

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SUPPORT OF SCHOOL-TO-WORK JACKSON-HILLSDALE COUNTIES, MICHIGAN

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the name of educational reform, educators are increasingly being asked to establish partnerships between schools and businesses within their local communities. These partnerships can result in a more integrated and comprehensive educational experience for students. Two neighboring counties in south central Michigan provide us with an example of how collaborative efforts between educators and their communities can result in a comprehensive School-to-Work system.

The Jackson-Hillsdale School-to-Work (STW) Partnership represents the Intermediate School Districts of Jackson, Hillsdale, and most recently, Lenawee¹. This partnership includes twelve public schools and one charter school in Jackson County, eight public schools in Hillsdale County, and thirteen public schools in Lenawee County. This region is mostly rural with the major population centers in the cities of Jackson, Adrian, and Hillsdale. This partnership reflects a continual commitment to the intent of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994). This commitment can best be described in the partnership's own words:

The mission of the partnership is to create a comprehensive School-to-Work system that transforms the educational experience of the students in Jackson and Hillsdale counties. Each student will graduate from high school globally aware, technologically literate, technically competent and prepared to succeed in a career

path designed to accommodate individual interests and abilities. (Jackson-Hillsdale STW Partnership Mission Statement²).

This mission statement, along with other supporting documents, demonstrates the partnership's awareness that "School-to-Work is the responsibility of the entire community." Accordingly, business and industry have joined with schools to assume responsibility for implementing this initiative.

Jackson and Hillsdale counties are influenced by the large number of manufacturing and industrial companies located in south central Michigan. Business and industry leaders have communicated their need for better-prepared employees and hope that the STW initiative is a means to achieve these ends. The president of a local company asks:

How are we going to get these kids today thinking about (taking advantage of opportunities) tomorrow? That's why I'm heavily involved—anything that has to do with education and business that I'm aware of or I can be a part of—because I want to see it move ahead.

An experienced high school teacher also stresses the importance of encouraging students to think about their future:

All of these children are going to be entering the workforce...and we're not being asked to address key issues because they have that intermediate step...go to college.

The Jackson-Hillsdale STW system responds to these concerns by preparing students to move from either “school-to-career” or “school-to-school-to-career.”

Although the STW legislation came about only recently, Jackson-Hillsdale was fortunate to have enacted a Tech Prep initiative eight years earlier, which provided a strong comprehensive foundation for STW. As a result, the STW initiative in this region of Michigan is extremely well developed and has progressed rapidly. The design of the Career Prep program, formerly Tech Prep in this region, was based on two main components — guidance and curriculum. Professional development plans were then designed to assist educators in creating experiences for students, emphasizing guidance and instructional activities which were integrated, contextual, and most importantly student-centered (see section on Vandercook Lake for additional details). Career Prep naturally evolved into what has now become the Jackson-Hillsdale STW system. The following elements of the system are designed to help prepare students for their future:

1. ***Comprehensive Career Awareness and Planning***—This element includes career awareness and planning (K-12), the development of an Educational Development Plan, familiarity with Career Pathways documents, and portfolio exhibits.
2. ***High Academic Standards for All Students***—This element includes integrated academics and contextual learning curricula, project-based learning, authentic assessment, and use of the Manufacturing Technologies Laboratory (MTL).
3. ***Structured Work-Based Learning Opportunities***—This element includes job shadowing, unpaid work experiences, Cooperative education, apprenticeships, preceptorships, School-to-Work mentorships, and a Senior Transition Project.

Due to the breadth of the above-mentioned opportunities for students, STW implementation requires the involvement of people too numerous to mention. However, the following key players assume primary responsibility for assuring that STW is systemic and comprehensive: the School-to-Work County Coordinator, the Outreach Projects Coordinator, the Jackson County Intermediate School District (JCISD) Director of Vocational Education, and The STW Partnership Board, which is made up of 51% businesses and is the driving force behind educational reform in this region.

The primary responsibility of the School-to-Work County Coordinator is to act as liaison between businesses and schools. In this regard, she establishes and continues working alliances between these two groups. She also acts as a link between the twenty School-to-Work Coordinators who are located in thirteen schools in Jackson (served by the JCISD), and seven schools in Hillsdale (served by the HCISD), and the central STW partnership.

