

Partners: Melbourne-Palm Bay Area Chamber of Commerce Education Foundation/Melbourne High School

Project Name: Academy of Business and Finance

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The Academy of Business and Finance at Melbourne High School is a three-year academic program, associated with the National Academy Foundation, designed to provide students with the business, financial, leadership, teamwork and technical skills necessary for personal success regardless of whether they chose to go to college or to work upon graduation from high school. The curriculum combines traditional academic requirements with “real world” experience, providing its students with a firm understanding of the skills essential for success. The Academy provides a learning environment that teaches students to think critically, to solve problems creatively, to communicate effectively, and to demonstrate leadership and teamwork skills. The Academy provides integrated curriculum designed to ensure students understand the critical relationship between academic and technical skills. By the time a student graduates from the Academy, they will have had the opportunity to meet and work with a number of different local business and community leaders. Not only will high school graduates have the skills required for immediate success in any business environment, they will also have a thorough understanding of how a business really works.

Core Concepts. Teachers, business leaders, parents and students work together as a team to provide a challenging and exciting program which allows students to immediately apply the skills they learn in school to the “real” world. The Academy provides an environment in which teachers and business leaders work together on a regular basis thereby creating an environment which will foster a better understanding of each other roles, responsibilities, abilities and limitations. It ensures that students understand that success in their chosen field requires both technical skills and academic skills and also understand that they must constantly work on improving these skills if they are to rise to leadership positions in their chosen fields. Instruction demonstrates that the business community plays a critical role in ensuring our schools are providing meaningful, challenging and rewarding academic programs that will excite students, keep them in school and working hard, and ensure that young people joining the work force understand what their employers expect of them.

Success Factors Each member of the team — from teachers, students, parents, schools, elected officials/school board to business partners - brings their unique and valuable expertise to the academy. Major programs include: Business Advisory Board of Brevard County business, education and community leaders; "Leadership Series"- events/activities for students and teachers; school-based learning infused with business/workplace concepts, comprehensive integrated curriculum; Job Readiness Preparation through guest speakers, internships, seminars, and workshops; career shadowing-field trips; six-week paid executive internships; workplace preparation through mock interviews, success skills seminars; sponsorships provided by Chamber members to support academy operation; awards and recognition for teachers; strategic planning facilitation; networking and professional organizations, community service opportunities; university and college connections and partnerships; major events for parents, students and teachers

Benefits. The Academy links youth to the business community through stages of training and job experience, providing them the skills they will need to succeed in the workplace. This reinforces the value and importance of developing attributes such as appearance, attitude, team skills, attendance and reliability that will translate into skills employers are seeking in their workers. Employers will have an opportunity to hire high school students who have made an effort in the classroom to develop personal and academic attributes needed in the workplace. Students possess skills to meet current and future workforce demands. The Academy offers opportunities to train students before they graduate and allows employers to evaluate potential employees in the work environment prior to permanent hiring. Finally, the Academy provides leadership training and ethics for future employees.

Student Success. Courtney Woodling grew up in a family of teachers, and was expecting to become an educator herself, but while in the academy, she discovered a love and talent for public speaking. During her internship at Spherion Staffing, Courtney learned what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur. As a result of her Academy experience, Courtney has started her own consulting firm while attending college at UCF. Courtney helps clients improve their communication skills, and is available to make personal development presentations.

Partners: Universal Orlando/Orange County Public Schools

Project Name: Universal Education Center

Lead Partner: Debra Graves; (407) 622-8240

The Universal Education Center is a school-to-work partnership developed through the joint efforts of Orange County Public Schools and Universal Orlando. Nine years ago, a decision was made to develop a program for at-risk high school students. Through thorough planning and commitments from both private business and public education, Universal Education Center was created to provide an opportunity for at risk students to complete their high school education while learning employment skills on the job. The major goal of the Universal Education Center is to provide a positive academic and work experience for students in order to ensure that they are back on track for receiving their high school diplomas.

Targeting At-Risk Students. Students attend UEC (Universal Education Center) year-round and come to Universal from high schools all over Orange County. School bus transportation is provided. All students fall under the category of at-risk for not graduating from high school. Some students may have problems juggling work with the demands of maintaining a 2.0 GPA for a high school diploma. Other students have made poor choices in their high school experience and need a smaller, more contained setting. In any event, all students come to the Universal Education Center needing a different educational experience while wanting to understand the world of work.

The program is housed on Universal property in two doublewide trailers provided by Universal. UEC staff consists of three classroom teachers and a school secretary. Approximately 40 students attend school half a day and work at Universal Orlando the other half. Students are grouped between morning and afternoon and switch from school or work during their lunch periods. Universal Orlando assures students of a minimum of 15 work hours per week. Students earn three academic credits for on-the-job training. Job supervisors are aware of the goals of the program and work closely with school staff to insure a smooth transition between the classroom and the workplace.

