

BRINGING THE WORLD INTO THE CLASSROOM: BUSINESS-EDUCATION COMPACT

Portland, Oregon

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In response to demands for education to strengthen its connection to the “real world,” educators and business leaders in the Portland, OR area have joined forces to lead this reform. The Business-Education Compact (BEC) is a not-for-profit organization which connects educators and students to the workplace. This organization is funded by membership dues, contracted services, grants, and contributions. The Board of Directors for the BEC is currently composed of 30 business leaders and 30 educators. This group of 60 forms the backbone for the Compact’s programs and helps to implement its mission: “to promote educational excellence, relevancy, and expanded learning opportunities for *all* educators—*all* students.”¹ Since its establishment in 1984, more than 1800 educators have participated in BEC programs and in turn have impacted more than 125,000 students. In addition, more than 300 businesses of a variety of sizes and interests have participated in these programs.

The Region 2 School-to-Work System benefits from the availability of BEC programs for both students and educators. Region 2 is divided into three areas: the East, composed of Multnomah County; Central, composed of Portland; and the West, composed of Washington County. The STW system is further divided into three components: Regional System Components, Sub-Regional System Components, and Building Level System Components. In each of these components, school-based, work-based and connecting activities are offered for both students and

educators. For example, the BEC offers the following activities for students in support of the regional STW system:

- Paid and unpaid work-based learning experiences with employers
- National Engineers Week and other programs targeting math, science and technology
- Employer/site visitations
- Guest speakers
- School retention projects
- The School-to-Work Information System (SWIS)—a regional database linking educators, students, and employers.

EDUCATOR EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

Concurrently, the BEC offers invaluable professional development opportunities to help educators implement these programs and support STW principles. Among a variety of other programs, the BEC offers both a structured internship and a visitation program for K-16 educators called the *Educator Excellence Program*. This program was the primary focus of the site visit and will be highlighted here along with some related projects which complement the mission of the BEC.

INTERNSHIPS

I was provided with many more resource materials and hands-on activities. I am able to tie my

curriculum much more closely to 'real world' applications. This makes a huge difference to the students and is reflected in their motivation. — Educator Intern

The BEC places K-16 educators (i.e., teachers, administrators, career coordinators, School-to-Work coordinators, and counselors) in worksite positions (internships) with Oregon employers as part of the Educator Excellence Program. These internships vary in length and activity—they are determined by the needs of the employer as well as the strengths of the intern. The BEC functions as the contractor and handles all of the details including project management, educator recruitment, payroll, supervisor training, orientation, and evaluation of the employer-sponsored internships.² The business is responsible for identifying a project in their company, selecting the intern, and paying approximately \$2500-\$5200, depending on the length of the project and the salary paid to the educator. In the last twelve years, more than 200 employers have participated and over 600 projects have been completed. Seventy-eight K-16 educator interns participated in the summer of 1996. The BEC hopes to reach a goal of 150 interns placed in 1997.

The following schedule guided the implementation of this program in 1996:

- April: Project Description Booklets are distributed
- April 15: Interview and Resume Skills Workshop
- April 30: Educator applications are due for project descriptions
- May 6-24: Employers interview/select applicants
- June 20: Orientation meeting (overview, registration, and contract signing)

July 17: Mid-summer meeting for educators and business mentors

August 30: Educators submit Action Plans to the Business-Education Compact.

Educators identify the project in which they are interested and apply for that specific internship. They typically look for projects whose application would relate to their classroom needs or professional goals. The BEC and the specific businesses cooperate to ensure the intern's needs and interests fit well with a project. The placement will not be made if the educator might find the experience unproductive or unfulfilling. Unfortunately, there might not be a "match" for either the employer or the prospective intern and approximately 20% of the internships are not filled each year. More specifically, 20 internships were not filled and 20 educators were not matched to a project in 1996. This "mismatch" can be explained by the discrepancies between skills the employer is looking for compared to the applicant pool.

ACTION PLANS

As mentioned previously, the BEC provides much of the support for the program's implementation. The Orientation program in June is instrumental in setting the stage for both the employer's and the intern's experience. The Program Manager of the Educator Excellence Program uses this session as an opportunity to identify goals and expectations for both the intern and their business mentor. She specifically encourages the mentor to prepare for the intern's arrival by setting clear expectations for the summer project and by providing the intern with an orientation to the company. During the orientation program in June, interns are also asked to begin thinking and preparing their "Action Plan," which is required to earn the mandated university credit for their internship experience.

The Educator Internship Guide³ provides a wealth of information for the intern including the definition of an Action Plan:

The Action Plan documents how you translate your summer business experience into something applicable to students in your classroom. It's a practical application of skills and knowledge gained.

The goals are to:

1. Develop an action plan to put into practice new concepts that you have developed as a result of your summer internship.
2. Provide an opportunity for critical reflection on the usefulness of the action plan for your school district, school, or class.
3. View the elements of your action plan, your summer internship, and the school or school district's goals as a system of interrelated parts.

