

Ford Partnership for Advanced Studies (Ford PAS)

By Cheryl Carrier

Using project-based learning strategies, the Ford PAS program is helping students gain knowledge about real-life business issues.



The members of a local rock band decide to quit their day jobs and devote their attention full time to their music careers. They hire you as their business manager, and you need to do market research, analyze the results and give advice. How much money do they need to cover expenses and earn a living?

This is a Ford Partnership for Advanced Studies (Ford PAS) lesson being taught at the “Met School” (Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center) in Providence, R.I. Ford PAS is an educational program that combines college-prep academics with the critical 21st century skills students will need to succeed in college and in the workplace.

Created by Ford Motor Company Fund in collaboration with Education Development Center (EDC), Inc., and launched in 2004, Ford PAS is built on the success of the Ford Academy of Manufacturing Sciences, a national model school-to-work program developed by Ford in 1990.

Ford PAS uses project-based learning strategies and student-created projects that allow young people to gain knowledge about real-life business issues such as global economics, engineering, design, finance and corporate citizenship. At the same time, students gain key critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork and communication skills, as well as learning math, science, social studies and English language arts in an interdisciplinary fashion.

“We applaud Ford’s commitment to seeing that this quality program gets out there, gets used, and gets the support it needs to grow and be adapted locally to succeed,” says Ilene Kantrov, director of EDC’s Center for Educational Resources and Outreach.

Building Connections

The fast-moving knowledge economy of the 21st century requires a radical rethinking of the high school experience. New, more relevant models of teaching and learning are no longer a luxury, but a necessity. High schools must reach out to the higher education and business community in new and innovative ways in order to ensure what is being learned in the classroom is relevant to the new demands of college and the workplace.

Ford PAS is designed to meet these demands and link the local community to the classroom. With a curriculum that bridges high school, college and careers, Ford PAS provides high school students



Through teamwork and independent research, students apply the lessons to their own dream businesses.

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Real-world work and the Ford PAS curriculum get high school students pointed toward college.

with high-quality interdisciplinary learning experiences that challenge them academically. The Ford PAS curriculum focuses on professional careers in business, engineering and technology. More than simply encouraging partnerships with local businesses and higher education, the Ford PAS program generates interest and excitement among students and enables them to have real-world experiences that clarify their vision for the future.

“Ford PAS helps students develop academic knowledge and practical skills that allow them to enter college and the workforce with confidence and competence,” says Jim Padilla, president and chief operating officer of Ford Motor Company. “We’re optimistic that Ford PAS graduates will be among the leaders of the next generation of science, engineering and business professionals.”

One School’s Experience

The Met School sees Ford PAS “as a way to take projects to the next level—as an alternative to Advanced Placement classes,” says teacher Joslyn Homberg.

The MET is a “Big Picture School” funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, focusing on “early college” achievement. Learning through intern-

ships is a key requirement of the Met program, and Ford PAS is the perfect instructional companion to these work experiences.

As Homberg explains, “An internship connects the classroom to life. Real-world work and the Ford PAS curriculum point young people toward college.”

Students use the Ford PAS Web site, which provides spreadsheets, links to Web resources, and extension activities. The Ford PAS curriculum materials can be downloaded for free or purchased as bound copies. Teacher training, online student and teacher centers, guest speakers, field trips and business mentors are also a part of the Ford PAS program.

The Met’s Ford PAS classes are taught at the neighboring Community College of Rhode Island. High school students have the opportunity to both experience the college setting and receive college credit.

Sing-Yi Cheng, a Met teacher, says students “don’t just receive credit for the course, they also gain experience and familiarity with the college system and how to navigate it. They become familiar with college-level expectations.”

An important aspect of the Ford PAS experience is the extension of learning

beyond the classroom. Partnerships with local businesses and higher education institutions allow community partners to take an active role in the learning process. Each Ford PAS high school or regional partner forms an active Business/Education Advisory Council, which supports the program in a variety of ways, such as providing career mentoring and job-shadowing opportunities for both students and teachers; hosting field trips; critiquing resumes and conducting mock interviews; offering guest speakers and tutors; making available internships or volunteer service experiences; assisting with fund raising; donating supplies and equipment; and raising funds for scholarships and classroom grants.

The Ford PAS program provides a valuable link between the classroom and the broader community by engaging the community as a partner, rather than a bystander, in practical learning experiences for young people. ■

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