

Indiana's Employability Skills Innovation & Implementation Grant



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ABOUT AMERICA SUCCEEDS:

America Succeeds is a nonprofit organization committed to engaging business leaders in modernizing education systems to drive equity and opportunity. Our organization is uniquely positioned between business and the education policy sector – acting as an “education voice to business” nationally and a “business voice for education” at the state-level. America Succeeds’ work bridges these two distinct constituencies, with advocacy efforts aimed at larger culture change and policy efforts that ultimately help us achieve our vision of preparing every student to succeed in the competitive global economy and contribute to their local community.



ABOUT LEARNER-CENTERED COLLABORATIVE:

Learner-Centered Collaborative is a non-profit that emerged from decades of experience in education—from classroom educator to district superintendent—spanning every corner of the country. Our team’s diverse set of experiences in education allowed us to see firsthand what works, identify the biggest challenges, and set ambitious goals for what is possible. We are guided by the persistent truth that a learner-centered approach is the foundation for a successful, thriving learning community. And we know that a shift to learner-centered is a collaborative endeavor.



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In the summer of 2022, the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) launched the Employability Skills Innovation and Implementation (ESII) Grant to help students develop in-demand employability skills that prepare them to meet the ever-changing needs of today's workforce. The department commissioned America Succeeds to document the ESII grant initiative and to tell the stories of and lessons learned from early implementation through this case study.

A Broad and Responsive Vision

The ESII grant is part of a larger vision of state leaders to ensure that Hoosier students graduate ready to succeed in any postsecondary pathway, equipped with both academic and employability skills. The belief is that whether a graduate plans to employ, enroll, enlist, or some combination of the three, they will need both core academic skills and content knowledge and competencies in listening, communicating effectively, and working well with others.

IDOE's efforts reflect a comprehensive approach, including re-envisioning how school and student performance are measured (see the new Graduates Prepared to Succeed (GPS) system), the ESII pilot grant initiative, integrating employability skills development with existing federal grants (e.g. school improvement grants), and rethinking the high-school experience in Indiana to ensure the four years are as valuable as possible.

There is strong evidence to support IDOE's elevation of employability skills. Employability skills fall under what America Succeeds calls, "Durable Skills." Durable Skills include a combination of how you use what you know – skills like critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity – as well as character skills like fortitude, growth mindset, and leadership. In a 2021 report on Durable Skills in Indiana, America Succeeds analyzed 1.6 million Indiana job postings across 20 industries and 29,000 employers from 2020–2021, finding that 1.2 million Indiana jobs demanded at least one Durable Skill, 704,000 demanded three or more Durable Skills, and that six of the 10 most requested skills across all postings were Durable Skills.



WE STUDIED
1.6 MILLION
 JOB POSTINGS
 FROM
2020-2021



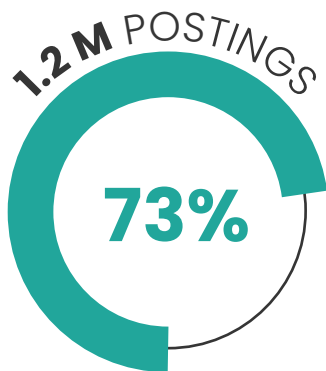
ACROSS
22 OCCUPATIONS,
20 INDUSTRIES,
 AND OVER
29,000 COMPANIES



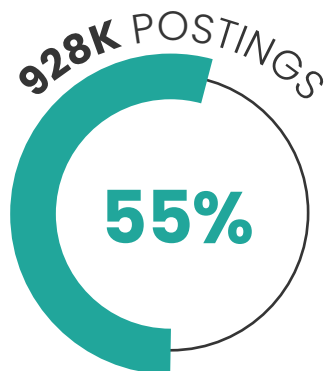
73%
 OF THOSE JOB
 POSTINGS REQUESTED
AT LEAST ONE
DURABLE SKILL

A 2021 REPORT SHOWED THAT
1.2 MILLION INDIANA JOBS
 DEMANDED DURABLE SKILLS

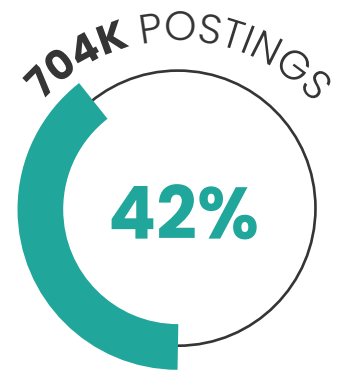
1+ DURABLE SKILLS



2+ DURABLE SKILLS



3+ DURABLE SKILLS



OVER **826K**
POSTINGS
 REQUESTED
 COMMUNICATIONS



THE **TOP 5**
DURABLE SKILLS
 WERE REQUESTED **3.5X**
 MORE THAN TOP 5 HARD SKILLS



6 OF THE **10**
 MOST REQUESTED
 SKILLS WERE
DURABLE SKILLS

The Demand for Durable Skills by Occupation Sector

(DATA FROM 2021 REPORT)

