

## Program's work-based curriculum helps struggling high school students

By Matthew Bin Han Ong of the Journal Sentinel

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Sitting attentively for eight hours a day never really worked for Jeff Kopp, but that didn't stop him from getting a high school diploma.

Kopp graduated in May 2010 despite not having to attend regular classes throughout his junior and senior years at Mukwonago High School.

"I'd rather be working and making money than sitting still," said Kopp, 19, who added that he had no love for homework.

Kopp said getting a diploma probably would have been impossible if not for Second Chance Partners for Education, a nonprofit that partners with school districts and private companies to create manufacturing apprenticeship programs for youths.

"We select students who have become disengaged with the traditional high school environment and who have inevitably become credit-deficient," said executive director Stephanie Borowski. "Our education system seems to direct most students to a four-year college program, and the rest fall through the cracks. Most of these students are very capable."

Second Chance has served more than 200 students since 2000. It partners with 20 school districts in Wisconsin, including Waukesha, Racine, Oconomowoc and Germantown.

With eight education centers statewide and one more opening in Green Bay in January, the organization hopes to partner with Milwaukee Public Schools in 2012, Borowski said.

Students attend classes at Second Chance for almost two years while working for several of 52 local partner businesses, including MetalTek International, Signicast Investment Castings and Generac Power Systems, the company that founded Second Chance.

"The program has been very beneficial for Signicast, and I can see it running for the foreseeable future," said Fritz Marston, Signicast human resources manager. "In the long term, we would love to be able to hire some of these students full-time, but the primary goal is to give back to the community."

Hartford Union High School senior Evan Stark worked for Signicast last school year and said the program was a perfect combination of class and work.

"I think it's a benefit to most of the kids that don't do well in a normal high school," Stark said. "I used to feel like all the different classes were overwhelming - a lot of the stuff I learned I don't think I would ever use again." Stark now works in the shipping department of a Germantown company and said he hopes to get a job there when he graduates.

"I think right now I'm most interested in becoming a machinist," said Stark, who also plans on going to Waukesha County Technical College, which Kopp currently attends after completing an apprenticeship with a New Berlin company.

"I'm in the tool-and-die and mold-making program," said Kopp, who plans on getting a license in the industry to become a full-fledged professional after the two-year degree program.

Borowski said almost all Second Chance students attend classes regularly and graduate on time.

Two-thirds enter full-time employment after graduation, and at least 20% go on to post-secondary education, she said.

"My current schedule is working really well for me," said Stark, who clocks two hours of class time a day and works for another six. "There's still a lot to learn, but it's not to a point where I feel like giving up."