

School-to-Work Intermediary Project Snapshot

Intermediary Organization

Maury County Education/Community/Business Partnership

Highlighted Activity

Teacher Think Tank: Bringing together business people and teachers from several local schools to discuss issues of mutual concern

Contact

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Background

In 1996, the Maury County Manufacturing Bureau organized an effort to identify and implement ways to improve the work-related skills of high school graduates. The Maury County Chamber of Commerce responded by hiring an education coordinator to facilitate the initiative, which became the Maury County Education/Community/Business Partnership. In the summer of 1997, the partnership held a retreat to begin a conversation among representatives of previously isolated entities: the community, the school system, and Columbia State Community College.

Since the retreat, the partnership has spawned a host of school-to-career initiatives, including job shadowing, teacher externships, career cluster teams, and the "teacher think tank," an informal series of meetings between representatives of county-area schools and other interested parties. In 1998, the partnership provided professional development activities for 125 teachers and other school staff, and career exploration activities for over 1,000 eighth and ninth graders.

Activity Summary

The teacher think tank project grew out of the retreat held by the Maury County Education/Community/Business Partnership for key stakeholders in the county school system. An *ad hoc* team that formed at the retreat suggested the need for a way for teachers to address issues of concern. This team

surveyed teachers about what they wanted in a partnership, which led to the idea of a “teacher think tank” that could offer teachers a regular, informal meeting with a professional facilitator. Through such a format, teachers from various area schools could compare notes about school-to-career issues, and other issues of mutual concern.

Representatives from 17 schools, six members of the business community, and several librarians and guidance counselors, as well as a professional facilitator, began monthly meetings in 1998. Initially, the group grappled with general problems concerning teacher morale, which led to a decision to focus attention during the first year of meetings on issues of student discipline. As a result, think-tank representatives are proposing to the county school director a new, county-wide procedural and educational plan for handling student discipline matters.

The think-tank group decided to continue its monthly meetings into the 1999-2000 academic year. At upcoming meetings, it will receive reports on Maury County school-to-career initiatives and other topics so that representatives can bring the information back to their individual schools.

Funding and Staffing

The professional facilitators donate their services, and a Tennessee School-to-Work grant pays incidental costs. The Maury County Chamber of Commerce has provided food at the sessions, and the county has provided meeting space. Teachers assume a rotating leadership role.

The Maury Education/Community/Business Partnership has committed to funding substitute teachers for all teacher representatives who take part in the think tank. This will allow teachers to take a full day off from regular teaching duties to attend to think-tank business.

Evidence of Effectiveness

- Through the teacher think tank, the partnership has established a channel for ongoing communication among key stakeholder groups throughout the county. The sessions have proven to be an effective tool that allows educators and school administrators to compare notes, connect with members of the business community, and exchange of information on school-to-career initiatives, as well as other topics.
- The think tank has been driven by teacher concerns, yet it is also a powerful county-wide forum for informing teachers about school-to-career activities, as well as other community and business initiatives, so that the teachers can inform their schools about those activities.

August 9, 1999

Sources of Additional Information

Maury Manufacturing Bureau School-to-Work Committee, "Knowledge, Skills and Programming Opportunity Survey: Report of Findings of Needs Assessment Activities," available from Maury Education/Community/Business Partnership.