SOC-2	OCCUPATION	AT LEAST 1 DURABLE SKILL	AT LEAST 2 DURABLE SKILLS
11	Management	93%	84%
13	Business & Financial Operations	91%	81%
41	Sales and Related	91%	77%
43	Office & Administrative Support	90%	76%
33	Protective Service	88%	44%
15	Computer & Mathematical	86%	71%
55	Military-only Occupations	85%	62%
19	Life, Physical & Social Science	84%	51%
17	Architecture & Engineering	84%	45%
23	Legal	83%	69%
21	Community & Social Service	81%	64%
27	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, & Media	81%	48%
25	Educational Instruction & Library	80%	60%
49	Installation, Maintenance & Repair	77%	57%
35	Food Preparation & Serving Related	70%	47%
51	Production	64%	61%
39	Personal Care and Service	63%	62%
37	Building & Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	63%	66%
29	Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	60%	42%
31	Healthcare Support	60%	42%
45	Farming, Fishing & Forestry	56%	33%
47	Construction and Extraction	53%	34%
53	Transportation & Material Moving	46%	53%



Through a 2021 analysis of occupational demand for Durable Skills in Indiana, we found that more than half of the jobs in the following industries request three or more Durable Skills on all job postings:

- Manufacturing
- Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
- Information
- Real Estate & Rental & Leasing
- Public Administration
- Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation
- Management of Companies & Enterprises
- Utilities
- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting
- Mining, Quarrying & Oil & Gas Extraction
- Wholesale Trade

More than 80% of job postings for these occupation types request one or more Durable Skills:

- Management
- Business & Financial Operations
- Sales & Related
- Office & Administrative Support
- Computer & Mathematical
- Military Occupations
- Architecture & Engineering
- Legal
- Community & Social Services
- Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports & Media
- Educational Instruction & Library
- Life, Physical & Social Science
- Protective Services

Given the direct overlap between Durable Skills and Indiana’s core Employability Skills, the IDOE is responding directly to employer demand for a skilled talent supply.

Indiana Employability Skills	America Succeeds Durable Skills
Work ethic (including Independence, Perseverance, Time Management and Organization, Adaptability, Integrity, and Professionalism)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fortitude ■ Character ■ Growth Mindset ■ Metacognition ■ Critical Thinking ■ Mindfulness
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Communication ■ Collaboration ■ Mindfulness
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Collaboration ■ Communication ■ Mindfulness ■ Leadership ■ Metacognition

Employability Skills Innovation and Implementation Grant

“

We quickly realized we needed to have a Northstar. We needed some guiding principles. And so we started working with other states and local schools to talk about what we want for every child as they come out of the K-12 system in the state of Indiana.” – **Jason Callahan, Assistant Secretary of Student Pathways and Opportunities for the Indiana Department of Education**

For the ESII grant, IDOE established three goals:

1

Schools, in partnership with external stakeholders, will develop programming to measure student readiness and proficiency in the skills of communication, collaboration, and work ethic.

2

Schools will increase the number of students mastering the Indiana Employability Skills standards of communication, collaboration, and work ethic as measured through micro-credentials and badges.

3

Schools will implement systemic programming that has transferability with and validity from internal and external stakeholders around the skills of communication, collaboration, and work ethic.

The department invested \$10 million through the ESII initiative to provide grants to 58 schools across 40 counties. IDOE's approach to the grant itself reflected four key principles: innovation, flexibility, measurement, and capacity building.

Innovation

Central to the ESII grant's theory of change is innovation. For some schools, integrating employability skills into the curriculum would be an entirely new venture; for others, it may be part of an ongoing initiative. In any case, there was no single program or approach that had been taken to scale yet; this work would be at the forefront of similar efforts across the country to expand what it means for students to graduate college and career ready. IDOE utilized the ESII grant to accelerate this work in Indiana, measure the outcomes, and capture lessons learned and promising practices. Prospective grantees were asked to develop as part of the application an "innovation implementation plan" and to participate in a Community of Practice as part of implementing the grant in order to encourage the transfer of ideas and notable findings.

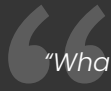
Flexibility

While IDOE had very clear goals for the ESII grant and broad requirements for the competitive grant application, flexibility was paramount. The department opened the grant up to all school types (traditional public, public charter, and non-public) serving all grades. IDOE did not specify to grantees how employability skills should be integrated into the curriculum, how much time students had to spend learning the skills, nor how outcomes were to be measured. Because of this, the ESII grant truly was a pilot or laboratory model, allowing grantees, as well as the department, to experiment and learn from a variety of approaches and ideas.

