



JAG Indiana Serves as Talent Pipeline Between High School Students and Indiana Employers

Originally adopted during the 2006-07 school year to help combat the state's escalating high school dropout crisis, Indiana's Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) program is now widely recognized as one of the most successful initiatives in the country.

JAG is a state-based national non-profit organization that was created more than 40 years ago. The resiliency-building workforce program is geared toward helping students who face significant barriers to graduation learn in-demand employability skills while in school. Participants receive adult mentoring and career exploration opportunities before they complete high school along with one year of follow-up counseling after graduation.

Administered by the Indiana Department of Workforce Development (DWD), JAG Indiana has served more than 40,000 students and graduated more than 95% of program participants since its inception.

"When the Indiana program began, the goal was to help kids stay in school. That's still central to our focus today," said Brianna Morse, DWD Director of Youth Initiatives. "JAG is a pipeline of highly qualified students who have a base line of skills employers are looking for. They're going to show up for their jobs, be enthusiastic and be able to work in teams."

In March 2024, DWD held the 16th annual State Career Development Conference for JAG participants, which provided qualifying students with an opportunity to earn monetary awards by showcasing skills they've learned through the program, such as those related to finance, entrepreneurship, and project management. The event was a culmination of regional competitions, which focused on disciplines critical to employment. In all, more than 145 students from over 50 Indiana high schools advanced to the state competition.

However, participation numbers weren't always that extensive. In fact, during its first year, JAG Indiana served 217 students through a total of 12 statewide in-school programs.

"When we first started, the program was small, and we worked primarily with urban schools. Then, we started to see significant interest and investment from legislators," Morse said. "We doubled the program size in 2013 and did another big push in 2017."

Indiana's 2023-24 academic year opened with 125 programs but also with the potential for significant growth momentum thanks to an announcement by Governor Eric J. Holcomb that detailed an expansion target goal of 250 programs in the state by the 2024-25 school year. The goal is driven by DWD's new partnership with the Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA), which will invest more than \$23.1 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grants.

As of April 2024, JAG Indiana program administrators are already halfway to that goal.

“This is a big undertaking, but JAG programming can fit all schools and as of today, we’re at 78 of 125 new programs,” Morse said. “Our goal is to hit the 250 mark by the second semester of this coming school year.

“JAG programming will reach approximately 10,000 students in the next couple of years. We have the opportunity make this the largest program in the nation.”

While continuing to expand its program base, JAG Indiana consistently boasts admirable achievements in comparison to national program goals. In fact, for the 2022-23 school year, JAG Indiana highlights included:

- 95% graduation rate (national goal is 90%);
- 83% full-time employment rate (national goal is 80%);
- 82% positive outcome rate (national goal is 80%);
- 72% job placement rate, including military (national goal is 60%); and
- 39% further education rate (national goal is 35%).

For more information on Indiana’s JAG program, visit <https://www.in.gov/dwd/jag/>.