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CBICC, Centre County education leaders launch collaborative local workforce preparedness initiative

CentreREADY is a community response to local workforce needs

STATE COLLEGE, PA, Sept. 12, 2018 – At a special breakfast program, the Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County and the leaders of Centre County’s five public school districts – Bald Eagle Area School District; Bellefonte Area School District; Penns Valley Area School District; Philipsburg-Osceola Area School District; and State College Area School District – and the two career/technical institutions – Central Pennsylvania Institute of Science and Technology and South Hills School of Business & Technology – officially launched a collaborative workforce initiative designed to help build a better local workforce.

CentreREADY represents a community response to local workforce needs, better matching Centre County employers with employees who possess the desired core skills and competencies needed to fuel a 21 st century workforce.

As it is nationwide, the workforce skills gap is a concern for Centre County employers. After meeting with numerous businesses across industry sectors, the CBICC’s Business and Industry Partnership Committee found that core skills and technical skills were often cited as lacking in the local workforce.

“The CBICC was resolved to respond to the workforce needs of employers here, to find ways in which the community could begin to address the issue,” said CBICC President and CEO Vern Squier, CCE, PaCCE.

Squier said buy in and support from the county’s educational institutions was essential to the success of the initiative. After spending several months discussing the scope of the initiative with education leaders, the group formally launched *CentreREADY*.

In implementing *CentreREADY*, the educational institutions pledge to provide 21 st century workforce skills experiences as part of their curriculum offerings in their respective institutions, focusing on six specific core attributes.

Squier said *CentreREADY* recognizes that each institution has its own way of assessing proficiency in these core skills. It's the designation and its emphasis on the six core attributes that resonates with employers.

For students who sign up for *CentreREADY*, earning the designation will be akin to earning the local business community's seal of approval. When Centre County employers see the *CentreREADY* designation on job applications or resumes, they will know that the applicant possesses an understanding of and proficiency in the core attributes that businesses find essential in employees.

To that end, Squier said promoting the value and purpose of *CentreREADY* certification, as well as the individuals achieving the designation, is a priority for the Chamber and community partners. The response to date has been overwhelmingly positive.

"Local businesses have embraced *CentreREADY*," Squier said. "The concern over having the workforce needed to grow and expand, and to remain competitive, is top of mind for many employers. They are receptive to efforts at the national, state and local level to address workforce readiness and close the skills gap because it ultimately matters to their bottom line and survival."

The CBICC and its education and community partners say with a focus on core skills and primarily students entering the workforce upon graduation, *CentreREADY* program is an essential, but first step in the process of building a 21 st century workforce.

The event also served as the formal signing of a workforce development Memorandum of Agreement between the CBICC and its educational partners, and the signing of a Memorandum of Support between the CBICC and its community/business supporters.

Speakers at the event included:

- CBICC President and CEO Vern Squier, CCE, PaCCE
- Paul Mazza III, president, South Hills School of Business & Technology
- Dr. Brian Griffith, Superintendent, Penns Valley Area School District
- Cheryl Johnson, executive director, Private Industry Council of the Central Corridor
- Ben Eltz, COO/CFO, Diamondback Truck Covers
- Joe Miller, Senior HR Professional, FirstQuality Enterprises

CentreREADY partners are:

- Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County
- Bald Eagle Area School District
- Bellefonte Area School District
- Central Pennsylvania Institute of Science and Technology
- PA CareerLink® Centre County
- Penns Valley Area School District
- Philipsburg-Osceola Area School District
- Private Industry Council of the Central Corridor
- South Hills School of Business & Technology
- State College Area School District