



EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD: NWI collaborating to create world-class workers

By Peggy Buffington | Posted: Sunday, February 20, 2011 12:00 am

Leaders from Northwest Indiana are taking a unique approach to produce world-class workers by collaborating on an action plan. The goal is to educate and equip a work force with the skills the region needs to compete and thrive in a global economy.

This comes at a time when the Indiana Department of Education and legislators labor to create laws that would allow for privatizing public schools instead of providing support for them because state officials say public schools are failing. Are Indiana's public schools really failing?

Claims that Indiana's public school performance is declining are simply untrue. The IDOE paints a dismal picture of Indiana schools through the lenses of ISTEP-Plus and End of Course Assessment scores in which they control the passing bar.

Last summer, the IDOE raised the recommended bar for a passing score on the state's ECA test, which is what high school students need to pass to graduate. Seventy-five percent of Indiana's high schools found themselves on academic watch or academic probation after this change. This change certainly created a scenario of failing schools along with the urgency to reform public schools.

The IDOE does not mention or focus on Indiana's test scores from the National Assessment for Educational Progress in which they do not control the passing bar. Why? Steady improvement over the past 20 years in Indiana's public schools has been documented clearly.

Currently, Indiana's public schools stand at or near their highest marks in history on attendance rate, SAT math, ACT, NAEP, ISTEP-Plus and the percentage earning Academic Honors diplomas and Core 40 diplomas. Indiana outperforms Florida on fourth- and eighth-grade math, eighth-grade reading, and fourth- and eighth-grade science on the NAEP.

The IDOE and lawmakers will not focus on the positive in schools or on collaborating with partners for solutions on how to compete in the global economy when the mission is to privatize public schools. Of course, more improvement is needed to meet global economic competition, but outsourcing students to private schools will undercut support and hamper further improvement in public schools.

Nonetheless, in Northwest Indiana, the support for public schools is unwavering. Those involved in Northwest Indiana Partners are taking a unique approach for educational reform in their desire to see thriving communities, schools and students in the region.

On Wednesday, join leaders from Northwest Indiana who are gathering from 3 to 7:30 p.m. for the One Region, One Vision Education Summit at Hobart High School. Participants include business and labor leaders, school board members and administrators, higher education officials and local community members. Through this unique partnership, attendees have been working to create a vision, mission and action plan to make Northwest Indiana's students career- and college-ready.

The evening includes the following events:

- Mark Maassel, president of the Northwest Indiana Forum, will speak on aligning with the economic development potential of Northwest Indiana for the global marketplace.
- Linda Woloshansky, president of the Center of Workforce Innovations, will highlight key findings from the State of the Workforce report and present hiring opportunities in Northwest Indiana.
- Martha Kanter, undersecretary for the U.S. Department of Education, will be the keynote speaker. She oversees policies, programs and activities related to post-secondary, vocational and adult education, and federal student aid.
- Current strategic initiatives in Northwest Indiana high schools will be presented, including Freshman Transitions: Small Learning Communities/Freshman Learning Academies, 21st Century Learning: Project-Based Learning and New Tech High Schools and College and Career Programming: Dual Credit Programming.
- Joe Medellin from ArcelorMittal will present Today and the Future! How Do We Know? Measuring College and Career Readiness. He will talk

about a partnership of Northwest Indiana businesses funding an assessment initiative called the WorkKeys Project.

- The Indiana College Acceleration Network: Assessing Success of College and Career Readiness will be featured.
- Bill Masterson, publisher from The Times Media Co., will conclude with the Northwest Indiana Leaders' Call to Action and a Northwest Indiana Partnership Compact holding each stakeholder group accountable for their actions in the plan.

Our expectations from the One Region, One Vision Education Summit are high. We have a unique approach through collaboration for educational progress that delivers an action plan, which will pave the way for all youth to leave high school prepared for college and careers.

If you are interested in becoming a part of the One Region, One Vision Education Summit, please visit <http://innovativeworkforce.com/>. Questions? Call (219) 462-2940

Peggy Buffington is superintendent of the School City of Hobart. The opinion expressed in this column is the writer's and not necessarily that of The Times.