



NEWS RELEASE

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Media contact: Lizette Downey | 260.278.8478
Don Wood Foundation

Don Wood Foundation and OrthoWorx release CTE ecosystem results for Kosciusko and Whitley counties

Focus on technical, soft skills development along with entrepreneurialism

FORT WAYNE, IND. (May 9, 2024) – The Don Wood Foundation, a private foundation dedicated to advancing manufacturing and entrepreneurship, and OrthoWorx, a Warsaw-based nonprofit focused on advancing innovation and a globally competitive orthopedic industry, today made public findings from a research study on the technical education ecosystem within Kosciusko and Whitley counties, plus employer and community needs. The two nonprofits partnered with an Indianapolis-based national consulting firm, TPMA, to conduct the comprehensive study.

“The goal was to understand what is working well in the two-county region, to identify challenges and opportunities, and to offer strengthening initiatives for the future,” said Patrick Buesching, vice president, strategic initiatives, Don Wood Foundation. “This region has the benefit of a strong orthopedic manufacturing industry that could inspire more students to consider an advanced manufacturing career path.”

Of the nine findings listed in the study, two stand out to Buesching including:

- Developing employability skills as well as technical skills; and
- Incorporating an entrepreneurial mindset into education and beyond.

Equipping the next generation with talent and driving innovation through accelerating industry are two of the three goals of OrthoWorx. President and CEO of OrthoWorx Bob Vitoux, immediately saw benefit to identify the workforce needs more clearly in the area.

“As the report recommendations suggest, it’s crucial that Kosciusko and Whitley counties develop a unified effort to marry career education and training with its robust orthopedic, agricultural, and other dominant manufacturing partners to ensure a prepared workforce. With that, OrthoWorx is even more resolved to help bolster and retain our local talent,” said Vitoux. “Collaboration is more important than ever, especially now that work-based/experiential learning is strongly trending in our state. We need employers and schools to see this need as an opportunity to become more engaged and united in building the workforce it needs to sustain and flourish.”

Key findings listed below highlight strengths and challenges in the two counties’ current CTE ecosystem.

1. **Strategic partnerships propel workforce development between CTE programs and large employers** enabling the region to facilitate a seamless transition from classroom learning to career readiness.
2. **Employers need CTE training to teach both technical and employability skills** to bridge the differing perspectives on the value of the technical aspects of secondary CTE training. It remains essential to connect internal training with external education options, so students receive a well-rounded skill set and keep the doors open for future career growth.
3. **Challenges in work-based learning (WBL) implementation** surface for employers as they face obstacles in supporting students’ WBL experiences due to concerns about liability, administrative workload, and uncertainty about post-training employment.

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4. **Inconsistent access to CTE pathways and WBL opportunities** creates challenges in meeting the growing demand of more students joining CTE programs, and districts expand WBL opportunities. Coordinators of WBL play crucial role in student success.
5. **Rural school districts face distinct challenges** means that students in rural CTE districts encounter barriers to ensuring equitable access to CTE pathways and WBL opportunities.
6. **Multiple CTE districts complicates resource allocation and collaboration efforts** which reveals a need to streamline efforts and foster regional partnerships to optimize resource effectiveness and enhance the quality of CTE education available in the two counties.
7. **Advanced Manufacturing CTE Pathways Are Cost-Prohibitive for Schools** because new training programs for high-wage, high-demand pathways have higher equipment and materials costs compared to existing programs. Although some local employers donate their used equipment to schools, it is outdated and does not meet industry standards.
8. **A unified strategy for talent pipeline development is essential** among employers, schools, and community stakeholders to help the region effectively address workforce needs and economic recovery.
9. **Balancing graduation pathways and career interests** may encourage students to pursue CTE courses primarily to meet graduation requirements rather than aligning with their personal career interests. With increased student interest in CTE programs, schools may encounter growing difficulties in accommodating the heightened demand, the high initial costs of establishing and sustaining CTE programs, and the struggle to recruit qualified CTE instructors.

The 2-County Region study may be found by clicking the following link: [Kosciusko and Whitley counties CTE study - Don Wood Foundation](#). Learn more about DWF's granting process online at donwoodfoundation.org.

About the Don Wood Foundation

The Don Wood Foundation is a private foundation, established in 2018 by Don Wood, founder of 80/20, Inc., that serves and supports innovators, leaders, collaborators, and skilled workers with the potential to create and sustain opportunities in manufacturing. The Foundation partners with nonprofits and educational institutions to provide sustained investment that supports the development of a diverse workforce through exposure, education, and training to create strong communities rooted in the advancement of manufacturing. Follow Don Wood Foundation on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

About OrthoWorx

OrthoWorx is an initiative formed in 2009 in the Orthopedic Capital of the World® through initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc., to fill a critical void in the industry as a connection from industry members, education, and our community, leveraging resources to drive positive change. OrthoWorx was specifically designed to make our region the best place for orthopedic industry talent to grow and thrive. We are a catalyst, deepening connections among the various interrelated moving parts of our unique orthopedic industry ecosystem, so our region remains the Orthopedic Capital of the World®. This is accomplished through our work and initiatives to equip the next generation, enrich our community, and accelerate industry. Learn more about OrthoWorx online at orthoworxindiana.com.

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