



LESSONS LEARNED FROM PREPARING CTE ADMINISTRATORS

By Lois Kappler and Leanne Long

TRAINING NEW CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) ADMINISTRATORS TO BE PREPARED

for their myriad responsibilities and to be effective academic leaders is an overwhelming, but rewarding, job. This is the amazing task that we (the authors) have been given as project managers of the CTE Administrator's Academy. It is a job that is constantly evolving as we strive to meet the needs of new CTE administrators in Mississippi. We have learned a great deal over the last five years, and our excitement grows each year with the progress being made across our state.

Building school leadership continues to be an ongoing hot topic in education. School administrators lead the culture and performance of a school, and the leadership of the principal shapes the perceptions of teachers within the school setting (Karaköse, 2008). The importance of the school leader is only second to the classroom teacher, so the focus on building strong educational leaders has intensified.

Furthermore, "instructional leaders provide focus and direction to curricu-

lum and teaching, establish conditions that support teachers and help children succeed, and inspire others to reach for ambitious goals. Effective instructional leaders understand the difference between leadership and management and find time for both" (Educational Broadcasting Corporation, n.d.). Evolving federal and state accountability standards require CTE centers and programs to produce college- and career-ready students for the 21st century, and the administrator plays a central role in this preparation.

In Mississippi, the Department of Education (MDE) works with the research and curriculum unit (RCU) at Mississippi State University to implement the CTE Administrator's Academy, which recruits and supports new CTE administrators and prepares them to lead a CTE center.

What We Have in Place

The CTE Administrator's Academy has morphed since its inception in 2012. We have learned many lessons since then, namely that administrators need

technical training and direction on handling personnel issues. They also need access to the most current information in the CTE administrator world, and the structure of the academy facilitates this transfer of information by connecting participants to real-time updates and information, as well as familiarizes them with best practice strategies and suggestions on how to comply with these updates.

As project managers, we develop and align the agendas for each day of training, and we support new directors with leadership guidance, teacher training and professional development activities. We have seen how the resources trainees get and the opportunities for professional collaboration have positively impacted their effectiveness and strengthened their leadership skills. Because of the value of the training, a concerted effort is made to fill each day's agenda with timely topics that meet their ongoing needs.

In addition to training and direction, we have found that new administrators

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also need a mentor; as a result, each new administrator is supported by a mentor who meets with each program participant twice during the first year and as needed after that. Don Hardin, a retired CTE director, travels to each center and mentors each new director by offering training on writing reports, program development and other relevant areas. Hardin consistently reports that he is pleased with how the directors are growing in their knowledge and confidence to embrace their new responsibilities.

Preparing CTE Leaders

The academy consists of eight full days of training throughout the school year for the cohort of new or aspiring CTE directors. The first two days are an MDE boot camp held in late July. The boot camp outlines the year ahead; affords participants an opportunity to meet MDE and RCU resource personnel; and provides information and instruction on Perkins law and how it affects their funding, local plan updates and data entry (*i.e.*, how to enter data for budgeting purposes, correct coding for funding, etc.).

In September, two days are devoted to helping the new directors understand leading curriculum, instruction and assessment in CTE. Two days in November are spent discussing how to use data to support college- and career-readiness, and two days in February have an emphasis on building a culture of accountability.

As mentioned previously, one of the goals of the training is to create opportunities for professional collaboration, and we also make time for attendees to hear from those in the field and industry. During

training, participants attend sessions facilitated by guest speakers, successful CTE directors, industry partners and essential MDE/RCU staff members. Afterward, attendees take time to talk together about their impressions of the speakers, training and agenda. They discuss hot topics, as well as share strategies and resources they are using.

What’s more, they depend on each other as sounding boards; between scheduled meetings they call and e-mail each other to get input on various topics. This level of collaboration increases their effectiveness and confidence in their new positions. When queried about the value of the academy experience, Derek Morgan, Wilkinson County CTE director, said, “The interaction and ability to connect with other vocational directors has been an awesome experience. The training is not only team building, but it is also very engaging and relevant.”

Attendee feedback is vital to the success of the training, and it drives any modifications that are made. Therefore, after each training session we survey the attendees about their impressions, questions and needs.

In the last five years, 108 leaders have gone through the training, with 90 percent continuing in the CTE field.

Parting Words

The takeaways from the CTE Administrator’s Academy are consistent with three key training elements that we incorporate into each session: be intentional, be relational and be professional. During training, our top priority is to teach the CTE administrators how to be intention-

al with their actions and words to other educators and industry personnel in their field. This can be accomplished by being visible in their schools and communities and by giving constructive feedback to teachers. Second, the best school environments are based on the great relationships between educators and between educators and their students. Lastly, administrators must consistently model professionalism for their teachers and students. Modeling leadership, effective communication and soft skills is critical for new administrators so that they are viewed and respected as the academic leaders on their campuses.

As we look ahead to train new CTE directors, the academy will continue to fulfill its mission to equip new directors with the resources, direction and support they need to facilitate their success. **Tech**

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