



BRAIN TRUST

COLLABORATION CAMPUS UNITES SCHOOLS AND EMPLOYERS TO DEVELOP WORKFORCE

Story by Laura Hill

It's a challenge many communities face: how to help prepare young people for the jobs they want and the jobs local employers need to fill right now – and 20 years down the road? For some students, that might mean smoothing the way to a four-year college and a professional degree. For others, it may be finding the right career concentration at a community college. And for others, it could be cutting-edge, high-tech training or an apprenticeship in the building trades.

The choices students face as they prepare to enter the workforce can be confusing. But now, the Douglas County School System, Arapahoe Community College and Colorado State University are partnering to create the Collaboration Campus, which



Renderings depicting the Collaboration Campus



they envision will provide a smoother pathway from high school to two-year and four-year colleges as well as a variety of rewarding post-high school job opportunities.

PHASE ONE

The Collaboration Campus will be based in Castle Rock on a 14-acre site comprising two 54,000-square-foot buildings to be constructed in two phases. The first phase is scheduled to open in fall 2019, with the second to follow several years later. The \$40 million campus, to be built by Arapahoe Community College, will offer affordable educational opportunities close to home.

"Families have always been drawn to Castle Rock to rear their

children, but then when the kids were ready to leave home, we lost a lot of our young folks," says Castle Rock Chamber of Commerce President/CEO Pam Ridler. "We continually hear from employers the need to bring young people into their entry-level positions — whether it's health care, IT, industries or our trades. A partnership like this can help us retain millennials by connecting them with businesses and connecting businesses with the educational community."

ACC, DCSD and CSU, guided

by input from the business community, will initially offer educational programming in business and entrepreneurship, health care, information technology and programming, general education and workforce training. In addition to its business partnerships, the Collaboration Campus got an enthusiastic thumbs-up from the Castle Rock Town Council, which agreed to invest \$3 million in infrastructure reimbursement and other economic considerations.

The underlying concept behind the Collaboration Campus is to start students early on a path to their work lives as adults.

That doesn't mean locking students into a prescribed job training path, as much as offering students of all kinds of ways to

explore their interests and talents with an eye toward future employment in their own community. For some students, the campus will provide a chance to earn college credit for high school course work, an option not available at every high school.

"Other students may take some courses at their high school, but if there are industry opportunities, or courses not available at your school, then you can find them on the campus," says Eric Dunker, ACC Dean of Business Technology and Workforce Partnerships. "We'll be offering degrees in subjects like cyber security and IT that will be transferable to a four-year degree. We'll be forming apprenticeships in health care, advanced manufacturing and finance. Our goal is to help create interesting, meaningful work experiences."

In providing that meaningful work experience, through shadowing, internships, mentoring, apprenticeships and so on, the Collaboration Campus will also help employers by training 21st-century workers with the skills employers say they have a hard time finding: communication skills, a collaborative attitude, critical thinking, problem solving and creativity.

"We're working on identifying what employers' needs are and introducing them into that educational component, and working with kids in high school," Ridler says.

TALENT PIPELINE DOUGLAS COUNTY

Through the Douglas County Talent Pipeline, the chamber is leveraging its contacts with local businesses and industries to create hands-on opportunities for students through the Campus, and bringing educators and employers together to help both understand

what their future needs and the opportunities might be. Employers are encouraged to offer scholarships, internships and apprenticeships. White Construction, for example, offers an active internship program for college students, and also grants a scholarship for ACC students pursuing a degree in construction management.

"Employers are interested. Some are waiting to see what happens, and some are feeling enough pain now in their workforce that they are ready to try something different," Dunker says. "But we're hitting all our benchmarks this year, and our stakeholders all seem pleased with the intentions we have and the progress we've made. We're working with some pretty creative partners. And we're going to have some pretty unique programs."



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Camilla Benbow, Vanderbilt University¹

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¹ Benbow, Camilla: "Parents should look for these 3 things in a great school." Blog post, *The Tennessean*, 8 March 2012

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