

The Benefits of a Comprehensive K-12 Career Development System

IN LICKING COUNTY, OHIO, THE CAREER AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION CENTERS ARE PUTTING THAT QUESTION TO THE TEST.

RIGOR, RELEVANCE AND RELATIONSHIPS—they are the three buzz words in education. Now there's a fourth: Resources. And the Career and Technology Education Centers (C-TEC) of Licking County in Newark, Ohio, are among the institutions responsible for creating that fourth "R".

The concept isn't that career technical education is what's found in our campus building at 150 Price Road, in Newark, Ohio. It's much more than this building for 11th and 12th graders wanting to focus on their futures. It is a K-12 system rich with resources and opportunities.

Serving as a full-scale resource for its 10 associate school districts—that is the goal behind the development and implementation of C-TEC's career development system, which extends throughout the K-12 system, from local school districts through the career center.

What exactly does that mean? What's relevant is that C-TEC is working closely with all schools in Licking County to ensure that the academic standards of schools align with career development standards. This means teachers deliver a single lesson plan that addresses career topics, as well as the required academic standards. The real relevance lies in the fact that students now are exposed to career awareness and exploration as early as kindergarten.

"Licking County's career development system serves as a model so that other schools easily could adopt the plan and implement it," says Julie Novel, C-TEC's satellite center director. "Schools don't have to reinvent the wheel. We have developed the format for career-infused academic lesson plans and other career-development materi-

als, and we're in the process of posting the materials to our Web site so teachers can easily get to them."

Starting from Scratch

The history behind the development of C-TEC's district-wide career development plan is important, because an instrumental part of the process has to do with one of the four Rs: Relationships.

C-TEC began with a summer workshop for district high school teachers and counselors from 11 area high schools, plus C-TEC's secondary center staff. The teachers and counselors agreed that all high school students should have a career focus, regardless of whether they planned to attend postsecondary education. The group adopted career clusters and began organizing high school course offerings catalogs around clusters and pathways.

It wasn't long before they recognized that if the high schools adopted the career pathways model, that it made sense for elementary schools and middle schools to do so as well.

"We believe that the entire K-12 system should prepare students for their eventual roles in the workplace," says Carolyn Wells, a teacher at Lakewood High School, one of the schools that has implemented the career development system. "It just didn't make sense for career development to start in high school."

The following summer, after adopting the high school career clusters, a group of K-8 teachers began to develop career-infused lesson plans based on the academic "content standards," the standards most likely to be tested on Ohio's achievement tests.

Ronald A. Cassidy

is the superintendent of the Career and Technology Education Centers of Licking County, Ohio. He can be contacted at rcassidy@c-tec.edu.

Taking it on the Road

Then, the journey began. C-TEC Career Development Coordinator Beth Bronkar took on the task of working individually with each of the schools to customize and implement the system. She started with one school at a time and is still in the process of working through the 10 school districts.

While every high school has adopted high school career clusters, currently, about four of the 10 school districts have completely implemented the program. These include Licking Valley, Northridge, Lakewood and Newark. These schools have a system of learning activities emphasizing career awareness K–4, career exploration in grades 5–8 and career preparation in nine–12.

Also, these schools have formal activities such as the eighth-grade career experience, freshman career fair and sophomore hands-on days to support students' career development. Real excitement is being generated by the program.

"It wasn't additional work to teach in a career context," says Karen Roby, a teacher at Adams Middle School. "The benefits I see are that students now get rigorous academic content and can apply it to real-world relevance. Who doesn't learn better when it has application and is logical? We're really excited and enthused about the impact so far."

"I'm not aware of another school system in Ohio that has implemented an entire K–12 career development system," says Novel. "Of course, all districts would like to do it. It's often a matter of funding and staffing. We want C-TEC's program to serve as a model that could be easily replicated."

Proof is in the Research

Even though C-TEC is in the beginning stages of implementing its system, there is quantitative evidence the program is making a difference.

In 2006, Lakewood Local Schools utilized the program, while another dis-

trict did not. An experimental research study conducted by The Ohio State University indicated that the use of the career-infused lesson plans resulted in a 15 percent increase in career maturity of the Lakewood students over the control group.

Career maturity was defined by measuring the maturity of attitude and the maturity of competencies.

Consistency is Key

The program also complements C-TEC's initiatives. For instance, at C-TEC, eighth-graders are invited to tour the school and explore some of the options they have been hearing about throughout middle school. C-TEC also sponsors foundation programs in associate schools for ninth and 10th-graders, which offer career exploration and introduction to skill building around a career cluster.

In 10th grade, sophomores have many opportunities to explore careers in depth through attending visitation days, shad-

owing days, open houses and informational nights sponsored by C-TEC.

When students enroll in C-TEC, each student and his/her parent create an Individual Success Plan. This plan picks up where the student left off in 10th grade from the individual academic and career plan. It is focused on every student's needs—from special education services to academic preparation to post-high school career goals.

A Review of the Key Components

It isn't easy to develop a consistent program with 10 different schools, but the keys are open communication and strong partnerships. C-TEC works hard to maintain positive relationships with associate school educators in ways that include monthly superintendent, principal, counselor and teacher meetings, as well as school visits.

Ohio requires all high school students to complete a career passport—a portfolio that documents academic achievement,



▲▲ Teacher School

Students in the Teaching Professions Academy at C-TEC work with young students in the community.



technical skills and other employability skills—as a graduation requirement. The K–12 career development system supports this process as students make the transition from high school to work and college.

“Our partners have told us they believe our career development system benefits students,” says Novel. “Therefore, it isn’t a C-TEC plan. It isn’t viewed as a recruiting tool for the career center. It’s a Licking County career development system. We all buy into it. We all support it. Students benefit from it.”

This is a student-centered program that requires everyone’s buy-in—from the superintendents of our associate schools to the teachers, students and parents. Blending academic progress and career awareness into a seamless process is the goal.

Bronkar, C-TEC’s career development coordinator, witnesses the impact almost daily. She is responsible for working with the teachers and counselors to implement the program.

“Career development provides the Relevance and Rigor already in place in the curriculum,” says Bronkar. “Past and

present Relationships with educators have made the implementation of the system possible.”

In addition to supporting a K–12 career development system for thousands of Licking County students, C-TEC offers 29 career and technical programs at its secondary and satellite centers and maintains

a thriving adult center serving more than 4,000 basic education, workforce development, customized training and continuing education students.

Serving the educational needs of this community is the C-TEC mission. C-TEC as a resource puts yet another “R” into the equation: Results. **T**

Using Career and Academic Standards in the Classroom

Here is an example of how career and academic standards are used in Licking County schools to develop a lesson plan.

Grade 5 Economics

Academic Standards—Two Social Studies and One Language Arts
 Social Studies: problem-solving and decision-making
 Language Arts: writing application

Career Development Lesson Plan:
 economics and employability within the context of problem-solving and decision making

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