

Indianapolis, Indiana

Year Started: 2017

Students Enrolled:

Total: 608 (6<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>)

FRL: 40%

English Learners: 1.7%

Instructional Model: Online courses and pre-apprenticeships and/or work-based experiences at training centers and businesses

Opened in the 2017–18 school year, Indiana Connections Career Academy (INCC) is a full-time online school district serving 6th-12th grade students across Indiana. INCC served 608 students in school year 2020–21. INCC has eight career centers that they partner with across their state, and they are the only online school that has this type of partnership with the centers in their state. Through these partnerships, INCC illustrates their commitment to providing students located in rural and urban areas around the state equitable access to CTE options. As Stephanie Chi, INCC’s Principal, emphasized, “These centers and field-based work opportunities offer students prolonged hands-on learning experiences with professionals to really apply what they are learning.” INCC also has a partnership with a makerspace in northern Indianapolis.

When students do not have access to the experiences needed for work-based learning, INCC works with them to set something up so that the student can authentically apply what they are learning.

INCC offers a course called Career Education that centers on badging, which is tied into their curriculum, meeting Industry-specific Standards and Indiana Department of Workforce Development’s Employability Skills Standards (Mindsets, Work Ethic, Learning Strategies, and Social and Emotional Skills). In this course, students are introduced to badging options. The badges allow students to “create their own path.” As Chi explained, “I think the best student differentiation technique is student choice.” As part of this course, students can request to meet with a guest speaker of their choosing who aligns with their interests, participate in community service, learn how to prepare a professional resume, get certified in OSHA, CPR, or PYTHON, and more. These badging options require students to reflect on how their learning experiences have helped prepare them for their future and act as a means for assessing students toward certification requirements in their respective career clusters. Each activity a student completes earns the student a badge at a yearly award ceremony. INCC also focuses on one of the Employability Skills Standards each month, which encourages instructors to refocus lessons to put additional emphasis on that standard as it relates to the topics being covered in the curriculum. For instance, the standard in May 2021 was “lifelong learning,” and Chi asked instructors to have students reflect on where they saw themselves in five years and what they might be focused on to enhance their learning at that time.

As part of their student support system, their program includes Career Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs). One of the CTSOs they are most proud of is their chapter of Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA). INCC’s chapter of FBLA meets bi-weekly, and they have earned multiple awards as a team and as individuals from the

National Chapter, including Super Sweeps for their member recruitment, Non-Stop November for their cause awareness for first responders and financial literacy, and Action Awareness. In addition to their awards, the chapter is concentrating on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and has invited multiple experts to share their experiences. Whereas some chapters of FBLA might limit membership to students in fields specific to business, focusing on DEI has opened up their chapter to welcoming students from a variety of career clusters. As INCC Principal Stephanie Chi shared, “Our FBLA chapter is an inclusive community, providing students learning opportunities that enhance their eye for business, increase their employability skills, and prepare them to be marketable as they enter the business community.”

INCC uses Nepris and hosts at least a dozen opportunities each week for students to connect with professionals online. INCC connected their students with over 300 field experts in their physical professional spaces during school year 2020–21. One of their graduating seniors who was pursuing his certification as an automotive tech in 2021 expressed his gratitude for the program: “I have found my place in the world. I know where I'm going to open up my shop. I know who I'm going to do it with. I already am making money fixing cars on the side, and I have never felt this hopeful and positive before.” Chi expressed, “Those are the kind of meaningful partnerships, such as the one in which this student found his passion, that just help the school flourish.”