Measurement

To facilitate learning from the ESII pilots being implemented, IDOE required grantees to measure outcomes and report the data. Specifically, the grant application required the plan to collect and report to the IDOE data regarding:

- **Skill mastery:** How skill development is measured
- **Settings for skill development:** How skill measurement is differentiated between internal experiences (classroom) and external experiences (extracurricular, co-curricular, work-based learning)
- **Currency of skill development:** How student completion of micro-credentials provide external currency (preferential hiring, mentorship, career ladder, scholarships, college credit, etc.) to students
- **Alignment with accountability and reporting (GPS):** How skill development qualifies for Graduation Pathways (work-, project-, and service-based learning)



“What we really want to see is a process [whereby] the schools can collect this data through their school information system, [and then] we can know how many students across the state of Indiana are mastering these skills on scale and with fidelity in a standardized approach.”

– Jason Callahan, Assistant Secretary of Student Pathways and Opportunities for the Indiana Department of Education

Capacity Building

Although schools ideally were integrating their ESII activities into an existing program, curriculum, or instructional vision, many schools were not fully equipped to take on the task without building out some capacity, infrastructure, and processes to implement their plan. Adoption and purchase of curriculum and materials, hiring of design and project-management staff, programming and assessment mapping and development – these are just some of the tasks necessary for schools to implement employability skills projects meaningfully. In most cases, it involved a combination of building capacity in-house and contracting through various partners. According to surveys and reviews by [Chamberlin/Dunn](#), capacity building with grant funding included:

- Alignment of curriculum to pathway projects and skills; development of micro-credentialing systems
- Mapping of employability skills assets and programs to organize programming and track progress
- Creation of a design team to identify, define, and determine mastery of competencies; creation of indicators and processes for demonstrating mastery; and creation of data collection processes
- Use of data to identify areas of need; expansion of programming and creation of assessments; and identification of counseling curriculum around employability skills
- Expansion of collaboration and employer engagement, within and across districts

IDOE engaged several partners to support this process:

[Learner-Centered Collaborative](#) (through America Succeeds) to develop an interactive [Employability Skills Playbook](#) using the processes, resources, and highlights of early implementers as a 'how-to' toolkit for educators seeking to implement their own skills-focused programs;

[Chamberlin/Dunn](#) to evaluate early implementation efforts and results of ESII grantees; and

[America Succeeds](#) to engage business leaders around the state with the Indiana Chamber of Commerce and to tell the story of Indiana's efforts through a case study and video highlighting grantees and their partners.

Indiana by the Numbers

Total population:

6,862,199

according to Census Bureau
July 2023 estimates

Total employed population as of Dec. 2023:

3,423,256

Top Five Industries

(by number of people employed
as of September 2022)

- Trade, Transportation, Utilities
- Manufacturing
- Education and Health Services
- Government
- Professional and Business Services

454 school corporations,
1,934 schools

(including 132 public charter
schools as of 2023-2024) and

384 non-public schools

1.13 million students during
the 2023-2024 school year



The Employability Skills Playbook

From the pilot implementers, Learner-Centered Collaborative distilled the approach into four phases, each with a series of steps:



Set Strategy

Articulate the **WHY** and listen to your community to inform where you're going.

Plan to Measure Learning

Determine how you will measure the development of Employability Skills.

Create Conditions for Success

Forge community partnerships, build capacity, curate resources, and align policy.

Develop Employability Skills

Create relevant, high-quality experiences for students to practice and demonstrate Employability Skills.

1

Set Strategy:

Articulate reasons for change and listen to your community to inform where you're going.

This is the planning phase where leaders put the pieces together. Steps include: forming your guiding coalition, anchoring on your “Why?,” scoping the work, and spreading the word.

“

That's the best advice that I would give if I were still back in the superintendency. Engage everybody, all stakeholders, parents, students, community foundations, chambers of commerce in this conversation about, 'What do we want to see from a skills standpoint in addition to those academic standards? And then how do we do it? How do we embed this? What's that answer?'"

– Jason Callahan, Assistant Secretary of Student Pathways and Opportunities for the Indiana Department of Education

2

Plan to Measure Learning:

Determine how you will measure the development of employability skills.

How to measure these skills is the question everyone is trying to answer – and there's no agreed-upon answer yet. What is certain is that employability skills likely cannot be measured by a single test. Steps in this phase include: considering your context, defining your measurement, and exploring different measures, such as performance assessments, student portfolios, badges and credentials, and exhibitions of learning.

“

How do we really embed this in teaching and learning and then how do we measure it? I think where we're landing is kind of in the middle of the road – ensuring that it's embedded in the teaching and learning and then some way to have that external validation [of] if the student has mastered that skill.”

– Jason Callahan, Assistant Secretary of Student Pathways and Opportunities for the Indiana Department of Education

3

Create Conditions for Success:

Build structures, resources, connections, and capacity to support the development of students' employability skills.

Managing change is always a challenge; success often relies on getting the right conditions in place to support the process. Steps include: forging business partnerships, aligning professional development, curating resources, and updating policies and reports.

