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May 03, 2014 9:15AM

Collaboration in Stark County: Schools work together to help students

The school districts, colleges and universities in Stark County have been working for more than a decade to raise college attainment with appreciable results.

The cities of Massillon and Canton, as well as the county, now exceed the state and national averages on associate degree attainment. With a 3 percent gain since 2000, today 21 percent of Stark County residents have earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

You may be wondering why this is important. The community that has a well-educated workforce and can adapt to new educational needs is much more nimble at attracting new businesses and creating new job opportunities for its residents.

We have added new businesses to our community including Chesapeake Energy, Old Dominion Freight Line, Baker-Hughes and 12r Power Cable, and are expanding businesses including H.J. Heinz and Quest Specialty Coatings, LLC.

We are building programs that match specific certificates, associate, bachelor's, master's or doctorate degrees to current and future employment needs. In 2010, the University of Mount Union added two bachelor of science programs in mechanical and civil engineering.

Graduates of the fuel cell program at Stark State College may be employed by LG Fuel Cell Systems Inc., Lockheed Martin, Contained Energy, Technology Management Inc., Nextech Materials, Ltd., Catacel Corp., Plug-Power, and over 900 companies in the Ohio fuel cell supply chain database.

If you visit <http://oogeep.org/> you will find a listing of all of the area colleges, universities and school districts that have programs specific to the job requirements in the oil and gas industry. Stark State College is anticipating opening its gas and oil campus in downtown Canton in August.

Philanthropic organizations in Northeast Ohio have joined together and are creating a website on the health industry that will specify all job opportunities and all school district, college and university programs.

School districts also are responding to employer needs through their career/technical programs. For example, Marlinton Local Schools developed the first oil and gas technologies high school curriculum in Ohio in 2012. Our high school graduates are going to college in increasing numbers.

From a college-going rate of less than 50 percent a decade ago, 73 percent of Stark County's Class of 2010 went to college by the fall of 2012, and it's not just graduates of suburban schools. More than 70 percent of Canton's McKinley High School and Massillon's Washington High School students now enroll in college within two years of graduating from high school.

DUAL CREDIT COURSES

Collaborative programs between our school districts, colleges and universities are on the increase. Often known as dual credit programs, students can take college courses while they are in high school. Stark County has the second largest dual credit enrollment among high school students of any county in the state, regardless of population. Last year, more than 1,500 students took advantage of these high school-based dual credit courses. Another 560 students enrolled in courses on college campuses.

Sometimes these courses result in certificates that allow high school students immediate access to employment. Examples are the availability of a welding certificate at Canton South, or an emergency medical technology certificate at Perry High in partnership with Stark State College.

Other collaborations encourage students to earn transferable academic credits that are usable as students pursue associate or bachelor's degrees.

Kent State University offers dual credit courses in Minerva and North Canton's Hoover High. Kent State at Stark offers courses at Lake, Perry and East Canton's Osnaburg Local. Mount Union offers courses in Alliance, Marlinton, Minerva and at Plain where Malone University also offers a course.

Stark State College offers many courses taken at most school districts as well as specialized courses in fire safety on its main campus or online courses for school districts. The Canton City School District and Stark State College have sponsored an early college high school since 2004.

Stark County participates in regional activities to raise attainment in Northeast Ohio including the Talent Dividend sponsored by the Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education (NOCHE) CEOs for Cities. The Talent Dividend's goal is to reach 1 million degree holders in the 16-county area by the end of 2014.

With 70,466 adults with degrees in 2012, and a growing college enrollment of over 25,000, Stark is doing its part.

About Stark Education Partnership

The Stark Education Partnership, Inc., is a 501(c)-3 nonprofit education reform support organization in Stark County crossing the lines of 17 public school districts. The partnership collaborates with educators, business, community and civic leaders to create and respond to opportunities that will add substantial and measurable value to education. Learn more at www.edpartner.org.



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