The Outreach Projects Coordinator provides resources, support, and information about gender equity, career planning, and career awareness for educators and students throughout the school districts. Much of her work involves disseminating information and training surrounding the Educational Development Plan (EDP³).

Staff of the Jackson Area Career Center also play an active role in supporting the career development of students in this STW partnership. The Jackson Area Career Center offers....

...A full range of occupational education programs in twelve career cluster areas. The Career Center houses some of the most advanced laboratories in the Jackson and Hillsdale region, and also provides a wide range of comprehensive support services. High school students and adults who have not yet completed high school requirements can attend at no cost. Occupational education programs are an

important part of STW; because they certify skills achieved and provide graduates with evidence which can be used in attaining employment as well as upgrading work skills in their present jobs.

This center and the work of its staff are integral pieces of this partnership.

Jackson Community College (JCC), through collaborative efforts with the Jackson Area Career Center and Jackson-Hillsdale STW, provides a powerful means for developing seamless career preparation. The college offers articulated credit for certain courses taken at the Career Center, allowing the student to save time and money, and reduce repetitive training. They also offer dual enrollment and special admission to students. The EDP process is continued at JCC through the Employment/Educational Development Plan (E/EDP). The expansion and implementation of the Jackson-Hillsdale STW system model depends upon the continuation of School-to-Work activities at the community college level.

THE NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The breadth and novelty of this comprehensive STW program requires educators to take on many roles above and beyond the “typical” teaching responsibilities. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act was only recently signed into law (May, 1994). Accordingly, experienced educators may lack the knowledge about this initiative, which was absent from their previous professional preparation. Administrators in this partnership rely on professional development to help provide the information necessary for educators to implement the program as it has been designed. Unfortunately, teachers have a hard time connecting real-world challenges of teaching with the “stand and deliver” style of professional development so often employed. To address these needs, the Jackson-Hillsdale STW Partnership created a variety of “non-traditional” professional development opportunities for educators.

Administrators recognize the competing forces and challenges teachers face. One administrator noted that “Teachers need to be trained in how to meet the benchmarks established by the business community while still maintaining their curriculum.” Educators agree with this analysis, yet fear being absent from their classrooms when off-campus professional development opportunities arise. For example, a missed day requires a substitute and can cause the teacher to fall behind in his or her curriculum. Another teacher cited the fears she confronted when given the opportunity to work in a business as an “extern.” She described the experience:

For years (I had) asked business people and manufacturers to come in and speak to kids at career fairs and in our classrooms. And then all of a sudden I had the opportunity to go out to do an externship. It was so frightening for me that morning . . . what am I going to wear, where am I going to eat lunch? . . . I approached my externship from a human relations slant . . . and I would take that back to the kids . . . how they might feel as a new employee and how they should prepare themselves.

Despite these challenges, the Jackson-Hillsdale STW Partnership attempts to address these concerns by offering a variety of opportunities, each requiring different levels of commitment. In the following sections, three partnership sites are highlighted—each offering meaningful professional development in support of STW.

SPRING ARBOR COLLEGE BUSINESS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Working in cooperation, the Greater Jackson Chamber of Commerce and Spring Arbor College (SAC) established the Business Fellowship Program⁴ to encourage educators and corporate individuals to participate in meaningful collaborative workplace experiences. Corporate and educational participation is facilitated by the director of the Business Fellowship at SAC through building-level presentations the

distributing brochures throughout Jackson county. Educational applicants are interviewed by the program director and a panel of business members, in an effort to match them with corporate sponsors based on predetermined points of convergence. Since the program's inception in 1991, fifty-three educators have participated. SAC has recently been contacted by the Hillsdale Industry Development Commission requesting the expansion of the Business Fellowship Program into Hillsdale County. A separate but identical program is being pursued for educators and businesses in the Hillsdale area.

