



Building Iowa's Future Workforce Starts in the Classroom



STORY ON PAGE 30

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

AUGUST 18
Employment and Workforce Public Policy Meeting
DES MOINES

AUGUST 20
Environment Public Policy Meeting
DES MOINES

AUGUST 24
Golf Classic
WEST DES MOINES

OCTOBER 13
Iowa Manufacturing Conference
ALTOONA

OCTOBER 14-24
Elevate Iowa Manufacturing Tour
STATEWIDE

Visit www.iowaabi.org and click the "Events" tab for details on upcoming events.

INSIDE

FROM THE CHAIR: Kathryn Kunert	28
EXPERT ADVICE: Amanda Ewing	29
COVER STORY: Iowa's Future Workforce.....	30
Q&A: Marci Chickering	32
ABI FOUNDATION: Business Horizons.....	33
CAPITOL BUSINESS: JD Davis	34
WHAT'S TRENDING: Kelsey Hanson.....	34

MEET ABI'S NEWEST MEMBERS

Visit our newest members' websites, and see how their products and services can benefit you.

Central Bank | www.mycentral.bank

The Samuels Group | www.samuelsgroup.net

Learn more about how ABI membership could benefit your company by visiting www.iowaabi.org/membership/why-abi.

FROM THE CHAIR

Investing in Iowa's Future Workforce

As students across Iowa prepare to return to classrooms this fall, it is a good time to reflect on the important connection between education and the business community. The future of Iowa's workforce depends on the investments we make today — and businesses have an important role to play in helping prepare the next generation of talent.

Workforce continues to be one of the top priorities facing Iowa employers. Businesses across the state are looking for skilled employees who are ready to contribute, grow and succeed. But addressing workforce needs is not just about filling open positions today. It is about building relationships and creating opportunities that help students see what is possible for their futures.

Across Iowa, businesses are partnering with K-12 schools, community colleges and universities in meaning-

ful ways. Employers are opening their doors to students, providing internships and apprenticeships, supporting work-based learning opportunities and collaborating with educators to ensure students have the skills needed for tomorrow's careers.

These partnerships benefit everyone involved. Students gain real-world experiences and a better understanding of the opportunities available close to home. Educators gain valuable insight into the skills and experiences employers need. Businesses have the opportunity to connect with future employees and help shape the workforce they will depend on for years to come.

Through ABI and the ABI Foundation, we see the impact of these connections every day. Programs like Leadership Iowa, Leadership Iowa University and Business Horizons provide

opportunities for students and emerging leaders to develop skills, build relationships and learn more about the many career paths available in Iowa.

The success of Iowa's workforce depends on collaboration. No single organization can solve workforce challenges alone, but when businesses, educators and communities work together, we can create opportunities that benefit generations to come.

As we begin another school year, I encourage businesses to look for ways to engage with students and educators in their communities. Whether through mentoring, job shadowing, internships or classroom partnerships, every connection makes a difference.

By investing in Iowa's students today, we are investing in the future of our businesses, our communities and our state. **ABI**



Kathryn Kunert
ABI Board Chair
MidAmerican Energy

Anderson, Lower, Whitlow, P.C. is now UHY

Your source for Audit, Tax,
Advisory & Consulting Services

New name, same great service



uhy-us.com



EXPERT ADVICE:

Is Your Business Carrying More Than It Should?

As businesses grow, they naturally become the hub for more than operations. Owners often rely on trusted employees to handle personal financial matters, oversee family entities, coordinate estate planning, or manage investments. While this may seem efficient, it can quietly create operational, governance, and cultural challenges that affect the entire organization.

If your business is supporting both company operations and the personal affairs of its owners, consider these steps:



Amanda Ewing

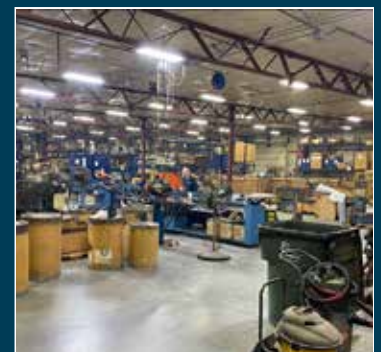
Director, Growth
& Family Engagement
Legacy Bridge

- **Define clear roles.** Employees should understand when they are acting on behalf of the business versus supporting personal or family matters. Blurred responsibilities can lead to confusion, inefficiency, and burnout.
- **Protect confidential information.** Personal financial records, estate documents, and family matters often require a higher level of privacy than business systems are designed to provide.
- **Separate costs and resources.** Track the time and expenses devoted to owner-related activities to maintain transparency and ensure business resources are being used appropriately.
- **Strengthen governance.** As your company grows, establish policies that distinguish business decisions from family or ownership decisions. This improves accountability and builds confidence among employees, lenders, investors, and outside advisors.
- **Plan ahead for growth.** Major milestones — succession, acquisitions, outside investment, or a future sale — often expose weaknesses in blended business and personal operations. Addressing these issues before they become urgent makes future transitions much smoother.

