

WEDC: Regional organizations launch statewide initiative to address workforce development needs

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Contact: Mark Maley, [608.210.6706](tel:608.210.6706)
mark.maley@wedc.org

Statewide expansion of web-based platform will enable local employers to engage directly with students and help build talent pipeline

MADISON, WI. Aug. 15, 2017 - In an initiative aimed at addressing Wisconsin's workforce development needs, all nine of the state's regional economic development organizations are teaming up to develop a statewide platform that directly connects local employers to students.

The regional organizations, with support from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), will expand the use of a web-based platform called Inspire that virtually connects area businesses to their future talent pool through online profiles, virtual career coaches, and career-based learning activities for high school students and educators.

"This initiative is a great example of how partners in the public and private sector are teaming up with local schools to help address the workforce development challenges of today and tomorrow," said Governor Scott Walker. "Efforts like this will enable businesses to engage directly with students, counselors and parents, and will provide real-life experiences to help guide students as they consider their career options."

Developed by Career Cruising, a global leader in career development software,

Inspire helps educate students, educators, parents and job-seekers about the current and projected talent needs of local companies. It also provides an opportunity for employers and communities to enhance existing work-based learning and career-readiness programs by making it easier for students to engage in opportunities best aligned to the careers and career pathway areas of interest.

Depending on the region, Inspire could be used to increase engagement between businesses and students in several ways, including interactive messaging with local professionals, job shadowing, interviewing opportunities and internships

Taking the lead on the initiative is the Regional Leadership Council (RLC), a coalition made up of the executive directors of the state's regional economic development organizations: Visions Northwest, Momentum West, Grow North, The 7 Rivers Alliance, Prosperity Southwest, Madison Region Economic Partnership (MadREP), The Milwaukee 7, The New North and Centergy. ([See map](#))

Under RLC leadership, each region will develop and manage its own Inspire operating infrastructure and stakeholder collaboration for engaging and onboarding the region's employers and businesses into Inspire. The regions also will engage area school districts in implementation of the Inspire tools.

The employer databases of the nine regions will be connected together, forming the new statewide Inspire network that will help students and employers connect both regionally and statewide.

"The reality in Wisconsin is that there simply are not enough working adults in our regions to fill existing and projected jobs, and the labor market is expected to continue to tighten," said Steve Jahn, executive director of Eau Claire-based Momentum West and chairman of the RLC. "Implementing Inspire in collaboration with other new initiatives as part of the state's talent development and retention strategy will increase the number of people available to meet the job needs of our employers."

Expanding the program statewide comes after the successful implementation of Inspire in portions of four regional economic development organizations: MadREP, Milwaukee 7, Prosperity Southwest and the 7 Rivers Alliance in western Wisconsin.

"We already have 350 companies and 50 school districts signed on to Inspire and, by collaborating with the other eight regions in the state, we can provide student

mentoring connections statewide,” said Paul Jadin, MadREP president.

Inspire integrates employer profile information, career-based learning opportunities, and access to volunteer online career coaches directly into the existing Career Cruising Academic and Career Planning (ACP) system already used by most Wisconsin school districts.

“Wisconsin is well-positioned to be a leader in developing career pathways that allow students to explore and plan for a successful future,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers. “This doesn’t happen by accident – it’s the result of the strong and growing collaboration between classroom teachers, their communities, and local business partners.”

WEDC is providing the nine regions with \$52,500 to expand the Inspire license statewide.

“Inspire brings business and education together by working with partners from across the state to help develop the talent pipeline,” said Tricia Braun, deputy secretary and COO of WEDC. “This is one of the ways WEDC works with more than 600 statewide partners to meet the current and future needs of the business community as we continue to grow Wisconsin’s economy.”

The statewide expansion of Inspire aligns with Think-Make-Happen In Wisconsin, a new unifying message that celebrates the opportunities Wisconsin offers for business, personal and professional fulfillment. WEDC and its partners around the state have launched Think-Make-Happen In Wisconsin to communicate Wisconsin’s competitive advantage of world-class education and innovation, industry leadership, renowned workforce, and high quality of life.

Think-Make-Happen also is being used to build greater understanding of the opportunities offered through the multitude of initiatives geared towards readying and aligning our future workforce to the needs of Wisconsin employers.

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What is Inspire?

- Inspire is a cloud-based platform that enables collaboration among all community partners in preparing youth to transition from school success. Inspire integrates seamlessly into Career Cruising for grades 6 to 12.

- Inspire connects education and industry with employer profiles, career coaches, work-based learning experiences, communication tools, local events, and social networking connections in a safe and secure platform.
- Students engage with employer profiles to see how their pathways connect with businesses and organizations in their community. Students can ask questions of real working people in their community, learn about apprenticeship opportunities and see upcoming employer-hosted events.
- Employers can connect with students and share information about the work they do and skills they need. They can also target students with profiles that match their needs, all on a secure platform that protects students.
- Community members can serve as pre-screened mentors to offer real-time career advice and answer students' questions about the real world of work.

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About the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) leads economic development efforts for the state by advancing and maximizing opportunities in Wisconsin for businesses, communities and people to thrive in a globally competitive environment. Working with more than 600 regional and local partners, WEDC develops and delivers solutions representative of a highly responsive and coordinated economic development network. Visit www.inwisconsin.com or follow WEDC on Twitter [@InWisconsin](https://twitter.com/InWisconsin) to learn more.