

GORDON REPORT, July 2021
White Paper
Job Shock: Solving the Pandemic & 2030 Employment Meltdown

Part VI: RETAIN Case Studies: Partnerships Rebuilding Local Employment Pipelines

The June Gordon Report provided an introduction to the general characteristics of regional public-private partnerships focusing on economic and workforce development or RETAINs. Across the United States RETAINs have many local brand names. RETAINs bring together enlightened community leaders from many industry sectors. They cooperate in developing initiatives that provide career education and information to students and retrain incumbent workers to meet the skill demands of workplace technology changes. The goals of RETAINs are to strengthen local institutions and competitive companies while providing local residents with better job opportunities.

There are many paths to pursuing these objectives. Here are examples of RETAINs that are continuing to develop programs that address the talent challenges in their communities.

Manufacturing Renaissance, Chicago, Illinois

For the past 38 years Manufacturing Renaissance (MR) has been recognized as a leading expert, advocate and practitioner of policies and programs that support the manufacturing sector as a primary strategy for reducing poverty, expanding inclusion, and sustaining middle-class communities.

MR has currently developed programs in three areas: Career Pathway Services, Policy and Advocacy, and Economic Development. Here is a snapshot of MR's Career Pathway Services:

- a. **Manufacturing Connect.** MC is a program designed to expose, inspire, prepare, and support youth and young adults to pursue career pathways in manufacturing. MC is a community-based program serving in-school youth, ages 14-18, to provide high quality, career pathway programming including career exposure, technical training and work experiences to help young people start and keep good paying jobs in manufacturing.
- b. **Young Manufacturers Association.** The YMA serves as both a network and a program for young adults, aged 18-29, who are pursuing careers in manufacturing, in-between jobs, in training or interested in starting a career in manufacturing. Through regular meetings and social events, they support one another as peers through training, transition into permanent employment, professional and life skills development, and balancing personal and work life dynamics. The YMA as a program provides services on an as-needed basis, including career coaching, wrap-around supports, employer liaison to help troubleshoot issues that come up at work, and technical training. Together, the YMA network and program are serving the untapped talent and potential that young adults specifically represent to their communities and their current or future employers.

- c. **Instructors Apprenticeship for Advanced Manufacturing.** IAAM was developed in partnership with the Chicago Teachers Union Foundation and the National Institute for Metalworking Skills to train the next generation of great machining instructors to be technologically, culturally, and pedagogically competent in the machine shop classroom.

Career Pathway Services is not a traditional workforce development program. MR draws heavily from a youth development and social services orientation to engage youth and young adults who typically may not identify or seek out manufacturing as a pathway that can assist them in achieving their life goals. MR introduces young people to the sector, finds a variety of ways for them to relate to peers already in the sector to help illuminate what could be possible for their future. No matter what they ultimately choose, young people benefit from having a network of professional and social support, work experiences, technical and professionalism skills. For those who enroll in our training program and choose to pursue a career-track job in manufacturing we support them as much as possible through training, job placement and beyond to help ensure their success.

MR is expanding its reach in Cook County and showing the way for other RETAINs to begin similar efforts. It illustrates that for a RETAIN to be successful there must be strong cooperation among educational entities, the business community, unions, government agencies, and non-profit partners.

High School Inc., Santa Ana, California

The initial impetus for the creation of the High School Inc. Academies Foundation came from local business leaders in the Santa Ana Chamber of Commerce. Starting in 2003, members of the Chamber of Commerce held discussions with school districts officials on how to raise student achievement. The result was a partnership involving the Chamber, the Foundation and the Santa Ana Unified School District. An official “Memorandum of Understanding was signed by all three partners in May of 2006. This agreement outlined the responsibilities of each partner for the development and operation of the High School Inc. program.

The first six High School Inc. Academies began in 2007 on the campus of Santa Ana Valley High School in the Santa Ana Unified School District. The district’s Career Technical Education (CTE) department conducts monthly meetings with High School Inc.’s staff to maintain the continuity and effectiveness of the academies.

At Valley High School, the High School Inc. Academies merge both academic and technical skills through Project Based Learning (PBL), competitions, mentorships, and business internships. Because of the success of the High School Inc. academies, there has been considerable growth in the school district’s creation of career pathways in business and industry sectors. These pathways start as early as sixth grade in the school district’s intermediate schools and send students into the waiting High School Inc. Academies.

The number of Valley high school students categorized as “socioeconomically disadvantaged” in 2008 was 80 percent. However, with the help of talented teachers and staff members, and the

existence of High School Inc., Valley High School has raised the level of achievement for all Valley high school students.

Mary Tran, Executive Director of High School Inc. reports that the six High School Inc. Academies have grown from an enrollment of 96 students at its start in 2007 to over 1,572 students in 2019. The Academies boast a 98% high school graduation rate. In the past year there have been 160 professional internships for seniors. The number of students receiving "Industry Certifications" after a minimum of two years in the program was 511, with over 319 students participating in business/industry themed competitions. Students in the 2018-2019 received over 950 hours of volunteer time from business and industry representatives. The program has received numerous awards and recognitions including the prestigious "Golden Bell Award" given to High School Inc. in 2014 by the California School Board Association.

