

Design Thinking – Homegrown Skills for the Future

Written by Joy Gaasch, Chamber President and Andy Ingall, GHAPS Superintendent

In a recent Chamber member survey, the number one challenge today, is finding employees to fill positions at all levels. As we look to the future, it is imperative we give the next generation the tools and information they need to be successful and help drive a vibrant economy for this community.

For many years, The Chamber has been connecting businesses with teachers and students through business and education partnerships. In conversations with teachers and industry focus groups, three areas emerged about careers in manufacturing. First, kids need to learn about types of career options at a younger age. Second, they need to understand how what they are learning applies to the world of work in manufacturing. Third, the world of manufacturing today is not the same as it was 20 years ago.

At GHAPS, we believe in Success for All. This means a successful educational career throughout elementary, middle and high school, where we nurture our students' interests and challenge them to explore new possibilities. Recently, a variety of programs in our district have focused on design thinking: a process where students tackle real-life projects and learn to develop solutions through creative problem solving.

This past fall, GHAPS, in partnership with The Chamber, launched a new program called *Homegrown*. Homegrown brings design thinking to elementary school classrooms by pairing teachers with local manufacturers to solve actual design challenges. Seven different classrooms partnered with local leaders from Automatic Spring Products Corp., Beacon Recycling, GHSP, Herman Miller and Klever Innovations.

Teachers and businesses collaborated to identify sample projects for students to complete, linking those projects to the classroom curriculum. Students then had the opportunity to pitch their solutions directly to the businesses, with their parents in the audience.

Homegrown generates early interest in high-demand careers, especially ones students can pursue here in our own community. We believe Homegrown is a vital program because it targets younger students. Many students begin preparing for high school and beyond in eighth grade so early exposure to these types of careers is important. Homegrown not only instills tools students will use throughout their educational journey, but offers insight as to the multitude of career choices that await them.