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ONLINE PORTAL

Initiative to offer Flagler, Volusia students work-based learning opportunities

Initiative will make jobs, internships, company tours more available

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Published: Tuesday, October 6, 2015 at 7:01 p.m.

Today's students will make up tomorrow's workforce. That's inevitable. But how will they find their way into the jobs that employers will most need to fill?

A new initiative in Volusia and Flagler schools may provide the key to the next generation's success.



Robin R. King

The school districts are working with the region's CareerSource office to set up a career community portal that will help give students valuable experience in the workplace. And the potential benefits flow both ways.

"In essence, what we're doing is asking through this database or this portal for businesses to be our partners in developing the talent that they want in their future workforce," said CareerSource Flagler Volusia president and CEO Robin R. King.

The portal is being developed by Palm Coast-based Coastal Cloud, which has built a reputation for using technology to help businesses grow.

"It's a simple portal that will allow an employer to say, 'I have a job opportunity, I have an internship, I can do a company tour, I can do a job shadowing, I can come in and do a lecture or a classroom presentation,'" said Coastal Cloud managing partner Sara Hale.

In addition to employers, educators and academy and flagship program coordinators will play a central role in the portal's operation. They will arrange the opportunities for their students to learn more about employment opportunities and career goals.

After participating businesses have been validated, students will be able to log on and see what work-based experiences are available.

While this initiative could open students' eyes to the opportunities available to them, there's another benefit to seeing the working world from the inside. A student may discover that the career he or she had planned on isn't the right fit after all.

"That's just as valuable," said Kelly Amy, coordinator for career and technical education for the Volusia County School District. "It's just as valuable to mark something off your list as to find your lifelong passion."

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

The concept is a work in progress. This month, teachers are receiving training in how to use the portal. Then, as they become more familiar with it, school districts will have opportunities to make adjustments.

The portal has simple search functions for users to find what businesses have to offer and for businesses to learn what requests educators have of them. It also has a dashboard of analytics to track trends among the students, employers and individual schools.

“Our responsibility is going to be helping populate the business side of things,” said King. CareerSource Flagler Volusia and the schools will help employers learn how they can use the portal.

“The teachers are the ones who really kind of get in there and see what’s there for their students, and then give their students the access to it,” King added. “So, the students can’t just jump in and meet up with a business directly. There will be some guidance.”

While high school students will be the primary beneficiaries of the portal, the initiative will benefit younger students as well, though not in terms of jobs and internships. In Flagler County, business and industry representatives will be invited to give presentations to the lower grades.

“This is a great way for kids to even know what opportunities there are,” said Lynette Shott, director of student and community engagement for Flagler Schools.

The Flagler County School District is on track to start using the portal in the next few weeks, King said. Volusia schools expect to give students access sometime in November or December, according to Amy.

MEETING A NEED

According to ManpowerGroup’s latest Talent Shortage Survey released in May, 32 percent of U.S. employers report difficulties filling job vacancies due to talent shortages. For the sixth consecutive year, skilled trade vacancies were the hardest to fill.

Employers in the survey cited a lack of applicants, a lack of experience and a lack of technical competency or hard skills.

At the same time, teen employment is dropping, and with it some of that experience employers seek.

Salim Furth, reporting in April for The Wall Street Journal, cited data showing the share of teens age 16 to 19 not working was up 15 percent since the 1990s. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that employment of 16-year-olds fell by 16.3 percent between 1998 and 2013, while that of 17-year-olds fell by 18.1 percent and 18-year-olds fell by 16.2 percent.

While the new local initiative will familiarize students with the kinds of skills needed in the workplace, it will also help them to develop the so-called “soft skills” they need to succeed.

In a talent gap survey, “we learned that an average of 90 percent of companies reported motivation, oral communication, time management, critical thinking and problem solving as highly important traits,” said King.

“We don’t learn that in a classroom. We don’t learn that from our parents. We learn that on the job,” she added.

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