The question isn't whether owners need support — they do. The question is whether the business is the right place to provide it.

Businesses that intentionally separate personal affairs from company operations often experience stronger governance, better employee engagement, clearer decision-making, and greater scalability. Creating those boundaries doesn't weaken the business; it strengthens it while allowing leadership to focus on what the company does best.

This version speaks to any business owner, while subtly introducing the challenges that often lead organizations to consider a family office or more formal governance structure. It feels educational rather than promotional, which is typically the tone trade publications are looking for. **ABI**



Affordable Funding for Business Energy Upgrades

The IADG Energy Bank, administered through Iowa Area Development Group, offers low-interest financing for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

- No Upfront Costs for Eligible Energy Upgrades
- Flexible Loan Payments
- 1% Annual Interest Rate
- 1% Origination Fee

FOR MORE DETAILS CONTACT:

BRUCE NUZUM
515-223-4817



WWW.IADG.COM

COVER STORY FROM PAGE 27

Building Iowa's Future Workforce Starts in the Classroom

BY CHELSEA KEENAN PRIEST



As Iowa employers continue to face challenges finding skilled workers, one solution is already within reach — stronger partnerships with local schools.

Across the state, manufacturers, healthcare providers, agricultural businesses and skilled trades are searching for qualified employees. At the same time, many students graduate from high school without a clear understanding of the career opportunities available in their own communities. Bridging that gap benefits everyone, experts say.

Internships, job shadowing opportunities, classroom presentations and career mentorships give students experience in the workplace and help teach them about future careers available to them, said Meg Schneider, vice president of strategic initiatives and member engagement at Iowa ABI.

“Worker shortages are not unique to Iowa — it’s a nation-

al issue,” Ms. Schneider said. “Engaging students and letting them know about opportunities in their own backyard, well the earlier that happens, the more impactful it can be.”

“We’re not in a position any longer where we have workers who are ready and waiting,” she added. “A decade ago, there would have been multiple applicants for every role and that’s not the case now.”

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Iowa has tens of thousands of job openings across the state, with many employers reporting difficulty finding qualified applicants. At the same time, national studies show that students who complete internships are more than twice as likely to receive a job offer after graduation, highlighting the value of early career exposure.

That’s been the case for Geater, a family-owned aero-

space manufacturer based in Independence. The company hired at least five full-time employees who were high school or college graduates that participated in a job shadow or internship in the past year, said Melissa Trumbauer, Geater's student and community outreach specialist.

Ms. Trumbauer works with local schools to give presentations explaining career fields and opportunities available to students including job shadows and internships. This year, the company hired 12 high school and college students for internships. The students were placed throughout several departments, she said, from machining and sheet metal to maintenance.

Students meet with department managers to learn about the different jobs and skills needed in each department. Managers then hold interviews with the students before placements are decided, Ms. Trumbauer said. Students have the option to move to additional departments if they're interested in multiple things.

For businesses, strong partnerships with schools create pipelines to future talent, and ABI is working hard to facilitate these relationships. The organization has a variety of programs to help connect businesses with students from elementary school age to college age, Ms. Schneider said.

Crystals of Innovation is a board game that ABI and its members can take into classrooms to help students learn the importance of problem solving and teamwork as well as what skills are needed in different STEM careers. Designed by The Manufacturing Institute, the game is for students in grades four through nine, introducing them to concepts like additive manufacturing, aerospace engineering, electromechanical components, robotics and quality control.

So far, ABI has introduced the game to about 200 students across Iowa, including Oelwein, Marshalltown, Atlantic and Waterloo.

ABI staff also bring local businesses into the classroom to speak with students and build relationships, she said. Not all businesses are used to looking in that direction for future employees, and the game provides a fun and easy way to start conversations. Their presence also helps give students an idea on how these skills

will transfer into real careers.

"When we first arrive in a class, the students kind of look at us, like, 'what are you going to have us doing?'" Ms. Schneider said. "By the end, they're having a lot of fun. It opens their eyes to more possibilities in these areas."

ABI also hosts programs for high school and college students aimed at introducing them to career pathways and connecting them with companies.

