

Imitation of Life

Partnerships Prepare City's Future Workers

By Symone Salisbury

Small towns often are regarded endearingly as places where familiarity among residents and businesses create a type of “we’re in this together” mentality. With nearly 70,000 residents, Bloomington can hardly be considered a small town. In fact, it’s the state’s seventh largest. Collaboration among its various community members, however, has developed similar connections, especially in the areas of education and workforce development.

One shared priority is reducing the county’s high school dropout rates and providing alternative education options for individuals who do not graduate from high school. Those resources often directly relate to workforce training. Another major focus in Bloomington is the life sciences industry, including a planned training facility.

“I think Bloomington’s (education/workforce) partnership is doing good work,” comments Rep. Baron Hill, whose Ninth Congressional District includes the Monroe County seat. “These kids need to realize there are consequences of not getting a good education and when you have businesses bringing it home to root, it should motivate a lot of these kids to stay in school.”

Reality check

A “reality store” project helps middle school students correlate educational efforts with workforce earnings. The event introduces middle school students in the Monroe County Community School Corporation (MCCSC) and the Richland-Bean Blossom Community School Corporation to “real world” financial obligations occurring in a one-month time frame, including utility or mortgage payments, medical expenses or purchasing a car. Approximately 100 local businesses display their products and services for students who have received a “monthly salary” based on their grade point averages and ideal careers.

“They go from table to table to make decisions that bring that monthly salary into perspective,” states Carol Maloney, vice president of education and workforce initiatives at the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce. We have a number (of students) who say, ‘I realize how important my schooling is because I want more money when I graduate.’”

Drop-out deterrents

Jason Lee is a dropout prevention specialist for the MCCSC. He currently counsels more than 90 students who have expressed interest in dropping out of high school or who have been identified by the schools as potential dropouts.

Lee discusses with them “how dropping out will impact them the rest of their lives, especially in the area of workforce,” Maloney shares. “He does some career awareness activities. He’s worked with some of them to get them job shadowing opportunities.”

Lee may encourage students, for example, to attend the Aurora Alternative High School in Bloomington. It is designed for individuals who have struggled in traditional high school settings. Graduates receive an Aurora diploma. Another option is the Broadview Learning Center at which individuals can obtain their high school diplomas or GEDs.

“Basically, what he does is work on a one-to-one basis with students,” explains Jim Harvey, interim superintendent of the MCCSC. “He tries to encourage them to consider one of the other alternative (educational) programs that are available in the school corporation so we don’t just lose them completely.”

Richland-Bean Blossom will offer the same services next year.

Jason Lee works one-on-one with students at Bloomington North and Bloomington South high schools.



Education: first things first

The Franklin Initiative brings together education and workforce sectors to maximize students' scholastic performance and prepare them for professional careers. Two examples of Franklin Initiative programs are employment workshops and internships.

Internships are available to high school seniors.

A group of community leaders spanning various sectors identified eight factors contributing to high school dropout rates. Among them were attendance, medical reasons, quality of education, relevance of education and family issues. The coalition then divided the motivations for dropping out of high school into 10 teams. Examples include a behavioral deterrence team, as well as a skills and enhancement team.

According to Maloney, "Twenty to 25% of our students do not succeed in high school. We wanted to partner with our educational institutions and tell them that the dropout rate isn't just their problem. It's everyone's issue. We felt if we partnered and approached the reasons for students dropping out together, we probably would make a better impact than working separately."

Ivy Tech Community College is one of the Greater Bloomington Chamber's educational partners. Members of Ivy Tech's Bloomington campus staff have participated in meetings with the MCCSC to discuss curriculum design. As a result, the MCCSC increased its scientific focus by creating a math and science coordinator position.

"We also articulated to IU about (our) biotechnology degree program," says John Whikehart, Ivy Tech-Bloomington chancellor. "That means the graduates of our two-year program can take their two-year degree to IU to build to their four-year degree. So the goal is to create a seamless educational opportunity for students coming from the high school to the college and on to the university if that's their desire."

Soft skills 101

More than 30 members of Bloomington's community – including business leaders, teachers and administrators – formed the Graduation Work Group to enhance the city's high schools. Their efforts resulted in the awarding of grants that could ultimately lead to the implementation of two unique high schools.

One project is the New Technology High School, for which the MCCSC received a \$50,000 replication planning grant from the National Governors Association. Modeled after a program in California, its curriculum directly relates to workforce skills desired by employers.

"This is a high school that is organized around project-based learning and it also has a one-to-one computer-to-student ratio," Harvey remarks. "It emphasizes a lot of what you might call soft skills: (a strong) work ethic, being able to communicate well. Students work in teams and it's a different way to organize a school, a different way to carry on instruction.

"It's not necessarily what you would call a school for dropouts," he adds, "but if you could create an experience where students see more relevance for what they're doing, they may be more likely to stay in school."

The New Technology High School also promises to instill skills that students can apply to a variety of career fields, including the life sciences.

