

Creating an Emerging Workforce

The benefits of the corporate "adopt-a-school" philosophy

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Could it be that students and corporations are asking for the same thing? Students (our emerging workforce) and corporations (their potential employers) are seeking more practical experience.

According to the Every Child Every Promise* (ECEP) report from America's Promise Alliance, most high school students want more challenging work as well as work that is relevant to potential careers, while employers are looking for young people to enter the workforce with a higher level of practical skills.

"A school's goal is to develop interests and open avenues for students to explore, and along the way gain insight into the work world," said Dave Snyder, co-chair of the Career and Technology Department at Gettysburg High School. "Experiences such as working in a manufacturing cell concept, designing, problem solving and finishing, in addition to hands-on experience give our students and their employers an advantage when they enter the work force."

Many schools have found the solution in active cooperative partnerships with corporations. Such a partnership exists between Gettysburg High School in Gettysburg, PA and McClarin Plastics in Hanover, PA.

* *The research behind the ECEP comes from collaboration among America's Promise Alliance, Child Trends, Search Institute and the Gallup Organization.*

Last year, the school's Career and Technology Department was looking for a way to expand their Materials Processing Course to include more experience with plastics via an industrial quality thermoforming machine – which was out of their budget and expertise. Because of their established relationship, they went to McClarin Plastics who advised them of the Society of Plastics Engineers' Thermoforming Division Machinery Grant process and pledged to help where they could.

The thermoforming machine arrived at the school in June of 2008 thanks to the grant, federal funds from the Perkins Fund and a generous discount from Maac Machinery in Carol Stream, IL. McClarin Plastics has also taken an active role with the students by providing personnel for set-up and training, molds and sheet plastic donations.

Since its arrival, the students have designed and manufactured a flying disk mold and embossing top plate. The flying disk project has given them experience not only with thermoforming, but with design, problem solving, mold making, finishing, Auto-CAD Inventor and CNC equipment. In addition to the practical skills, the students will also receive sales and marketing experience as they plan to sell the disks.

The experience has also made an impact on McClarin Plastics. According to Morrell Myers, Corporate Production Manager at McClarin, the program has spurred enthusiasm within their work force. "Working with the students has given us a fresh perspective," said Myers. "It is also encouraging to know that if some of these students decide to work here [McClarin], they'll be able to start at a higher level and bring more to the table at an earlier stage in their employment."

But this isn't the first positive experience McClarin has had with working with schools. For the past

six years, they have partnered with chambers of commerce, industry associations and other manufacturers to offer programs designed to pique students' interest in manufacturing.

During the Fall of 2006, McClarin Plastics partnered with MANTEC, a nonprofit organization dedicated to meeting the needs of small and mid-sized manufacturing enterprises in South Central PA, and the South Western School District in Central PA to offer **Adventures in Technology**. Tenth- and twelfth-grade students with diverse interests and backgrounds, their instructors and their McClarin mentor, Tim Dietz, identified an issue for which the company was seeking a solution. The students studied the process, evaluated what was happening, developed a couple of solutions, ran a cost/benefit analysis and then presented their findings and recommendations to McClarin's management. The students' recommendation was deemed a viable, innovative solution and management decided to implement it. The solution is projected to save the company about \$95,000 over the next five years.

"This program [Adventures in Technology] was designed to give 'bottom line' exposure to the students and trigger ideas for their future. Manufacturing and corporate functions were disassembled so the students could understand how many disciplines fit together to make a company work," said Rob McIlvaine, Vice President of MANTEC.

"The 'adopt-a-school' philosophy is based on the fact that in order to be successful we all depend on each other: schools, students, and industry. We've seen our personnel and bottom line benefit from our involvement with the schools and we've seen a more prepared workforce come to our door," said Todd Kennedy, President of McClarin Plastics. "All in all, it benefits everyone to stimulate the intelligence, imagination, and confidence of our students." |