Mentoring is Key. An important aspect of Universal Education Center is mentoring. Once a student enters the program, the student is matched with a mentor who is employed by Universal Orlando. Universal mentors have expressed an interest in helping a young person. Students and their mentors attend special activities throughout the school year. Through mentoring, students receive support and guidance while they are working and attending school.

Since its beginnings in August of 1994, 145 Orange County seniors have received high school diplomas. Approximately 360 students have participated in the program; 20% of these students have been retained as employees at Universal Orlando.

Student Success. Daniel consistently skipped school at his high school and was beginning to become a discipline problem for his parents and school. While at UEC, Daniel received help from an interested supervisor who was able to place him in a job involving electrical repair. He was able to raise his GPA to 2.0 and was able to finally pass the state assessment test. To the joy of his family, he graduated. That was seven years ago and today Daniel is still employed at Universal full time in air conditioner repair. His mother calls the school on a regular basis to thank teachers and Universal for providing the chance that Daniel needed to make major changes in his life. Daniel represents the achievement of the goals that the Universal Education Program was developed to attain.

Partners: Aegis Communications Group, Inc. and Fort Pierce Central High School
Project Name: The Learn and Earn Academy/Performance-Based Diploma Program
Lead Partner: Arthur Dibari, (772)398-2000; dibaria@aegiscomgroup.com

Wanting to increase their presence in the community and with the school system, an idea was proposed to the St. Lucie County School Board by Aegis Communications Group to create a partnership that would establish a satellite school. The Performance-Based Diploma Program (PBDP), designed for alternate approaches in education, began operations in August 1989 through a Private Industry Council grant and a partnership with The St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce. The PBDP design best served the establishment of a satellite school and, after much planning during the summer of 1999, Aegis opened its door to The Learn and Earn Academy on October 4, 1999, becoming the 16th such satellite school established in Florida.

The learning center serves 20 students at a time to provide high school credits *at the job site* through computer-assisted-instruction. Students can progress at their own pace by earning credits through the Fort Pierce Central High School Performance-Based Diploma Program. Students also have a jump start for a college education, by taking dual-enrollment marketing classes on site, provided by a partnership with Indian River Community College.

For the first two years of the program, the Learn and Earn Academy was awarded a Florida Challenge Grant of \$20,000. Aegis contributed \$175,213 the first year. The investment in provides an equipped learning center on site, along with paid internships, mentors, and workplace experience. The second and succeeding years, the financial investment through student paid internships, in-kind value of mentor hours and the hours of those Aegis employees who serve weekly on the Learn and Earn Steering Committee range from \$120,000 -- \$140,000 annually.

The Goals. The program objectives are: 80% of students will stay in school and/or graduate annually; 80% of students will earn a 2.0 GPA by the end of one year in the program; 70% of the students will improve attendance. In 1999, 98% of the students remained in school and/or graduated with over 98% of the students performing at a 2.0 level or higher. In 2000, 87% of the students remained in school or graduated with 87% improving their GPAs to 2.0 or higher. In 2001, 98% remained in school or graduated, with 100% raising their GPAs to 2.0 or higher and in 2002 95% remained in school or graduated, with 100% again improving their GPAs to 2.0 or higher. Improved attendance for this at-risk population is: 1999, 99% improved, 2000, 80% improved, 2001 81% improved, and in 2002 96% improved.

Second Chance. For St. Lucie County Schools and students, this partnership provides an opportunity to *retrieve* students in a unique way: at the job site. The recruiting manager at Aegis investigates the education status of the candidate. If the applicant is not in school and does not have a high school diploma, the recruiting manager gives him an opportunity to consider The Learn and Earn Academy. Many of these second chance student/employees earn a high school diploma through this partnership. For Aegis, this is an upgrading of employees' abilities and a reduction of job turnover.

The 2001-2002 school year featured the highest percentage of graduates from The Learn and Earn Program with an overall GPA OF 3.26, (46%). Many of these graduates will take leadership roles in our community in the future. Current students are serving their community as mentors themselves. Each week, all students work one hour with an elementary student at Village Green Elementary School. In addition, students have offered two *leadership workshops* the past two years based on SCANS Competencies, in collaboration with the St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners. Students, along with school and community partners, (some 15 partners) studied the population growth in St. Lucie County, as well as transportation networks, to make recommendations to develop plans for community development.

Student Success. Christina Benton earned a state honor as the Compact/Challenge Grant Student of the Year. She attended the Florida Business Partners Convention in Orlando and as one of three Florida students to earn this honor in 2001, spoke at the Commissioner of Education Business Recognition Awards. Christina graduated and is now attending Indian River Community College.