

February 24, 2016

Letter of Support
New Skills for Youth Comprehensive Grant Program

I'm writing in support of Wisconsin's application for the New Skills for Youth Grant Program. This grant addresses an area that I am passionate about and an area which I devote a substantial amount of time. My day job is president of a contract manufacturing company in Western Wisconsin. I founded the company about thirty years ago and today we have about four hundred Team Members. Since the companies' founding our growth has been constrained by the lack of skilled workers in a wide variety of areas, but mostly related to manufacturing.

I have always been interested in career and technical education and during my own technical college experience in the seventies; I served as a national officer for VICA, which is now SkillsUSA. I worked in industry for about ten years prior to starting my own company, OEM Fabricators. Since then, I've become involved in our technical colleges, universities, K-12 systems, even early childhood development, all in an effort to inspire kids and parents to be aware of the great opportunities in our economy.

Some of the roles that I currently fill as part of my involvement education and promoting Career Pathways are: Pilot Committee Member for the Baldwin Woodville School District for Academic and Career Planning; Board Member and Vice President of the Wisconsin Technical College System Board; Chair of the Governor's Council on Workforce Investment; Regent with the University of Wisconsin; Executive Board Member for Success by 6 in the St Croix Valley; Board Member for Gold Collar Careers/Manufacturing Works; and finally as an employer of students and graduates.

In addition to these roles, there are more grassroots activities that I join in as well. My company and I are strong supporters of Cardinal Manufacturing at Eleva-Strum High School. Cardinal Manufacturing is a for profit business that is embedded in the technical education department at Eleva-Strum. We provide donations of materials and money, work, and advice to their program which is becoming nationally recognized.

We assisted Baldwin Woodville High School in purchasing two CNC machines with a forty thousand dollar donation and ongoing financial support for the machine tool program. We also serve on their Tech Ed. Advisory Committee and their ACP Pilot Committee.

We have partnered with other school districts and donated welding machines to them as well. Our OEM Team Members serve on a wide variety of K-12 and technical college advisory groups. Our primary focus is on manufacturing careers, but in our participation in workforce efforts, we frequently get involved in other sectors as well.

The reason for all this participation is based our need for great Team Members and a recognition that many students don't get complete information about the broad range of

opportunities available to them, given they have prepared themselves for the opportunity. We often work to educate parents as well as students and educators. There are many old, established biases that are not accurate, and in addition to guiding students to opportunities, frequently educators and parents need to have their understanding of opportunities brushed up a bit too.

It is incredibly important for students to begin exploring early and gain an understanding of their strengths and interests, then leverage those strengths and interests in advancing their education. Earning dual enrolment credits and advanced standing while still in high school can pave the path to post-secondary experiences and shorten the path to a career. Earning industry credentials along the way provide the potential to work for a company and earn tuition assistance and on the job experiences. Integrating these opportunities as part of the career pathway can enhance the experience and accelerate success.

Wisconsin has been a leader in building career pathways and in collaborating across typical siloes. We still have much important work to do. The foundation for leveraging partners has been established, but the work must continue to develop robust career pathways and deep relationships that can respond to rapid changes in the preparation needs of students. The capacity needed to shepherd students and the program capacity to handle the training needs of students is critical to enabling every student to be successful in graduating and being career ready.

For these reasons I provide my strongest support for this application and encourage that Wisconsin participate in continuing to lead the way in the development and implementation of career pathways and career clusters. This grant would accelerate progress and ultimately to drive student and graduate success. Further, the ultimate outcome is highly engaged and contributing members to our communities.

Please give your highest consideration to Wisconsin for this request.

Sincerely,



S. Mark Tyler
President