



Thank you for attending the WVCC Upshur 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

- ✓ **Industry Advisory Boards are widely supported and valued.**
Employers want direct input into curriculum to ensure programs align with workforce needs. Advisory boards strengthen communication between industry and institutions and help keep curriculum current and responsive, often allowing minor adjustments. Adult worker advisory boards also support talent pipelines, creating mutual benefits for both companies and institutions.
- ✓ **Students need early and repeated exposure to careers.**
Work-based learning includes internships, micro-internships, job shadowing, and site visits or field trips. Paid experiences are especially important, as hands-on exposure helps students determine career fitness. Tools like VR and simulators can help overcome safety and access barriers. Employers generally report positive experiences hosting interns, though retaining graduates in the region remains a challenge. Soft/essential skills are a major gap for employers.
- ✓ **Greater flexibility is needed in high school curriculum.**
CTE completers are often better prepared for the workforce, and career days help connect students to local industry opportunities. Apprenticeships build both interest and job readiness, while stackable credentials—such as certifications, micro-credentials, and degrees—create clear, flexible pathways. Ongoing legislative engagement is also important to ensure the system remains adaptable and responsive to workforce needs.

- ✓ **Employers see better results training local students while many graduates are leaving the state.**

Employers see better results when training local students, and apprenticeship and workforce training programs—often supported by state agencies—have proven effective in building sustainable local talent pipelines, especially where national recruiting has had limited success. However, many graduates still leave the state due to perceived limited opportunities and concerns about quality of life, despite overlooked advantages like lower cost of living and local companies operating in global markets. Better marketing of these strengths and maintaining connections that encourage “leave and return” pathways could help address outmigration.

- ✓ **Entrepreneurial mindset should begin early (elementary/middle school).**

There is limited structured K–12 entrepreneurship programming in some areas. Support organizations such as the Small Business Development Center can assist with idea development, business planning, and step-by-step guidance. AI can assist but requires informed use.

What We Learned

- ✓ Industry Wants a Stronger Voice in Education
- ✓ Early and Repeated Career Exposure Is Critical
- ✓ Local Talent Development Is More Effective Than External Recruitment
- ✓ Stronger Alignment Between K–12, CTE, and Higher Education Is Needed
- ✓ Retention Is About Perception as Much as Opportunity
- ✓ Soft Skills Are a Significant Workforce Gap
- ✓ Mindset Is a Major Barrier—and Opportunity
- ✓ Exposure Alone Is Not Enough—Intentional Matching Matters
- ✓ Communication and Momentum Must Be Sustained

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