The Business Fellowship Program is based on a six-week summer experience. Educators spend thirty-six hours a week on the job making observations and working on activities that apply concepts learned through their work-site experience. In discussing the value of having business fellows participating in work-site related activities, a local manufacturer recalled:

(The fellow). . . came up with a program that we're still using today. There are lots of things that teachers can do to help business. It is beneficial to the teachers' morale if you can get them out and show them that they are worth something, besides being a teacher.

Four additional hours each week are spent on the Spring Arbor College campus discussing the implications of their experiences and their application to the classroom. A participating high school math teacher, addressing the application of her experience, stated, "it has increased my own ability to make math relevant to my students." Time and again the educators used surveys to document their elevated awareness of the role teamwork plays in today's workforce. For example, a Summer 1996 participant wrote:

I saw better than ever how much teamwork does affect the workplace. As teachers we are often isolated and do our own thing — we don't always use teamwork with our colleagues on a daily basis.

This weekly collaboration is seen as an integral part. For their endeavors, participants may elect to earn two graduate credits from SAC. Two of the seven participants in the 1996 program elected this option. The participating fellow is responsible for covering the current fee of \$190 per credit hour. The documentation necessary to obtain credit include a written reflective paper on the summer fellowship, unit or lesson plans integrating the academic content with practical applications learned during the fellowship, and a portfolio documenting how the fellowship experience demonstrates attainment of employability skills. An additional graduate credit may be obtained by completing additional projects related to curricular integration of the business fellowship.

Members of the Greater Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce strongly support this professional development program for educators. Corporate sponsors provide \$3000 per educator annually for participation in this program. A participating business leader justified his firm's participation by stating, "It's a cost associated with doing business." He went on to say that educators who participate in experiences such as these "have their eyes opened to what goes on in the real world and how business works and how people operate." The corporate funds are collected by the program director at SAC who distributes \$2000 to the educator as a stipend and retains the remainder for SAC administrative costs. It was apparent when meeting with two of the local business leaders involved with this program that they value this experience, and that the benefits were mutual:

Both groups need to understand each other's point of view and then develop an action plan so that tomorrow's kids will have a better ethic, better understanding, and be ready to go out in the workforce. It's pretty shocking to find out they (educators) have no idea of how a business is run, . . . one of the steps forward in education is to get teachers more acclimated to the business world.

That's what we have to spend more time on in school, teaching these kids about the practical side of what life is all about.

Pre- and post-surveys are conducted with participants to assess their attitude toward and knowledge of the employability skills necessary for students to succeed in the workplace. These surveys provide insight into how a participant's attitude and knowledge has changed through participating in the Business Fellowship Program. Prior surveys have revealed that this collaborative experience leads educators and businesses to obtain a better understanding of the role each plays in educating the workforce. The professional development integrated within this program assists educators in their ability to see the connection between the world of work and the education that occurs in the classroom. Although it is still experiencing growing pains, the Business Fellowship Program at Spring Arbor College is providing outcomes and pedagogical shifts which promote the guiding principles of School-to-Work.

WESTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Western School District is a progressive school district located eight miles west of Jackson just off I-94. This district is composed of approximately 2,500 students in three elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and an alternative/adult education program. The many activities and programs this district offers have been strongly supported by the local community. Recently, a major bond issue was passed to further promote technology within the district, as well as to add additional classrooms and media centers.

TEACHER EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Over the past four years more than fifty-five teachers have participated in a voluntary one-day Teacher Externship Program which is open to 4th-12th grade educators and student teachers throughout the Western School District. It is an opportunity for educators to participate in work-based experiences which demonstrate how business and industry are

operating in today's global environment. Educators who complete these externships return to the classroom and share with students their observations and greater understanding of the subject matter's application of to the world of work. Teachers value this experience, as one participant stated:

It is very interesting for me to get out in the community and see what actually is going on in those places . . . I just think it's a good experience for any teacher because it really keeps the connection [between] what you're doing and what you're trying to train the kids for.

The building principal, who strongly promotes the externship, shared the following about a recent participant:

(She) had a practical application for what she was teaching academically; she had never seen that connection before. Everything was curriculum and textbook oriented. She saw that what she was teaching people were really using in the real world. There was a direct application — she connected.

The teacher externship has provided educators with a professional development opportunity which allows them to bring practical applications of real life experiences into the classroom.

