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Successful Pathway Training Program Enrolling More Students

A successful training program implemented last fall at Kirkwood Community College is now accepting more students and seeking state funding to expand to all community colleges in Iowa. The Kirkwood Pathways for Academic Career Education and Employment (KPACE) gives people the skills needed to work in local industry, set them up for advancement and help them escape poverty.

The program was created in response to the region's identified skills needs and community goal of increasing the number of financially stable households in the area. This is a partnership between Kirkwood Community College, the United Way of East Central Iowa, community-based organizations and local employers.

With its first students moving through the program, it has a 76 percent completion and retention rate overall. KPACE focuses on pathways in health care, manufacturing and information technology. Students are receiving credentials for Certified Nurse Aide, Welding and PC Applications.

"Overall we're very pleased with the results of the programming. We've seen the impact this has on successful students, and we are committed to continually improving the pathway programs," said Kim Johnson, vice president for Kirkwood Continuing Education and Training Services. "We've helped people get their GED, helped them find better employment, and put many on the track to earn more credentials and academic degrees in their chosen field."

KPACE is targeted at lower-skilled, low-income adults, the unemployed and underemployed. It's set up to support individuals' abilities to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment, helping them gain financial stability along the way. The program weaves together basic skills training, workplace readiness training, academic learning and credential attainment, preparing the students for work in local industries that have a shortage of qualified employees.

The program uniquely positions a "pathway navigator," whose role it is to work with participants of the program to navigate the educational environment and their pathway. The program can provide tuition, supportive services and case management to income-eligible participants.

Many of the students enrolled in the pathway program do not have their GED. They take courses that lead to their GED, while earning the industry credentials that will help them find a job.

Those who work toward their GED while going through this program have been twice as successful in attainment as those who only focus on the GED.

“In today’s competitive workforce, we know that the GED is no longer enough,” said Marcel Kielkucki, Kirkwood director of high school completion programs. “For students to earn good paying jobs, combining a GED with additional skills training, increases the chances for students to gain better employment or continue their education. We’re also finding that students enrolling in these programs have greater motivation and we’re seeing better success rates than those who have enrolled in traditional GED programs.”

Numerous funding resources are leveraged that support better outcomes. Kirkwood Community College commits funding from the Workplace Training and Economic Development Fund and the GAP Tuition Assistance Program. United Way of East Central Iowa has allocated \$65,000 through 2013 to provide support services, both during their program of study, as well as in the transition to further education or employment. The Workforce Investment Act program commits funds as well.

Other community grants are also supporting the program: the Witwer Center, Food Assistance and Employment Training Program, and the Adult Literacy for the Workforce in Iowa. These supports are intended for use when all other state and local resources have been exhausted. Combined with the training received, they can have a long-term impact on the financial stability of households in our community.

“We’re glad to see the success of this program on our community already,” said Judy Stoffel, Community Building manager at the United Way of East Central Iowa. “The continued success of this program will help the United Way reach its goal of increasing the number of financially stable households by 15 percent over the next five years. Helping low-income individuals build work related skills that meet industry demand is a key component to the KPACE Initiative. Earning credentials that are recognized by area employers can open doors for an individual to secure more stable employment at a sustainable wage.”

The KPACE programs in health care, information technology and advanced manufacturing lead to credentials that support middle-wage jobs at a self-sufficient wage. The programs focus on the college readiness and work readiness needs of education and employers. Those in the program come in with different levels of education and leave at different levels as well. The goal of the program is for participants to earn a certificate or credential, and then translate that into a diploma and in many cases a degree, giving them the education and skills local industries demand.

KPACE’s priority applicants are residents of Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Jones, Johnson, Linn and Washington counties, who are at least 18 years old, have a family or individual income at or below 250 percent of the federal poverty level, are unemployed or underemployed, and in need of a GED or high school diploma. Other individuals who already have a GED or high school diploma also qualify.

“This program will help identify and address the academic and social supports that are needed for students to fully engage in training and acquire certificates, diplomas and degrees,” added Stoffel. “This community initiative will have lasting impact on vulnerable households in our area.”

For more information or to apply for KPACE, contact Mialisa Wright at 319-784-1518 or mialisa.wright@kirkwood.edu. New sessions start in April.

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