

THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM AT GARRETT HIGH SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

The Construction Trades program at Garrett High School, located in Garrett, Indiana, has been in existence for over 40 years and has recently expanded to include career development. Previous administration and construction instructors were instrumental in the longevity of the program. Chad Sutton, Director of Career Development, with the support of the school superintendent, has helped take the program to the next level by offering NCCER credentials and college credit through a partnership with Ivy Tech Community College in Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY AND INDUSTRY

The involvement of the community has been the key to keeping the Construction Trades program at Garrett High School successful. In Garrett, the community and industry are not separate entities but one and the same. Being hands-on, craft professionals themselves, the locals rally to support and help train the students. Area businesses value the program and understand the importance of continued enrollment to closing the skills gap in construction. Since the launch of the Construction Career Development program in 2018, community involvement remains high.

Local businesses are involved by interviewing the students, offering mentorships and providing gainful employment. Further, the program is completely funded through community businesses, philanthropic organizations and a commitment from the school corporation. Funds provide for staff, equipment, renovations, supplies, tool upgrades, professional development and curriculum.

In addition, the program has a very active Construction Career Development Advisory Panel, consisting of regional economic development members, local workforce development members, commercial contractors, residential contractors, manufactured housing builders, electricians, plumbers and HVAC technicians.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS

Having a background in construction, Sutton has a wide range of contacts in the industry, from commercial to residential, general contracting to mechanical contracting, as well as sub-contractors, who have all supported the program. When Sutton started at the high school as a construction craft instructor, he strove to place the students in the industry who were interested in pursuing a career in construction. Through this, Sutton increased his network of local industry connections that the program could depend on.

BEST PRACTICE PROFILES

Local associations have offered their support to the program as well, understanding the importance of training students in the industry. The Builders Association of Northeast Indiana (BANI), Home Builders Association of Ft. Wayne (HBA) and Building Contractors Association of Northeast Indiana (BCA) and their members have all been supportive.

TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

One of the unique aspects of the Construction Career Development program is that it does not begin in high school or even middle school — the program starts in elementary school and encompasses fifth grade through 12th. The fifth-grade exploration class, dubbed the “construction class” by the students, offers an opportunity for the elementary class to build projects that they are able to take home. The Career Development Program will impact over 600 students from 5th through 12th in a corporation that has 1,700 total students.

Beyond the expansion of covering multiple grades is the program’s commitment to academic integration. Many programs offer either one or the other — career and technical curriculum or academic curriculum. Garrett High School has combined the two to offer a more cohesive way of learning. Math and English are taught right beside NCCER Core modules. From 9th to 12th grade, the students study construction and manufacturing with their academic content integrated into hands-on work experiences. Because of the local businesses involved, the students focus on soft skills and career exploration, which they are able to practice in real life scenarios.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Garrett High School partners with Ivy Tech Community College in Ft. Wayne, which includes students earning college credit through dual enrollment and an instructor from the college teaching in the construction trades program. When a student graduates from the program, they will have earned a high school diploma, 22 college credits, a carpentry certificate and 10 NCCER credentials. They will also have gained lab experience and on-the-job training.

MEASURING SUCCESS

While in its infancy, the program’s initial success and growth is a tribute to the passion of those who support it. The first graduating class was 10 students, seven of which were placed in industry positions directly out of school. The students were recognized for their hard work by their peers, teachers, local business owners and politicians during a signing day event at the high school.

The program is estimated to have between 35 – 40 students in each class over the next few years.

BEST PRACTICE PROFILES

GAINING BUY-IN

The program uses many methods to recruit students and earn parental support, including specific parent nights, active social media accounts, printed media and involvement by the business community. The community supports open houses and signing days, as does the local press.

The idea that the program is doing what is right for students and creating opportunities and environments for them to have meaningful work has been successful in overcoming opposition. Interdisciplinary learning allows students to grow and develop and is not only teaching career skills, but also academic content in a different way. Students are realizing that many schools are not teaching them life lessons needed for entering adulthood; programs like the one offered by Garrett High School help them graduate as responsible, productive citizens, confident in their real-life skills.

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

The addition of NCCER curriculum has put the program over the top. NCCERconnect has revolutionized how students use the system; advanced students can begin an apprenticeship and never miss a beat of NCCER curriculum. NCCER, through Ivy Tech Community College, has allowed the students to register with a nationally recognized construction education provider and complete NCCER Core Curriculum, Electrical Level 1 and Carpentry Levels 1-2. Students graduate prepared for the next step of their lives.