Many program-specific business-education partnerships have developed from the collaboration promoted by the Teacher Externship Program. An elementary externship participant recalled how one such partnership developed:

I visited a local manufacturer and videotaped my experience. Later I showed the tapes to my 4th grade class and they were very inquisitive about the kind of manufacturing production they saw. I was unable to answer all of their questions so I invited the president of the company to come and view the tape with my 4th grade class, and he showed up. After the initial visit to the classroom, he returned a second time to discuss how he got

started in manufacturing, his interests, and how he started his business. The students were impressed by his talk; they drew pictures of a variety of different machines and sent them to him. The president was so impressed with the drawings that he made copies of them and took them to an engineer and showed them around. The engineer asked, "Who made these?" The manufacturer replied, "a class of nine year olds." "Maybe we ought to do something with kids that are a little younger. You don't have to wait until they are in high school," stated the engineer. From then on every few weeks the manufacturer brought something in from his place of business for the class to work on. Occasionally this included bringing in other employees to talk with the class about what they did in the plant. On one occasion, he spent time teaching the class about the kinds of quality controls found in his plant and then he said afterward, "you know all of these kids that have learned to do this could come into my shop and work." The kids were thrilled to know this.

This example demonstrates how an area employer has begun preparing the future workforce by providing practical experiences for teachers and students. Businesses have the ability to impact a significant number of students through the teacher's externship experience.

The Partnership in Education is a local non-profit organization composed of school, labor, and community representatives which oversees partnership activities for K-12 students and staff in the Western School District. Educators interested in participating in the Teacher Externship Program contact a building-level coordinator, who makes all of the arrangements in cooperation with the partnership staff. The participating educator is required to make a classroom presentation applying the subject matter to the business. The partnership staff uses a locally developed instrument with both the participating business and the educator to evaluate the extern experience.

STUDENT CAREER AWARENESS

A natural extension of the teacher externships are student programs within the district, which provide opportunities for students to participate in career awareness activities. Sixth-grade students' one-day job shadowing experience helps them consider future careers. In 1996 this program included over two hundred students and fifty-eight businesses. In the seventh grade all students participate in a technology job shadowing experience, which in 1996 included 160 students and 27 businesses. During the summer between their seventh and eighth grade years, students have the opportunity to participate in Success Camp. The camp allows students to "see real people and real jobs" in the various EDP career clusters. This past summer approximately forty students participated in Success Camp, with pre-service teachers from Spring Arbor college serving as counselors. The participants spend a week touring and learning about careers associated with various business and industry sites throughout Jackson and Hillsdale counties. The variety of career awareness activities provides a strong foundation for 8th grade students prior to their participation in the three-week EDP class.

Local evaluation of these programs suggest outcomes which include an enriched curricular presentation, increased student motivation to stay in school, and a sense of teamwork and mutual achievement between educators. In addition, the Teacher Externship Program was recognized as a 1996 Exemplary Program by the Michigan Education Association as part of their "Showcasing Public School Success" project.⁵ The professional development which occurs through the Teacher Externship Program, in connection with the various career awareness activities for students, provides a promising model for implementing the guiding principles of School-to-Work.

VANDERCOOK LAKE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Vandercook Lake School District consists of five square miles with a student population of about 1,100. The students are serviced in three buildings, housing

grades K-2, 3-6, and 7-12. Residents of this district are primarily employed outside the community in manufacturing settings.

INTEGRATION

Vandercook Lake was one of the pioneers in the Jackson-Hillsdale STW Partnership. Their efforts stem from involvement in the Coalition of Essential Schools⁶ initiative and the Tech Prep initiative, which later evolved into Career Prep Throughout Jackson County. A member of the high school Career Prep team explains,

Career Prep is really a partnership that was developed in our community between businesses and schools. . . it was an effort that was designed to start us networking together rather than in isolated efforts.

These efforts have provided the foundation for a variety of activities which integrate many of the emerging pedagogical trends associated with STW. Under the guidance of the Jackson County Career Prep Team two specific components aimed at increasing students' technical and occupational literacy without remediation were developed. The first component focused on guidance, and the second one focused on curriculum.

