Challenge

Ivy Tech wanted to drive long-term change in how education was delivered in support of completion. The project focused on four objectives: (1) increase the number of Hoosiers who will earn a postsecondary credential with value in the workplace; (2) align stackable industry-recognized skills certifications with educational degree pathways in the Ivy Tech community colleges and four-year institutions (Purdue and Indiana Universities regional universities) and with career pathways in advanced manufacturing; (3) modularize college curricula along the pathway to shorten the time to credentials and provide more on- and off ramps in postsecondary education; and (4) strengthen employer engagement.

Action

The first step to implementing certification programs was to conduct research. Ivy Tech gathered teams of subject matter experts to determine what certifications do and which ones to offer. Then, they put suggestions forth to curriculum committees and voted to implement. Next Ivy Tech educated employers on the value of certifications and began to see evidence of success.

In addition to the technical certifications, particular attention is paid to workplace and academic skills. Students must complete the National Career Readiness Certificate for academic and workplace readiness, and have access to Work Keys training to build up skills in reading, applied mathematics, and locating information. Students also must pass a drug test, participate in a personal interview, and meet high attendance standards, akin to what is required on the job, during the training.

The companies have a unique arrangement: after 90 days successful retention, they pay half the cost of training (about $1,300) back into the consortium. This is a win-win and saves the companies money that otherwise would have gone to turnover, retraining costs, and staffing agency fees.

Results

>> Grant Competition:
Offering certifications has helped Ivy Tech gain grants as they are awarded for certification systems in place as well as the number of credentials completed.

>> Program Validation:
The passing rates are high indicating that that programs offered match the levels of skills needed. This helps validate the educational value of Ivy Tech and keeps them competitive.

>> Multiple Credentials:
Block scheduling classes allows students to obtain multiple credentials and makes it more likely that they will finish the program. Completion rates are now as high as 92% for certification systems. Moreover, Indiana has moved from 5th to 3rd in state ranking relative to the delivery of certifications.

“For us as a school, certifications have turned our focus towards students more and whether these students get the outcomes they need and are prepared to take and pass the certification tests. We were early adopters and people laughed at us saying it would never catch. One of the reasons it works here is because we believe it works. We want the mainstream certs that are valued by employers and make sure we are operationally capable. It is a value-added all the way around.”

-Vearl Turnpaugh,
Associate Vice President Career & Technical Programs, Ivy Tech