



Thank you for attending the WVCC Preston County Networking Event. We truly appreciate your time, engagement, and willingness to share your insights.

The conversations were thoughtful and productive, and the feedback we received was extremely valuable. We encourage you to look them over and share any additional thoughts or items we may have missed.

## **Common Themes**

### **Education and Industry Collaboration**

- ✓ Industry advisory boards are valuable tools for aligning education with workforce needs.
- ✓ Programs benefit from consistent employer feedback and participation.
- ✓ Schools are actively seeking new advisory board members as current members retire.
- ✓ Strong partnerships between schools, employers, and community organizations support program development.

### **Early Career Exposure and Exploration**

- ✓ Students need exposure to career pathways earlier, ideally beginning in elementary or middle school.
- ✓ Career exploration programs, job shadows, site visits, and internships help students understand career options.
- ✓ Emerging tools such as VR and hands-on STEM activities can spark early interest.

### **Work-Based Learning Access and Barriers**

- ✓ Transportation, rural distance, and unpaid opportunities limit student participation.
- ✓ Paid experiences significantly increase student participation and commitment.
- ✓ Expanding external work-based learning opportunities can provide broader career exposure.

### **Workforce Readiness and Soft Skills**

- ✓ Employers continue to see gaps in communication, professionalism, and interview skills.
- ✓ Students often lack preparation for professional environments.
- ✓ Workforce readiness requires development of soft and durable skills early in education.

### **Value of Skilled Trades and Alternative Pathways**

- ✓ Careers in skilled trades provide strong wages and opportunities.
- ✓ Interest in trades is increasing after years of emphasis on traditional college pathways.

### **Community Engagement and Workforce Retention**

- ✓ Increasing awareness of local career opportunities and cost-of-living advantages is important.
- ✓ Community engagement and local pride influence decisions to stay.

### **Need for Life Skills and Real-World Learning**

- ✓ Programs teaching financial literacy, budgeting, and real-life decision making are valuable.
- ✓ Experiential learning activities help students understand adult responsibilities and career pathways.

## What We Learned

- ✓ Advisory boards help keep education programs proactive.
- ✓ Career awareness must begin earlier.
- ✓ Work-based learning opportunities must be accessible.
- ✓ Soft skills are still one of the biggest workforce gaps.
- ✓ Hands-on learning increases student engagement.
- ✓ Skilled trades are valuable and viable career pathways.
- ✓ Community connections influence retention.
- ✓ Workforce preparation is a shared responsibility.
- ✓ Life skills education is important for career readiness.
- ✓ Young people want to be part of positive change in their communities.

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