“

Our employers have been fantastic. Honestly, I think they were hungry for it. They were just waiting to be asked to help because the quality of graduates we put out directly affects them. They're the future of their workplace.”

– Amy Madden, Community Liaison, New Castle Community School Corporation

4

Develop Employability Skills:

Create meaningful experiences for students to practice and demonstrate employability skills.

This is where the work happens. With the right strategy, plan to measure learning, and conditions in place, educators can provide the right opportunities for all students to develop employability skills. Opportunities might include: pathways aligned with career fields and clusters, community partnerships and internships, and courses integrated with employability skills.

“

We have a lot of different routes that students can take, whether it's with our career center or staying within the high school itself. Team projects [and] project-based learning [are] something that we're starting to do a little more just because we realize that's what happens in the real world – essentially trying to marry different subjects together, [like] the science and the math or the English and the econ, and having not only students work collaboratively, but [also] teachers work collaboratively. Instead of students having four different projects and four different classes, they may have one project that they're working on in four different classes.”

– Amy Madden, Community Liaison, New Castle Community School Corporation

Grantee Highlights

The following grantee summaries – aligned with the Employability Skills Playbook sections – are included as a sample of the innovative approaches and impressive work done across the state.




Batesville High School

Batesville High School’s ESII plan centers around creating “desirable applicants through intentional professional development sessions led by Batesville teachers and local industry professionals focused on the creation of durable skills aligned to Indiana Employability Skills standards.”

Students developed durable skills through a combination of facilitated, small-group sessions focused on reflection and critical thinking; mentorship and professional development; and off-campus learning opportunities during their junior and senior years.


Batesville High School continued

Plan to Measure Learning	Create Conditions for Success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Formative assessments focused on terminology and conceptual understanding of industries (developed with Skillsline) ■ Micro-lesson completion rates (program participation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Partnered with Skillsline, Indigo, RISE Project (local industry leaders), and JAG (high-quality PD) ■ Partnered with local community businesses like Margaret St. Mary Health, Integrity Tool, and Med-Mizer (experiential learning opportunities for students)
Develop Employability Skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Skill-development activities facilitated by Indigo and Skillsline-certified teachers ■ RISE Project lessons, DISC assessment, extended mentorship opportunities using Skillsline curriculum, and JAG-led weekly professional development seminars using Skillsline curriculum aligned with Employability Skills standards 	



Andy Allen

Principal - Batesville Community Schools



believe in **better**

“How do we best develop the concept of them becoming desirable applicants, not just upon graduation? We know that when they leave us, they’re going to do one of three things: employment, enrollment, or enlistment. They’re going to be applicants all throughout the high school experience, whether it’s an extracurricular function, whether it’s a part-time job, maybe a fine arts setting – our kids are applying all the time. And in a competitive applicant pool, we want them to be the most desirable applicants.” – **Andy Allen, Principal, Batesville High School**



Center Grove Community Schools

Center Grove saw the ESII initiative as an opportunity to implement a “comprehensive approach to ensure all students are receiving explicit instruction on the employability skills.” The district uses the grant to “expand current programming and establish a “Portrait of a Center Grove Graduation” portfolio, which would showcase how our students K-12 are proficient in the necessary employability skills to be successful and marketable in the workforce.” Center Grove targeted efforts on students in grades K-8 in order to prepare them for opportunities in high school to explore different career pathways.

Center Grove Community Schools continued

Plan to Measure Learning	Create Conditions for Success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Universal screener in fall and spring semesters (data on regulation, classroom effort, and grit) ■ Summative assessments (unit tests) at K-5 level and formative assessments (pre- and post-) for grades 6-8 (proficiency) ■ Panorama student surveys (student wellbeing and school climate) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Partnered with regional employers, including Community Health, Riley Hospital, and Ivy Tech (Whole Child Committee team participation) and local colleges and universities (presentations to students regarding career options and skills needed to be successful) ■ Partnered with Johnson County Purdue Extension (K-8 work-, service-, and project-based learning programming)
Develop Employability Skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Explicit instruction on employability skills of regulation, connection, and collaboration twice each month ■ Career-exploration activities in grades 6-8, including Go College Week and weekly lessons provided by the counseling and mental health team ■ Experiential-learning activities through Johnson County Purdue Extension partnership, including INWork – INnovate, INvest, INspire, and Captain Ca\$h ■ Expanded programming and course options in grades 9-12, including career-interest inventories for 10th-graders and in-house field trips for all students 	



“Our school counseling and social work team has continued to see [a need for skill development related to] peer conflict, being able to regulate emotions, good time management, develop[ing] those relationship skills. We really see the importance of building the skills in our students before they [graduate] so that they can be successful after, whether that’s college right away, straight to the workforce, or into the service.” – **Christy Berger, Director of School Counseling and Mental Health, Center Grove Community School Corporation**



Herron Preparatory Academy

Herron Prep used the ESII grant to support its Related Arts programming, enabling students to develop employability skills and “build stamina to complete Core 40 requirements, be successful in AP courses, and earn honors and technical diplomas; prepare students to participate in work-based internships across central Indiana; [and through project-based learning activities], develop excellent writing skills so that they can effectively write to inform, persuade, and entertain.”

