled "Specific Needs by Industry". In addition, the Summary section, pages 9-10, summarizes employer needs by industry as they were expressed across the state. The industry specific information from each of the employer panels is presented in the matrix below. The comments are categorized by region and industry. Please note that not all industries were represented at each panel, and some panels had multiple representatives from the same sector. Thus, some industry boxes will appear blank in regions where no representative was included in the employer panel.

	REGION				
INDUSTRY	**Northern Stateline**	**W. Central**	**Southwest**	**Southern**	**Southeast**
Healthcare	Need RN, lab pros, physical therapists, nurse practitioners, behavioral health, coding system personnel, training. Work well with Rock Valley College and Northern Illinois Workforce Alliance.		Changing environment due to Affordable Care Act is forcing industry to be customer service focused. Industry is rapidly changing due to technology and staff need technical skills to adapt. Encouraged work-based learning programs that embed the values of work culture (e.g. attendance, punctuality, teamwork)	Medical educational programs lengthening to 4 years has created gap in talent supply chain. Need employees with technical skills, and also managerial/leadership skills. Changes in the national healthcare model require improvement in customer service skills.	
Manufacturing	Workforce readiness, request flex class schedules for working people.	Lack of technical expertise in their workforce, all workers need foundational computer skills and many need advanced technical training (e.g. CAD, digital control operation, robotics, programmable logic controller). The industry needs qualified individuals to maintain and repair complex systems and also needs for the community college to provide computerized numerical control (CNC) training.	Difficulty finding people who can pass interview and skills assessment during hiring process. Need critical thinking, STEM and on-the-job safety skills. Need assistance marketing industry.	Extremely difficult to find machinist. Struggle with new employees who have the credentials, but lack skills. Encourage more work-based learning opportunities.	Potential employees do not present professional appearance or demeanor. Need assistance marketing manufacturing to potential talent pool. Ultra-competitive environment to retain employees.

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	REGION				
INDUSTRY	**Northern Stateline**	**W. Central**	**Southwest**	**Southern**	**Southeast**
Mechanical/ Electrical	Need soft skills, strong skill sets, building analytics and expertise in the cloud. Participates in apprenticeships with local workforce board for electricians and other skills.	All need foundational computer skills, many need advanced technical training.	Want to expand apprenticeship programs into high schools. Need for community colleges and workforce boards to help industry stay ahead of trends through research and studies.		
Call Center (Customer Service)	Customer service/technical skills; professionalism/soft skills. Younger workers need to accept constructive criticism				
Transportation, Distribution & Logistics		High attrition among skilled workers; secondary and post-secondary need to understand industry's talent needs.		Employers face challenges in attracting employees to Southern Illinois due to pre-existing perceptions. Need assistance marketing area to potential employees.	
Business and Professional Services		Workers need customer service skills and specific skills, such as medical billing and coding. The industry representative would like to partner with the community college to provide online training.			

INDUSTRY	REGION				
	Northern Stateline	W. Central	Southwest	Southern	Southeast
Information Technology					
Public Sector					
Utilities *public sector			New hires, including lab-techs, union employees, customer service and billing, looking for key industry recognized credentials. Additional skills needed: STEM, computer software, electronics, critical thinking, verbal, willingness to learn.		
Economic Development/ Business Organizations					

INDUSTRY	REGION					
	E. Central	Central	N. Central	Northwest	Northeast AM	Northeast PM
Healthcare		Changes in Affordable Care Act are impacting industry. Recruitment a challenge for RNs and surgical technicians. Retention of entry-level employees is a key priority.	Changes in Affordable Care Act result in needing to upskill all associates to RNs. Would also like to enhance career pathways for incumbent employees to progress in specialized fields. Build communication and critical thinking skills.			
Manufacturing	Develop OJT, apprenticeship, internship opportunities, including high schoolers. Developing internal learning management system, which could be aligned with community college to create stackable credentials.	Incumbent truck drivers need additional skills, but lack time and resources to take truck drivers off the road. In Decatur, 55,000 truck driving job postings and only 811 applicants; 411 maintenance positions and only 45 applicants. Upskilling and retention key challenges, along with competitive wages. Need to form partnership with community colleges. Need human resources help due to new hire activity.	Internal training does not have the capacity to train workforce due to high volume of retirements. Manufacturers need assistance with marketing career to talent pool.	Need to increase the talent pool by promoting the career pathways. New hires need to be skilled in math, robotics, blue print reading problem-solving and soft skills.	Manufacturing needs to be marketed to emerging workforce and influencers. Need more integrated, hands-on training for students. Including, academic learning and concurrent paid job placements at hosting companies. Expectations, requirements, and quality of internships need to be defined by employers and standardized, so that employers can trust the quality of interns coming out.	

INDUSTRY	REGION					
	E. Central	Central	N. Central	Northwest	Northeast AM	Northeast PM
Mechanical/ Electrical						
Call Center (Customer Service)						
Transportation, Distribution & Logistics		(See manufacturing)	New hires lack social skills (e.g. team-building, communication). Incumbent employees need additional skills/training to advance, but community college programs only offered on a full-time basis.			Over 50% of the transportation industry workforce will be retiring in the next decade. Essential skills for these jobs (which are often lacking) include reading, writing, math, critical thinking, problem-solving, and soft skills. A consistent training program built around industry needs is needed statewide.

INDUSTRY	REGION					
	E. Central	Central	N. Central	Northwest	Northeast AM	Northeast PM
Business and Professional Services		(See manufacturing)			Vital skill need areas include computer skills, problem-solving, math, communication, and global awareness. Many companies are working with a global consumer base, and it is necessary for the workforce to have an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures. Students need internships to gain ability to understand academic learning in a business context.	Need for education and training programs to work together to address industries needs, including anticipating changes in industry standards which will be adopted in curriculum.
Information Technology			Looking for technical skills (e.g. java developers, data analytics, cyber security), in addition to other skills; strategic thinking, agility, problem-solving, communication and virtual collaboration skills.			

	REGION					
INDUSTRY	**E. Central**	**Central**	**N. Central**	**Northwest**	**Northeast AM**	**Northeast PM**
Public Sector	Struggle with employee retention, difficult to compete with private sector transportation companies. Short-term, fast-track training is needed. Need for waste water operators to be recertified on new technology, would like community partners to assist.					
Utilities *public sector						

INDUSTRY	REGION					
	E. Central	Central	N. Central	Northwest	Northeast AM	Northeast PM
Economic Development/ Business Organizations						Companies need assistance understanding the long-term training strategies which will help engage/retain their workforce. Additionally, outside of industry recognized credentials businesses face soft skills gaps in the talent pool. The changing nature of "makers" community, including digital design and manufacturing, requires that workers have a new mindset and a new skill set, including how to think about an idea, evaluate, work in teams, and innovate.