

Van Wert County Business Advisory Council Joint Statement

The Van Wert Business Advisory Council organized in July 2018 under the guidelines established by the Ohio Board of Education. Membership includes the superintendent of each of the county's school districts, education leaders, company officials, and economic development professionals.

The group is charged with the task of developing a working relationship between business leaders and educators, defining employment skills needed for students to succeed, and understanding changes in the economy to identify jobs most likely to be available locally in the future.

A survey was developed by the group in September and sent to the county's major employers. The goal was to determine which skills employees need but lack, the curriculum needed to produce students who are prepared to enter the workforce and contribute to our community, and which programs are effective in informing students of local opportunity. The response was tremendous, with feedback from businesses employing more than half of all workers in Van Wert County.

Dependability, adaptability, communication, integrity and problem solving were at the top of the list of qualities employers are seeking in an employee. The survey also showed that general labor/production jobs are in the highest demand in our county, followed by office administration/professionals, maintenance and welders.

In the comment portion of the survey, business leaders had several messages for educators, including: Van Wert County has good jobs for those who want to work hard and show up to work — the survey showed poor attendance was the top reason for termination (63%); College doesn't guarantee success and isn't the right path for every student; learning how to work hard and communicate with others is the surest way to find and keep a good job; and students need to be taught about the job opportunities in the county.

As a result of the survey, business leaders and educators held a roundtable to discuss how dependability can be addressed in the classroom. The exchange of ideas between those with differing perspectives proved enlightening. Superintendents at all districts shared the highlights with their staffs and a review of what is being done and what additional lessons can be incorporated into the classroom is underway.

Another initiative developed as a result of the survey is Education on Location, a five-day course for local educators to be taught at Vantage Career Center in June. Teachers will earn three graduate degree credits for attending the class in which they will learn about local job opportunities and what skills are needed for those jobs, tour 10 area companies, hear from business representatives, and learn virtual reality technology to pass the information along to their students.

In its eight months of existence the Van Wert BAC has completed many steps toward meeting its responsibilities. Relationships have been established between business and education leaders through monthly meetings, a successful survey was completed indicating business demands so an effective curriculum can be developed, and a course for county educators to learn more about the local job opportunities has been scheduled.