Jack E. Oakes, an officer on the Board of Directors for High School Inc., says "High School Inc.'s development has produced the realization that, before students can be College and Career Ready, they must be 'Achievement Ready.' Students reach this new level of preparedness by being motivated to strive at or beyond their potential. The High School Inc. model ensures that students are Achievement Ready *before* they graduate and pursue higher education and careers. The reforms at Valley High School embrace the mission of High School Inc. 'to empower youth and strengthen communities through education and business partnerships.' "

Vermilion Advantage, Danville, Illinois.

The Danville Area Economic Development Corporation has been operating in Danville for 39 years. This organization merged with the Chamber of Commerce in 2002 to form a single entity- Vermilion Advantage. Vermilion Advantage is the lead agency in the county for economic development, workforce support, and local business data.

Vermilion Advantage is a unique hybrid organization that employs a multi-pronged approach to economic development, workforce development, and community development. It works closely with the county's communities and businesses to anticipate, develop, and maintain a viable workforce and community. Its mission is to create a community where people work, live and play.

Workforce development continues to be a high priority. The Vermilion Advantage partners with the local community college and the Workforce Investment Board to introduce high school students in Vermilion County to apprenticeships, internships, and other career-related programs that are central to the continued success of the local economy.

The New North, Northeast Wisconsin

The New North geographic region covers the 18 northeast counties of Wisconsin. Since it started in 2005 New North, Inc. has grown to become a RETAIN that now has the support of over 100 private investors. It fosters collaboration among a long list of private and public sector leaders and governmental entities. Its website includes multiple resources for employers, workers, educational institutions, students, and parents. It facilitates communication among these communities providing such information as in-demand jobs and careers, the educational requirements for them, and regional resources for obtaining the needed educational preparation.

New North acts as an intermediary in workforce and career development that enables key industry sectors to build stronger employment pipelines. It acts as an umbrella organization linking industry associations including the Northeast Wisconsin (NEW) Manufacturing Alliance, Northeast Wisconsin Educational Resource Alliance (NEW ERA), NEW Digital Alliance, and the NEW Construction Alliance.

The NEW Manufacturing Alliance began in 2006 with 12 manufacturers has grown to over 300 member organizations. It provides information on careers in advanced manufacturing to local students in middle schools, high schools, and local community/technical colleges. The alliance actively recruits students using plant tours, career speakers, and job shadowing. Ann Franz, the Alliance’s executive director, states its central message “that manufacturing is a vibrant, well-paying career is resonating with people.”

The alliance also posts its member companies’ employment opportunities on its website (www.newmfgalliance.org), showing the training and education requirements and skills required for each job. Many member companies offer tuition reimbursement for their employees. The Alliance’s Earn and Learn Program pairs high school seniors in youth apprenticeship programs or taking dual-credit courses in manufacturing with area manufacturers who want to offer a training opportunity to such students. The companies pay a portion of the college course tuition for these students and the students work part-time for the manufacturers.

ConxusNEO, Akron, Ohio

ConxusNEO is focused on building the capacity and improving the performance of the talent ecosystem in Summit County, OH. Rather than running programs, ConxusNEO takes stock of organizations doing programming within five essential functions to prepare young people and adults with the skills and competencies companies tell us they need. The five functions are: Awareness, Exploration, Development, Connection and Upskill (See Figure 1).

FIGURE 1



ConxusNEO supports programs that deliver positive outcomes, so they have the resources they need to continue and, in some cases, to scale their work. ConxusNEO also identifies gaps in the system that need to be shored up. In some cases, new programs need to be created to continue to cultivate a comprehensive system that delivers the results wanted in the local community. ConxusNEO is also establishing key performance indicators within each of these functions to begin to track community-wide outcomes.

In order to accomplish this, it partners with companies to identify the skills they need, and it supports them to work with educators, and a range of other partners to innovate solutions that:

- fill open positions
- build a talent pipeline with those skills

ConxusNEO has created industry sector partnerships within the manufacturing, tech and healthcare sectors to bring all of these partners together. Its role is to convene and facilitate the process.

The bottom line is that every organization wins when a cooperative program is done well. Companies become investors in the education system instead of simply consumers. That's one of the reasons the College and Career Academies of Akron has been so successful in engaging the business community. Businesses helped established new pathways aligned with demand and provide experiential learning opportunities and curriculum development support. ConxusNEO served as the community convener for the master planning process and it continues to support implementation.

As the work of ConxusNEO is driven by the demand for specific skills, it routinely compiles, analyzes and shares data with its partners and vets this kind of information with the companies themselves.

And while jobs like retail and fast food are in greatest demand, ConxusNEO focused on good and promising jobs for Summit County residents – ones that have a career pathway and that provide a good wage with benefits and advancement opportunities.

Summing Up

Each organization profiled here has continued to evolve to meet the challenges posed by technological, economic, and workforce shifts. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted American life at many levels. It opens up new opportunities for many communities to use the RETAIN model as their first step toward a more knowledgeable workforce and the better paying jobs of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The last segment of “Job Shock” will focus on why the 2020s will be a crucial decade for building a skilled workforce. As the nation emerges from COVID-19 shutdowns, the disconnect between needed skills and available jobs is gaining increasing attention. The time has arrived for RETAINs to take the lead in rebuilding education-to-employment pipelines in communities across the United States.