

UTAH DELIVERS OPPORTUNITIES FOR



By Kristine Dobson and Shannon Fischio

Career and technical education in Utah is working to meet the career exploration needs of the state's citizens.

Providing information and resources to support career exploration is key to the mission of career and technical education (CTE) in Utah. Career exploration is considered to be a critical step in the career decision-making process.

In fact, that career decision-making process might more accurately be envisioned as a cycle, in which people are engaged time after time over the course of their lives.

The career exploration phase of the cycle looks a little different for people at different stages of life, and Utah CTE has responded in a variety of ways, working with various partners to meet the career exploration needs of Utah citizens. To follow are some sample career exploration opportunities available to students and adults in Utah.

Work-based Learning

Students can see how classroom instruction connects to the world of work and future career opportunities through work-based learning (WBL) programs throughout the state of Utah.

During the 1990s, an increased interest in using the community effectively—both in and as an extension of the

classroom—grew largely out of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act. As we involve the community in the learning process, students recognize that what they are learning has real-life application. Work-based learning answers the nagging questions, “Why do I need to learn this?” and, “When am I ever going to use this?”

With the broad range of occupational choices available today, CTE is dedicated to exposing students to career options suited to their interests and abilities. Work-based learning provides students firsthand information, which helps them make better-informed career decisions and maximizes the options available at the secondary and postsecondary levels.

Personnel and sustainable resources are two ways in which our work-based learning program in Utah continues to grow. In 1999, the Utah State Legislature provided an ongoing allocation for work-based learning coordination—school-based personnel.

The work-based learning coordinator is the vital link in providing students the opportunity to participate in quality educational experiences that enhance learning and personal and career development. Serving as a single point of con-



In Utah, students have the opportunity to participate in an internship related to his or her career goals. Corey Boyle was able to intern with South Davis Metro Fire Department.

tact between the schools and the business community, WBL coordinators organize and manage the logistics of providing work-based learning experiences for students, including (but not limited to): job shadows, field studies, internships, career fairs, guest speakers and apprenticeships. Additionally, they provide training to employers on educational policy, safety and liability issues, and keep business partners from becoming overwhelmed with individual demands on resources. Thousands of business partners now participate more fully in the educational process, many because of their involvement with work-based learning.

One example of a sustainable resource developed under the direction of WBL and CTE is Utah's Core Career Connections. This project was established in 1998 during the five-year school-to-work effort funded by Congress through the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor.

Utah's Core Career Connections is a collection of instructional activities for grades K–6 and 7–8 that was designed by Utah teachers and business partners. There are instructional activities for each grade level that align directly with the Utah State Core Curriculum, adding world-of-work relevancy for students. This instructional resource provides a framework for teachers to integrate career awareness and exploration in the elementary and middle-level grades.

The activities encourage academic rigor while sustaining community partnerships within the classroom. Through work-based learning, student learning becomes a partnership between the students, parents, educators, employers and the community at large.

Technology, Life and Careers

Technology, Life and Careers (TLC) is Utah's introductory level Career and Technical Education Core Curriculum requirement for middle/junior high school. This award-winning,

activity-centered curriculum exposes students to careers in agriculture, business, career development and guidance, health care careers, family and consumer sciences, marketing, personal finance, and technology and engineering education.

Career exploration is at the heart of TLC. Objectives of this exploration include:

- exploring the nature of work and the changing world of work;
- exploring nontraditional as well as traditional roles;
- experiencing broad exposure to technologies and processes found in the workplace; and
- examining high-growth and emerging occupations.

A new Web-based tool that supports career exploration for TLC students (and others at the middle/junior high level) has been made available just this year. Choices Explorer is specifically recommended as a tool in teaching four of the career development lessons in TLC, and has been readily adopted by teachers and counselors as they become familiar with a plethora of career resources organized within the Explorer. Meeting career exploration objectives, and the objectives defined for the self-knowledge and individual planning components of TLC, results in students who have the information they need to make initial plans for further education and careers.

