

ELEVATING IOWA'S WORKFORCE.

Raising our game by developing Iowa's talent.

Ask the president of Agri-Industrial Plastics Co. about her leadership philosophy and you'll also get a glimpse into how she's approaching the nation's workforce gap. For Lori Schaefer-Weaton, it's all about talent development.

"When I think about leadership, it's certainly about getting the right people at the beginning, developing them, and then empowering them," said Schaefer-Weaton.

This commitment to employee development led Schaefer-Weaton, and many other Iowa manufacturing industry leaders, to think outside the four walls of the plant. Fairfield, Iowa-based Agri-Industrial, a blow molder of large scale industrial parts, is a vocal proponent of [Elevate Advanced Manufacturing](#), a program designed to help kids envision a career in advanced manufacturing.

"As much as I need people in my facility to contribute and be part of my team, there are so many kids out there who are not finding the right career path," said Schaefer-Weaton.



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—LORI SCHAEFER-WEATON,
PRESIDENT OF AGR-INDUSTRIAL PLASTICS CO.

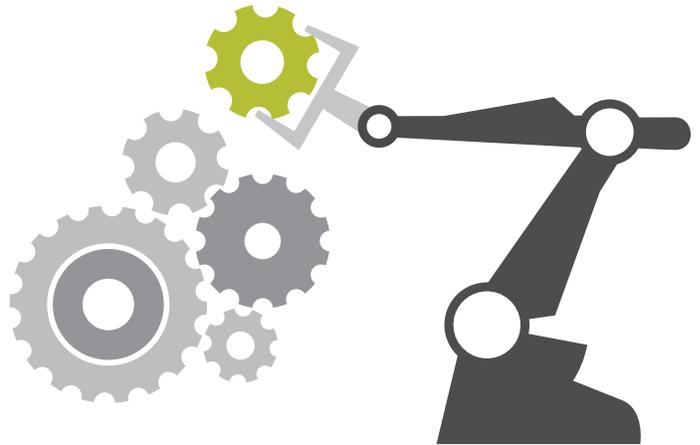


BUSINESS AND SCHOOLS WORK TOGETHER

Elevate is a collaboration between Iowa's business community and the state's community colleges. The project is designed to funnel manufacturing-related curricula and guest speakers into Iowa's kindergarten through 12th grade school system. In the two years since its inception, Elevate curricula have been incorporated into the classrooms of more than 70,000 students. Those kids are exposed to messages that enlighten and inspire. Classroom activities reveal the presence of high-tech robotics and innovation on today's plant floor, as well as dispel old stereotypes of the thankless, dirty manufacturing jobs. Schaefer-Weaton stressed, "It's just not that way anymore, but we've got to get out there and tell our story if we want people to think otherwise."

If college enrollment is an indicator, Elevate is seeing great success. Between 2013 and 2014, enrollment in manufacturing and skilled trade programs increased by nearly 10 percent at Iowa's community colleges. Welder technology program enrollment increased by 20 percent. With its sights set on long-term workforce

▶ **IN IOWA, WELDER TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM ENROLLMENT INCREASED BY 20 PERCENT BETWEEN 2013 AND 2014 ACADEMIC YEARS.**



SOURCE: Elevate Advanced Manufacturing 2014

development, Elevate anticipates those numbers will continue to grow as kids exposed to the curriculum proceed from high school into college. Schaefer-Weaton expressed optimism, “I think there are a lot of conversations and a lot of great activity going on right now in Iowa, and it’s really starting to gain traction.”

TRAINING FILLS THE SKILLS GAP

There are few places you’ll find that match Iowa’s high-quality workforce.

“They know how to function as a team. They know how to work under pressure. They know how to troubleshoot,” said Schaefer-Weaton.

“It’s just about how do you make that into a career for those people?”

The answer is excellent training. The same group of community colleges supporting Elevate are also striving to create meaningful, postsecondary job training. The Iowa-Advanced Manufacturing Consortium is comprised of the state’s 15 community colleges. Each is coordinating with area manufacturers to create college coursework that directly helps students develop the local employers’ needed skills. These efforts are ample evidence of Iowa’s commitment to developing a workforce with depth in the skilled trades and supporting Iowa’s business needs.

“There’s a respect for manufacturing in Iowa. I think once people realize what manufacturing contributes to the economy and how it supports our small towns across the state, there’s a lot of appreciation for that,”



THE IOWA-ADVANCED MANUFACTURING CONSORTIUM IS COMPRISED OF THE STATE’S 15 COMMUNITY COLLEGES.



SOURCE: Iowa Association Of Community College Trustees 2014



said Schaefer-Weaton. She sees that appreciation translated into action by the people she employs at Agri-Industrial. "There's a lot of loyalty; there's a lot of commitment to the company," reflects Schaefer-Weaton.

ADVANCED WORKERS FOR ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

Many other Iowa business leaders share Schaefer-Weaton's sentiment and benefit from the state's outstanding workforce. Iowa has the highest high school graduation rate in the country, resulting in a smart workforce. At the same time, the U.S. Census Bureau reports Iowa is among the top states when it comes to value-added production per manufacturing worker.

Schaefer-Weaton commented, "I think that there is a quality workforce in Iowa. Definitely when you compare Iowa to other states and when you talk to manufacturers from other states, the story's very different."



Visit iowaeconomicdevelopment.com to learn about Iowa's other workforce training programs.