Business Horizons gives high school students a chance to work on a team to create and pitch a product. The five-day summer program has students stay overnight at a dorm, bringing in different speakers and taking the students on tours.

"There's a personal transformation that happens," Ms. Schneider said. "They really get into the project work and it's so impressive what they're able to accomplish."

This year, students came up with the Comfort Cover, a cordless blanket that heated or cooled you depending on the environment, and the Mama Phone, an alarm that can use the sound of your parents' voice to wake you up, she said.

Leadership Iowa University is aimed for college-aged students, who will soon be entering the workforce. It gives students the chance to explore different industries, through tours, panels with leaders, and resume and interview workshops with HR directors.

"We have a number of companies who want to be in front of students year over year," Ms. Schneider said. "But we also keep the door open for folks who haven't done it before."

This past year, ABI also partnered with Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) to help with a professional development program, Teaching for the Workforce, Ms. Schneider said. K-12 educators connect with local businesses to better understand the regional economy and workforce needs through tours and professional panels. DMACC started the program three years ago, with ABI joining this past year.

"We will definitely be helping with that going forward," she said. "We're really trying to hit the full continuum." **ABI**

Leaders in engineering and innovation.

IMEG has built a global reputation for engineering high-performance buildings and infrastructure using forward-thinking solutions.

We believe that together we create positive outcomes for people, communities, and our planet.

- 100+ Locations Nationwide
- 3,200+ Team Members / 250 Local
- QC Headquartered
- Full-Service Engineering & Surveying
- Building Design & Infrastructure
- Sustainability & Energy Solutions
- Consulting & Advisory Services

Let's get you there.



IMEGCORP.COM



Thank you
for voting us the
Best Engineering Firm
in the Region!

Siebel Center for Design,
University of Illinois - Urbana/Champaign, Urbana-Champaign, IL
LEED Gold



Q&A: From Classrooms to Careers — Building Stronger Paths for Iowa Students

Education, career opportunity and long-term health are interconnected. When people have access to strong schools and meaningful career paths, it creates a foundation for both economic stability and overall well-being.

At Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield, we see business and education as a critical partnership. When schools, employers and communities come together, they can open more doors for students and strengthen outcomes for everyone.



Marci Chickering
Executive Vice President –
Human Resources, Wellmark
Blue Cross and Blue Shield

Q: Why is education such an important focus for Wellmark?

A: Education creates opportunity. Strengthening the connection between education and career opportunity has long been a priority for Wellmark through both our core business efforts and The Wellmark Foundation. We invest in programs that expand access to education, support career readiness and help people succeed at every stage of life.

We reinforce that commitment internally through a culture of continuous learning. A prime example is Wellmark's Educational Assistance Program — including Tuition Plus and loan repayment support of up to \$15,000 per year — helping employees build skills, grow their careers and invest in their future.

Q: What are you hearing from Iowa employers about workforce challenges?

A: Across industries, employers continue to emphasize the need for both broad and specialized skills — communication, problem-solving, critical thinking and adaptability — along with growing expertise in data, finance, technology and healthcare.

Advances in technology, including artificial intelligence (AI), are also reshaping roles. That makes it even more important for students to build technical skills, stay flexible and understand how their education connects to long-term opportunity.

By sharing what is needed now and in the future, businesses help schools shape curriculum and experiential learning that better prepare students for success.

Q: How is Wellmark working with higher education to better align learning with workforce needs?

A: Our higher education partnerships connect academic learning with real-world experience in practical, meaningful ways.

One example is our collaboration

with the University of Iowa's Tippie College of Business, including support for the Vaughan Institute for Risk Management and Insurance. This partnership expands hands-on learning, strengthens academic programs and introduces students to career paths in insurance and financial services.

Through the Vaughan Institute, students gain technical and professional skills while exploring insurance careers. The program now supports more than 600 students and ranks among the largest risk management and insurance programs globally, with strong placement outcomes before graduation.

We also engage directly in classroom innovation. Through the Vaughan Institute's insurtech innovation course, Wellmark participates as a client partner, with student teams developing solutions to real industry challenges, including AI-driven approaches to improve customer engagement, member experience and risk management.

We see similar impact through partnerships with Drake University and Iowa State University, where a Risk Management and Insurance certificate program launched in 2025 through the Ivy College of Business. Across these efforts, the goal is the same: create more direct, practical pathways between education and career opportunity.

Q: Why are these partnerships especially important in Iowa?

A: Iowa stands out because of how closely employers, educators and com-

munities work together.

