

The World They Created:

South Bend Community School Corporation



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All4Ed



Introduction

South Bend Community School Corporation (SBCSC) is at the forefront of innovative career and technical education (CTE) programs. As a U.S. Department of Education Perkins Innovation and Modernization (PIM) Career Connected High School (CCHS) Grant program grant recipient, SBCSC is reimagining what it means to prepare students for joyful and rewarding lives after high school. At the heart of their approach is a bold commitment to career-connected learning for all students and humanizing education by fostering a sense of purpose, belonging, and community for students, educators, and community partners.

SBCSC's CTE programs are not only equipping students with real-world, hands-on experience in dynamic fields, they are also fostering collaborative relationships between employers, schools, and students. These partnerships are reshaping career pathways, boosting local talent retention, and combating brain drain by inspiring students to pursue high-paying, in-demand jobs within their communities. SBCSC's work goes beyond preparing students for jobs; it revitalizes communities, strengthens local economies, and is making South Bend a place where students can build their lives and pursue their dreams.

So how has South Bend Community School Corporation reimagined its programs? What strategies have yielded its success?

South Bend Community School Corporation's Strategies for Success

Intentional Workforce Alignment and Strong Partnerships

South Bend's CTE programs thrive because of deliberate, sustained collaboration between educators, industry leaders, and community partners. The medical magnet coordinator at [Washington High School's Medical Allied Health Science Magnet program](#) has cultivated relationships with [Beacon Health System](#), the region's largest health care employer.

Through this partnership, students receive hands-on training, mentorship, and exposure to real-world medical careers, creating a direct pathway from high school to a postsecondary credential, to employment in good jobs in the local health care system. Students learn by doing. They are required to (1) complete a minimum number of hours shadowing and working with nurses to help patients and (2) take courses while completing their hours toward a credential.

Washington High School also established a relationship with local colleges [including Ivy Tech Community College](#) (Ivy Tech) and [Indiana University South Bend](#) (IU South Bend) to enrich student experiences. In their partnership with Ivy Tech, students can register for dual enrollment programs and gain college credits for courses in health sciences. With IU South Bend, students can participate and get a feel for college life. This is a foundational experience that shapes their understanding of the world, builds their college-going identities, and deepens their exposure to and engagement in the medical field as emerging young professionals. During this program students gain hands-on experience at a [simulation center](#), where they learn about human anatomy and health sciences. Creating opportunities for students to gain this immersive, hands-on experience early on strengthens their skills while simultaneously playing a crucial role in developing and retaining the region's in-demand future nurses and health care professionals.

Many students enter nursing school with an idealized or incomplete perception of the field, only to realize

All4Ed is seeking to understand and identify strategies for success in reimagining high schools to center career pathways. Our team conducted a site visit to South Bend Community Schools Corporation in March 2025. We met with students, educators, district leaders, and community partners to learn about the district's career and technical education programs, workforce development initiatives, and industry partnerships. The visit's goal was to identify best practices, challenges, and opportunities for strengthening career-connected learning and expanding equitable access to high-quality college and career pathways for all students. Here is what we uncovered.

it is not what they expected. By exposing students to realistic clinical environments, complete with patient care simulations, emergency response training, and real-time problem-solving, they develop a clear, informed understanding of what a nursing career truly entails. This early exposure ensures that those who pursue nursing do so with confidence, reducing attrition rates in higher education programs and strengthening the long-term health care workforce.

Perhaps the most transformative aspect of the health sciences pathways work in South Bend is the development of an on-site health clinic at Washington High School. This clinic serves a dual purpose:

1. Trains students in real health care settings, allowing them to apply their learning in a controlled, professional environment.
2. Provides essential health and dental services to the broader community, addressing a critical health care access gap for residents in the community.

This approach ensures that CTE programs are not just about workforce development; they are about building self-sustaining ecosystems where students, businesses, and community members mutually benefit from investments in education. Additionally, given that Beacon Health System is the largest employer in the region, ensuring that the growing

workforce demands in health care are met is a top priority—and they see their partnership with schools as central to their talent development strategy. To address this, [Beacon Health System](#) established the Beacon Scholar Program, a partnership with Ivy Tech that provides students with a full scholarship to earn their associate degree. This initiative not only helps meet the region's urgent workforce needs, but it also creates debt-free pathways to college for students, ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent them from pursuing a stable and fulfilling career in health care.