The emphasis placed on the guidance component is evident in the variety of experiences to which students are exposed. At the elementary level teachers are supported by programs sponsored by the JCISD which include the Elementary Level Career Awareness Curriculum⁷ and the EDP process. At the secondary level, students may participate in career awareness activities through job shadowing, service learning, the Community-As-School Program⁸, or enrolling in programs at the Jackson Area Career Center. "The guidance component is so important to us . . . perhaps it's even more important than the curriculum," was a statement made by a Career Prep team member and supported by others.

The curricular component has impacted the entire

staff. Infusing applied academics into existing math, language arts, and economics curriculum has provided professional development opportunities in curriculum and instruction. In addition to the applied curriculum the entire 7-12 staff was trained to use Analyze and Apply⁹ materials. As described by an educator, teachers initially felt threatened by the introduction of these materials:

The mindset was that this was a curriculum that we were going to use. I think the training was helpful in that it showed that it is not a curriculum, it's not to be used as a curriculum. It's a supplement to what we are currently doing.

After the training on these materials was completed, one person noted:

More of our teachers are using projects. They may not find them exactly in those books but they are developing their own units and projects similar to what you find in the Analyze and Apply materials. The training was very helpful in that way.

Using project-based integrated projects has created excitement throughout the district:

The teachers were excited about it, the students were excited about it . . . attendance is 100% when you're doing this. Some of the kids who are just terrible, they're there . . . they are there every day.

In addition to the areas mentioned previously, integrated project-based activities are also used in the student companies project and the reality store.

COMMON PLANNING

Many of the activities stemming from the Career Prep guidance and curriculum components take time, training, and planning to implement. During the past three years, these activities' development has been facilitated by weekly district-wide common planning time. Every Wednesday morning educators throughout the district come together either as a

building or as an entire district to address planning needs. During this two-hour block of time, the staff participates in a variety of professional development activities. In the past year these activities have included necessary training with curricular materials, touring local business and industry sites, and inviting individuals to address the challenges of changing to block scheduling. The high school principal believes that:

We would never be where we're at without (common planning) . . . I would argue to the hilt it's been the biggest reason why we've been able to get things done around here. . . the morale has been built among our staff members through the common planning time.

The school board's support was instrumental in overcoming some barriers to implementing common planning time. This practice has proven advantageous to the Career Prep initiative, and various additional outcomes have been documented. One high school educator recalled how this time has facilitated an increase in the amount of instructional time:

When you figure out that the teachers in the middle and elementary schools are talking, and they know where the kids are coming from. . . those kids are going to be on-task more and the teachers are not going to have to back up and reassess the kids every year.

Also, common planning has provided educators with a sense of continuity. One teacher noted, "It's like an inservice every week . . . we're able to go back and just finish what we're working on and have some sort of a continuous process." In the beginning, several of the teachers were skeptical of the value of this decision. However, after the first year of inservice the principal recalled how one of the skeptics stood up in front of the group and said, "this experience has changed my whole life and my attitude about my career."

The outcomes associated with the efforts in Vandercook Lake have been attributed to the district's vision and willingness to change. A Career Prep team member believes it is because...

...The administration and central office encourage us to take risks, try things, and say 'we support you. If it doesn't work adjust it, do whatever it takes. It's not like if you step out of line we're going to smack you back in line.' That atmosphere has allowed us to grow professionally.

The willingness to change and the strong sense of community this district has created through its efforts with Career Prep and common planning have provided opportunities for professional development and student outcomes which truly promote the School-to-Work philosophy.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Jackson-Hillsdale School-to-Work partnership continues to support local district coordinators and the expansion of local school district's efforts with STW. Many districts are working collaboratively on curriculum and other STW projects. They are continually building new partnerships with business and industry, as well as with Lenawee County STW efforts. A recent staff enrichment day implemented in the Jonesville Community Schools in Hillsdale County exemplifies the strengths of this partnership. The entire K-12 teaching staff, counselors, and administrators chose from 140 sites to participate in a one-day job shadowing activity. This pilot activity meets one local goal for professional development activities. The partnership is also working with other STW partnerships and the Michigan STW office to develop system measurements. In the words of a STW coordinator, "We see professional development for teachers as a 'must' in educational reform."