Heron Prep Academy continued

Plan to Measure Learning	Create Conditions for Success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Four Related Arts projects during school year ■ Use of rubric categories to assess student learning of collaboration, presentation, and time management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ New dedicated position to direct college and career readiness programming and partnerships in close collaboration with stakeholders to ensure rigor and alignment to employer demands ■ Partnerships with Indy Urban Youth Music Academy (IUYMA) and E.K.I.S.2 to offer curriculum enhancement
Develop Employability Skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Partnership with IUYMA for program to nurture creative abilities through artistic activities, rigorous instruction, and community engagement ■ E.K.I.S.2 partnership program to educate students on self-awareness and increased self-efficacy, and to expose them to STEM concepts through project-based learning 	



“One of the tenets of a classical education is that our kids develop habits that are similar to... employability skills. That is a continuous part of our program from our [general education] classes all the way through the related studies classes that we offer that focus on the arts and classical education. When we think about how employability skills play out for our kids here, it’s just something that they get to see and experience every day in every classroom...it’s a point of continuity for them from the time they walk in the building until the time they leave us every day.” – **Cody White, Head of School, Herron Preparatory Academy**



Milan Community Schools

Milan Community Schools sought to use the ESII grant to build on its successful Milan Works program (which provides students with work-based learning opportunities) to further integrate Indiana's Employability Skills Standards in grades K-12; improve attendance and assignment completion through programs that nurture accountability, self-confidence, and social development; and expand graduation pathway opportunities to meet the growing needs of the regional healthcare industry.

Milan Community Schools continued

Plan to Measure Learning	Create Conditions for Success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ mCLASS with DIBELS (K-4), ILEARN (Grades 3-8), and IREAD (Grade 3) ■ Student attendance and number of missing assignments (work ethic) ■ Employability Skills Self-Assessment at beginning and end of school year ■ Digital portfolios that reflect career and college goals and showcase examples of academic work, work-based learning, and volunteer experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Partnerships with local healthcare and pharmaceutical employers to provide experiential learning (health science pathways) ■ STEM certification opportunities through partnerships with IN-MAC, Genesis Pathways to Success, and Project Lead the Way ■ Facilitated presentations from local financial businesses to enhance financial literacy and career exploration ■ Partnered with Ivy Tech, Hanover College, Indiana University, and Southeastern Career Center to enable students to earn college credits and provide experiential learning through campus visits and industry-based credentialing

Develop Employability Skills

- Milan Works program to increase work-based learning and integrate Employability Skill standards into classrooms
- Leader in Me program for K-8 students
- Graduation Preparation course, facilitating postsecondary exploration and Employability Skills practice and incorporating Can Do U program
- “Authentic Accountability” initiative to assist students in development of perseverance, time management, organizational skills, independence, self-confidence, and passion for lifelong learning



“It’s such a win-win for our community. We feel like we’re a community bank and it’s our responsibility to help grow our future students. As an employer, we realize how important this is for students to gain interest in the financial industry, and then for those students to gain experience in the workplace.” – **Linda Meyer, Branch Manager, Vista Bank**



New Castle Community Schools

New Castle's approach to the ESII pilot involved the development of a micro-credentialing system for K-12 students. New Castle uses a combination of skills-embedded curriculum, hands-on or inquiry-learning tasks, professional development for educators, and increased opportunities for high school students to participate in work-based learning.

New Castle Community Schools continued

Plan to Measure Learning	Create Conditions for Success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Employability Skills micro-credentialing system with Equitable Education Solutions (EES) focused on communication, collaboration, and work ethic, providing teachers with rubrics, assessment materials, and a badging platform to track and share student achievement data ■ Rubrics and assessments aligned with curricular materials to provide feedback on individual progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stakeholder feedback throughout the year to identify key skills as well as experiential learning opportunities for students ■ Representatives from around 15 local businesses and higher education institutions informed micro-credentialing system, enhanced curricular resources, and built awareness of postsecondary opportunities for students ■ Curricular materials incorporating hands-on/ inquiry-learning tasks ■ Project- and inquiry-based learning professional certification and professional development for educators
<h3>Develop Employability Skills</h3>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Grade-level learning tasks, projects, and assignments, using curriculum maps and resources with an emphasis on communication, collaboration, and work ethic ■ Opportunities for service-, work-, and project-based learning for high school students 	



