



APPRENTICESHIP ENDEAVOR

Making Great Strides for Hoosier Students

By Anthony Schoettle

An ambitious and ground-breaking apprenticeship program that's been taking shape in Indiana for several years has achieved multiple milestones in the last 12 months.

A trip to Switzerland by a sizable contingent of Hoosiers representing various industries in 2023 to study that country's innovative apprenticeship program served as a catalyst to greatly accelerate the apprenticeship initiative here. That momentum continues to build and more – and bigger – milestones are expected this year.

In December 2023, CEMETS iLab Indiana, a coalition of more than 200 leaders representing a variety of sectors including business, K-12 education, higher education and government, was established to lead the apprenticeship initiative. The organization grew greatly and its plans took shape during 2024.

With iLab Indiana's support, a fledgling pilot program started in 2019 grew last year to 450 apprentices and 100 employers, providing proof that a statewide system is possible.

Talent alliances

Fueling the optimism, the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation in November announced several grants to launch industry "talent associations," which are organizations that enable employers within their industry to speak as one when it comes to talent needs, explains Claire Fiddian-Green, president and CEO of the Fairbanks Foundation and co-chair of CEMETS iLab Indiana.

This new career pathway could accommodate students as early as the 2025-26 school year.

CEMETS iLab Indiana had identified the creation of talent associations as the most critical priority of their strategic plan. The groups will serve thousands of Hoosiers – including those who otherwise may not have opted to attend college or pursue training after high school – while also creating a new talent pipeline for

employers, according to Fiddian-Green.

BioCrossroads was awarded \$200,000 to be the healthcare talent association and another \$200,000 to be the life sciences talent association. Conexus Indiana was granted \$250,000 to be the talent association for the advanced manufacturing and logistics sectors. The grants are contingent upon each organization's ability to secure matching funds for the talent associations from employers within their industries.

Plans are underway for a talent association in the banking industry to be operated by the Indiana Bankers Association (IBA). The Fairbanks Foundation expects to award a similar grant to IBA's Foundation in early 2025.

This entire effort is in direct response, Fiddian-Green states, to the biggest takeaway from the Swiss trips – the need to establish groups in Indiana that speak for an entire business sector with one voice. "In Switzerland, there's an organization whose full-time job is to do that," she imparts. "That's the key that's been missing in our pilot programs. This is new for us."

The talent associations will work with employers to select occupations, identify the required knowledge, skills and competencies, plus collaborate with educators to develop education and training content.

"The most important (next) step we have to take is with these talent associations," Fiddian-Green emphasizes. "We must organize employers and create a curriculum that can be adopted by employers within their industry regardless of their location in the state or their size. We already have these existing pilot programs; to get to scale, we have to organize employers."

Big diploma change

In December, Indiana's apprenticeship initiative got another big boost when the State Board of Education changed its requirements for earning a high school diploma. The new set of requirements allow high school students to leave the school building three days a week as a junior and four days a week as a senior for a high-quality apprenticeship.

The high school diploma change "was the biggest hurdle (to

Indiana University Health has established a winning apprenticeship program with Crispus Attucks High School and plans to expand that initiative in the coming years.

launching the apprenticeship program in Indiana), and now it's behind us," emphasizes David Becker, chairman and CEO of Fishers-based First Internet Bank and co-chair of iLab Indiana. Becker credits Indiana Secretary of Education Katie Jenner for getting that change made.

"We have to look at the reality of where we are in Indiana, starting with our data," Jenner relays. "We can't just sit around admitting the problem but not going after the solution."

Jenner points out that just 53% of Hoosier high school students attend college and of those, only 51% graduate in four years. At the same time, she notes, more Indiana employers than ever are looking for skilled workers.

"The need for this new way to access professional education and training is clear," Fiddian-Green adds. "By 2031, 72% of U.S. jobs will require education beyond high school, but only 39% of Indiana adults 25 or older have an associate degree or higher."

Dennis Trinkle, senior vice president for talent, strategy and partnerships for Indiana tech industry group TechPoint, envisions an apprenticeship program that could be intertwined with postsecondary education. "We want students to be able to easily go back and forth between college and the apprenticeship program if they want," he states. "The goal is to create a system to address the pace of change and provide more pathways to success."

Strong buy-in

Fiddian-Green is optimistic about the statewide rollout of the apprenticeship program due in part because student demand in the pilot program is higher than the spots available. "We think having 50,000 apprentices in Indiana in the next decade is realistic," she adds. "The new high school diploma requirements will accelerate this."