Harnessing Social Capital and Community Knowledge: The Power of Relationships

One of the most distinctive elements of South Bend's approach to CTE is the way it leverages [social capital](#), the power of relationships, mentorship, and community knowledge. These programs do not just connect students to jobs; they connect them to skilled professionals who have walked similar paths to those the students want to pursue, creating a culture of support and opportunity, and an intergenerational network of professional social capital for students.

For example, high school students participating in phlebotomy training typically practice their needle sticks for blood draws on tough-skinned fruit, like oranges. South Bend, however, takes phlebotomy training to the next level, recognizing the importance of both real-life experience and a key aspect of this career path: providing care and comfort to strangers. Thanks to a connection between a school leader, the Washington Medical Magnet Coordinator, and the National Guard, South Bend created and institutionalized innovative and leading-edge collaboration, illustrating how social capital translates into life-changing opportunities for students. Through their partnership with the local National Guard unit, students in the health sciences program gain hands-on experience in phlebotomy.

To earn their phlebotomy certification, students need to perform at least 30 live-stick blood draws on humans—an essential but challenging requirement, and one that high schools seldom provide. This partnership allows students to practice on

“The National Guard has walked alongside of us. We needed live sticks and it's very difficult to get twenty-two students, forty live sticks without the help of the National Guard and so they've really been instrumental in helping us get those clinical skills.

– Theresa Godette, CTE Medical Magnet Coordinator

willing National Guard members, offering a unique training environment that mirrors real medical settings and improves their bedside manners by having students talk with real people as they administer the blood draw. Providing phlebotomy training to high school students lowers the overall cost of nursing education in the future by equipping them with essential skills early on, reducing the need for additional training at the postsecondary level. It also provides them with an in-demand credential that allows them to transition immediately into the medical field and earn a living wage.

Similarly, Indiana's innovative [Career Scholarship Account \(CSA\)](#) have allowed for significant capacity growth in the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program at the Medical Magnet due to the direct training engagement of industry partners [Legacy Medical Academy and Senior1Care](#). The Career Scholarship Account provides \$5,000 per student annually in career-based funding for high school students in grades 10-12. This direct alignment of industry-integrated training with high school students has allowed for elevated career acquisition and trajectory.



Hands-On Learning That Expands Possibilities: Exposure as a Game Changer

Aviation

In South Bend, the power of personal history and hands-on learning plays a key role in transforming CTE programs, especially in aviation.

At [King Aero Aviation](#), the company's founder Marty King came from an aviation family; from a young age, the skies were his backyard. His lifelong passion for flight has become a catalyst for opportunity to invest in the next generation of aircraft maintenance technicians. Upon graduation from high school, learners have the opportunity to apprentice under King, continuing their learning while stepping directly into a career pipeline.

In this unique aviation program, students work collaboratively to construct a fully functional aircraft under the guidance of experienced instructors and [industry mentors](#). The aviation program's approach of providing students with the experience of assembling an aircraft from the ground up gives students an [unparalleled sense of achievement](#), technical expertise, and a realistic pathway into high-paying aviation careers. For example, pilots in Indiana average a salary of [\\$109,680 per year](#).

Meanwhile, aircraft mechanics and maintenance technicians in the state typically earn an average of [\\$68,640 per year](#) with average salaries in Indianapolis closer to \$72,520 annually. This sets the program apart from other programs in the nation where the only offering is typically aviation mechanics and repair—not aerospace manufacturing and pilot training. Through partnerships with industry professionals, students gain access to mentors, inherit invaluable knowledge, and earn certifications that position them for high-paying careers in a growing field.

With a national shortage of pilots and high-paying job opportunities available, this program is attempting to meet the local economy's needs by inspiring, connecting, and training the next generation of aviation mechanics and pilots. Students who participate in this dual credit CTE pathway can leave the program with up to [18 dual enrollment college credits](#) toward a college degree, a stackable aviation credential, and relationships with mentors who guide them through postgraduation opportunities. At its core, this program seeks to inspire curiosity and help students understand that there are multiple ways of being successful in pursuing a career in aviation. The program also provides multiple postsecondary pathways, from an apprenticeship program with industry partners to higher education at Ivy Tech, the state's system of community colleges.

