



Bridging the Gap Between Education and Enterprise

Tuesday, October 08, 2013 - by *ASTD Staff*

The Bluegrass State has created one of the nation's most innovative workforce development programs. The Kentucky Work Ready Communities program boosts high school graduation rates while simultaneously developing the state's workforce. The program's structure is simple, and is built to ensure relevance, accountability, and collaboration.

Counties apply to be certified as "work ready," which means they have met certain labor quality standards, currently the most rigorous in the country. The standards concern high school graduation rates, National Career Readiness certification, demonstrated community commitment, educational attainment, soft skills development, and digital literacy. When applying to the program, counties must gather and demonstrate support from local education and business leaders. Seventy-five percent of the state's counties have joined the program since it launched in 2012.

Local business leaders are critical in securing a county's Work Ready Community designation. For example, Madison County applied and was awarded an "in progress" status because its schools had not been adequately developing soft skills in students preparing to enter the workforce. So the county brought together local education and business leaders to develop a high school soft skills curriculum that was integrated into standard high school courses.

"We're connecting industry and education to bring corporate standards into the classroom," says Helen Mountjoy, executive director of the Regional Alliance for Education and former secretary of the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet. "We are preparing Millennials for a productive career and ensuring that Kentucky companies have the talent they need to compete and create jobs."