Career Fields

Career fields offer Utah students—especially at the high school level—additional opportunities for career exploration and to connect to CTE programs and postsecondary training. A recent effort to develop a model that integrates the Utah career fields, CTE areas of study, pathways and CTE supporting programs (*e.g.*, tech prep and skill certificate programs) resulted in a high-quality brochure that helps educators and students better visualize the connections among the various elements related to career fields.

For students, the key connection is between their own career personality types and “matching” Utah career fields. Helping students to better focus their exploration using career fields is very valuable at this stage, as students are making plans that should include additional training and education beyond high school.

Career Information Delivery System

According to the Utah Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, Utah has the nation's fifth highest rate of Internet usage (63 percent of Utah households are online). The state has worked enthusiastically to bring information and government resources to citizens via the Internet.



These students from Riverton High School were among the nearly 6,000 students who participated in Construction Career Days this fall in Salt Lake City. This event is just one career exploration event happening in the state.

Working under the umbrella of the Workforce Education Economic Development Alliance (WEEDA), a small sub-group was formed about two years ago specifically to design a careers portal Web site that would better assure that all citizens in Utah had easy access to state-based career information resources, including the Choices Planner, our state's Career Information Delivery System (CIDS). The work of this group is reflected in www.careers.utah.gov, a site that continues to be maintained and enhanced through the efforts of both the working group and WEEDA.

The homepage offers visitors three main starting options: "Investigate Careers," "Explore Education and Training," or "Find a Job." A "Hot Jobs in Utah" box grabs visitors' attention by rotating profile information for high-demand, well-paying jobs. Here users find real-time information on job requirements, including education, skills in demand, wages and trends, and current openings. Rounding out the content of the homepage, is a footer common to all pages within the portal site offering quick links to a glossary, resources, tips for parents, FAQs, partner information and feedback.

The Utah Career Resource Network (UCRN) picked up the responsibility of coordinating the CIDS when America's Career Resource Network came into being under Section 118 of the Carl D. Perkins Act approximately six years ago. The State Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (SOICC) had previously laid the groundwork as it conducted an in-depth evaluation of available systems and subsequently identified the Choices program as the best option to meet the state's needs.

In conducting its review, the SOICC used an evaluation tool based on the standards defined for comprehensive systems by the Association for Computer-based Systems of Career Information (ACSCI). Choices was one of just a few systems available that could meet the comprehensive ACSCI

standards. In addition, the publisher (now Bridges Transition Company) effectively communicated that it envisioned a public-private partnership that would result in the delivery of high-quality career information at a very reasonable cost.

This public-private partnership continues to this day and enables Utah to offer an exceptional CIDS at a most reasonable cost, both in terms of dollars and personnel, shared by the publisher and partners from public education, the Department of Workforce Services, higher education and the Office of Rehabilitation.

From the beginning, Choices was viewed by most group members as a cornerstone of the careers portal site. The comprehensive nature of the Choices program was evident, and the group was anxious to take full advantage of the rich content already available. In addition, there were some state-specific Web sites that had been developed to deliver content to selected populations or groups with specific needs or interests. Group members' knowledge of such Web-based content was invaluable as the site design evolved under the direction of Utah Interactive, a company responsible for many of the sites identified under the www.utah.gov banner. ■

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

You may be interested in visiting the CTE Web site, www.utahcte.org, for additional information about these and other efforts being made to increase career exploration options for Utah students. Also, Utah's CTE educators would be happy to share their successes (and maybe some of the challenges) of designing programs, working with partners, and enlisting state legislative support.



You can contact: Utah state director of career and technical education Mary Shumway at mary.shumway@schools.utah.gov, coordinator of student services and comprehensive guidance programs Dawn Kay at dawn.kay@schools.utah.gov, coordinator of technology, life and careers Nadine Bunnell at Nadine.bunnell@schools.utah.gov, or the authors of this article, Kristine Dobson and Shannon Fischio.