

Pickaway WORKS Business Advisory Council Plan  
September 2018

Pickaway HELPS (Higher Education Learning Partners for Students) was established in 2007 as a comprehensive, county-wide college access program by the Pickaway County Commissioners. This collaborative effort to increase the post-secondary education participation and baccalaureate attainment rates in Pickaway County was initially funded with an Ohio College Access Network (OCAN) grant which was matched with a mix of local government and school investments. In the ensuing years, a variety of programming and support services were developed and custom tailored to the unique needs of Pickaway County's four public school districts. Best practices from around the country were employed in the effort to increase the aspiration and preparation for education beyond high school.

College tours, ACT preparation, financial aid assistance, career exploration, financial literacy training, scholarships and much needed one-on-one advising were amongst a menu of HELPS programming available for delivery in Pickaway County schools. The impact of this effort has been significant. Since the inception of Pickaway HELPS just over a decade ago, the baccalaureate attainment rate in Pickaway County has increased by ~50% - a rate of increase well in excess of state and national trends.

As the baccalaureate rate increased, Pickaway County's needs changed. Local economic development has been extremely successful in bringing jobs to our county. Many of these newly-created jobs require credentials and certifications beyond a high school diploma, but not always a college degree. Pickaway HELPS' mission has evolved into one with a college and career readiness focus. With this change in mission came a new name. Pickaway HELPS is now more readily-known as Pickaway WORKS (World of Real Knowledge & Skills).

As part of the fastest growing metropolitan region in the Midwest, Pickaway County is in the midst of significant change. The Columbus Region is experiencing historic economic growth with nearly 150,000 new jobs created in the last five years. Locally, the expansion of existing employers and the attraction of new companies are providing local residents with a myriad of employment opportunities. This all bodes well for the economic vitality of our community, but low unemployment rates and a tightening labor market can prove to be challenging for local employers. We often hear that employers have difficulty finding people to fill openings, and new hires often come lacking basic soft skills.

In response to this, the local school districts in Pickaway County have invested significant resources over the last couple of years in developing new career readiness initiatives intended to prepare and align students with local employment opportunities. Entrepreneurial training, internships, 21st century skills curriculum and a variety of other tools are now being utilized to equip graduates for the workplace.

Last fall, in a collaborative effort to align Pickaway County employers with our local education and workforce training resources, we began a series of Workforce Connection meetings. We brought together local educators and employers, to learn about each other and begin relationship building, and as a result discovered many resources and identified common challenges, and began work on solutions. Originally intended to allow educators and employers the opportunity to connect with each other, the Workforce Connections meetings highlighted real challenges our schools and local employers face in a time of great change and growth for our community. More importantly, we also learned that there is great energy and openness to working together in new ways.

Much work has been done to harness this energy since we first met. Multiple focus groups were held and a large group of collaborators met in a strategic STEM Community Roadmapping series to vision how a community can holistically engage schools and employers in relevant problem-solving opportunities that provide purpose and life-long learning in our community. All of this work was done with the intent of identifying new ways to bridge the readiness and awareness gap between students and the workplace. Collaborators participating in this strategic planning process include:

Pickaway HELPS P3 – Pickaway Progress  
Partnership Pickaway County Chamber of Commerce  
Pickaway County Community Foundation Ohio  
Means Jobs Pickaway Circleville City Schools Logan  
Elm Schools New Hope Christian Academy Teays  
Valley Schools Westfall Schools Eastland-Fairfield  
Career Center Ohio State University Extension  
Pickaway County Educational Service Center  
Pickaway Ross Career Center Pickaway County  
Community Action Organization Pickaway County  
Visitors Bureau Pickaway County District Public  
Library Pickaway Addiction Action Coalition Pickaway  
Soil & Water Conservation District REAN -  
Rickenbacker Employer Assistance Network Health  
Care Logistics Accurate Heating & Cooling The  
Savings Bank Berger Health System Kenworth Truck  
Company The Reserves Network Heartland Bank

Pickaway WORKS - World of Real Knowledge and Skills - was developed through this process and was rolled out to the community at our November 2017 Workforce Connections meeting. The vision of Pickaway WORKS is..*to engage and develop all stakeholders in uniting education and workforce to positively transform and grow our vibrant community.* The following six program initiatives were identified through the strategic planning process, to be implemented in a comprehensive, countywide way:

**EDUCATOR BUSINESS TOURS:** Small groups of teachers visit businesses to learn about career pathways and local opportunities.

**JOB SHADOWS/INTERNSHIPS:** Onsite and virtual options to help students gain real world knowledge of careers.

**GUEST SPEAKER EVENTS:** Career day and other networking events to connect employers, educators and students.

**SENIOR BOOT CAMPS:** Mock interviews and small group workshops to prepare students for future success.

**THINKING PARTNERS:** Businesses partner with classroom teachers to provide real world problem scenarios and allow students to develop solutions.

**BUSINESS SHOWCASE:** Students created business spotlight videos featured in schools and online.

We began implementation in early 2018 and recently held the latest in our series of our Workforce Connections meetings, with over 90 business leaders and educators in attendance, and were able to share and celebrate our successes to date and highlight examples of real partnerships in action between local business and schools.

