

Opinion

Editorial: Employers, educators can bridge gap

By The Canton Repository Editorial Board

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On the same day one of Ohio's major-party candidates to be the next governor outlined his education plan should he be elected, educators and employers gathered in Stark County to discuss workforce development and how best to prepare today's students for jobs available now and in the future.

Fortunately, it appears many of the people who can help shape the lives of "the next generation" are beginning to recognize the same priorities and how to address these areas of importance.

At Kent State University at Stark on Thursday, a panel of five speakers at the latest installment of the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce's "Stark Forum" series outlined ways for employers and educators to meet each other's needs, or as Teresa Pursles, executive director of Stark Education Partnership, put it: "How can we lean into one another?"

Also speaking on the "Inspiring Our Future" panel was Alliance Superintendent Jeff Talbert, who reminded audience members that "we're working with different students" today compared with previous generations.

"They are used to getting what they want when they want it," he said, also pointing out "we expect them to (become) adults in one day" after they've walked the stage for their high school graduation. "Just because they have a diploma doesn't mean they are prepared for adulthood," so "How do we bridge that gap?"

On Thursday, Republican candidate Mike DeWine said his "Preparing for Ohio's Future" education plan would be built on four "pillars": less testing and more learning; increasing access to technology and a 21st-century education; establishing more vocational education opportunities; and making college more affordable.

"We need less testing and more learning in our schools ... (to) focus on problem-solving, logic skills and creativity that will help prepare them to be college ready or on a pathway to a career once they graduate," DeWine said in a news release.

When asked how educators could prepare today's kids for future jobs no one can predict, county superintendent of schools Joe Chaddock responded we need to encourage "critical thinking" and "adaptability." To its credit, the state of Ohio recently announced the development of social skills — in addition to reading and math proficiency — would be part of its new five-year education plan that shifts away from test results to focus on helping students succeed after graduating from high school.

In outlining some of his priorities should he be elected Ohio's next governor, Democratic candidate Richard Cordray also has placed an emphasis on workforce development, along with early childhood education, saying "an investment in our children is an investment in Ohio's future."

Making early education a priority would help educators such as Talbert, who said one of the biggest opportunities for his district is helping more kids to read at grade level sooner, allowing teachers at Alliance High School to spend less time on basic skill sets and more on career readiness, whatever shape that takes — college, a trade or other employment.

“We need as many (helping) hands as we can get,” he said.

Preparing today’s kids for tomorrow’s job will take many hands, but we can “lean into one another” to bridge the gap between education and the workforce. On a positive note, we’re seeing more and more stakeholders pulling in the same direction.