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ENDNOTES

- [1] The site visit was complete before Lenawee Intermediate School District was an active participant in this partnership. For purposes of this case study, only Jackson and Hillsdale will be described.
- [2] Jackson-Hillsdale School-to-Work Partnership. (1996). A Comprehensive System. School-to-Work: Linking Business and Education in Jackson and Hillsdale Counties [Brochure]. Jackson, Hillsdale, MI: Author.
- [3] The Educational Development Plan (EDP) is the cornerstone of the School-to-Work initiative in Jackson-Hillsdale Counties. Every eighth grade student completes an EDP after receiving approximately 30 hours of classroom training on career awareness, planning, decision-making, and testing on aptitude and interests. This written plan sets forth the student's career goals, identifies ways of attaining those goals and documents the education, skills, and experience attained in line with those goals. Each year students are required to revisit their EDP reaffirming or changing their choices. This instrument has been designed to encourage students to use their high school years most effectively by facilitating course selection based on career interest. The EDP serves as the center piece of the student portfolio which is an authentic assessment of student achievement and employability skills. Jackson-Hillsdale School-to-Work Partnership. (1993). Student Employability Skills Portfolio: Teacher Training Module. Jackson, Hillsdale, MI: Author.
- [4] Spring Arbor College. (1996). Business Fellowship Program Guidelines [Brochure]. Spring Arbor, MI: Author.
- [5] Michigan Education Association. (1996). Showcasing Public School Success [Brochure]. Lansing, MI: Author. Norton, K. (1996, November). A School-to-Work Process...at Work! Paper presented at the Annual Statewide Conference, Michigan.
- [6] Michigan's regional center for the Coalition of Essential Schools (MCES) is based in Jackson, and provides a local resource for professional development. Vandercook Lake School District is one of 5 MCES member institutions located within the Jackson-Hillsdale ISD (3 entire districts and 2 elementary schools). MCES individual membership is made up of Educators, Administrators, Board Members, Business/Community Members, and Parents. The regional center has been in operation for about three years and is funded largely by local foundations. MCES supports participating area schools in the improvement of instruction through the Foxfire Network. Locally the MCES provides support and professional development through their close consultation between an MCES coach and the Critical Friends Group at the school. In addition, MCES Critical Friends Dinners are held quarterly where participants from across the region gather together informally and address the significant challenges to reform in education.
- Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools. (1996). Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools [Brochure]. Jackson, MI: Author.
- [7] Elementary Level Career Awareness Curriculum: "Job Jabber" is a four unit action learning curriculum which teaches students in grades 2-6 about jobs. The curriculum focuses on activities which allow elementary students to realize the connection between their school subjects and

jobs. The “Job Jabber” units allow students to practice a variety of “life skills” including communication, team work, problem solving, and decision making. In each unit of this activity based curriculum students apply the knowledge they have obtained in all of their subjects. Well developed step-by-step teachers guides allow teachers to proceed through the content of this career awareness curriculum. This curriculum meets a number of the state of Michigan mandated objectives in core curricular areas. Jackson-Hillsdale School-to-Work Partnership. (1996). Job Jabber Career Curriculum Units and Video Packages: An Overview. [Brochure]. Jackson, MI: Author.

[8] Community-As-School is an individualized internship program open to seniors who would like to explore their career interest at an in-depth level. Students are placed at learning sites within the community and a Learning Experiences Activity Packet (LEAP) is developed. The goal of this program is to provide students high school credit for a work-based experience with professionals in their chosen field on a daily basis, thereby gaining career information, skills, and knowledge. Vandercook Lake High School. (1996). Vandercook Lake Community-As-School Program: Make the Connection. [Brochure]. Jackson, MI: Author.

[9] Analyze and Apply is a set of resource materials which provides teachers with workplace situations that integrate problem solving and real world examples. These project-based grade appropriate activities provide students with an approach to problem solving and an attitude toward learning that will lead to an advantage in the workplace. Analyze & Apply: 230 Clarendon Road, Suite 304, E. Lansing, Michigan, 48823-2617.