Raising Awareness of Industry-Driven Career Pathways

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Defining, aligning, and constructing industry-driven career pathways can be a challenge. And then, how do you also ensure students and adults know the career pathways exist? Colorado's career pathways initiatives are developed on a responsive, dynamic, data-driven system that provides users a "walk" through career pathways. Multiple Colorado state agencies are working with industry to enhance career development through regionally defined pathways that help students understand education and career opportunities for "top" jobs in high-demand industries.

It is important to continue establishing efficient and effective means of developing skilled talent so that employers can find the high-quality workforce necessary to be competitive. Creating systemic change requires public-private partnerships to establish functional feedback loops between industry and education, and to ensure that resources are used wisely. In 2014, the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) identified sector strategies and industry-led career pathways as key strategies that states and local areas must implement for workforce development.

In Colorado, we rely on our industry-led sector partnerships in career pathway systems-building, engaging industry leaders and community partners in a continuous dialogue to ensure that education and training systems respond to industry needs. A career pathway system engages education and training providers in a continuous conversation with one another and industry to ensure that students move seamlessly through and among educational institutions and work-based experiences to build skills and credentials that meet industry demand and prepare them for careers.

Following are key steps in building regional, industry-driven career pathway systems:

1. Organize businesses through sector strategies or connect them with an existing sector partnership.
2. Organize a team of public partners.
3. Identify critical occupations.
4. Inventory relevant education, training, and workforce programs.
5. Understand the competencies required to perform jobs.
6. Align, improve, and create career pathway programs and prepare students and job seekers with critical competencies.
7. Create a picture of the career pathway and market it to all audiences.
8. Create a process for continuous improvement.

In building career pathways (see *Building Industry-Driven Career Pathway Systems in Colorado: A Step-by-Step Guide,* https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/Career_Pathways_Step-by-Step_Guide_v3_2016_e.pdf), we utilize many sources of data, from labor market information to information collected through regional industry-led forums on specific occupations and critical competencies. Once critical occupations have been

identified by the sector partnership, critical competencies are identified. We start with the competencies models from the Career One Stop Competency Model Clearinghouse and then collect regionally specific information through industry forums. This information is shared with education and training programs so they are empowered to be responsive to the needs of industry in their program offerings and curriculum design. The resulting career pathways are accessible on a free public platform, careersincolorado.org.

Our career pathway building initiative is in its third year. This past fall, we focused on building awareness and providing training on the initiative and the current state of the careersincolorado.org platform. We conducted more than 60 presentations to 600+ representatives from education, training, workforce, and industry on career pathways and the use of online tools.

The two occupational areas to be added in 2018 are cybersecurity and business operations. In collaboration with the Colorado Community College System and other statewide partners, we will be conducting regional, private, and public forums to determine the most critical gaps and opportunities we as a state can address to ensure the success of cybersecurity and business operations occupations in Colorado. We recognize that this constitutes an investment of industry's time. Therefore, we carefully designed an interactive forum agenda where industry leaders will identify current and future critical occupations while prioritizing the skills, knowledge, and abilities of an ideal workforce for those industries.

Through industry-led collaboration, we will continue to grow the talent pipeline for high-demand industries, positively impacting our local and state economies.

Thomas Hartman, Ph.D., is the Talent Development Coordinator for the Colorado Workforce Development Council. Thomas is central to moving forward sector partnerships and career pathways as key strategies for the implementation of state and federal legislation. He plays a key role in developing a statewide career pathways framework and specifically identified career pathways with input provided by staff liaisons and partners. ◆