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For Immediate Release:

The Results Are In! MR's Manufacturing Connect program performance met or exceeded the average performance of 24 similar Career Pathway programs across school districts nationally.

Highlights: Upon comparing Manufacturing Connect's (MC) data to the national averages across the Youth Career Connect (YCC) grantee cohort, overall, the metrics which represent the activities that Manufacturing Renaissance (MR) had primary control over implementation, we overwhelmingly met or exceeded the performance of our YCC grantee colleagues nationally. For example:

- 100% of MC students came from low income families compared to the national average 46%
- 83% of MC students had a work experience compared to the national average 56%
- 10% of MC students went into full employment compared to the national average 2%
- 22% of MC students entered post-secondary education compared to the national average 17%
- 38.5% of MC students had paid internships compared to the national average 20%
- 99% of MC students completed their internships compared to the national average 81%
- 44% of MC students secured a high school diploma in addition to a nationally-recognized industry credential compared to the national average was 24%

Background:

MR Has Been on the Leading Edge of Manufacturing Career Pathways Since 2000: Starting in 2000, MR documented a public-school system that had no contact with the manufacturing sector. Thousands of good paying jobs were going unfilled because of the lack of quality training programs in our education system which meant thousands of young people, particularly from low-income communities, were excluded from the kind of career opportunities that would provide economic opportunity and mobility. MR studied the European education system and recommended the creation of Austin Polytechnical Academy (APA) that applied our knowledge of European best practices into career pathway programming at the secondary level. MR's career pathway-oriented school design was accepted by Chicago's Board of Education and used to open APA which opened in the Fall of 2007 as a public school operated by Chicago Public Schools. MR's efforts to assist CPS to implement the school design evolved over the years into a program operated by MR that we now call Manufacturing Connect (MC).

A National Opportunity To Demonstrate Proof of Concept: In 2014, we were successful in winning a competitive Youth Career Connect (YCC) federal grant designed to support the development of career pathway programs at the secondary education level demonstrating best practices. MR's MC program proposal became one of 24 successful grant awardees from over 400 applications nationally and the only successful grantee in the State of Illinois. MR was only 1 of 2 grantees of the 24 awarded

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who were considered “intermediary” organizations and not school districts or workforce boards. The grant was \$2,670,909 for 4.5 years of operations. MR operated the MC program under the YCC grant serving 9th-12th graders at Austin Polytechnical Academy (now Austin College and Career Academy) between September 2014 and August 2018. YCC required all grantees provide the same core program activities and tracked the same metrics relative to participation and performance quarterly throughout the grant period. MC concluded its YCC-funded services in September 2018.

The Bottom Line: The Investment in Career Pathways Programming Must Significantly Increase to Reach the Impact Communities and Employers Need

Youth Career Connect (YCC) was the first grant program of its kind, a partnership between the US Dept. of Education and the US Dept. of Labor to develop new models of public/private partnerships in secondary education towards expanding career pathway opportunities for youth and young adults. MR was proud that, as the only YCC grantee from the State of Illinois, we could demonstrate best practices in career pathways programming for the manufacturing sector on the Westside of Chicago.

While MR is proud of the work we did through the MC program and grateful to have had the opportunity to be part of the cohort of esteemed YCC colleagues doing the hard work of creating and expanding new programs that serve our communities – we know there is much more work to be done. There is an overall structural underinvestment in education and workforce development, including career pathways programs that limit the number of youth—especially from low-income, traditionally marginalized communities—to get exposure, preparation, training and support to enter and retain career-track employment. If our group of YCC programs were considered “the best” designs nationally, collectively, we did not get as many youth into careers and college as we all would have hoped or expected nor were we anywhere near our objective of closing the gap between the thousands of jobs available and those youth who need career-track jobs.

Programs that help youth get and keep career-track jobs, require funding way beyond the technical and professionalism training. Career pathway programs need the investment to build relationships with and programs for parents and relatives of youth in the program; training for counselors, teachers and administrators who are critical determining which students ultimately get served by the program and how to sustain these programs in schools with employer partners over the long term; funds to be able provide effective wrap around supports like math and reading remediation, drug use counseling, social/emotional and financial life skills development; even funds to support smaller employers (common in manufacturing) in how they can improve their on-boarding and on-the-job training for youth who this may be their first full-time job. All these dots must be connected to move the needle towards at a scale of impact such that it’s not just 2% of high school graduates able to get career track jobs after high school, but its 40-60%.

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