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Chamber Announces New Apprenticeship Program Available for Christian County Students



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HOPKINSVILLE, Ky. (April 21, 2016)-A new competency-based apprenticeship program has been approved for Christian County students beginning the fall of 2016. The Christian County Chamber of Commerce and White Drive Products joined officials from the Christian County Public School System and Hopkinsville Community College to celebrate the new partnership formed for The Manufacturing TRACK (Tech Ready Apprentices for Careers in Kentucky) Program. This program creates post-secondary opportunities with employers who offer Federal and State Registered Apprenticeship programs to local high school students seeking careers in manufacturing.

Larry Dean, Global Director of HR for White Drive Products and Chair of the Workforce Education Committee along with Lanita Wilson, Vice-President of Community Affairs for the Chamber of Commerce and Penny Knight, Principal of Gateway Academy to Innovation and Technology, announced at the Board of Education meeting that White Drive Products has finalized documents to work

with the Kentucky Department of Education and Kentucky Labor Cabinet to design their pre-apprenticeship program with Gateway Academy.

"White Drive products is excited to partner with the Christian County School Board, Superintendent Gemmill, Gateway Academy, Hopkinsville Community College and the Chamber of Commerce's Workforce Education Development Committee. All of these entities working together to offer students an opportunity to a career pathway in manufacturing is magical," said Dean. "The TRACK program is a perfect match as it produces a generation of specialized employees for the future of our community."

Employers tailor the program for their specific needs and are able to select the Career and Technical Education courses and students for their apprenticeship pathway. This creates a competitive recruiting environment insuring that employers benefit by gaining future employees that have a good foundation of not only technical but soft skills at the same time. Additionally, it enables students to receive a nationally recognized credential at little or no cost.

"Our local business and industry partners want and need skilled workers for their organizations. When Christian County Schools approached the Chamber to partner together and research some of those opportunities, we gladly accepted. Having career-ready students is a critical part of our economic development and growth of Hopkinsville and Christian County and White Drive volunteered to be the pilot organization to lead this program," said Wilson.

The TRACK apprenticeship program allows students to earn while they learn and, once completed will lead to high-demand, high-wage jobs skills that will follow them. By the end of this four-year apprenticeship, the wages are likely doubled for the students.

Amy Wilcox, Chief Instructional Officer for Christian County Public Schools said, "The Christian County Board of Education is committed to expanding career readiness opportunities for our students through partnerships with local industry. Board members and Superintendent Gemmill have been clear about this priority over the last four years and it is a component of the Board-approved strategic plan. We are excited to offer this specialized career opportunity for both students and the employers where our students will take the classroom instruction a step further with on the job, hands-on learning."

Students apply for the TRACK program their sophomore year of school and co-op during their junior and senior years of high school. Once they graduate they transition to Hopkinsville Community College to finish their credentialing along with continued on-the-job training with their employer. Students are actual employees of the sponsoring company and earn all the same benefits as regular employees.

"This community has incredible assets with Gateway Academy and Hopkinsville Community College. These students will not only have a rewarding career but will also earn the right to complete the last two years of the process at HCC thus resulting in an Associate's Degree. Additionally, students gain a Registered Apprentice Certification which is recognized nationally and internationally by manufacturers, so it's a valuable credential for students to possess", said Dean.

The students who apply to this program are choosing a career path and employers gain knowledgeable and valuable new employees. Employers pick the courses a student takes in addition to regular attendance and course grade guidelines. Upon successful completion, the Kentucky Labor Cabinet will issue a Pre-Apprentice Industry Certification.

"The TRACK Program has the potential to train students for high-skill, high-wage jobs here in Christian County to fill the needs we have in existing and new businesses. White Drive was impressed with the program and we are committed to it by looking to hire four students this fall," said Dean.

"Gateway staff and I are excited about the new opportunities that the TRACK Apprenticeship program is offering students. We appreciate the partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce and White Drive and look forward to exploring additional partnerships in the future. This partnership takes Co-Op to a new level by challenging students to make a 4+ year commitment to work hard and take their place in the global competitive workplace right here in Hopkinsville, KY. Applications are now being accepted at Gateway Academy," said Knight.

Current sophomore students at Gateway who are interested in applying need to contact Principal Penny Knight to discuss the application process.

For more information, contact Lanita Wilson, Christian County Chamber, lwilson@christiancountychamber.com or 270.885.9096.

