

WATCH US ACADEMY

A Purdue Polytechnic IN-MaC Pathways System



Watch Us Academy — High School Graduates Ready to Work in the Real World

Layne Enyeart, a Mississinewa High School graduate, had one clear goal through high school, - to become a millwright. Little did he know that a program within his school, the Watch Us Academy, would put him on the path to success sooner than he expected.

"Watch Us gave me a flash of the real world and got me ready to work," said Enyeart. "I was able to develop relationships I didn't even know I needed. It didn't change my plans, it assisted them."

Mississinewa High School launched the Watch Us Academy program during the 2023-24 school year, focusing on building partnerships with local employers and creating meaningful career-readiness experiences for students.



The academy is part of Purdue Polytechnic IN-MaC's statewide Pathway Systems, which coordinate people, assets, and resources to align industry needs with education systems through work-based learning, internships, and professional skills development.

"Pathways help students understand that a successful future does not have to mean following the traditional four-year college route," said Rachel Roesch, Mississinewa High School Principal. "They are being exposed to careers, internships, certifications, technical training, and opportunities to enter the workforce with valuable skills and experience."

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LAYNE ENYEART

For Enyeart, the academy gave him the experience and professional network to make his plan real. Working hard throughout the program, he was able to start working at Wiley Metal in Marion during his senior year of high school. This internship provided hands-on exposure to industrial processes, from sheet metal fabrication to assembly workflows.

"I learned the processes at Wiley, seeing things go from a blank sheet of metal to a lift basket, casing or something else," said Enyeart. "It was cool to see that and realize that the processes are all different, but efficiency is the main focus for most of it."

Today, Enyeart is employed full-time as a millwright with a manufacturer with Indiana locations. He appreciates his time at Wiley and having the opportunity to gain experience in a local company. His current role gives him the opportunity to see more of Indiana and gain additional insights into the manufacturing industry.

"The Pathways Systems are a great idea. If you are looking into working for a local company, definitely do it. Even if you don't want to work for that company long-term, it is still a great opportunity to learn the process," said Enyeart. "It is a great way to learn from people who have been in the industry for a long time. It gets you experience to go into the industry. I would definitely suggest it to students considering the program."



Students at Watch Us Academy get hands on experience on various manufacturing equipment and showcase finished products benefiting the community.



A Community-Driven Talent Pipeline

Roesch describes the program's impact as transformational for many students and for industry as well. As the gap widens between manufacturers' retirees and the replacement talent available to them, community-grown talent becomes critical.

"Pathways have given students who may have otherwise felt 'lost' a sense of direction and a clear path toward life after graduation... We are seeing students become more engaged because they can finally see how what they are doing in high school connects to their future."

This alignment between education and industry is intentional. IN-MaC's statewide mission is to strengthen Indiana's manufacturing ecosystem by building manufacturing talent pipelines and supporting Industry 4.0 adoption. Watch Us Academy operationalizes that mission locally, connecting students with employers, building professional skills, and giving industries a direct role in shaping future workers.

"A strong talent pipeline starts in the community. When schools and employers work together, students can see where their skills might take them, and manufacturers can help shape the experiences that prepare them," said Lisa Deck, IN-MaC Pathways System Director. "Watch Us Academy gives young people a reason to see a future for themselves right here in Indiana."

Industry Partnerships That Lead to Real Jobs

Local manufacturers benefit from early access to emerging talent, while students gain paid experience, mentorship, and exposure to modern industrial environments.



"Participating industries are benefiting through community outreach and the opportunity to connect with and develop young employees," said Roesch. "Businesses are building relationships with potential future employees while gaining a better understanding of the skills and experiences young people need."

For Enyeart, this meant learning how to stay on task, communicate effectively, and solve problems—skills he says are essential in industrial careers.

"Staying on task is a big thing in the industrial world," he said. "Employers like to see that you know how to keep doing what you are doing and to figure things out with your team."

These partnerships also help students navigate barriers. When three interns were too young to meet industry age requirements, Mississinewa Community Schools collaborated with partners to create paid, school-based internships.

"This is exactly what makes the Pathways program so valuable," Roesch said. "It is about our schools and community working together to remove barriers, create opportunities, and show students that their community is invested in their future."

Growing Demand and Expanding Opportunity

Since its launch, Watch Us Academy has served 33 students in its first-year cohorts, with 7 internships completed, and 12 more students participating this year. Demand now exceeds capacity, an indicator of the program's perceived value among students and families. This exposure helps students make informed decisions, sometimes confirming their interests, other times redirecting them.



"By exposing students to that reality early, Pathways Systems help shift perceptions and draws more young people toward the field," said Roesch. "By building this talent pipeline locally, the program strengthens our regional economy by keeping skilled workers close to home, reducing turnover for area employers, and ensuring manufacturing businesses have a sustainable source of talent for years to come."

A Model for Indiana's Future Workforce

Watch Us Academy exemplifies IN-MaC's statewide strategy: build local talent pipelines, strengthen industry partnerships, and prepare students for high-skill careers close to home. By connecting education, community leadership, and employers, the program is helping Indiana address its manufacturing workforce shortage while giving students meaningful, high-wage opportunities.

Enyeart's journey from high school student to full-time millwright trainee is not an exception. It is the emerging norm for Watch Us Academy students. As student and industry demand grows, the program is poised to expand, deepen partnerships, and continue shaping the next generation of Indiana's manufacturing workforce.

"If you do the Pathways System program, don't settle. Continue to improve," said Enyeart. "Life is about getting better and improving. Keep pushing. If you think you can improve and go further, always bet on yourself."

"The support and investment in the pathways system and programs like ours have given schools the resources and credibility to not only reach out and collaborate with community members, but to customize our instruction to better fit local industry needs." - Principal Rachel Roesch