

CONNECTING STUDENTS TO BUSINESS-BACKED HIGH SCHOOL COURSES, SKILLS

As Indiana employers grapple with a rapidly changing workforce, a new partnership is pushing career readiness further upstream – into the high school classroom. The Indiana Chamber of Commerce and College Board have teamed up to bring employer-informed, college-level career courses to students across the state, aiming to better align education with real-world business needs.

The courses are part of College Board’s new Advanced Placement Career Kickstart initiative that combines the decades of college-level rigor of Advanced Placement® (AP®) with industry-guided relevance, beginning with AP Business with Personal Finance and AP Cybersecurity. The courses will launch nationwide in the 2026-27 school year and ultimately expand to new high-growth industries such as health sciences.

“A big goal of ours is to further align education with what employers need,” offers Vanessa Green Sindors, Indiana Chamber president and CEO. “Through our partnership with the College Board, we’re introducing high-quality, employer-endorsed courses into Hoosier high schools. That will empower students with in-demand skills and provide teachers with a scalable, effective way to deliver them.”

“For decades, students have turned to AP to challenge themselves and get ahead in college,” says David Coleman, College Board CEO. “Now, that energy is also being devoted to career learning. Students want to do work that matters. Employers want to hire talent that’s ready. AP Career Kickstart brings those worlds together so every student can earn credentials that count for the future they choose.”

The actual AP courses are being shaped by educators, higher education and industry advisors and to date include the CompTIA, Oracle, IBM, U.S. Bank and Sephora. The Indiana Chamber joins approximately 400 employers and 75 local chambers across 40 states in endorsing the courses.

One early adopter is Kristin Lidstrom, a business teacher and department chair at Hamilton Southeastern High School in Fishers.

“Field testing AP Business with Personal Finance has given our students practical, real-world business and financial skills while strengthening the critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-

making abilities employers value,” she says. “The course bridges classroom learning with the realities of the modern workplace, helping students become informed consumers, responsible employees and contributors to Indiana’s long-term economic growth.”

Jason Troutwine, vice president of Reid Health in Richmond, notes that “by inviting industry to shape AP courses that will be taught nationwide, Career Kickstart creates a dynamic in which we, as employers, know the curriculum is meaningful, appropriate and applicable to our work environments.”

He adds, “It’s a win for our economy but most importantly, it’s a win for our students who walk away from these courses with college credit and industry-recognized credentials that put them on the fast track for their careers.”

Recent research confirms the need for this approach. The 2025 New Hire Readiness Report from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and College Board examined the perceptions of 500 employers on the preparedness of entry-level employees to enter today’s workforce. Among the key findings:

- A total of 84% of hiring managers say that most high school students are not prepared to enter the workforce.
- The vast majority (92%) said there should be more business courses in high school.
- Industry-recognized credentials and hard-to-quantify “soft skills” such as critical thinking and communication are a talent booster for entry-level workers.

College Board offers 40 AP courses in nearly 24,000 high schools worldwide, providing consistency across schools, districts and states. AP Career Kickstart assessments will validate both student learning for higher education and career readiness for employers.

Employers or local chambers interested in becoming an industry advisor and help structure Career Kickstart courses are encouraged to fill out the form at www.indianachamber.com/AP.

The Indiana Chamber’s Institute for Workforce Excellence offers programming and training to help the state attract, develop and retain the talent needed to drive a highly skilled workforce. **Learn more at www.workforceindiana.org.**

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