

# Wyoming School-University Partnership

## Wyoming Transition Programs Case Study Natrona County School District #1 Pathways Innovation Center

### Program Goals and Inception

Natrona County School District #1's Pathways Innovation Center (PIC) was developed through school district and community input to allow for specialized curricular offerings in support of high school programs in the district. Officially begun in 2016, the program offered at PIC focuses on providing students with the access to gain specialized skills in preparation for workforce, college, and military readiness.

### Program Description

Programs offered at PIC connect students' academic experiences at their home high schools with community and college trade school opportunities in fields such as Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources; Architecture and Construction; Manufacturing; Transportation; Health Sciences; Education; Hospitality and Tourism; Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM); and Business Management and Administration. The PIC program also provides students with access to certification in a variety of industries and fields, such as veterinary medical applications, heavy equipment handling, food handling, welding, and automotive service, among others.

Students come to the PIC program campus during their junior and senior years to complete specific coursework related to the PIC program of their choice, while still attending their home high school in NCSD#1. The spaces and equipment provided by the PIC program campus give students access to facilities that allow them to pursue intensive and extended hands-on learning within their chosen field of study.

### Stakeholder Perspectives

In order to gain stakeholder perspectives on the PIC program, we talked with the program coordinator and the school administrator, current students, recent completers, and community members.

PIC Program coordinators and administrators described as strengths the ability to integrate core courses with hands-on experiences, the applied nature of the PIC program courses, the

alignment of coursework with industrial certifications, and collaboration with high school guidance counselors across the district.

A current student explained that he engaged with the PIC program because of the opportunity it provided to get experience/training with heavy equipment operation. He also is pursuing automotive servicing as an alternative educational plan. For this student, scheduling was critical. He is able to take the bus from his home high school to the PIC program, and still have time to eat his lunch and get to class on time. He also valued getting out of school early, which allowed him to get a part-time job. When we talked, he was looking for a job as a heavy equipment operator and was excited about the opportunity to start at a slightly higher rate because of his certification.

A recent completer of the PIC program was working and planning on attending the local community college in the fall, where she will be majoring in nursing. Through the PIC program, this student completed her CNA license and is planning to complete a bachelor's degree in nursing. This recent completer spoke very highly of a specific teacher in the PIC program who provided additional support, particularly in the area of reading, which presented a struggle to her. After graduation, this student is seeking employment as a CNA at a local hospital, planning to use this experience to help earn additional income and for experience.

Another recent completer had just graduated with ServSafe food handling certification, and was accepted into the Culinary Institute of America for further post-secondary education, where he will be pursuing a baking and pastry associate's degree. This graduate had been involved in SkillsUSA's annual state competition in baking and pastry. He attributed the PIC program culinary teacher for helping him get into the competition and preparing for it; ultimately, he scored first place in the SkillsUSA baking and pastry competition and will be going onto the national competition in Atlanta, Georgia. He spoke very highly of the equipment available in the PIC building and wished that more students would enroll in the culinary program.

We also spoke with a completer from several years ago, who completed four Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certifications as well as American Lift Institute (ALI) certification. After graduating from high school, this completer entered the military, where he reports still using not only the content from the certifications he completed, but also the leadership skills that he attributes to the work of PIC program instructors. While in high school, he did not complete an internship; however, he did apply the knowledge he was gaining to his part-time position with a tree service, where he was able to work on their machines.

A member of the community who works in outside sales at a contracting supply has been involved with the PIC program for about four years through making presentations to students, providing tools and materials as incentives, and participating in PIC program open houses and other events, he was very complimentary about the program, indicating that he sees it as part of encouraging students to enter trades after high school. He was particularly appreciative of the way administrators and teachers in the PIC program keep community members informed and

up-to-date about their work. In addition, he noted the introduction of a new course in upholstery and advocated for the addition of coursework in cements/foundations.

**Promising Practices**

- Focus on aligning coursework with industry certifications;
- Embedded leadership skills in hands-on coursework;
- Collaboration with high school guidance counselors; and
- Hands-on experience with industry-specific equipment.