

## **What is the Chamber Foundation?**

The Chamber Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit. The purpose of the Chamber Foundation is to lead workforce and education efforts that will ensure Huntsville/Madison County has sufficient quantity and quality of talent to meet employer needs and support sustained growth.

## **How is the Chamber Foundation different than the Chamber of Commerce of Huntsville/Madison County?**

The Chamber of Commerce of Huntsville/Madison County is a 501(c)6 membership organization. The mission of the Chamber of Commerce of Huntsville/Madison County is to prepare, develop, and promote our community for economic growth. The Chamber Foundation supports and enables the work of the Chamber of Commerce through education and training.

## **Why should The Chamber lead this work?**

The business community's desire for better educational outcomes has never been more intense. Yet a single company or business owner can do little working alone on a complex challenge like this. Systemic action is required, and the Chamber – with more than 2,000 members – can be the mechanism for collective business action in this space.

## **Why aren't our School Districts leading this work?**

We are fortunate to have three very strong and successful school districts in Huntsville/Madison County. However, most of our educators have never worked in a business environment. While they are highly qualified in their subjects, they don't know what it means to work in many of our key industries like aerospace, defense, bioscience, advanced manufacturing, or information technology.

Currently, all 9th grade students in Alabama are required to complete a year-long Career Prep class. This means that more than 4,000 students per year in our three public school systems are spending an entire school year talking about their future, careers, financial literacy and making smart choices. We spoke with instructional leaders, Career Coaches and Career Prep teachers to better understand this class and opportunity. They identified that Career Prep teachers do not have professional development opportunities that enable them to learn more about the vast career choices that are available to their students. School districts do not have the knowledge, network or resources to fill this void, yet educators want – and need – this information to help guide their students.

The business community is the only voice that can truly articulate current and future workforce needs. Industry, education, and public sector stakeholders must work together and invest in classrooms today to develop the workforce of tomorrow. By bringing educators into our business community, we will have the opportunity to facilitate dialogue and develop networks to identify workforce needs, share pathways to obtain the skills and experiences needed, and also look for opportunities to expose students to careers before they invest in higher education.

*continued on page 2*

Approximately 80 percent of college freshmen have not declared a college major. Fifty percent of those who have declared a major will switch during college. Seventy percent of all college students will change their major. These numbers prove that students across the country are not aware of their skills, interests and abilities before making major decisions, therefore creating unnecessary expense and frustration, and wasting time.

### **What efforts will the Chamber Foundation lead?**

In 2017, the Chamber Foundation will host four **Industry Insight** professional development programs for Career Prep teachers, Career Coaches and Career Tech Directors in our three districts. These educators impact more than 4,000 students annually. The purpose of these programs will be as follows:

1. Increase teacher knowledge of career opportunities in our region and the pathways to obtain them.
2. Inform students and educators about local careers and industries to retain young talent in our community.
3. Provide educators with useful, tangible career information and resources that they can share with students, teachers, and others in their school/district.
4. Facilitate relationships between educators and industry leaders.
5. Share best practices among educators to help students explore potential career pathways through academics, career-based learning, and workplace experiences to develop the skills necessary to thrive in our growing industries.
6. Increase long-term alignment between post-secondary majors/areas of study and careers with the greatest regional demand.

Future areas of focus will be based on needs identified by the districts and through industry/education partnerships. Programs may include expanding **Industry Insight** professional development to counselors and school leaders, opportunities for students to participate in similar **Industry Insight** or **Career Fair** programs, and helping to develop internship, co-op and/or apprenticeship programs for students.

### **Why does the Chamber need additional investment for this work?**

The Chamber Foundation is being reactivated to meet specific, pressing needs of the business community, above and beyond the ongoing economic development and business support activities of the Chamber. There are grant funds available to support workforce and education efforts, but they often require a match and do not fund salaries or other costs associated with operations. In order to successfully implement the Chamber Foundation program of work without negatively impacting the Chamber's efforts to grow our economy, we need a stable base of funding to initiate and sustain the program. The Chamber Foundation will supplement, not supplant, the Chamber of Commerce, and therefore will require supplemental funding.