The Insure Your Future Early Internship Program is a strong example. Developed by Michael Gould at the Iowa Economic Development Authority with higher education institutions and insurance employers, including Wellmark, the program gives students early exposure to career opportunities through hands-on experience.

The results show how effective that approach can be. Students from the first cohort, which began in 2023, graduated in May 2025. Six went on to graduate school, and 98% of the remaining students had job offers before graduation — with the final student receiving an offer shortly after.

The program has continued to grow, with more than 90 students participating this summer and more than 300 students having taken part since launch. Many participants go on to pursue insurance careers, demonstrating the lasting impact of early exposure.

What makes it especially meaningful is that students are not just hearing about insurance careers — they are experiencing them firsthand. For employers, it is also a valuable way to connect early with future talent.

Q: How important is experiential learning for students today?

A: It is incredibly important. Each year, Wellmark hosts more than 20 college interns and several high school interns across departments, giving them hands-on experience, exposure to different careers and early opportunities to build professional networks.

Today's students are motivated and thoughtful about how they invest their time and resources. They want to make a meaningful impact, learn skills relevant to their future and see a clear connection between education and career outcomes.

Experiential learning helps address all three by connecting students to real-world challenges early, building practical skills and giving them confidence in their direction.

Q: How does this work connect with K-12 education?

A: Workforce development starts early, and exposure to careers helps students begin to understand what is possible for their future.

Through longtime support of Jobs for America's Graduates, students gain

insight into different career paths and start connecting their interests to real opportunities.

We also recognize that some students face barriers to learning, including access to mental health support. That's why The Wellmark Foundation invests in school-centered behavioral health programs that bring care closer to where students are — helping them stay present, engaged and ready to learn.

When students have both early exposure and the support they need to succeed, they are better positioned to explore their interests over time.

Q: What role should businesses play in this space?

A: Businesses can help educators understand how work is changing and what skills students will need next. At Wellmark, that includes sharing insight into data, technology, AI and other emerging areas so learning stays relevant.

When employers share needs and create practical learning opportunities, students are better prepared, businesses gain stronger talent pipelines and communities benefit from more sustainable growth.

Q: How do these efforts benefit communities across Iowa?

A: When students can see clear opportunities in Iowa — and have the experiences to pursue those paths — they are more likely to stay and build their futures here. That strengthens communities in lasting ways.

Q: Looking ahead, what does success look like?

A: Success means students are confident and prepared, educators are aligned to workforce needs, and employers are actively engaged in developing future talent.

Iowa already has strong momentum in this area. Continued investment in partnerships and practical learning opportunities will strengthen that progress. By building on those strengths, we create long-term benefits for individuals, communities and overall well-being.

Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Iowa, Wellmark Health Plan of Iowa, Inc., Wellmark Advantage Health Plan, Inc. and Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of South Dakota are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

The Wellmark Foundation is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. ABI

ABI FOUNDATION

Business Horizons Inspires Iowa's Next Generation of Leaders

Forty high school students from across Iowa gathered at Grand View University July 19-23 for ABI Foundation's Business Horizons program, a five-day experience focused on innovation, leadership and entrepreneurship.

Throughout the week, students were divided into four industries, A through D, with teams of seven to nine students tasked with building a business from the ground up. Students developed a product or service, created

marketing strategies and prepared a final presentation to pitch their ideas to a panel of judges.

After a week of collaboration, creativity and problem-solving, Industry A took home the gold for their invention, "Comfort Cover." The winning team impressed judges with their innovative product, business strategy and ability to bring their idea to life.

In addition to the business challenges, students participated in workshops,

heard from Iowa professionals and explored how their unique skills and interests can connect to future career opportunities. The experience encouraged students to think creatively, strengthen their leadership abilities, and gain confidence in their ability to solve real-world problems.

Business Horizons continues to provide Iowa students with valuable opportunities to learn, collaborate, and discover what is possible for their futures.

By connecting students with business leaders and hands-on experiences, the program helps prepare the next generation of innovators and leaders.

ABI extends its sincere appreciation to the sponsors, volunteers and business professionals who contributed their time and expertise to make Business Horizons possible. Their support plays a vital role in creating impactful experiences that inspire and prepare Iowa's future leaders. **ABI**



Strategic Growth

Fredrikson continues to grow its presence in Iowa with the opening of the firm's new Eastern Iowa Office in Coralville to better serve clients across the state.

