



## Partnerships, Collaboration Critical to Cultivating Talent Pipeline

By Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC, Communications Manager  
Photos courtesy CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion

A few months ago, in advance of our State of the Workforce conference, *Cultivating Your 21st Century Workforce*, I talked about the importance of cultivating, aka nurturing, our crop of future workers.

We know with certainty that unless we actively cultivate our talent pipeline, there will be shortages in industries critical to our region's economic well-being.

While there were many great takeaways from the conference, what really stuck with me is what the panel of education leaders had to say when asked, "What does partnership mean to you in your pursuit of educating students and placing them into jobs?"

That discussion came on the heels of a deep dive into Duke Energy's approach to leveraging partnerships to grow their own talent pipeline.

"Partnerships are very important at every stage of the pipeline," said Isabel Nieto, workforce development consultant for Duke. "From partnerships with other companies to partnerships with your local school board ... success is when you're working collaboratively."



Happily, gone are the days of entrenched turfdom. When it comes to growing the talent pipeline necessary for local businesses to succeed, cultivation requires collaboration; it requires planting seeds – of ideas, cooperation, possibilities – that sprout into partnerships.

Here, in the order the question was answered, are the panelists' responses:



**Sandra "Sam" Himmel, superintendent of the Citrus County School District:** "Partnerships with the community and businesses and the school system are critical because we know that when you get students engaged, they learn better. That's why we partner with the chamber, for example, on internships and apprenticeships to get students involved and excited about what they want to do."



**Dr. Heidi Maier, superintendent of Marion County Public Schools:** "Partnerships? Absolutely. Partnerships with local colleges, local governments, the CEP partners with the family ... and partnerships with other agencies. Not only that, but (it's about) expanding your thoughts about what is vocational education. The traditional misconception, let's be very honest, of that vocational student is that of a big, burly 11th grader who can't read ... That's not our vocational student. Instead of looking at vocational students as 'oh, you're not college material,' we need to change that mindset ... We are finding that a tremendous amount of our gifted students want to go into vocational education, but that opportunity hasn't been presented to them."



**Jeff Edison, superintendent of the Levy County School District:** "Our mission is to educate our kids in a safe environment and graduate them ready for college or career success ... Career and Technical Education does not mean a dumbing down of standards. In order for these kids to go out and compete in the job market today, they have to be able to do the rigorous standards you have in your jobs. The key to partnerships is relationships. It's providing these students opportunities for career shadowing, internships..."



**Dr. Jim Henningsen, president and CEO of the College of Central Florida:** "When you talk about partnerships, it's a 360 circle; everyone gets involved. We're producing graduates out of our programs for you to hire. Not many of our students come through as a trust fund baby saying, 'I don't need a job, I'm just coming through for the fun of it.' They're looking to improve themselves, improve the community and help you as employers to get into jobs in the local area. So, we partner with our local school district, partner with the business and industry sector, partner with those agencies that can provide grants, funding and resources that can help us

accelerate what we're doing ... We need to make sure we're closely aligned with students, to provide them opportunities early on, and to keep linked with businesses – what's most relevant, what do you need ... Partnership is key. We can't do it in isolation, the school district can't do it in isolation. It's all of us coming together ... to make a difference."

*Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC, is communications manager for CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion, is Accredited in Public Relations, a Certified Public Relations Counselor and a Florida Certified Workforce Professional. To learn more, please contact her at (352) 291-9559, (800) 434-5627, ext. 1234 or lbyrnes@careersourceclm.com.*

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