Media and Film Production

Similarly, at Riley High School's Broadcast Media & Film Production CTE program, students step into the fast-paced world of media production. Through their involvement with [WETL 91.7 FM](#), South Bend's only student-run radio station, students gain hands-on experience in video editing and podcast creation, live radio broadcasting, and professional client work and portfolio development.

This program teaches students technical skills while building confidence and industry relationships, positioning them for future careers in journalism, digital media, and communications.



Photo from South Bend Community School Corporation

More than that, programs like Riley's Broadcast Media & Film Production CTE pathway inspire students' curiosity and spark their excitement for learning and wonder, while also building a solid foundation of skills that are in-demand and transferrable across all industry sectors.

“What If, and Why Not?”

South Bend promotes an attitude of “What if, and why not?” when supporting students to dream big, have bold ideas, and pursue their goals through college and career pathways.

Former broadcast media student Blake Wesley, who was also a basketball player for South Bend, dreamed of joining the NBA—which he went on to do as a first round NBA draft pick out of the University of Notre Dame and now plays for the Portland Trail Blazers. He now uses the skills he developed in the South Bend broadcast media pathway to engage with the press and effectively and compellingly communicate with the media and the community.

Radio-host student, Alex, talked to us about how he had never imagined pursuing a career in broadcast media, but this program allowed him to discover new pathways. He joked about how this broadcast program and the students in it have put the heart back into news and entertainment.

All in all, providing students with hands-on experience gives them the opportunity to learn how to (1) apply their knowledge and skills in real-world settings, (2) explore and take risks in new ways, and (3) struggle, fail, learn from failure, and persist in a safe environment before they enter the workforce where the stakes are higher. This work-based learning allows students to build confidence, hone their skills, learn about the world of work, and build professional identities.

Educator Investments

South Bend Community Schools Corporation recognizes the critical role educators play in student success and is committed to investing in their professional growth. In a rare and unique move, the [South Bend Regional Chamber of Commerce](#) is taking an active role in building capacity around college and career pathways. The South Bend Regional Chamber serves as a key convener for local

businesses and industries, connecting them with education and government leaders. This convening role aligns closely with the college- and career-development work underway in SBCSC. Through this collaboration, the Chamber has helped create college and career pathways that are more informed by, and integrated with, local industry needs.

Leveraging funding, and other federal funding streams, the [South Bend Regional Chamber](#) is building and delivering educator-facing programming that connects classroom instruction to real-world industry needs. This innovative collaboration is grounded in the belief that when educators have a deeper understanding of the skills, experiences, and opportunities available in the regional workforce, they are better equipped to guide students along pathways that are both meaningful and economically viable. One of the key initiatives championed by the South Bend Regional



Photo from South Bend Community School Corporation

“If students can think of an idea, they are encouraged to make that dream a reality.”

– Chad Addie

Chamber is the [Career Coaching Fellowship](#), a program that includes 20 educators who receive specialized training in career development theory.

Most educators have come into their role through a pathway in education—starting as students in grades K–12 and postsecondary education and then continuing in schools as educators. They may have little knowledge about other industry sectors and occupations and may not know how to support their students in pursuing career pathways in fields beyond education. The Career Coaching Fellowship program enables educators to serve as career coaches, fostering collaboration between schools and strengthening career-connected learning. The program also facilitates thought partnership, allowing educators to share best practices, work through challenges together, and enhance student career readiness through a more cohesive, informed approach.

By acting as both convener and capacity-builder, the South Bend Regional Chamber is bridging the gap between education and industry in tangible, sustainable ways. This kind of leadership models the importance of buy-in from all stakeholders. A college and career pathway system is stronger when policymakers and leaders see the value in aligning their own programs around a shared vision for student success. The South Bend Regional Chamber’s engagement highlights how building coherent college and career programs is the responsibility of the entire community and shows what is possible when those in power help shape, champion and create a more coherent and equitable system.

