

## Engaging Our Students to Fill the Workforce Pipeline

*By Jack Llewellyn, CEO of the Durango Chamber of Commerce*

With spring break behind us, I am reminded summertime is when school is out, high school and college students are looking to gain experience. Coincidentally, when I ask local businesses what are the challenges faced in today's environment, one of the top three answers relate to finding skilled employees. As businesses navigate the shifting market landscape, the demand for a diverse, trained, and talented workforce grows. Recognizing this, numerous avenues exist that may contribute to the solution. These range from shadowing initiatives and internships to mentoring programs, enabling businesses/organizations to provide valuable practical experience to the next generation of workers.



The Southwest Colorado Education Collaborative recently launched a key initiative to help connect businesses and organizations who are interested in work-based learning opportunities for students in our region. [Career Launch Southwest](#) is a virtual tool that connects industry with our region's high school students to promote workforce development. Any business or organization that wants to participate is eligible to take part in the program. Once you create an account, you can host a job shadow, be a guest speaker, participate in a career fair, or employ a student intern at a variety of commitment levels. Each of these options matches your availability with their interests.

Job shadowing provides an avenue for businesses to engage with young talent at an early stage. Shadowing is a firsthand glimpse into the daily business operations. These programs allow the student to observe and “test drive” the career, typically for one day. This type of experience gives the student an idea of what the profession entails, ultimately deciding if they would like to explore the career further.

Internships are more involved and can be part-time or full-time, paid or unpaid, or for credit. Interns typically are interested in a particular field, eager to gain real world experience. Interns bring a new perspective and can complete specific tasks quickly due to minimal daily interruptions. Internships are a cornerstone in the bridge between academic and real-world application. As an intern supervisor you will provide practical insights into your industry while the intern develops essential skills, builds networks, and grows their resume. If it's a good match, you possibly have a future employee.

Mentoring is a crucial part of nurturing talent. Mentoring can take place on the job or as a guest speaker. Mentoring can occur with an individual or a group of students. Offering your experiences and knowledge might be the key to piquing a young person's interest in your profession. As a mentor, you can foster a culture of continuous learning, not only for the mentee but also for yourself.

Programs like shadowing, internships and mentoring play a crucial role in shaping the future of our workforce. By investing in these initiatives, you not only expand the talent pool but also foster long-term advantages in recruitment, retention, innovation, and community engagement. Join us in being part of the solution and invest in our workforce pipeline.

Key resources: [Career Launch Southwest: swCoEdCollaborative.org](https://swCoEdCollaborative.org) and FLC [Handshake: FortLewis.joinhandshake.com](https://FortLewis.joinhandshake.com)