The opening marks Fredrikson's third office in Iowa and 11th office worldwide.

fredlaw.com/eastern-iowa



Bill Daly



Jon Landon



Krista McDonald



Thomas Bush



Allison Richter

Fredrikson

Where Law and Business Meet®

CAPITOL BUSINESS

Let’s Show Off – Bipartisan Solutions in Workforce Pipeline Solutions

It is August in Iowa in an election year. The airwaves, social media and our mailboxes are full of messages from political candidates and their allies comparing and contrasting their positions, hoping to get an edge with voters. Strategies to divide the electorate are successful and so they are repeated from cycle to cycle.

It is August in Iowa and that also marks the ramp-up of ABI’s public policy development process with all five of our policy committees meeting to develop policies for the post-election 2027 Legislative Session. Fortunately, some of the most important policy development we undertake are not met with the political division mentioned above, but instead with bipartisan support. Policies that break down barriers to workforce

participation like affordable, available, sustainable childcare get bipartisan support. Policies that increase the availability and affordability of workforce housing get bipartisan support. Policies that upskill the workforce and advance careers get bipartisan support.

An area that would benefit from increased state policy participation is the exposure of Iowa students to workforce opportunities with ABI members, particularly manufacturers. Like childcare, housing and training these efforts have sitting legislators and new candidates leaning in to offer their support.

Many ABI members have well established school-to-work programs, partnering with third parties and schools. Many offer successful internship programs. During this election season

candidates are searching for chances to connect in their districts with employers that are making the economies of their part of Iowa run. It helps candidates reach voters and it helps employers highlight a need and show solutions. The public policy team at ABI would like to help you make connections with policymakers so that we can highlight the success stories so we can spread what is working. If you have such programs, we encourage you to reach out to JD Davis at jddavis@iowaabi.org or Brad Hartkopf at bhartkopf@iowaabi.org so that we can help you arrange a visit to your facilities. We expect policy attention in this area in 2027 and your involvement now will reap rewards for your enterprise and all employers in the coming year. ABI



JD Davis
Vice President, Public Policy
ABI
jddavis@iowaabi.org

WHAT'S TRENDING

AI Needs PR, and So Do You

Public relations has always been about getting someone else to tell your company’s story for you. A well-placed story in a respected news outlet can be far more impactful for your brand story than simply placing a splashy ad. At Anthologic we’ve known this for years. Turns out, AI knows it, too.

As we turn to generative AI for help with everything from our workflows to asking which lawn mower to buy, large language models (LLMs) like Gemini, ChatGPT and Claude, are turning back to PR pros to develop answers. Increasingly, LLMs are citing third-party content, such as product reviews and feature stories in media outlets, to shape and

inform their answers.

LLMs are not only referencing your brand’s owned content, but searching for what others are saying about you across the digital landscape, from reputable digital media outlets to trade publications. That means authoritative mentions are driving your brand’s discoverability. If you don’t have a PR strategy building trust and shaping narratives on your behalf, then you’re actively falling behind. Because if you’re not there in the news articles, podcasts and review sites when the LLM comes looking, you won’t be in the answer it provides either.

When it comes to the future of search

and discoverability, PR is at the very heart of it all. Trust can’t be generated by a machine, influence can’t be faked and credibility can’t be invented. Those are uniquely human characteristics, and the AI engines not only recognize that, but are seeking it out in reputable media spaces. Which means if you aren’t deploying a well-rounded content strategy that shares a consistent brand narrative across earned and owned channels, pretty soon you’ll become invisible to the LLMs. And as LLM queries start to overtake search, that means you’ll become increasingly invisible to your audience.

AI knows it needs PR to be credible. Do you? ABI



Kelsey Hanson
Director of Public Relations
Anthologic



**IOWA
ASSOCIATION
OF BUSINESS
AND INDUSTRY**

AUGUST 2026 | VOL 16 | #8

Iowa Association of Business and Industry
400 East Court Avenue, Suite 100
Des Moines, IA 50309
515-280-8000 or 800-383-4224
abi@iowaabi.org, www.iowaabi.org

- PRESIDENT:** Nicole Crain
- VICE PRESIDENT, PUBLIC POLICY:** JD Davis
- VICE PRESIDENT, STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND MEMBER ENGAGEMENT:** Meg Schneider
- SENIOR DIRECTOR, PUBLIC POLICY:** Brad Hartkopf
- FINANCE DIRECTOR:** Levi Hoffman
- MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR:** Olivia Jones
- MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MANAGER:** Levi Lefebure
- WORKFORCE PROGRAMS MANAGER:** Anne Lowder
- MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR:** Kelsey O’Connor
- EVENTS MANAGER:** Amanda Ruckdaschel
- WORKFORCE PROGRAMS & ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR:** Sydney Strunk
- EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT:** Michelle Vollstedt
- MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SERVICES:** Kerry Servas