The following is an abstract from the Action Plan of a Composition Instructor from Mt. Hood Community College:

Learning Agility is the ability, and perhaps the willingness, to learn and use new concepts, programs, and/or strategies and to apply them to new situations. Since the term comes from a list of job competencies, learning agility also suggests that one is in control of one's learning and one's career. Community college students need to develop learning agility and self-direction for success in college and the workplace. I will include learning agility in my introduction to the freshman writing course I teach and in my discussion of writing assignments for which education and work are key topics. I'll also share with my colleagues how I plan to encourage students to develop learning agility.

This intern's experience as an Employee Development Strategist at a technology business helped her to meet the goals of her action plan:

1. to assist students enrolled in college writing courses.
2. to increase her ability to use a "coaching" style of teaching.
3. to present insights about her experience and the writing applications gleaned from the internship to divisional colleagues at the community college.

Both the Executive Director of the BEC and an adjunct faculty member at Portland State University evaluate each intern's action plan. Interns decide on the format in which they would like to present their action plan. Formats include, but are not limited to, written lesson plans, a video, a database of resources, strategic plans, proposals, budgets, or computer programs. The plan can also be developed individually or in partnership with one or more interns. The evaluators require a description of the goals the intern will address, the changes the intern hopes to bring about as a result of implementation, and a description of the target audience and an analysis of their learning styles.

Interns are also asked to include an outline of the units, exercises, modules, or presentations they will develop after their internship experience. They must be conscious of how the internship relates to their goals and how it will be implemented. All of this needs to be described in detail—including a time line, resources needed, and how it will be evaluated. Interns are also asked to include any materials, handouts, and a list of references on topics related to their final project. As mentioned previously, the intern receives course credit after completing their action plan.

EVALUATION OF THE EDUCATOR EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

The Educator Excellence Program Manager expresses this view of the program:

Everybody wins in this situation. Businesses get a project completed and come to see teachers as professionals. Teacher interns get an inside view of business and go on to become spokespersons

and curriculum development leaders. Students are the recipients of whatever modifications or adjustments a teacher would make in their curriculum.

A participant from the summer of 1996 agrees:

It has given me exposure to the workings of corporate America and what the business world puts a premium on. Areas such as problem solving, independent work habits, responsibility to work on a project alone, and dependability are all things we stress in school and business also stresses.

Also, educators were asked to indicate the likelihood that they would apply the internship to their classroom: 92% said they were likely to “add new content to lessons or labs;” 97% said they “would tell their students about their experience;” and 94% said they “would share their experience with school personnel.”

Business participants also had positive reactions after their experience with an educator intern. Evaluation comments included:

- I learned more about what teachers are dealing with in the classroom.
- (The program is) A good way to participate in improving the educational environment and creating a connection to the school system.
- Words used to describe characteristics of teacher interns included: wonderful attitudes, extremely professional, dedicated to completing quality work, and highly self-directed and focused.

In 1996, 97% of the internship mentors reported that the educator “met” or “exceeded” expectations; 100% were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the educator’s overall performance; and 97% of the mentors said that they would be willing to participate again if they had another project.

From both the interns’ and mentors’ responses, it is obvious that these experiences are meaningful. However, many teachers do not participate in internships. They often value their time off during summer and may have other commitments during that time. Also, there is not always a good fit between the projects available and an educator’s interests. Businesses might not participate due to the expense or time required to develop a project and mentor the intern. For these reasons, the Business-Education Compact offers the Visitation Program for educators and businesses to connect without a substantial time or money commitment.

VISITATION PROGRAMS

The BEC offers two types of visitation programs: career-focused and curriculum-focused. The career-focused opportunity is available for K-16 educators who can only make a one-to two-day commitment. There are three purposes of these career-focused visits:

- To gain awareness of the changes and challenges in today’s workplaces
- To gain awareness of types of career opportunities, required preparation, and occupational outlook
- To create an opportunity to build partnerships with local businesses.

The BEC sets up visits to a variety of businesses depending on the educators’ interests. For example, four sites could be visited in two days. These opportunities are open for classroom teachers, counselors, STW coordinators, and administrators.

The curriculum-focused visitation days usually occur over a four-day period of time. Each day is devoted to the application of subjects (e.g., math, science, language arts, social studies) in the workplace. While career education is definitely one of the goals of the visitations, they are primarily designed to help educators understand how subjects are applied in business. They then bring back these ideas and

incorporate them into their teaching practices. Single-day visitations have also been arranged to meet the needs of various educators. The Portland Community College (PCC) faculty have been actively involved in the curriculum-focused visitation days. For example, several PCC Math faculty recently spent four days exploring how mathematical concepts are used in the workplace.