Tackling Brain Drain by Investing in Local Communities

A recurring theme across South Bend Community School Corporation’s CTE programs is the emphasis on preparing high school students for good jobs that exist within their communities so that students

can stay in their hometown, earn a great living, raise their families, and continue to strengthen their community. The greater South Bend region has long struggled with brain drain, with its talented young people leaving in search of higher education and employment opportunities elsewhere. South Bend’s CTE programs actively combat this trend by:

- Creating high-demand career pathways in aviation, health care, logistics, and media production—fields that offer well-paying, stable jobs with career advancement possibilities within Indiana.
- Forging partnerships with (1) local institutions of higher education so that students earn the degrees and credentials needed to thrive, and (2) local employers so that students graduate from high school with direct access to local career opportunities.
- Investing in community driven solutions, such as the Washington High School health clinic, which trains students while simultaneously addressing health care disparities in South Bend.

The message to students is clear: “You don’t have to leave the area to find success; you can build a meaningful, high-paying career right here, while giving back to the community that raised you.” Without access to college and career pathways like those offered by South Bend Community School Corporation, Indiana students will look elsewhere for opportunities.

A Shared Value System

What sets South Bend’s CTE programs apart is the deep sense of purpose and shared community responsibility for and dedication to student success. The college and career pathways they are building are more than just workforce development, they are a living commitment to humanizing education, fostering community connections, and revitalizing local economies.

The educators, employers, and industry mentors involved in these programs believe in something greater than job training. They are investing in young people, ensuring that every student, regardless of background, has the chance to build a future with dignity, stability, and purpose.

The success of these programs serves as a powerful model for other communities: when education, industry, and local leaders come together with a shared vision, the result is not just measured by individual student success; it is also gauged by regional transformation. CTE programs, at their best, are engines for wonder and bright futures. Programs like those in South Bend offer a new vision for what is possible in education and prepare students to thrive in a world not yet created.



Leveraging Federal Funding

In an era of global competition, the United States must invest in its people. If we want to remain a global economic leader, we need to build a skilled, resilient, homegrown workforce. That starts with our high schools.

Federal funding is the lifeline that makes career-connected learning possible in South Bend Community School Corporation and communities nationwide. The state of Indiana supports CTE through categorical grants based on student enrollment in state-approved courses, with funding amounts varying by course type. In addition, the state offers competitive opportunities, such as Education Readiness Grants, to help districts expand CTE programs in high-demand fields. In 2025, Indiana awarded \$1.1 million through these grants. These resources have helped South Bend establish a solid base of CTE programming, but they have not represented the level of transformative investment needed to redesign high school for all students.

Federal funding substantially augments state investments. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2024–2025, Indiana's total estimated federal Perkins V allocation is approximately \$32.4 million, most of which is distributed to secondary and postsecondary institutions to support CTE. South Bend received \$446,008.90 in federal Perkins V formula funds. In addition to these formula dollars, South Bend also received \$1,778,357 in competitive funds through CCHS in year one of their grant to support the activities described in this brief. The original grant period was three years but the program was discontinued in the spring of 2025.

By strategically braiding and leveraging Perkins V dollars with CCHS grant funds, South Bend has strengthened industry partnerships, expanded access to high-quality pathways, and equipped educators to guide students from high school into meaningful, well-paying careers. Unfortunately, the U.S. Department of Education recently cancelled this program, preventing South Bend from receiving CCHS funding in the future.

These investments should be a part of our nation's economic playbook. While other countries pour resources into talent development and advanced industries, the United States must match that ambition with sustained, coordinated federal support. Without it, programs like those discussed above would not be possible, leaving our students without the skills and experiences needed to power our industries of tomorrow.



Photo from South Bend Community School Corporation



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Conclusion

U.S. policymakers, educators, and employers are deeply concerned with ensuring that young people are ready to seize opportunities, lead with confidence, meet our nation's workforce needs, build meaningful connections, and achieve economic and social mobility. Smoothing the transition between high school and postsecondary opportunities, and better connecting education and the world of work, have a significant impact on the life trajectory of a student. Furthermore, we must reimagine our education system so that all students have opportunities in high school that prepare them to make real choices about their lives and provide them with the skills and experiences that lead to success in college and careers.

Failing to support meaningful career-connected learning for our high school students—our nation's future workforce—could lead many of our young people to become mired in low-wage employment and deprive the U.S. economy and communities across the country of their full contributions. Beyond economic implications, supporting the development and education of our youth is critically important to the well-being of families and our society. To that end, policymakers must prioritize continued funding for career-connected learning, recognizing that these investments drive economic mobility, workforce development, and stronger communities. The future of our students and our economy depend on it.

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