



# Promising Business Education Practice

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Business Education Partnerships, Lawrence and Mercer Counties

## ***AT A GLANCE***

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In an ongoing effort to increase alignment between its career and technical education programs and the stated needs of regional employers, Mercer County Career Center (MCCC) staff leveraged funds obtained through the West Central Workforce Development Board. Resources<sup>1</sup>, including those from a Business Education Partnership (BEP) grant awarded by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, have expanded students' career exploration and work-based learning experiences, particularly in industries showing regional growth.

## ***RESULTS/IMPACT***

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The 2015 BEP grant utilized by the Mercer County Career Center and Lawrence County School to Work agency resulted in the following accomplishments during the 2015-2016 school year;

### **National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) Certifications**

Thirty students earned 85 NIMS certifications, a 100 percent increase over the previous school year.

### **Cooperative Education Program**

Nine additional students participated in paid work-based learning opportunities with local employers.

### **Worldwide Interactive Network Curriculum**

Fifty students enrolled in the Worldwide Interactive Network (WIN) to prepare for three WorkKeys® assessments: Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information.

### **WorkKeys® Assessments**

Thirty-four students completed the WorkKeys® assessments and obtained the following National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) levels: Gold (7), Silver (24), and Bronze (3).

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<sup>1</sup> Other grants utilized for these initiatives include those from the U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Innovation Funds, the Walmart Foundation, and other regional career and education partnerships.

### **Business and Industry Career Fairs**

More than 1,100 high school sophomores representing all county school districts attended and explored career opportunities available in manufacturing. More than 23 organizations participated as exhibitors. Lawrence County also hosted a business and industry career fair attracting 1,015 high school sophomores.

### **Health Career Fairs**

A health career fair was held in each county and attracted a total of 1,990 students.

### **Educator Boot Camp**

Twenty-three principals and counselors visited five industries during this full-day event.

### **Superintendent Employer Visits**

Similar to the Educator Boot Camp, MCCC's 12 sending school superintendents toured a different regional employer every other month to expand their understanding of local manufacturing and the required education, training, skills, and/or credentials sought by employers.

### **Girls Engaging Mentors (GEM)**

Two hundred fifty-four ninth grade girls attended the GEM Affair event where they met in small groups with 25 women working in nontraditional STEM<sup>2</sup> careers.

### **Engineering Day**

Twelve engineers from a local steel manufacturer facilitated a guided tour for 124 junior and senior students, showing them the engineering processes taking place throughout the plant.

### **Activities Supported Through Other Workforce-Education Partnership Funding**

In addition to the Business Education Program grant, other workforce-education partnership funding supported the following activities and accomplishments in recent years through 2016:

#### **Global Career Development Facilitator Credential**

Two MCCC staff members participated in Career Development Facilitator Program training allowing them to apply for the Global Career Development Facilitator credential.

#### **Oh-Penn Pathways to Competitiveness Project / Certified Production Technician (CPT) Credential**

Eight students were placed at work-based learning experiences related to their program of study. Each placement provided 300 hours of paid work.

Nine MCCC teachers and one manufacturing employee became certified instructors of the CPT credential. MCCC anticipates offering a CPT program in the summer of 2017 and during the 2017-2018 school year.

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<sup>2</sup> Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

## ***ORIGIN/IMPLEMENTATION***

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### **National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) Certifications**

Certification testing was offered at MCCC and all expenses were paid through grant funds. In previous years, the NIMS certifications were not offered to students.

### **Cooperative Education Program**

MCCC's cooperative education (co-op) program was expanded, enabling an additional nine students to participate in paid, work-based learning employment with local employers. The BEP funding paid for student wages (payroll taxes and workers' compensation were paid by the employer). MCCC secured the worksites, executed employer agreements, and provided payroll services as an in-kind contribution to the project (estimated to be \$18,176).

### **Worldwide Interactive Network (WIN) Curriculum**

WIN, a service offered through PA CareerLink®, provides basic skills remediation prior to taking the WorkKeys® assessments. MCCC teachers facilitated the WIN curriculum during the regular school day schedule. All students were invited to participate; 56 juniors and 34 seniors did so. A combination of funding over the past several years were utilized to purchase a WIN site license and establish MCCC as a certified WorkKeys® testing center. Currently, three of the nine WIN modules are utilized: Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information.

### **WorkKeys® Assessments**

Previous funding supported the purchase of a three-year license for MCCC to become a certified WorkKeys® testing site so that students could earn the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC). With the creation of a schoolwide Olympic-like event, students have become competitive about obtaining NCRC Gold level, in fact, several paid to take the WorkKeys® assessments again after additional remediation in WIN.

Recognizing the value of stackable credentials, many employers have added the phrase "National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) preferred" to the openings they post on the Job Gateway system.

### **Business and Industry Career Fairs**

Along with sophomores from other area schools, MCCC students attended the 2016 career fair, talking with local employers about the skills and training needed to succeed in various occupations. Two MCCC students also served as technology assistants for the event, operating the interactive Job Jeopardy sessions. The career fair, offered on a school day, was funded through BEP money and took place in a conference room at a hotel. All school districts were invited to bring their sophomore students.

