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# Investing in West Virginia's Future: Workforce and Education's Collaboration for Economic Prosperity



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Clinton Burch serves as Assistant Superintendent at the West Virginia Department of Education responsible for PK – Adult Instruction and Career Engagement. Burch leverages diverse perspectives from his military, teaching, and leadership backgrounds to enhance educational connections between secondary, post-secondary, and workforce. He has played a pivotal role in effectively implementing the renowned Simulated Workplace program and has also integrated work-based learning through Classroom 2 Career. Additionally, he has expanded CTE into the middle schools through the Discover Your Future initiative. Burch is a U.S. Air Force veteran and Marshall University Graduate College alum.

The landscape of workforce development is constantly evolving, demanding that students and parents have access to a wide range of resources to guide them toward successful career paths. Whether it's embracing new technologies or finding innovative ways to collaborate, responsiveness within the education and workforce sectors is crucial for career development success. The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) has actively launched various programs, such as Simulated Workplace, Classroom 2 Career, Discover Your Future, and Careertech WV, to support students in their professional growth and advancement within their chosen field. These initiatives aim to emphasize the importance of authentic learning experiences, allowing students to explore a variety of career options within the state.

In today's complex economy, the collaboration between workforce and education is pivotal for successful economic growth. By fostering partnerships, embracing innovation, and



To achieve genuine economic sustainability, it is imperative for industry and education to unite in creating authentic learning experiences through internships, apprenticeships, and clinicals. An excellent example of this collaboration is the establishment of industry advisory boards comprising of representatives from both the public and private sectors. These

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prioritizing the needs of students and industries, West Virginia can thrive in a future where education serves as a catalyst for economic sustainability, not just a pathway to employment.

boards provide valuable insights into workforce needs, inform curriculum development, and facilitate work-based learning opportunities that enable students to apply their skills under the guidance of industry professionals. Additionally,

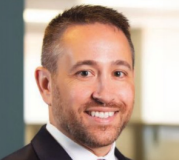


there are numerous benefits to fostering collaboration between the workforce and educational systems. Employers benefit by securing a continuous stream of skilled talent that can adapt to evolving needs, boost productivity, and drive innovation. Educational institutions, on the other hand, gain by ensuring program relevance, responsiveness, and accountability, thereby aligning with industry standards and labor market demands.

In the 2022-2023 academic year, West Virginia saw a significant increase in the participation of high school and middle school students in career exploration courses. A total of 44,524 high school students, representing 58% of all high school students, and 30,786 middle school students, accounting for 56% of all middle school students, actively took part in these courses. This surge in engagement highlights the recognition by students and parents of the importance of integrating career exploration into core academics.

To meet the rising demand, the WVDE is prioritizing skills-based and inquiry-based instruction. This approach incorporates an entrepreneurial mindset to motivate and prepare students at every stage of their educational experience. Programs such as Discover Your Future, Project Lead the Way, and Agriculture, tailored for middle school students, introduce them to a wide range of career clusters and STEAM fields. Through engaging

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hands-on activities like robotics, biomedicine, aerospace, and agricultural science, students have the opportunity to explore and delve into these exciting fields.

Additionally, in 2023 alone, over 6,000 high school students were actively engaged in 1.2 million work-based learning hours, including internships, job shadowing, clinical experiences, and apprenticeships. Of the 7,000-plus graduates from career technical education programs, 42% pursued post-secondary education, 36% entered the workforce, and 3% enlisted in the military. West Virginia's strong commitment to career development and the integration of career exploration into core academics is evident through the substantial student involvement and the wide array of programs and opportunities offered, all of which contribute to fostering economic mobility, social equity, and inclusive growth.

The connections between workforce and education are recognized in West Virginia. Ongoing initiatives are being implemented to further enhance and strengthen these connections for the benefit of students. Legislative measures such as Senate Bill 303, known as the "Students' Right-to-Know Act," and House Bill 4790, referred to as the "Workforce Preparedness Act," have played crucial roles in fostering collaboration between education and workforce entities. These efforts emphasize the importance of establishing effective lines of communication between education and workforce agencies, as well as extending communication to include family and community. Enhancing communication efforts through career exploration, industry field trips, guest speakers, and career mentors significantly enhances the classroom experience, revitalizing schools as the focal point of communities.

Collaboration between workforce organizations and educational institutions remains essential, as they both strive to foster economic growth through workforce development. In West Virginia, this partnership is crucial for ensuring the long-term sustainability of productivity, innovation, and capital inflow. It begins as students embark on their education journey in pre-school and remains significant throughout their career path. By aligning educational curricula with workforce needs, providing

relevant training and skills development, and fostering strong partnerships between industry and education, West Virginia can cultivate a skilled and adaptable workforce capable of driving economic prosperity for years to come.

The momentum in West Virginia's workforce and education sectors is truly exhilarating. Through collaboration, valuable resources are continuously being developed to meet the expectations of students and parents by integrating career exploration at every grade level. This collective endeavor guarantees that the upcoming workforce of West Virginia is equipped to undertake the future challenges and seize opportunities. Ultimately, this will advance the ongoing prosperity and growth of the Mountain State. **W**