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BUILDING A

# WORKFORCE

OPENING FALL 2015

GetCareerConnectED

GREATER SPRINGFIELD  
CareerConnectED



Greater Springfield  
CareerConnectED Center  
opens at the former  
South High School in August.

Greater Springfield  
Chamber of Commerce  
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B2BCover Story

# Building a workforce for tomorrow

CareerConnectED Center links students with area employers.

By Katie Wedell  
Staff Writer

SPRINGFIELD — When the Greater Springfield CareerConnectED Center opens its doors at the former South High School in August, it will be a hub of activities for student exploration, faculty development and community skill building, all with one goal in mind — train the workers that Clark County needs to fill the jobs of tomorrow.

The consortium behind the center — Springfield City Schools, Clark-Shawnee Local Schools, Springfield-Clark Career Technology Center and the Global Impact STEM Academy — has been working to increase student access to soft skills and real-world work training through individual efforts for years.

But an \$11.3 million state Straight A grant awarded last year has allowed them to create a one-stop shop where students will be able to identify and explore their interests, get college and career guidance, build a resume, get an internship, and more.

“Our CareerConnectED Center will offer students, teachers and community members not only several self-assessment tools, but also unique ways to build (skills) while they explore and tinker with things that interest them,” said Springfield Superintendent David Estrop.

Having a collaborative center like

The Greater Springfield CareerConnectED Center will open in August. B2B Staff photo by Bill Lackey

this at the gateway to downtown also is a boon for the community while it works to attract business investment.

"It's a game changer for the community," said Horton Hobbs, vice president of economic development for the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce. "From a recruitment and retention perspective, that is a competitive advantage."

### Teaching soft-skills

The idea behind what has morphed into the CareerConnectED center began about five years ago.

"We realized many of our students were struggling in their jobs or college," Estrop said. "In most cases, it wasn't the academic knowledge holding them back, but what people call soft skills. Time management,

working with others, asking for help, sticking with difficult tasks, etc."

The skills employers in the area were clamoring for were not the things the state measures on its standardized tests.

"Attendance is one of the number one reasons for someone to be terminated," said Deanna Nesbit, human resources director for McGregor Metals. "It is a lot of those interpersonal skills. Being able to interact with people appropriately."

The business was the first to partner with the schools on a collaborative internship program which has now grown to include 26 businesses and nonprofits that will host 66 students this summer. The program will be housed at the CareerConnectED Center in the future.

The internship experience can help students refine their ideas of what it's like to

succeed in the workplace, Nesbit said.

"Before the internship, I had never had a job, so I didn't really have expectations for a job. But then once I got to work and started to learn how the workforce can actually help you develop social skills or communication, it definitely changed my perception of how working would be," said Tiana Moss, a Springfield High senior who interned with McGregor and is heading to Wright State University next year to study nursing.

"It really helped to understand the work requirements and responsibilities of being at the job, learning how to deal with them, and then what it really entails to do that job correctly," said Springfield senior Noah Zeller, who interned at Ohio Valley Surgical Hospital.

*Continued on 14*



Springfield High School intern Noah Zeller looks over the shoulder of David Anon, manager of outpatient physical therapy, at Ohio Valley Surgical Hospital. B2B Staff photo by Bill Lackey



Workers build an entrance to the Greater Springfield CareerConnectED Center.  
B2B Staff photo by Bill Lackey

## Filling the skilled-worker gap

"It has been business driven right from the get-go," Cathy Balas, intern coordinator for the Springfield City School District, said of the program and the efforts to launch the CareerConnectED Center.

In fact, local companies came to the schools and said they were facing a shortage of qualified workers, especially in manufacturing jobs.

"We knew that a lot of their workforce, like 40 or more percent were going to retire in the next few years. They needed to replace them. People didn't even know that these companies existed, and they don't know how modern and varied manufacturing is today," said Kim Fish, special projects and communications consultant for SCSD, who has been a leader on the project.

The schools are hoping to open some students' minds to the vast array of good jobs available in the area for both the college-bound and those who do not have degree aspirations.

"The past five or six years, everyone's been going to college," said Rosie Matthies, a Shawnee teacher involved with the project. But with this collaboration, companies

are coming to the schools saying they need workers now for jobs that don't require a degree. "They will train them. They will send them to school. We're talking \$18 to \$22 an hour. They are in need of a skilled labor force ... and our students just are not aware of that, and we as educators have not been, either."

Shawnee senior Drew Hickman grew up in a family with a strong manufacturing background, but even he didn't know about the varied job options until he interned at McGregor last year.

"After the internship, it opened it up to all the different possibilities of what area I can go into in manufacturing ... all different types," he said.

He is heading to Ohio State University to study industrial engineering.

As part of the CareerConnectED efforts, teachers also will have the opportunity to get hands-on experience with local businesses so that they can better target their curriculum to workforce needs.

Teachers at the districts have already started dabbling with bringing local employers into their classroom as well, creating problem-based learning projects with issues facing real companies for students to solve.

"We want it to be that connection with the community, that partnership with the community," Matthies said. "It is so important for us to connect with the businesses. I think we've lost touch with what is out there."

Students say the efforts already underway have been successful in opening their eyes to the possibilities of working in Clark County.

"I probably when looking for work after college would have looked outside of Ohio or outside of Springfield, but after seeing that this was here, it's someplace that I could easily go to and they know me, so I would have those prior connections," Zeller said.

He's attending Ohio University next year and wants to eventually find a job as a physician's assistant in orthopedics — maybe back home in Springfield.

Those wishing to learn more about the CareerConnectED Center can visit [www.getCareerConnectED.org](http://www.getCareerConnectED.org) or phone Kim Fish at 937-505-2805 to get involved.

Contact this reporter at 937-328-0353 or email [Katie.Wedell@coxinc.com](mailto:Katie.Wedell@coxinc.com).