

Viewpoint: Partnerships crucial to implementing new strategic plan for DCTC and Inver Hills

By Michael Berndt

One of the shared core values of Dakota County Technical College (DCTC) and Inver Hills Community College (Inver Hills) is community engagement. The colleges have a long history of collaboration with K-12 educators, county and state agencies, civic organizations, nonprofits, and businesses.

This year, the colleges will implement a new five-year strategic plan. As aligned institutions, the colleges created a plan that honors each college's unique mission while setting a path forward to one bold future. The strategic plan contains two goals:

1. Enhance student success. We will create additional pathways into post-secondary education and strengthen pathways through the college to employment or transfer, especially for students who don't yet know their major.
2. Close educational equity gaps. We will extend to under-served students more opportunities to go to college or access post-high school training. We will also promote equity-informed teaching and support services to address equity gaps in the colleges.

Progress on these two goals can't be accomplished alone. The colleges need partners to develop inclusive, equity-informed organizations. Many area leaders have shared with me their efforts to also create more inclusive businesses. I believe we can work and learn together to foster more equitable and inclusive communities.

The pandemic disruption changed how organizations re-engage workers, which was highlighted in a recently published study by the National Association of Counties. Planning for the Future of Work Amid a Global Pandemic shares examples of collaboration across agencies to meet critical workforce shortages.

One example comes from DeKalb County, Georgia, which created the DeKalb Career Pathway Initiative using funds from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act. The program connects workers, who experienced pandemic-related job loss, to training in high-demand fields like information technology, health care, business technology and manufacturing. Participants received up to \$1,500 of the federal funds to offset costs for food, housing and transportation while going through the training.

Such programs, when coupled with other supports like childcare, can bring workers back into the labor force in high-demand areas and address some of the gender and racial disparities exacerbated by the pandemic. That's the type of collaboration that Inver Hills and DCTC seeks, so we can deliver on our strategic plan and serve our communities in significant ways.

There is great opportunity in the challenges ahead, and we invite partners to join us as we address these issues, with student success and equity in the forefront.



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