

ICTEF Northern Idaho Goodwill Tour, October 23 & 24, 2025
Representing ICTEF: Dr. Harold Nevill, Glen Riley

1. General. We participated in conversations at all sites, and extensive tours of 3 of the 4 industry sites and both of the schools. At each site and school, we asked: "What issues do you see with recruiting and retaining quality workers"?

All of the industry sites used advanced automation to process their products in large quantities and at rapid speeds. While the automation eliminates some manual labor, it requires highly trained technicians to operate, repair, and maintain; employees that are in short supply.

Both schools are striving to fill the need for these trained technicians, but all of these industries use "grow your own" training methods due to technician shortages. Idaho Forest Group reported that they must use an internal internship program in order to have enough millwrights and electricians for their plants. Pape Machinery has an internship program with LCSC, uses online training, and sends qualified technicians to John Deere University. Sofidel uses the apprenticeship/journeyman method for millwrights and electricians, and has internal training to fill drafting and accounting positions. Schweitzer has placed one of their employees in the LCSC Schweitzer CTE Center to help fill their training pipeline.

2. Partners. ICTEF visited the following organizations and individuals over the 2-days of this visit:

Schweitzer Engineering Laboratory, Lewiston. Met with 3 engineers and one technical trainer.

Idaho Forest Group, Lewiston. Met with two engineers.

Sofidel Paper Products, Lewiston (used to be Clearwater Paper). Met with one engineer and the head of HR.

Pape Machinery, Inc., Moscow. Met with one service supervisor.

LCSC, Schweitzer CTE Center, Lewiston. Met with Dean, Admin, Transition Coordinator, and 1 professor for lengthy meeting, plus about a dozen professors on the tour.

DeAtley Career Technical Center, Lewiston. Met with CTC Director, Principal, at least 4 teachers during the tour.

3. Take-aways. Here are some key take-aways and recommendations from discussions with representatives of the above organizations.

Take-away #1. Soft skills are as important as hard skills. ALL industry partners and school leaders stated their concern that students have poor work ethic and soft skills.

Every industry and school meeting included discussion on the lack of work ethic,

teamwork skills, and “stick-with-it-ness”. For new employees, work ethic and soft-skills are at least as important as technical skills, if not MORE important. Seasoned employees do not become seasoned employees unless they have a strong work ethic. Employers wonder how they can “teach” work ethic if the employee was not raised by their family/community/school to value a strong work ethic.

Recommendation #1:

- (a) Develop “work ethic” and “soft skill” badges in SkillStack.
- (b) Award SkillStack badges when students demonstrate proficiency by placing in statewide SLSC contests.
- (c) Award school credit(s) for participation in leadership roles in CTSOs.

Take-away #2. Students need to be taught “industry standard” phone discipline (i.e. ONLY before school, after school, and during lunch). ALL industry partners and school leaders stated this concern.

Employers support cell-phone bans in schools. Inappropriate phone use is causing accidents and wasting time, and employers will fire employees who spend too much time on their phones.

Recommendation #2:

- (a) Support restrictive school phone policies, especially in CTE labs where the policy can be said to mirror industry standards.

Take-away #3. A new employee needs to arrive with a mastery of fundamental skills, but does not need to have been exposed to every skill in the trade, especially if those skills are learned poorly. Fundamental skills include the math required for the trade/industry. 3 of 4 industries visited stated this concern.

Industry is very willing to train workers with new skills that will allow them to advance and make more money, through apprenticeship/journeyman programs or through tuition assistance to send them to school, but only if the worker has first demonstrated a strong work ethic and good soft skills. Industry would like to not have to reteach fundamental skills, including math.

Recommendation #3:

- (a) CTE training programs should focus on mastery of fundamental skills; skills identified by their industry TAC committees.
- (b) Create a SkillsStack badge for fundamental math skills related to each trade and/or industry.