“When I think about how we’re impacting students on preparedness for postsecondary opportunities [level], I recognize the need to provide them with skills that oftentimes they don’t have and they’re not provided in any other [setting]...We have the responsibility to make sure they know how to demonstrate accountability, to demonstrate collaboration and communication. And some of the best ways for us to do that are in the classroom. When we can provide those opportunities for our students to experience success in the classroom through those skills, we know that they’re going to be more successful in their careers.” – Adam McDaniel, Assistant Superintendent, New Castle Community School Corporation



Feedback from Employers

IDOE places a high value on understanding employer perspectives and ensuring that the state's educational preparation of the future workforce is reflective of and responds directly to feedback from employers. To engage employers, America Succeeds worked with the Indiana Chamber of Commerce to facilitate three employer workshops across the state. Regional business groups co-hosted the events in Evansville, South Bend, and Fort Wayne.

Over 60 participants joined the workshops to learn more about the state's initiatives for preparing graduates with employability skills and to share their insights, perspectives, and ideas to ensure the initiatives aligned with what employers are actually seeking. Specifically, employers were asked about how they define the employability skills of collaboration, communication, and work ethic; how they would determine whether a candidate has the appropriate level of mastery of those skills for a position with their company or organization; and the value of a new hire coming equipped with employability skills.

The workshops were instructive. Overwhelmingly, the Indiana employers who participated shared that they are looking for employees who have demonstrated experience using their skills, as opposed to candidates who may only have learned the skills in a classroom setting or demonstrated them through some sort of assessment. The evaluation of another employer or work-related leader (e.g. a manager in a work-based learning program) would be trusted the most by future employers. Participants also had differing opinions about the 'currency' of employability skills. Some employers believe that candidates with demonstrated skills could be fast-tracked to promotion opportunities or a leadership program. Others still want to see the skills in action in their own workplace first before rewarding or attaching value to having skills. Employers in the workshops were very clear, however, that simply having employability skills at the start would not automatically translate into higher starting wages or a hiring bonus.

These findings present both opportunities and challenges to education leaders considering similar objectives for integrating employability skills into what students are learning. On the opportunity side, employers seem to want students to have real-world experience as they're learning new skills; as educators rethink high school models and how to leverage community and business partners, there's a tremendous opportunity to make learning more engaging and relevant for both students and future employers alike. It will be challenging, however, to figure out a way to promote the need to learn and master employability skills without being able to translate skills mastery into a more tangible value or currency for the graduate. Telling students that they should develop competencies in collaboration and work ethic, for example, that make them stronger applicants and better employees than their peers who have not yet mastered those skills, but that they won't necessarily see a reward for their efforts until they gain more work experience, is not likely to be a compelling pitch. In terms of the currency of employability skills, the long-term bet is clear while the more immediate payoff is less so.





What We've Learned

Findings

Reflective of IDOE's commitment to using the ESII grant as a learning pilot, the department enlisted Chamberlin/Dunn to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data from grantees.

Skills development and student outcomes.

Chamberlin/Dunn found that grantees used a variety of approaches to facilitate the development of employability skills. In elementary grades, students encountered:

- Hands-on career awareness kits aligned to pathways;
- Learning experiences through culture-based curriculum that models and reinforces skills and positive behaviors; and
- Software and other systems for personalized learning.

Strategies for secondary students included:

- Service- and project-based implementation, including community service days, career digital portfolios, and shark tank competitions with credentialing opportunities;
- Employability skills professional development with small groups learning personalized components of behavioral assessments and completing organized skill-development challenges;
- Off-campus academic opportunities, mentorships, internships, and other work-based learning; and
- Graduation and career coaching (through internal staff and/or vendors).

Given that ESII was a short-term grant initiative, Chamberlin/Dunn characterized the early outcomes they were able to collect as “qualitative or progress-related in nature.” The evaluation report found:

- 90,732 K-12 students participated in employability skills programming (across 37 grantees that provided data) – surprisingly, at least among respondent schools, nearly two-thirds of participating students were in grades K-8.
- Most schools could not yet provide proficiency data, and those schools encompassed the vast majority (71,000+) of participating students.
- In addition to developing the three core skills at the center of the ESII grant initiative (collaboration, communication, and work ethic), grantees reported helping students to build additional employability skills such as expectations on the job, appearance matters, critical thinking/ problem solving, attendance/punctuality, professionalism, empathy, integrity, perseverance, and regulation.
- Over 3,400 students in grades 11 and 12 participated in work-based learning programs – this number comprises only 15 percent of 11th and 12th graders across 35 respondent schools.
- 11 grantees reported awarding a total of 1,786 badges and micro-credentials. The top five badges and micro-credentials included Communication Micro-credential, Work Ethic Micro-credential, Collaboration Micro-credential, Mindset, and Self-Management.

2

Grant expenditures.

To support the strategies noted above, grantees used funding for a variety of purposes: personnel; curricula and materials; college- and career-readiness software; training and professional development; travel and transportation costs; building, furniture, and equipment; outreach; and/or contractual services.