Jenner isn't surprised by the high student demand. She notes the growing absenteeism among high school seniors.

"Student apathy is at an all-time high in Indiana. Students just don't see the value of sitting in the classroom for seven hours a day," she acknowledges. "The apprenticeship is the crème de la crème of work-based learning and carries with it a credential that will have considerable value."

An apprenticeship is substantially different from an internship. "The biggest difference is duration – an apprenticeship

could be two to four years – and apprentices get education as well as on-the-job training. A banking apprentice, for example, will get additional specific education related to that job in the classroom," Fiddian-Green explains.

The initiative, she notes, has the support of numerous policymakers and key state legislators including Rod Bray, president pro tempore of the Indiana Senate, and House Speaker Todd Huston. Both are on the iLab board.

Buy-in among Indiana business leaders to this new initiative is also "extremely high," Becker shares. "We haven't spoken to one business owner or executive who has just flat said no to this. They realize we have an issue with our skilled labor pipeline, and they see this program could substantially address that."

Dennis Murphy, president and CEO of Indiana University Health, and Trinkle echo that.

"There is a very strong pull toward this program in the healthcare community," Murphy remarks. "We're all dealing with labor shortages, and we see this as a solution with real promise."

Additionally, he says healthcare officials have an even broader concern. "At IU Health, we have a goal of making Indiana a healthier state. One aspect of being healthy is having a good job. We believe this paves a different pathway for kids not pursuing college to get a good job."

IU Health is already working with Crispus Attucks High School on a small-scale apprenticeship program. With iLab Indiana, Murphy and his staff are looking to broaden that.

Trinkle – and other Hoosier tech and

Fairbanks Foundation officials – are headed to Switzerland in March to further study how an apprenticeship might work for Indiana tech companies.

"We hope to start having tech-related apprenticeships by the fall of 2026," Trinkle reveals. "We're still working on the number of apprentices – we're hoping for 50 to 100 to start – and companies involved, but there's no shortage of interest among tech companies."

Becker and Amber Van Til, Indiana Bankers Association president and CEO, believe apprenticeships in the banking industry could start as early as next fall. By 2028, the number of apprentices working at financial institutions statewide should be at least 200, Van Til notes. Becker thinks that number could be as high as 1,000.

"I've met with more than one-third of the banks in the state, and everyone – from Evansville, Fort Wayne, South Bend/Elkhart, Indianapolis and beyond – is interested," Becker reports.

Enthusiasm among school officials is strong but has a way to go, admits Jenner.

"The learning curve varies greatly," she acknowledges. "Some totally get it, and I would say that is growing. Others are still trying to think about how to set this up. There are questions about how this fits in with extra-curricular school activities, including sports, and there's a transportation issue. But we're seeing growing interest across the board; rural, urban and suburban schools in all kinds of communities."



Indiana officials are working to launch apprenticeships in a variety of industries including life biosciences, technology and advanced manufacturing.

New industries, employer engagement

In the coming year, the CEMETS iLab Indiana coalition will be looking at laying the groundwork for apprenticeship programs in information technology, microelectronics (such as chip manufacturing), construction trades and sports/entertainment/hospitality, according to Fiddian-Green.

“Employers must be the lead,” she emphasizes. “We learned that in Switzerland. All the employers are amazed and impressed and feel inspired about what we should be doing here in Indiana. They know our existing pathways aren’t going to be sufficient for their talent needs.”

Employers too will have to put money into this initiative and will likely be called upon to pay for apprenticeship wages, training and a fee to the entity that organizes this program and creates and updates the curriculum. Fiddian-Green is optimistic that won’t be an issue.



Major move for students and employers: A new state law allows juniors and seniors in high school time away from school to work onsite with businesses as apprentices.

“As in Switzerland, Indiana employers will realize a positive return on investment,” she stresses. “That’s why the companies in

Switzerland have agreed to pay. It pays off for those companies there, and we’re confident it will pay off here as well.”

RESOURCES: David Becker, First Internet Bank, at www.firstib.com | Claire Fiddian-Green, Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation, at www.rmff.org | Katie Jenner, Indiana Secretary of Education, at www.in.gov/doe | Dennis Murphy, Indiana University Health, at www.iuhealth.org | Dennis Trinkle, TechPoint, at www.techpoint.org | Amber Van Til, Indiana Bankers Association, at www.indiana.bank



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