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Lakota Interns to Gain Health Industry Insight

BY AMY HOWELL HIRT *Courier Contributor*

"What do you want to be when you grow up?"

It's a question that even college-bound 11th- and 12th-grade students can have trouble answering.

But starting this fall, the Lakota Local School District hopes to give students a better framework for career choices through internship programming that supports the future success of students as well as the local health-care industry.

"Until the students get out there, they don't really know what these folks do," said Lon Stettler, Lakota's executive director for program development and strategic partnerships.

Students accepted for co-curricular internships with Atrium-Medical Center in Middletown will rotate through six hospital departments related to the biomedical industry or hospital business operations. The four-hour job shadowing and observational shifts are designed to provide students with an intimate look at what a specific job entails and what is required to attain it.

"It's not just a tour of the building. They have the opportunity to interact with a professional and hear the path they took to reach this career," Stettler said.

The internships are an expansion of Lakota's STEAM² program (science, technology, engineering, arts/design, mathematics and medical). This begins at the elementary level and focuses on preparing students for engineering and biomedical fields. The district introduced internships about two years ago, after business recruiters expressed the need to expose students to different career opportunities before they reach the college level.

The internships at Atrium Medical Center are intended to complement those offered at West Chester Hospital, where students rotate through departments including inpatient care, operative and perioperative, imaging, rehabilitation and emergency. At Atrium, the biomedical internship program will focus on the outpatient setting, while the hospital operations program - Lakota's first internship experience in the area of business - will address, in part, how every hospital career impacts patient care, said Christie Gray, administrative director of nursing operations at Atrium Medical Center.

Lakota also offers engineering internships with Procter & Gamble Co. and Evendale-based Kinetic Vision, while Atrium is involved in similar programs with the Warren County Career Center and Butler Tech, focusing on job training rather than job shadowing.

Providing high school students with a "deeper-dive" into areas that interest them is beneficial for local schools, students and employers.

"Most of the 24 students accepted for Atrium internships are already taking advanced classes in related subjects, Stettler said. An internship experience at the high school level allows them to explore their options and fine-tune their choices for post-secondary education. In addition, if a given field clicks with a student, "There are great opportunities for involvement even after the internship," Gray said "There might be employment opportunities to help them get through school or volunteer opportunities."

Stettler said the experience - noted as credit on a student's transcripts - is also advantageous when students apply for ongoing education.

For employers, making early connections with these top-notch students - only half of those who apply are accepted for Lakota's internships - can support long-term workforce development.

"It allows us to partner with the community and build these relationships. These kids will eventually be in the workforce, and they may come back," Gray said.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Aside from the educational benefits for students, Lakota's internship program also promotes regional workforce development, said Lon Stettler, the district's executive director for program development and strategic partnerships.

"We don't have beaches and other geographical amenities that draw folks, so part of the thinking is if we recruit those who already have families here, they may be more inclined to stay," he said.

Lakota has implemented its Internship programming slowly to work through the kinks, but the district hopes to begin adding career paths at a faster rate," Stettler said.

Possibilities for new study areas" include: information technology/ computer science; business operations, supply chain management and logistics; nonprofit occupations; and fine and applied arts.