Workforce Learning Summit Innovation or Best Practice

Wilson Community College

Wilson Academy of Applied Technology (WAAT)

The project is a close cooperation between Wilson Community College and Wilson County Schools featuring an Advanced Manufacturing Academy designed on the very successful Early College model. Beginning in the ninth grade, students will be enrolled in a manufacturing workforce development program leading to college-level laboratory and coursework in their junior and senior years. The college coursework will prepare them to transition to full-time community college students to complete the associate in science degree in one of several programs directly relating to advanced manufacturing. The college will also develop the program as a standalone offering for students entering the college without having to have come through the Wilson County Schools portion of the program.

DETAILS

The simple reality is that in the decade of the 2000s, America lost approximately 6,000,000 manufacturing jobs or approximately one in three of its manufacturing jobs. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, from 1994 to 2014 North Carolina lost 370,000 net manufacturing jobs, or about 45% of the manufacturing jobs in the state. The abandonment of the American workforce by manufacturing has resulted in the abandonment of manufacturing by the American workforce. Thus, as manufacturing looks to repatriate to America, it is finding a workforce that has not kept pace with its needs and is often indifferent or rejecting toward manufacturing as an employment option. In an effort to tell the story of the new manufacturing opportunities to a new generation, Wilson Community College partnered with Wilson County Schools in developing a strategic plan to introduce the great opportunity of manufacturing jobs into the workforce and to bring that introduction to individuals early in their secondary career. In addition to the continuity of programming based on the Early College model, the program will also feature early exposure to the manufacturing environment, practicums and paid internships.

The goal is to provide realistic exposure and opportunities for early hands-on learning in the manufacturing work environment, thus allowing students for whom this career choice is appealing to arrive at the point of being hired with a very broad and rich experience base preparing them for the highly skilled manufacturing jobs of today.

Major partners include the members of Wilson’s Industrial Management Council. This group has been very active as an advisory committee providing critical commentary and insights on the competency needs of the manufacturing workforce they look to hire. They have assisted directly in such areas as curriculum, intern and practicum strategies, gifts of equipment, and skills assessment.

Another important partner integrally involved in the process has been the Wilson Economic Development Council.
Funding Source(s)
It is also important to note that the Golden LEAF Foundation has contributed significantly to making this happen in the form of two separate grants totaling $1 million to Wilson Community College for equipment. Also pending for the Wilson County Schools system is an additional $750,000 in Golden LEAF grant funds.

Partner Type(s):
- Business/Industry (direct involvement)
- Economic Development
- Workforce Development Board
- Public Schools

RESOURCES

Workforce Learning Summit Presenters
Sean Bulson, Superintendent, Wilson County Schools
Dr. Rusty Stephens, President, Wilson Community College

For Further Information
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