Take-away #4. Industry is desperate to hire trained employees. They are exploring various methods to obtain these employees. Some use internships, one employer has placed their own employee into schools to aid training.

Some industries have placed their own employees (paid by industry at industry salary) into colleges as instructors in highly technical areas so they can ensure that the graduates are being trained to acceptable entry-level standards.

Recommendation #4:

- (a) Examine the efficacy of replicating this approach in all community colleges.
- (b) Explore ways to help incentivize (pay for?) this partnership between industry and technical college.

Take-away #5. Industry focuses on industry certification, not SkillStack. The lack of knowledge of the SkillStack program was found at every industry site visited.

When speaking of certification and training of their workforce, industry professionals think and focus only on "industry certification". None of those we spoke to even knew about Skillstack or micro-certifications, which are being advertised by Idaho's Department of Labor and the Division of CTE.

Recommendation #5:

- (a) The Division of CTE should drop their emphasis on SkillStack, unless industry gets much more training so that they will accept SkillStack.

Take-away #6. Much higher wages in Oregon and Washington force Idaho industries located close to the Oregon or Washington borders to pay their technicians competitively with those states. 3 of 4 industry sites visited stated this concern.

Graduating students in Idaho towns near the Oregon or Washington border can drive a few miles and make as much money working at a convenience store as their peers working at technical jobs in Idaho.

Recommendation #6: The Idaho CTE Foundation will ensure legislators hear of this during their 2026 CTE-Month activities.

Take-away #7. High School Counselors do not see CTE as desirable careers. All visited sites stated this belief.

Many of our "best and brightest" are being steered away from CTE, despite being interested in a CTE career. Some students cannot enroll in their desired capstone class because it is scheduled at the same time as other classes they need for college. Young women do not have enough female role models and/or female mentors in CTE to guide them into technical careers. LCSC's Transition Coordinator stated that he does not know how to contact students enrolled in online schools.

Recommendation #7:

- (a) Recreate a counselor "track" at the Division's 2026 CONNECT CTE summer conference (the Division offered this track at their conferences in the early 2000s).
- (b) The Division should incentivize (i.e. help pay for) school counselors to attend CONNECT and participate in the counselor track.
- (c) The Division should encourage schools NOT to schedule desirable, high-level classes at the same time (Example: physics, calculus, and capstone pre-engineering all in the same period).
- (d) Invite online school counselors to CONNECT and put them in contact with transition coordinators.

Take-away #8. Too many schools' administrators focus on quantity, not quality, in their CTE classes. Both schools' teachers and professors stated this, in the presence of their administrators.

Some CTE instructors are being forced to operate their classes with insupportably high student numbers (i.e. class is not "safe"). At the same time, a capstone class with only a few students will face being cut due to low numbers. Emphasis on micro-credentials is seen by industry as an example of "quantity versus quality".

Recommendation #8:

- (a) Do not calculate CTC funding based partially on capstone class enrollment. Instead, focus CTC payment on percent positive placement.
- (b) Drop the emphasis on SkillStack unless industry accepts SkillStack.

Take-away #9. Students are not interested in participating in CTSOs unless they can be convinced that it is "worth their time". Both college and high school interviewees stated this concern.

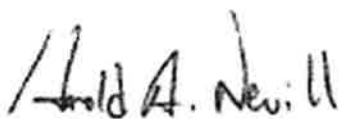
Today's students have a: "What is in it for me?" attitude. CTSOs must offer more.

Recommendation #9 (same as recommendation #1 above):

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- (b) Award SkillStack badges when students demonstrate proficiency by placing in statewide SLSC contests.
- (c) Award school credit(s) for participation in leadership roles in CTSOs.

See below for a one-page summary of take-aways that can be used by ICTEF members when they interface with legislators.

Respectfully submitted,



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Summary of take-aways to use as talking points with Legislators.

Take-away #1. Soft skills are as important as hard skills. ALL industry partners and school leaders stated their concern that students have poor work ethic and soft skills.

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