3

Partners.

Grantees engaged over 90 partners to support the work of integrating employability skills into their programs and curriculum. Many communities relied on existing relationships, and some schools extended their outreach and engagement through a dedicated liaison role. Employer partners assisted grantees in a number of ways, “including serving on curriculum advisory committees; hosting students for work-based learning; guaranteeing an interview for students who obtain certain badges; serving as a guest speaker in classrooms; participating in job fairs; and evaluating students’ employability skills proficiency.”

4

Challenges.

Implementing the ESII grant came with some challenges. Grantees reported challenges with securing staff buy-in; taking the time to roll out new programming deliberately and carefully; employer engagement, particularly for small businesses that are tapped repeatedly for partnerships; and identifying an appropriately objective assessment approach for employability skills.



Recommendations

Chamberlin/Dunn included three high-level recommendations in their evaluation report:

- Employability Skills programming requires time and resources to support the “substantial ‘behind the scenes’ foundational work.”
- There is general “consensus that proficiency should be measured, but not on how, how standardized, or who should assess students.”
- Without “enough outcomes data...to make a definitive recommendation about a given practice or model for implementation or assessment,” IDOE should “provide a menu of employability skills measurement and assessment options from which schools can choose,” as well as grade-level requirements for assessment and for data reporting.

Additionally, America Succeeds identified a few recommendations based on working with other states pursuing goals similar to those of Indiana’s ESII grant.

1

Formalize employer engagement.

Building formal relationships and processes to engage employers on the front end was a common feature among most grantees' implementation efforts. Particularly in smaller communities, schools rely on employers for a variety of means. Developing a shared vision for what a prepared graduate can do and how they should contribute to the workforce provides structure to those relationships and ensures buy-in along the way. Practically speaking, it's much easier for employers to provide meaningful work-based learning opportunities when they understand the educational goals, how skill development will be measured, and how all parties are intended to benefit.

"I've been with this district [for] 20 years, and that's probably one of the coolest things that's happened with this grant...we have a board that goes along with the grant and we reached out to all segments of our community. Employers meet with teachers, administrators, counselors... Once a month we have a luncheon meeting and they have given us so many ideas and input. But most of all now they're coming into the school and reaching those kids and they're working with us on new partnerships, and for a community school, that's what it should have always been. Our students are going to know people in the community and feel comfortable saying, 'I can go out here and be successful because an adult has told me that I have the skills to do that.'" – Vicky Madison, Secondary Instructional Coach, New Castle Community Schools



2

Think differently.

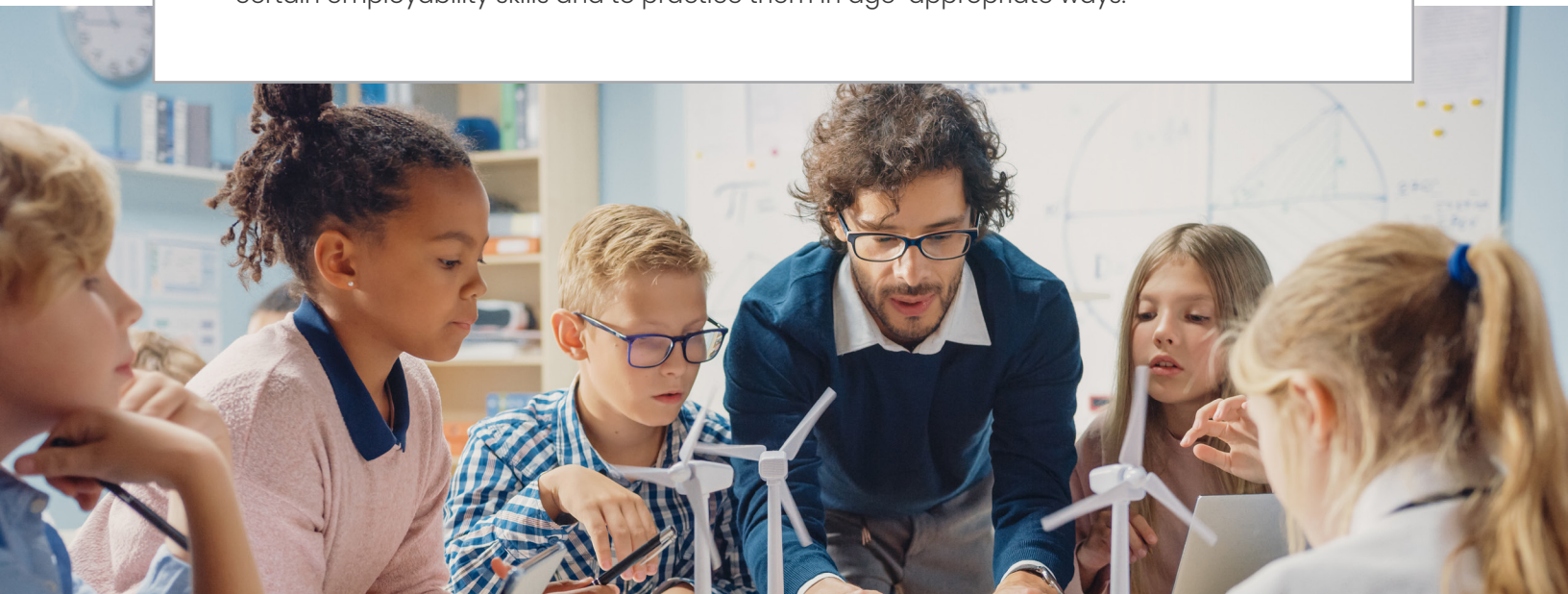
There's no one way to teach employability skills, and likewise, students aren't going to master them through any one educational opportunity. Across the board, grantees sought out ways to integrate new lessons within their curricula and to expand the student experience beyond the classroom walls. Students develop skills through real-world exercises and inquiry, reflection and feedback, and exploration. What's exciting about how Indiana schools approached the ESII grant is the myriad approaches educators deployed to provide those experiences – from hands-on internships with the local hospital to learning to regulate and collaborate in a theater class to facilitated peer-to-peer discussions and mentorship.

