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New NextWork Collaboration Between Lake and Geauga County School Districts and Manufacturing Communities is a Win-Win

- Regional partnership designed to provide k-12 students exposure, training and quality job opportunities while fulfilling local manufacturing workforce need-

Cleveland, Ohio – November 10, 2017 – The U.S. manufacturing industry is facing a skills gap as many segments are growing, but fewer young, skilled workers are entering the field at the rate at which baby boomers are retiring. Despite the skills gap, 45% of young adults under 25 remain unemployed*. Recognizing an opportunity, the Lake and Geauga County school districts and manufacturing communities have joined to create NextWork, a career and workforce development program providing education and training for students in the manufacturing field while helping local manufacturers increase their workforce.

“NextWork’s mission is to provide quality job opportunities to its students by giving them exposure, training, and life skills required to be successful in a manufacturing environment while helping to sustain and expand manufacturing in Lake and Geauga Counties,” said Joe Spiccia, superintendent of the Wickliffe City School District and co-founder of NextWork.

College is not always the first option for many students. The high cost of tuition and increased likelihood for students to be saddled with debt after college are leaving many parents and students to consider alternative career choices. NextWork is designed for students who identify as having a strong interest in entering the workforce directly following high school.

The NextWork program launched in August and is funded by the state of Ohio, the Cleveland Foundation and other smaller organizations. The program currently boasts many premier Lake and Geauga County manufacturing companies as partners, including Swagelok Manufacturing, Universal Metal Products, Inc., Component Repair Technologies, WVIZ Technology Fredon Corporation and Lost Nation Airport.

According to Deloitte Consulting LLP and the Manufacturing Institute, over the next decade, nearly 3½ million manufacturing jobs will likely be needed, and 2 million are expected to go unfilled due to the skills gap.

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“Students win by being exposed to the opportunities within the manufacturing environment and they develop lifetime work skills and behavior,” said Scott Seaholm, president Wickliffe-based Universal Metal Products, Inc., one of the first manufacturers to jump on board the NextWork program. “Employers win by obtaining a motivated and skilled workforce. Best of all, we retain these students and future employees in our community,” said Seaholm.

NextWork is an expansion of the Wickliffe Student Ten-Year Plan, which provides k-12 students with opportunities and experiences for academic and career planning and which Joe Spiccia and Julie Ramos, Wickliffe Schools’ Director of Strategic Innovation, together established in 2017. The Ten-Year Plan became an impetus for the creation of NextWork.

“The program provides a connection to internships and training programs customized by employers who wish to start cultivating their workforce of tomorrow,” said Ramos. “Manufacturing companies need skilled labor and offer high wages, excellent benefits, job security, and growth opportunities,” she added.

The NextWork program uses a web-based portal to manage communication and opportunities for all of its participants. The portal provides a single, easy-to-use, resource for local companies, schools and students to find/develop employment opportunities, skills and relationships.

NextWork has received praise by the Governor’s Office for Workforce Transformation and is considered a model for career and workforce development throughout the State. Additionally, NextWork has also been recognized by the National School Boards Association as a promising practice and Ramos and Spiccia have been invited to present both the Wickliffe Student Ten Year Plan and NextWork at their national conference in April.

Businesses, students and parents interested in learning more about NextWork can visit www.next-work.org for more details.

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*Source: www.youtern.com