

SWD INC. BUSINESS PARTNER RECOGNITION

We are thrilled to reestablish our Business Partner program, which recognizes businesses and organizations for their support in building futures for our students and helping to accomplish our mission and vision. We know these collaborations are vital to ensure our students are successful, and we truly value and appreciate these partnerships.

We are committed to providing multiple and flexible pathways for students to ensure they are college and career ready. We continue to work with colleges, universities and local businesses to enhance these options and meet our students' diverse and individual needs. We know these pathways are critical to help with the labor shortage and to connect students to hands-on, immersive experiences, as well as certifications, credentials and scholarships.

One of our top priorities is to remove barriers for all students to help them access employment and build positive futures. The focus is to connect them with viable short-term and long-term career options and work-based learning that can provide a supported pathway through their college pursuits.

We have established the following apprenticeships, internships and vocational trainings. This semester, 189 students are enrolled in these courses.

- CNC Machining Fundamentals (0)
- CTE Youth Apprenticeship Program (19)
- Education Teacher Preparation Program (25)
- Heritage Spanish Career Fluency (31)
- Medical Careers (7)
- Technology Center of DuPage (TCD) (107)

We are always looking to develop more partnerships, and those who are interested can read more at www.dupage88.net/BusinessPartnerships.

It's fitting that today we recognize SWD Inc., a manufacturing company in Addison, as a Business Partner, as the group truly meets all of the criteria mentioned above. Whenever we approach SWD Inc. with an idea to benefit our students, the answer is always an enthusiastic "yes." SWD Inc. is always willing to open its doors for District 88 students, and the following are examples.

- Host field trips and tours, where students get to speak with employees in various departments
- Allow students to shadow employees
- Serve as a site for students in our CTE Youth Apprenticeship Program
- Provide trainings for employees on how to mentor student learners to ensure District 88 pupils receive an enriching and positive experience
- Serve as a site for students in our Heritage Spanish Career Fluency course
- Participate in Addison Trail's SkillsUSA National Signing Day to celebrate high school seniors who have chosen to pursue a career in the skilled trades

- Serve on the Addison Workforce Development Committee (which provides opportunities to train students and adults for jobs available in the area, develops a directory of local businesses and hosts job fairs)
- Participate in Project Hire-Ed, which offers hands-on training to an employee while gaining necessary competency. The program offers skills in a particular occupation, helps connect to a career pathway and combines on-the-job training with appropriate instruction. It is commonly referred to as an “Earn and Learn” model. Two Addison Trail alumni are working for SWD Inc. as part of Project Hire-Ed, and SWD Inc. gives them time off to speak with students about their experiences.
- Provide vocational opportunities for students in the District 88 Transition Program, which helps individuals ages 18 to 21 who have a variety of abilities learn life skills, obtain job training in a community setting and transition to life after District 88
- Worked with Addison Trail automotive technology instructor Keith Santini to establish a program where senior students could begin working in various positions at SWD Inc.

Not only does SWD Inc. offer one-of-a-kind, real-world experiences for our students, but the company also provides competitive employment for several District 88 students.

One of those students is Brandon Zirkle, who graduated from Addison Trail in 2017 and attended the district’s Transition Program. Zirkle shared his thoughts on SWD Inc. and owner Rick Delawder.

“I was born with cerebral palsy and was told I might never walk or talk,” Zirkle said. “Today, I’ve not only graduated from high school, but I am employed full time at SWD Inc. thanks to Mr. Delawder. I drive the forklift and help with shipping and receiving on the docks. It has been an amazing experience, and I can’t say enough good things about Mr. Delawder. I know I’m different and have disabilities, and to know there’s someone out there like Mr. Delawder who wants kids like me to work for his company means a lot. Mr. Delawder is a lovely person and treats us all extremely well. He is friendly, generous and respectful, and he often gives us lunch and hosts picnics for us. He has taught me many job and life skills such as confidence, responsibility and what the real world is like. When I wake up each morning, I have a purpose and goals thanks to Mr. Delawder. He has provided so many opportunities for kids like me, and it’s great to have someone like him help me and others get this far. I work hard every day to show my gratitude, and Mr. Delawder always appreciates my efforts.”

Mr. Santini also shared a story of how Mr. Delawder and SWD Inc. stepped up to help an Addison Trail student.

“There was a graduate who had fallen on hard times and had to take care of her little sister rather than continue her education,” Santini said. “She was in desperate need of a job, and another teacher at the school sent an e-mail asking for help for this alumna. I made a phone call to Mr. Delawder, and he told me to have her come in immediately for an interview, and they would even try to have her work in a department that was related to what she had been learning in school.”

As you can see, it's difficult to find a company that's more involved and supportive than SWD Inc. They are the epitome of a Business Partner, and we truly thank them for all they do for our students, families and the community.