“I think we can and need to think about education differently. How we attack this has to look different than how we attack algebra.” – Andy Allen, Principal, Batesville High School

3

Start early.

Kids start thinking about “what they want to be when they grow up” long before high school. It's important to introduce concepts and give them opportunities to start building their skills as early as possible. Career exploration can be fun and should definitely be a component of earlier-grade work, and more robust integration would include explicit opportunities to identify certain employability skills and to practice them in age-appropriate ways.



“Our sixth graders are actually starting to do self-assessments to learn their strengths, what they like to do and not like to do, so that we can better help them find the path that they want in school. And then extracurriculars so that they are then better geared towards whatever it is they want to do once they get to high school and beyond. And our elementary curriculum director is actually starting to take bits and pieces of what we’re doing in the middle school and implementing it in the elementary school, so that they start hearing the terminology and even learning little pieces every once in a while, [for example,] recognizing that group work is another word for collaboration.” – **Amy Madden, Community Liaison, New Castle Community School Corporation**



“So our scholars from day one, we start working on the employability skills all the way up through when they’re in high school.”

– **Lacey Rhodes, Instructional Specialist, Herron Preparatory Academy**

Other Lessons Learned

Grantees shared a number of lessons learned for future implementers of employability skills education, reflecting the myriad approaches piloted throughout the state.

"Students want hands-on activities...[and] they need to know what the end goal is. We failed in phase one and phase two to tell them that we want them to be prepared for that interview. So in phase three, we started out with an outline of week one, week two, week three... saying, 'this is exactly what our plan is.' And the students really appreciated that – to know that there is structure, there is a plan, and the ultimate goal is, 'Can we answer the question about ourselves when we go into an interview?'"

– Kyle Laker, Grant Lead, Batesville Community School Corporation

"We can't do everything all at once...the importance of a slow start or small, small steps forward. There are a lot of great things happening across the country with this work, and it's easy for us to see those things and want to take...And we can't eat the elephant all at once. We need to take those small bites. We can be calculated and paced when it comes to how we venture into this work. And as a result of those small steps, we've seen even more growth than we would have seen if we tried to do it all at once."

– Adam McDaniel

"I truly believe that employability skills are not only important for students going directly into the workforce, but also those who are interviewing for scholarships, going into college, or going into the military. Employability skills aren't just about employability. Honestly, a lot of them are life skills that we all need."

– Amy Madden

"We're working together and partnering with families... that's a really important lesson I would want to share with anyone that we did that from the start. [Define] what we're doing for families, give input, and make sure that this is something that helps kids, not only [during] the 7 hours or so they're at school every day, but that parents can also use those tools at home."

– Nora Hoover, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Center Grove Community School Corporation

"[Learning employability skills] also helps me understand what kind of work environment I want to be in because...I want to make sure I know what's going on and I want to learn from it and learn anything I can...it helps me to know what kind of job opportunity I should be looking at."

– Mikayla, Student, Batesville High School

Conclusion

This case study was made possible with the generous support, time, and insights from the **Indiana Department of Education, Batesville Community School Corporation, Center Grove Community School Corporation, Herron Classical Schools, Milan Community Schools, and New Castle Community School Corporation**, as well as the incredibly valuable partnership with **Chamberlin/ Dunn, the Learner Centered Collaborative, and the Indiana Chamber of Commerce.**

To learn more about integrating Durable Skills into a school or classrooms, please check out the **Indiana Employability Skills Playbook**. To learn more about Durable Skills generally and efforts among educators around the country to ensure students are equipped to succeed, please visit DurableSkills.org.





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