Northeast Iowa Career Learning Link
Postville, Iowa

Program Model: Grades 11 – 12
Industry Focus: Health, Business/Finance, STEM, Advanced Manufacturing and Information Technology

Overview of the Northeast Iowa Career Learning Link YCC Program

Northeast Iowa Career Learning Link (CLL) connects businesses and high schools by offering relevant, work-based learning activities for students and educators. The program is currently funded through two grants – the U.S. Department of Labor Youth CareerConnect (YCC) and the state of Iowa Regional Work-Based Intermediary Network. Partners Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission, Northeast Iowa Community College, and East Central Intergovernmental Association administer the YCC grant portion of the program.

The CLL program is available to juniors who make a two-year commitment to participate and encourages interest in high-demand career pathways – healthcare, information technology, advanced manufacturing, business/finance, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, math). Advantages to CLL students include: one-on-one meetings with a career coach regarding future education and career plans, job shadowing opportunities, exclusive work-based learning events such as business tours, and optional mentoring and/or internship participation.

CLL initiatives are designed to assist students in determining career goals and aligning these goals with achievable education plans through quality work-based learning experiences and career coaching.

Program Highlight

Work-based learning opportunities is an area where CLL excels, and students rate job shadows as the number one component of the program in both exit surveys and focus groups. CLL has worked hard to intentionally offer work-based learning according to where students are on the career learning continuum and in their career decision-making process.

The career continuum phases as we have defined them are:

**Awareness**
This gives students opportunities to help them understand how education/training is related to career/work. Examples of awareness activities include speakers, career fairs, and informational interviewers.

**Exploration**
This provides experience-based learning through which students engage with professionals in a specialized career path. Exploration activities include work-site tours, job shadows and other field trips.
**Workplace Preparation**

The final phase encompasses events and individual or group discussions designed to integrate academic and work-based skills. These activities include internships, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and cooperative work experiences. Many students will not participate in this phase until their exit from CLL and high school graduation. However, career coaches work with students so that they understand the importance of this final step.

In the sustained CLL model, students must participate in awareness and exploration activities, then make a commitment to their career pathway choice before they are considered for funding or other necessary supports required to move into the workplace preparation phase.

**Success Story**

From early in our program, the highest student interest has been in the healthcare pathway, and it quickly became a priority to find partners who could offer quality experiences in this field. A partnership with Winneshiek Medical Center in Decorah offered job shadows, particularly in careers requiring up to a two-year degree. However, our demand was too large for one facility, and some students aspired to higher-level positions such as physician and nurse practitioner. Many were also interested in opportunities at larger facilities than those in our local rural communities.

A web search revealed that Gundersen Health Systems in La Crosse, Wisconsin, offered students exposure to health careers through their Integrated Center for Education (ICE House). In early 2016, a new partnership with the ICE House allowed CLL students hands-on demonstrations, tours of a large healthcare facility, and access to viewing live surgery with operating room interaction. CLL is now one of four featured partnerships on the ICE House education website.

CLL work-based learning in healthcare continues to expand in local facilities. Winneshiek Medical Center now offers an annual group event; Mercy Medical Center Dubuque and Dyersville hosted their first group healthcare events in 2017-18; and Regional Medical Center in Manchester will host an event this year. Additional facilities are offering or building job shadow programs to expose CLL students to their career opportunities and facilities.

Through these partnerships, we are not only enhancing the CLL program for health pathway students but also encouraging the next generation of local talent to remain in rural Northeast Iowa and contribute to the economic life of the area.

**Community Impact**

The majority of school districts would agree that having a dedicated career coach to work with students greatly enhances their ability to provide career and academic planning. CLL is proud to partner with school counselors, who must provide mental and social counseling as well as academic scheduling. As school counselors are often unable to devote adequate time to career and academic planning due to their other priorities, CLL fills this gap with career coaches who supplement the existing college and career programming advisement in partner school districts.

In addition, the extensive work-based learning provided through CLL would not exist without YCC, and these experiences create positive impacts on communities and individuals throughout the 5,000-square-mile region. All partners involved with work-based learning – schools, businesses, community organizations – benefit from having students participate in tours, job shadows, career fairs, mock interviews, and more. CLL is proud of the strong program developed through YCC funds and technical assistance, and we are thankful for the opportunities the program brought to more than 1,000 high school students in Northeast Iowa.

The future is bright for CLL, and the impact it is having on rural Northeast Iowa communities continues to grow.

Northeast Iowa Career Learning Link

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