The MCCSC also received a second grant from the National Governors Association to establish an Early College High School (ECHS), which allows high school students to earn associates degrees and early college credit.

"We're basically targeting first generation college students and helping them see that they have the capability of going to college," Harvey notes, "and making sure they get the support they need to prepare for higher education. We're doing this in conjunction with our local Ivy Tech campus and Indiana University."

Universal collaboration

As a member of the Congressional Science and Technology Committee, Rep.



Alyson Norrick, an analytical scientist at BioConvergence, is one of many talented life sciences professionals who was attracted to the industry opportunities in Bloomington.

Coming Soon

Indiana University and Bloomington are part of the emerging life sciences industry in Indiana. Indianapolis and West Lafayette also form the corridor of primary development, although the impact is felt throughout the state.

In the July/August issue, *BizVoice*® will take a closer look at the life sciences – the growth thus far and the prospects for the future.

Hill is ideally positioned to connect national initiatives with Bloomington's workforce and education efforts, including Indiana University's life sciences research. IU often seeks grants from the National Science Foundation, which the Science and Technology Committee oversees.

"Indiana University is doing a good job in terms of life science," he reflects. "When you have Lilly in Indianapolis, and Cook Industries and Baxter Pharmaceutical (in Bloomington), these are giants in the life sciences area. Businesses are likely inclined to come to Indiana because these businesses are already in place. But we have to have the research at Indiana University available so these potential businesses would want to move to the area because of all the expertise that Indiana University can lend to them."

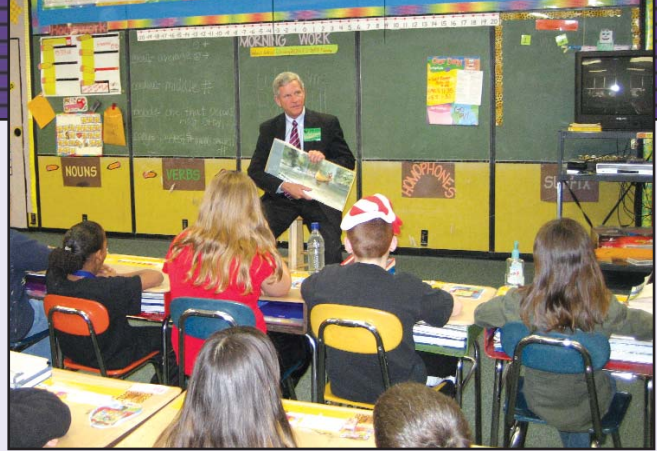
BioConvergence is one of Bloomington's fastest growing life sciences companies. It provides contract services to biotech and pharmaceutical companies and has increased its staff from six to 21 workers over the last year. Steve Bryant, the company's business development and marketing manager and former executive director of the Bloomington Life Sciences Partnership, anticipates that figure will double this year.

"Probably more than anything, it's the willingness (for the education and workforce sectors) to work together," he asserts. "I think the willingness has always been there, it has just been 'how?'"

"We're just scratching the surface. Now there's a way to kind of keep score with some of these initiatives that are moving forward and to continue to look at new programs. We just didn't have that kind of knowledge or infrastructure in the past specifically for life sciences, but it will benefit industries beyond life sciences because (you can apply) the same process. Things are happening that I think will be successful not only for Bloomington, but for the entire state."

Whikehart declares, "We really believe in Bloomington that we are perfectly positioned to be a center for life science activity. Indiana University's life sciences initiative and our life sciences initiative are extremely complementary. The university plays such a large role in research and development and will continue to do so, and we play such a large role in workforce

A rendering of the Indiana Center for the Life Sciences, which will be part of Ivy Tech Community College and near many of Bloomington's leading life science companies.



Rep. Baron Hill (D-9th District) strives to connect national initiatives with local education and workforce development efforts.

development. Those two goals complement one another and I think as industry looks to Bloomington, they're going to see a convergence of opportunity here."

Life sciences training facility

Many of the area's life sciences leaders – Cook, Cook Pharmaca, Baxter Pharmaceutical Solutions, Boston Scientific and BioConvergence – estimate that they will increase their workforce by between 12,000 and 15,000 employees in the next three to five years.

One strategy to maximize the talent of individuals occupying those positions is creation of the Indiana Center for the Life Sciences.

Scheduled to open by fall 2008, the center will span 22,000 square feet. Located east of the Ivy Tech-Bloomington campus, the center will feature four science labs, three classrooms and a training site mirroring a life sciences work environment.

"We clearly want to be responsive to the workforce development needs of our industry partners," Whikehart observes, "and we have worked very closely with the Bloomington Life Sciences Partnership to see the types of training we want to see done in the facility."

Bryant praises the center for its potential to not only assist BioConvergence's current employees who may seek training, but also new employees.

"That (the Indiana Center for the Life Sciences) is probably the most tangible thing that has come out of all of this work after the past five or six years," Bryant contends. "Anybody in the region can access it. So now you have a concept to bring industry and education together to meet a need."

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Rep. Baron Hill at <http://baronhill.house.gov/>

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