

Education & Workforce Preparation

Goal 2: Enhance the county's educational system and postsecondary opportunities so that individuals have the skills and education necessary to succeed in today's economy.

Intended outcomes: Improve postsecondary attainment in the county; reduce employer workforce skill deficiencies

Responsibility: Education & Workforce Preparation Action Team

Challenges that remain, following mid-term review:

- Educational attainment in Crawford County falls short of surrounding counties, and is at the bottom third of the State (11.8% with bachelor's degree or higher, 2013).
- Many companies lack people who can effectively function as supervisors, leading to high turnover rates; advanced training for management is scarce for various employment sectors in the county.
- Workforce training and post-secondary education partners in the county have worked hard to collaborate and align the needs of employers, available education and training resources, and economic development efforts. However, funding is limited to develop customized curriculum and create locally-relevant courses that fit workforce needs. Furthermore, capacity becomes an issue as many post-secondary students in the area are non-traditional and have multiple barriers to overcome before they can meet training pre-requisites (developmental level courses, soft skill gap, transportation and child care).
- Crawford County high school students (and their families) still lack awareness of what jobs are available here to help them start a sustainable career, support them through their college education, or come back to when they are ready to raise their families. Likewise, Crawford County businesses don't have many internship, co-op or summer job opportunities for these students. Financial resources for education, leadership and training improvements for Crawford County workers and school children are of questionable sustainability — mostly from grants, not guaranteed to be renewed each year.
- Organized mentoring opportunities are sometimes limited to students with TANF funds, and to hours during the school day. Many potential mentors cannot leave their jobs to participate as they would like, and many kids who need mentors are not being served.
- Early Childhood agencies and educators in the area continue to struggle with funding and volunteer support to educate parents on the importance of nutrition, reading, and Kindergarten readiness. Many lower income parents in the area cannot afford to send their child to preschool and there are limited subsidized spots.
- Crawford County's culture is impacted by multi-generational poverty that sometimes generates counter-productive work values in families. Reliance on government assistance is high, and barriers like transportation, child care, mental health issues, and substance abuse often prevent able and willing people to obtain and retain jobs with sustainable wages.
- *Of special note in 2016 is childcare. Crawford County needs to do a better job of supporting parents who want to work, or who want to go back to school. Currently, the number of childcare spots available are severely limited, especially for infants, and drop-in care such as on school delays and cancellations. In addition, there are little to no options during 2nd or 3rd shift hours.*

Strategy 2.1: Increase Crawford County's Educational Attainment Rate.

- Continue to support community groups that promote and encourage Early Childhood Education (Crawford Childhood Initiative, Help Me Grow, and local preschools). Find ways to increase capacity of volunteers and funding pathways for initiatives that improve literacy, social, emotional and intellectual skills and increase parental involvement in school readiness for children ages 0-3. Find ways to increase number of preschool

options available in the county—subsidized and unsubsidized; and/or help develop programs that ensure school readiness for families who cannot afford or who cannot get a spot in local preschools.

- Help local school-age children attain the right educational and/or training and career pathways by continuing to connect them with, and lend support to: The Crawford Success Center, Career Coaches and/or Guidance Counselors, Superintendents, local educators, employers, and initiatives that promote the value of education such as Senior Day, Senior Project and The Leader in Me.
- Continue to find ways to encourage, support, promote and obtain post-secondary training and education—credit and non-credit. Work to support traditional and non-traditional learners by connecting them to local resources, information and opportunities. Help improve access to quality and affordable childcare and transportation.
- Help to influence expansion of local mentor programs for students of all ages, and of all income levels. Leverage local programs already in place without duplicating efforts, and advocate for new ones to begin when/where appropriate. (Examples include the Crawford County Mentoring Program, Community Connectors Grant efforts, youth intervention programs).
- Look for ways to establish and maintain an internship and or apprenticeship/co-op program for high school, college and low income students to encourage them to choose to live and work in Crawford County.
- Research and help establish ways for the community to financially support and sustain programs that promote the value of education.

Strategy 2.2 Build a stronger and more reliable workforce

- Strengthen the current workforce through needs assessment and by leveraging local training partners to influence project-based programs that promote training and education, serve local business needs, and close the skills gap. Continue to influence improvements of support systems and programs that help residents obtain and retain sustainable employment with room for growth.
- Ensure readiness of potential workforce through proactive educational and leadership opportunities that include training in soft skills, guidance in career pathways, and that helps promote the value of education to our community's future generations and their families.
- Ensure opportunities for our youth to return to the county for career opportunities.
- Enhance employability skills of the unemployed and underemployed by continuing to support and grow Crawford Works—a workforce development training and job placement program that partners with employers and provides comprehensive support services to help job seekers move out of poverty through sustainable employment.
- Help influence positive change in alleviating barriers to employment such as childcare, transportation and substance abuse and generational poverty (see more in strategy 2.3).
- Educate the community on available jobs and skills needed to obtain those jobs; on the value of education/training and how it can positively impact/improve quality of life; and on the community's strengths so they can become advocates for attracting qualified talent to the county.
- Research and help establish ways for the community to financially support and sustain programs that promote the value of education such as a community-wide internship program and reverse scholarships.

Strategy 2.3 Make a significant impact on generational poverty throughout the county

- Continue to work with community social service, faith-based and mental health agencies that serve the unemployed, underemployed, and individuals living in poverty to eliminate barriers to employment such as childcare, transportation and substance abuse and generational poverty.
- Communicate services, programs and opportunities for assistance to the community so appropriate referrals can be made for those in need or for those who wish to help.
- Continue to support countywide initiatives like the Bucyrus Outreach Resource Network (BORN) that avoid duplication of efforts and share resources to help streamline financial and other types of assistance for people in need.
- Continue to support and grow Crawford Works— a workforce development training and job placement program that partners with employers and provides comprehensive support services to help job seekers move out of poverty through sustainable employment.
- Continue to promote and support programs that address and are proactive to prevent generational poverty in schools—mentoring, The Leader in Me, etc.