

BEST PRACTICES: NTWB Partners Establish Certified Production Technician Credentialing in High Schools



Building a Workforce- Ready Pipeline of Young Adults with Skills to Meet Employer Needs

As the State of Tennessee began to see economic recovery and manufacturing job growth post 2008 recession, the Northwest TN Workforce Board (NTWB) has embarked on several initiatives to meet the needs of local employers. NTWB collaborated with key stakeholders to develop career pathways in manufacturing and showcased these to high school students through onsite tours and various employer presentations. One of the most successful programs has been the Tennessee Labor Education Alignment Program (LEAP) grant, which helps ensure that TN postsecondary institutions are producing the skills and credentials that area employers actually need. Key partners include Dyersburg State Community College, several Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology, Governor Haslam's Workforce Sub-Cabinet, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Department of Education, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the Tennessee Board of Regents, the Department of Economic and Community Development, area high schools, and the employer community in the eleven counties served by NTWB.

The objective of LEAP is to eliminate skills gaps across the state in a proactive, data-driven, and coordinated manner by encouraging collaboration across education and industry and by utilizing regional workforce data to identify and then fill skills gaps across the state. To ensure they have a strong and work-ready pipeline of young adults with skills to meet employer needs, NTWB surveyed local employers to identify workplace needs. Soft skills and basic industry knowledge were identified as weak areas for young workers. NTWB utilizes the ACT® National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) assessment as a benchmark for measuring Reading for Information, Locating Information, and Applied Math, and this assessment was deemed appropriate to measure work-readiness for students interested in gaining industrial skills and entering directly into the workplace. In August of 2014, LEAP grant funds allowed NTWB to introduce the MSSC Certified Production Technician Program (CPT) into 17 high schools in 11 counties in rural northwest TN. High school students completing the year-long (LEAP) program have the opportunity to graduate with an NCRC, a credential as a CPT, and up to 12 hours of community college credit or advanced standing in one of Tennessee's Colleges of Applied Technology.

According to Lori Kelley-Burdine, Project Director for LEAP and Director of Public Information & Planning, *"We are finding that those students that took the National Career Readiness Certificate assessment and earned at least a Silver level are more successful in passing the individual modules. For the Safety module, we had a 77% first-time pass rate. In the spring recruitment effort for the fall classes, we will encourage all students to take the NCRC test with the goal of earning a Silver level. We want to ensure they have a solid foundation in reading, applied math, and location information in order to be successful in earning the CPT certifications."*

When LEAP grant funds expire in December 2016, high school students enrolled in CPT Coursework will be offered dual enrollment courses or local dual credit courses through Dyersburg State Community College and local Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology. Tennessee offers grants for study at eligible postsecondary institutions that are funded from net proceeds of the state lottery. The Dual Enrollment Grant program is funded by the Tennessee Lottery and administered by the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation. This program provides opportunities for students to begin working toward a college degree, while still pursuing a high school diploma, and encourages post-secondary education and the acceleration of post-secondary attainment. Local dual credit courses are provided through a partnership with an individual postsecondary institution, and students earn credit through an assessment that is developed and/or approved specifically for credit at that institution. The LEAP grant allowed the NWTN Workforce Board to fund instructor certifications for the participating high schools and postsecondary institutions. Moving forward, there should be minimal cost to schools offering the CPT classes as part of their Career and Technical Education curriculum.

For more information on LEAP, please visit <http://driveto55.org/initiatives/tennessee-leap> and contact Lori Kelley-Burdine, Project Coordinator at kelly@nwtworks.org or (731) 286-3585 ext 15.