

Fogle: Workforce development program completes first year

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Workforce development has been a hot topic in Washington, D.C., Springfield, high schools and businesses throughout the nation.

Responding to those same concerns, the DeKalb/Ogle Workforce Development Consortium was created and is about to conclude the first year of its Pilot Program.

With collaboration between area high schools and local industry, the program has exposed students to a variety of industries with numerous career paths and significant career value. While successes were abundant during the first year, challenges have been identified and will be addressed at an upcoming workshop June 27.

Many internship opportunities are throttled by the “18 years of age and older” restriction. Currently, there appears to be some confusion within the employer community regarding the state laws concerning youth in the workplace. Some employers interpret the law to be very restrictive, while others say it is flexible enough to create internships and summer opportunities. We will work toward a definitive statement from appropriate authorities prior to the workshop.

Historically, college-bound students are easily identified by teachers and counselors. Less identifiable, our pilot program seeks those students who may want to enter the workforce directly from high school. These students may not have the highest grades, but they have the ideas and innovations of the future. They build, design, work with their hands, troubleshoot, are naturally curious and think “outside the box.”

Another current trend is to introduce students to careers at elementary school age; research the careers that look interesting in middle school; plot a path to the career and execute it during high school. This sounds like a daunting task, considering that most of us land in a career rather than plan for it. Perhaps another approach is in order. Instead of being specific about the career choice, make an area choice.

For example: Suppose I decide that I like media production. Then take classes that relate to media production, but do not specify the job. This eventually opens opportunities in sales, graphic design, machinery repair, digital replication, writing, machine operation and anything that pertains to media production. So you are working and studying in an area that you like, while you are deciding what you can do really well.

These are but a few of the questions to be considered and the ideas for exploration. If you have questions or ideas for the DeKalb/Ogle Workforce Development Consortium, contact Gene Fogle, Industrial Workforce coordinator, at gfogle@dcedc.org.

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