

STEM School+Business Innovation Conference lights a spark on new partnerships



The first-ever Iowa STEM School+Business Innovation Conference united nearly 300 people from across Iowa to bridge local schools and businesses to close the skills gap and build a stronger STEM-talented workforce for Iowa's future.

The future of Iowa's economy and workforce is about to get a boost from nearly 300 educators, principals/administrators, business leaders, economic/workforce development leaders and more who attended this past week's STEM School+Business Innovation Conference.

The conference focused on equipping local teams with the tools necessary to build school+business partnerships in their communities across Iowa. To do that, the event brought in almost 50 leaders from various communities around the state already bridging partnerships to share their knowledge and best practices. The agenda tackled topics like how to build school+business partnerships, incentives and motives, policies and rules to consider, program assessment and professional development for teachers.

Some of Iowa's **STEM BEST®** models presented, including the four-district consortium model led out of Charles City, Iowa BIG,

Rocket Manufacturing and STEM Innovator, along with other active partnerships including Waukee APEX and Roosevelt High School's Rider Root Beer. Existing programs and organizations whose role is to connect schools with local employers offered their services, including DMACC's Teaching for the Workforce Workshops, Iowa Intermediary Network and Iowa STEM Teacher Externships.

As the lunch keynote, Gary Scholten, senior vice president and chief information officer (CIO) for The Principal Financial Group and executive committee member of the Iowa Governor's STEM Advisory Council, spoke passionately about the importance of school+business partnerships, offering insights into the changing landscape of the workforce needed and how Iowa should address it.

The end of the day's opportunity drew in a crowd of roughly 80 people eager to learn more about how to write a "winning STEM BEST proposal" in light of the current **STEM BEST award opportunity** through the STEM Council. The numbers showed the growing interest in developing more school+business partnerships, answering Governor Branstad's call for more STEM BEST opportunities in the next three years.

For more information on the conference, please visit **www.iowaSTEM.gov/School-Business-Conference**.