

WEDC: Workforce Innovation Grant helps youth discover career path

Posted on Wednesday, Feb 9, 2022

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Collaboration between schools, employers and Boys & Girls Clubs aims to positively engage teens in the workforce

MILWAUKEE, WI. FEB. 9, 2022 – A Workforce Innovation Grant of up to \$3.3 million is helping launch the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee’s new Ready Center and a collaboration between schools, employers and others to help young people find a career path.

“To be successful and find the right career, young people need to learn about many career fields and to have mentors who are successful in their careers,” said Missy Hughes, secretary and CEO of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC). “The Ready Center Collective will give youth exposure to many careers, help them choose a field that’s right for them and then give them the training and work experience needed to successfully launch their career.”

Hughes, Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek and Department of Safety and Professional Services Secretary Dawn Crim joined community leaders in Milwaukee Wednesday for a roundtable discussion about the Ready Center Collective and how the state’s Workforce Innovation Grant will make a difference for young workers.

“Wisconsin’s record-low unemployment and strong labor force participation rate are reasons to celebrate; these numbers also work in favor of the next generation of workers eager to get started on a fulfilling career path,” Pechacek said. “The Boys & Girls Clubs’ initiative will connect students with in-demand skills as well as opportunities to get on-the-job experience at some of the area’s top employers.”

A partnership between the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee, Milwaukee Public Schools, Employ Milwaukee, Milwaukee Area Technical College, Herzing University, and more than a dozen large employers, the Ready Center Collective will offer students job experience, training and the possibility of earning professional certifications and college credits while still in high school.

“This collaborative effort between educational institutions, employers, and community organizations will expose teens to the wide range of possibilities that their futures might hold,” Crim said. “Then, the supportive programming — including opportunities for paid work experience in a variety of fields — will enable these students to envision their futures and get started on a clear path toward their goals.”

After completing the sophomore year of high school, students will be placed into paid summer jobs to offer an introductory work experience. During the program students will also participate in weekly “career sampling” days offering an introduction to high-demand career fields such as: health care, IT, finance, hospitality and skilled industries.

In the first semester of their junior year, students will choose a career path they want to explore. Students will then be offered a job shadowing experience and training in the career field chosen.

Students who complete their training will be offered a paid internship or apprenticeship through Milwaukee Public Schools and employer partners.

“With ongoing training at the new Ready Center, students will be able to earn professional credentials such as those needed to become a certified nursing assistant or entry-level IT certifications without paying college tuition,” said Andre Douglas, senior director college and leadership services for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee.

“To be able to do that right now for free in our club is groundbreaking,” Douglas said. “It truly will give our young people the best of both worlds - college and career.”

In December, Gov. Tony Evers announced the first round of Workforce Innovation Grants awarding up to \$59.5 million to 12 collaborative programs, including the one at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee, working to solve Wisconsin’s

workforce challenges.

The Workforce Innovation Grants are paid for by \$100 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds, with a second round of grants expected to be announced later this year.