### **Health Career Fairs**

Funded partially through BEP money, each health career fair offered students the opportunity to speak with employers, postsecondary education institutions, and vocational trade schools that offer training programs in the health care field. Twenty-

eight businesses participated as exhibitors. The full-day event was offered on a school day and open to all area eighth grade students.

### **Educator Boot Camp**

Traditionally offered to high school guidance counselors, the Educator Boot Camp was expanded to include Mercer County high school principals in 2015. During this summer event, educators tour regional companies where they learn about career paths, average wages, hiring requirements, and the education and technical skills needed for employment. This event, organized by the Lawrence County School to Work agency, is funded through workforce development contributions to cover the cost of bus transportation, lunch, and coordination. Educators attend a four-hour orientation in June and then have six weeks to complete 32 hours at their assigned company. To conclude the program, a four-hour debriefing session is facilitated during which participants share lesson plans they developed based on their experience. The lessons are presented in classrooms the following school year.

### **Superintendent Employer Visits**

MCCC facilitates a monthly convening of superintendents from its 12 sending school districts to provide career and technical education program updates. On alternating months, MCCC organizes a local business tour in place of the meeting. All associated costs are in-kind contributions by MCCC and the sending school districts.

Bradley Gosser, Executive Director and Vice President of the Greenville Reynolds Development hosted the first tour and stressed that it is important for superintendents to be cognizant of the core skills students need in order to be successful in the manufacturing sector. In addition, Mr. Gosser recommended that all high school seniors are encouraged to register on the PA CareerLink®'s Job Gateway system.

### **Girls Engaging Mentors (GEM)**

A GEM Affair introduced female freshman students to women who work in non-traditional and STEM career paths. In small groups, the girls rotated among several rooms, each room featured mentors representing a different occupational field. Students learned about the mentors' personal career journeys including the postsecondary education and/or training they completed. In this and previous years, mentors have included engineers, a plant manager, quality control technician, biologist, archeologist, environmentalist, architect, draftsman, certified public accountant, military personnel, judge, pharmacist, and various health care professionals.

Lawrence County School to Work agency organized the three-hour event, and BEP funds paid for coordination and facilitation of the event, facility rental, student bussing, and mentor lunches. The GEM Affair took place on a school day.

### **Engineering Day**

Open to high school juniors and seniors interested in learning about careers in engineering, students spent a school day at a local manufacturing company. Twelve of the company's engineers explained the engineering processes involved at each station

within the steel plant as they guided students on tours. The engineers explained their specific type of engineering degree along with their job responsibilities. The day concluded with groups of students presenting an engineering-related topic they selected and researched in advance of the event.

### **Global Career Development Facilitator Credential**

The Career Development Facilitator (CDF) Program is comprised of 120 hours of course work and is based on the National Career Development Association's curriculum. Upon successful completion of the course work, participating MCCC staff members were able to apply for the GCDF (Global Career Development Facilitator) credential and will be better suited to help students make informed decisions regarding career pathways.

### **Oh-Penn Pathways to Competitiveness Project / Certified Production Technician (CPT) Credential**

Students' work-based learning experiences funded through the Oh-Penn Pathways to Competitiveness Project were a collaborative effort between West Central Job Partnership and the Lawrence and Mercer County career centers.

In order to increase the regional capacity for access to industry-recognized credentials through the Oh-Penn Pathways to Competitiveness Project, 11 staff members from MCCC and Lawrence County Career and Technical Center were certified as Manufacturing Skills Standards Council Certified Production Technician Instructors, completing the four modules required to teach the full CPT curriculum. Eight of the 11 were certified in the Green Production Module certifying them to instruct that course as well.

Beginning in the 2017-2018 school year, MCCC students may attain the Certified Production Technician (CPT) credential, which addresses the core technical competencies of higher skilled production workers in all sectors of manufacturing. MSSC awards certificates to students who pass any of the modules: Safety, Quality Practices and Measurement, Manufacturing Processes and Production, Maintenance Awareness, and Green Production. A full CPT Certification is issued to those who pass all four original modules (at this time, Green Production is not a requirement for full CPT certification).

### ***NEXT STEPS/SUSTAINABILITY***

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The West Central Workforce Development Board, MCCC administrators and staff, and other partners continue working to align the needs of employers with education programs and career exploration opportunities. Many employers have learned the value of the various stackable credentials discussed in this report.

It is important to note that the MCCC Director, Rachel Martin, has been a member of the West Central Workforce Development Board and the chairperson of the Youth Committee for many years. She was an active participant in the Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) grant, a regional collaborative initiative and the Oh-Penn Pathways to

Competitiveness grant, which involved two states and three workforce development areas. The WIF grant was funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to build and develop career pathways in manufacturing. Ms. Martin is also involved in the most recent U.S. DOL funded collaboration, the Greater Oh-Penn Apprenticeship Network.

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