

# The Journal Gazette

## Training students for work Internships, school credits could put careers in focus

SHERRY SLATER | *The Journal Gazette*

Employers can do more to prime the workforce pump by training tomorrow's workers – beginning when students are in high school.

That was the message two state officials delivered Wednesday during a presentation on the Indiana Department of Workforce Development's Office of Work-Based Learning & Apprenticeship.

Darrel Zeck, executive director of the state's work-based learning office, said even middle school isn't too early to invite students and their parents to tour facilities and learn what companies do.

About 25 attended the morning session at the Northeast Indiana Innovation Center, including representatives from Ashley Industrial Molding, Precise Manufacturing, Koester Metals, Jack Laurie Group and Ecolab. The presentation also attracted economic development officials from Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Steuben and Wells counties.

Wednesday's session was one of 32 Zeck is conducting statewide over six weeks.

With the region at what some experts classify as full employment, many companies could expand if only they could find enough workers.

Zeck encouraged the audience to connect with local schools and explore ways to increase career awareness among students. Various options exist, including job shadowing, internships, paid apprenticeships and dual-credit high school courses that allow high school students to earn college credit.

Carrie Lively, senior director of the work-based learning office, talked about her experience working as director of school counseling for Noblesville Schools in Hamilton County.

At one point, community and business leaders asked to meet with school officials, Lively said. Although she

and other school officials bragged that 95 percent of graduates went on to college, community leaders countered that 40 percent of that group returned with no degree but plenty of debt.

The wake-up call prompted the school system to re-examine its offerings, she said. One change involved expanding a program that allows juniors and seniors interested in health care to earn certified nursing assistant and qualified medical assistant certifications while still in high school.

Up to 60 students can graduate with more than 1,000 hours of on-the-job experience. The program's previous annual capacity was only three, Lively said.

Bruce Watson, Fort Wayne Metals' facilities director, attended the morning presentation even though the local employer of about 1,300 already has several worker training programs.

The manufacturer employed about 40 college interns this summer and four high

school interns, Watson said. Even with that pipeline in place, the company isn't able to keep up with its hiring needs, he added.

Recently, Fort Wayne Metals hired Freedom

Academy, a continuing education firm in Kendallville, to come in for eight months and train some former production workers and high school students on how to do skilled maintenance work.

"We're having to develop our own people," Watson said. "We can justify the expense of doing that."