Through these program initiatives, we are building partnerships that create relevant pathways and ultimately provide local career opportunities for students, meet workforce demands of local employers and strengthen the economic stability of our community. We are focused on reconnecting education with business and community, to better engage with each other and support a more authentic learning experience for students. To that end, education is evolving and all local teachers are being trained in problem-based learning (PBL). This training is currently underway and continuing over the next several years. Studies comparing learning outcomes for students taught via problem-based learning vs. traditional instruction show that when implemented well, PBL improves engagement, collaboration, problem solving, commitment and many other desirable traits and outcomes that Pickaway County workforce leaders cited as necessary for success, such as the ability to:

- think critically and analyze and solve complex, problems
- find, evaluate, and use appropriate resources to solve a problem
- work cooperatively in teams and small groups
- demonstrate versatile & effective communication skills, both verbal and written
- demonstrate time management and leadership skills
- develop grit and the ability to persevere

The program initiatives of Pickaway WORKS will blend perfectly with this method of teaching and can serve as a support for both business and educators as they work together to provide purpose and life-long learning in our community.

Pickaway WORKS is overseen by a 20-member advisory board and is a registered 501c3 with established by-laws and framework. Following are the WORKS advisory board members:

Ty Ankrom, Pickaway Co ESC Superintendent Natalie Blue, Ashville Propane - Business Owner Christine Boucher, Eastland-Fairfield Business Development Ronna Brisker, Teays Valley East, School Counselor Jean Droste, Community Member, former mayor of Circleville Wendy Elliott, Berger Health System, Sr. VP and COO Joy Ewing, Job & Family Services, Director Lisa Heins, Circleville City Schools, Curriculum Director Julie Kellough, Workforce Development Board, Area 20 Hank Kelly, Ohio Christian University, Provost Beth Keplar, Teays Valley Schools, Director of Education and Learning Jill McFarland, Bob Evans Farms, HR Manager Stacie Robertson, Kenworth Truck Co/PACCAR, HR Manager Stacey Sark, P3- Economic Development Specialist Ryan Scribner, Pickaway County Economic Development Director Roxan Sigmon, Ohio Means Jobs Pickaway, Manager Meghan Thoreau, OSU Extension, STEM/Community Development Jason Vesey, Pickaway Ross Secondary Principal Jennifer Williams, EG Industries, HR Manager Jay Wippel, Pickaway County Commissioner

This board will serve as the Business Advisory Council for Pickaway County schools and will meet quarterly with the Pickaway County ESC to advise on changes in the economy and job market in our area, advocate for needed employment skills and required curriculum, and aid the development of a working relationship among business and educators.

In addition to their partnership with WORKS, all four Pickaway County school districts have demonstrated a long-time commitment to college and career readiness for all students through their support and collaboration with Pickaway HELPS, a traditional college access program founded in 2007. Ongoing program activities of Pickaway HELPS include:

**Pickaway County College & Career Night** – education and employment options from over 100 institutions- 2 & 4-year education options, trade schools, military, many local employers.

**ACT Prep Workshops** – offered in spring and fall to all Pickaway County high school students to help prepare for college entrance exams.

**FAFSA Day: “Free Application for Federal Student Aid” Financial Aid Workshop** – In partnership with the financial aid office of Ohio Christian University, personal assistance is given to students and their families with completion of the FAFSA, the necessary first step in the financial aid process.

**Pickaway HELPS/Uia Jean Ater Metzler Scholarship** – a first-generation college student scholarship, awarded to one graduating senior at each county high school attending any accredited post-secondary institution, criteria include financial need.

**Real Money/Real World** - financial literacy curriculum through Ohio State University Extension presented to all Pickaway County 8<sup>th</sup> graders, teaching students the difference between wants and needs in a family budget and the impact of their education level on potential future income.

**Kids on Campus** - summer enrichment camp for all Pickaway County students grades 1-4, focusing on math, science, technology, music and art, providing hands-on activities in a fun learning environment. Held at Ohio Christian University, a guided tour of the campus is given at the end of each week providing young students with early exposure to a local college campus.

With a renewed focus on engaging business partners, the WORKS and HELPS programs have formally merged under the Pickaway WORKS brand and have become one united effort to better prepare our students for the demands of the modern workplace and ultimately, for future success. WORKS is funded by financial support from all four school districts, as well as the Pickaway County Board of Commissioners and grant funding from the Pickaway County Community Foundation. Our work is led by a full-time executive director and one part-time advisor, and our efforts are promoted and reported through many channels, including social media, school websites, local news outlets, community meetings and events, as well as our website [www.pickawayworks.com](http://www.pickawayworks.com). The Advisory Board provides overall guidance for the program and conducts an annual strategic planning retreat to evaluate program performance and direction moving forward.

The role of Business Advisory Council is a perfect fit for the mission and vision of this group. We look forward to continuing our work as together we build partnerships that create awareness of available career pathways and required knowledge and skills, alignment among local employers and educators, and relevant connections between classroom work and the real world of work.