The community college faculty noted the difference in their needs compared to K-12 faculty. Their students, for example, are usually working adults and already have a connection to real-world applications of their classes. Community college faculty need to be able to have opportunities which allow them to stay ahead of their students. For these reasons, both the visitation and internship opportunities must be geared to their specific needs. The BEC works very closely with its clientele, both in business and educational settings, to make sure that these concerns are addressed and their needs are met.

S.W.I.S. PROJECT

In July of 1995 the BEC was given approval by the Regional Workplace Quality Committee to develop and manage the School-to-Work Information System (SWIS). This computerized matching system allows educators and students to identify and participate in workplace learning opportunities throughout the region. Currently forty-eight secondary schools and two Community Colleges in the Metro-Portland area are utilizing this system, reaching more than 30,000 students and educators. Initially, local STW coordinators have been trained and are operating the system at each location.

The SWIS system tracks students by name and maintains a record of student participation in the associated workplace learning opportunities. This system also allows easier placement for educators and students and identifies a variety of workplace learning opportunities. The twenty-one categories in which matching occurs include:

- special projects
- intensive work experience
- job shadowing
- school based enterprise
- mentorship
- school directed project
- structured work experience
- school agricultural project
- cooperative work experience
 - professional/technical education
- internship
- pre-employment training
- practicum
- tours/visitation
- clinical experience
- simulations
- registered youth apprenticeship
- basic educational skills training
- non-registered youth apprenticeship
- paid job opportunities
- community/service learning

Gradually this system will be expanded to include elementary and middle school students, serving as well as a marketing and matching device for the Educator Excellence Program.

METALSWORK PROJECT

The Metalswork project unites industry, government, education, and community groups to focus on improving the skills of the emerging, transitional, and existing workforce in the metals industry. With the facilitation of the BEC, the Oregon Precision Metal Fabricators Association (OPMFA) and the Oregon Metals Industry Council (OMIC) have entered into school-to-work partnerships with ten high schools and six middle schools in the metro Portland area to pilot innovative ways to teach students and educators about the metals industry. Teachers and counselors from the schools participate in summer and school-year internships in metals companies to learn firsthand about the industry and translate their knowledge into information for students. In the summers of 1995

and 1996, more than twenty educators completed internships at local metals companies and over 2,300 students received information about the industry.⁴ Industry representatives and educators are developing curriculum to deliver metals-related knowledge and skills integrated into various academic and professional-technical courses. The BEC program director stated that, “the curriculum being developed in this process is seen as a living document, one that will grow and change over time to meet the needs of the industry and the educational process.” With the assistance of the Business-Education Compact, companies and educators are involving students in firsthand experiences in the companies, including job shadowing and in-depth internships.

Additionally, two alternative schools are utilizing the PCC curriculum designed by the educators and industry leaders to provide an innovative program for students. Students are introduced to the skills and knowledge necessary to enter into the metals industry. The Metalswork project, staffed and promoted through the BEC, provides information about pathways into and within the metals industry. This project intends to generate greater interest in careers related to the metals industry and to reinforce the importance of basic skills in math, science, and communications.

In September 1995, a workforce needs assessment⁵ for the metals industry was undertaken by the OMIC and the Portland Development Commission, on behalf of four industry associations. The goal of this assessment was to provide data on the future demand for production workers in the metals industry in the Portland metropolitan area. Eighty-nine companies, representing approximately one-fourth of the total metals jobs in the metro area, responded to the survey. When the survey asked candidates to respond to the question, “Why doesn’t the industry have the workforce it needs?” the respondents noted that teachers at all levels do not understand the current state of the industry, its use of technology, competitive factors, management, and quality control structures.

The BEC Metalswork Program Director stated, “Before we can do STW with the students we must have STW for educators.”

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

To understand the effectiveness of the BEC over the past decade, one must appreciate the supportive state environment in which the BEC operates. Since 1987, Oregon has enacted six pieces of legislation which have created a framework guiding the implementation of School-to-Work throughout the state.⁶ Through the efforts of fifteen Regional Workforce Quality Committees, students and educators can participate in work-based experiences that connect to school-based learning. During the implementation stages, student achievement is being documented by the number of students attaining a Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) and a Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM). School-to-Work activities provide the career awareness and exploration components of the CIM and the avenue for the work-based experience in the CAM. These standards are providing the basis for a series of criterion-referenced assessments that will be associated with other summative materials to document student attainment. The legislative action taken evidences is a commitment throughout the state to embed the School-to-Work initiative within school improvement efforts.

The Business-Education Compact will continue to offer opportunities for both educators and students to achieve the goals and competencies outlined in these statewide initiatives. As the BEC extends its regional impact across the state and the SWIS project continues its refining growth, new internship sites will be established and an increasing number of educators will have the opportunity to “bring the world into their classroom” through internships and other professional development opportunities.

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ENDNOTES

- [1] Business Education Compact. (1996). The Compact: At a Glance [Brochure]. Hillsboro, OR: Author.
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