

# Planning for student success is a community effort



Ron Coehler of the K-Connect program explains some of the keys to student success to area educators and business leaders Wednesday morning. (Photo by Amy Jo Kinyon)

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Area school and business leaders converged Wednesday morning to collaborate and create opportunities for Barry County residents. The event, at the training center of Flexfab Horizons, highlighted several programs from around the region that have fostered growth and success from an economic standpoint.

Kevin Stotts, president of Talent 2025, shared how the regional talent system is working to achieve its mission of ensuring an ongoing supply of world-class talent in West Michigan. Stotts detailed a list of skills and abilities employers are looking for in potential employees. Contrary to popular belief, Stotts said, job specific skills are not listed among those top-ranked. Instead, active listening, speaking, critical thinking, reading comprehension and oral comprehension are ranked highest.

Among the barriers to success in education and beyond, Stotts pointed to economic hardship as the largest contributor to struggles for students.

"Poverty impacts education, there's no way around it," said Stotts.

He encouraged employers to have an active strategy, a way to attract and retain a workforce. The keys to a successful strategy is three-fold: Pay, full-time status and culture are focuses an employer needs in order to develop solid, dependable, happy, employees.

"Have an active strategy - develop that," encouraged Stotts. "Don't wait for the perfect talent to walk through the door."

Lynn Russell, executive director of the United Way of Mason County, also was on hand to share the successes created through planned and integrated programs in her county to create financial stability and shared training. Through the United Way and a partnership with more than 20 businesses, an on-site success coach visits each business and connects employees with resources and programs. With the on-site coach's guidance, employees have been able to overcome issues that otherwise would have made holding a job difficult. Transportation, childcare, employee relations and a host of other topics are discussed with the coach.

Russell reported that 95.5 percent of employees who saw the success coach remained employed, and the coaching is one of the most frequent services provided by the program. She also stressed the need to connect the programs and resources already present in a community.

"Everything needs to be interconnected," said Russell. "How do we all come together for that collective good to work together to make the community the best place it can be?"

Levi Good and Lisa Larson from Kellogg Community College explained a few of their programs to the audience and how they can lead to student success in the workplace. The Kellogg Community College Advanced Manufacturing Assembly training is a certificate course preparing job candidates to successfully enter and thrive in the manufacturing industry. The KAMA program can be tailored to fit the needs of a school district in terms of scheduling the courses, with the last four days taking place in Battle Creek to give students hands-on experience working in a manufacturing setting. Students work on an assembly line on a manufacturing cell during those days, putting their newly acquired skills and knowledge to work.

Travis Alden from the Barry County Chamber of Commerce said the meeting is the first session in a series of gatherings meant to foster programming and ideas to help students succeed.

Maple Valley Superintendent Michelle Falcon said the 2006 state mandated Michigan Merit Exam program "slammed us" in terms of teachers being able to tailor education to the students' needs over state exam results. Falcon said it has created a disconnect between teachers and employers in terms of an awareness of what students will do after high school.

Stotts said less than 60 percent of Barry County high school students will go on to four-year colleges. Meetings such as Wednesday's are meant to ensure the 40 percent of students entering the workforce or other training are equipped for success.

# State leaders honor regional workforce development efforts

State leaders this week came together to honor Southwest Michigan leaders for their efforts to create jobs and develop fresh talent in their communities.

Lawmakers and statewide talent development officials recognized Coveris Americas Food & Consumer Group, local resi-

dent Karen Kelley and Michigan Works! Southwest. YOU, a division of Kalamazoo RESA, and Michigan HRDI also received honors at the event, according to Michigan Works! spokesperson Kathy Olsen.

Coveris, a premier packaging and engineered coatings manufacturer, established an employ-

ment recruitment relationship with Michigan Works! Southwest. As a result, Coveris is now experiencing a significant reduction in recruiting time and cost per hire, said Olsen.

"More importantly, the partnership has led to the successful placement of talented individuals into their workforce, benefiting Coveris and the community," she said.

"Karen Kelly's successful placement at Coveris through the EDGE (Essential Skills Demanded by Great Employers) program is a positive example of what can happen when communities come together to support personal career success," said State Sen. Mike Nofs (R-Battle Creek). "The entire community wins."

The EDGE Training Program is a collaborative designed to improve employment readiness and economic security.

With support from Michigan Works! Southwest, Kelly enrolled in and graduated from the EDGE training. Other EDGE partners who contributed



From left: Will Slone, Michigan Works! Southwest; Ben Damerow, director, Michigan Works! Southwest; State Sen. Mike Nofs (19th District); Gavin Kelley; Karen Kelley; Barry Fulcomer, facility manager, Coveris; Kathy Olsen, Michigan Works! Southwest; Rep. Jon Hoadley (60th District); Karen Todd, legislative aide for State Rep. John Bizon (62nd District); and Sam Dougherty, Michigan Works! Southwest.

to the training include Battle Creek Unlimited, Goodwill Industries of Central Michigan's Heartland, and Kellogg Community College. The collaborative is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The Michigan Works!

Impact Awards bring lawmakers and economic achievers together for a unique look at the work that's transforming Michigan's economic vitality. Dozens of honorees from across the state received awards presented by their local lawmakers and state workforce development offi-

cial.

Award winners included Michigan businesses, partners, employees and Michigan Works! agencies from across the state. During the event, lawmakers presented tributes to award winners, who shared their stories and the role Michigan Works! played in their success.

"My heartfelt congratulations go to Ms. Kelley and the people who've come together to support both her success and that of Coveris," said State Rep. John Bizon (R-Battle Creek). "Thanks to the effective blending of key resources, the people of Michigan are making it possible for one another to succeed both personally and professionally."

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