

## Young Consumer A New Jersey Best Practice

For the past 3 years, the Salem County School-to-Career Partnership has been participating in a program entitled the "Young Consumer" with fourth-grade students in Salem County. This program extends the boundaries of the classroom through community partnerships. The program started out as a pilot at the Penn Beach School in Pennsville and has spread since to include 27 classes in six different school districts. More than 600 students were involved this year. The best part about this program is it is not a "canned" presentation. It allows great flexibility for the classroom teacher. The activities greatly facilitate career development to be infused into the curriculum in a manner that is appealing to everyone, particularly students and parents. The focus of the program is on integration of math, language arts, science, and the workplace readiness standards and skills. A number of schools have expanded the activities to include music and health.

To initiate the Young Consumer program, professional development workshops entitled "Cogmotion" are held with classroom teachers. "Cogmotion" uses the knowledge about learning and the human brain to connect to hands-on learning activities to the curriculum. The workshops give tools and ideas to teachers on how the activities can infuse the workplace standards into the academic curriculum utilizing assessment as instructional strategies. The teachers quickly discover through "Cogmotion" that the Young Consumer program is for both regular and special education students. The teachers are shown how to engage students in the use of manipulatives in class to aid in understanding math; technology is introduced; and communication skills are honed.

At the workshops, care is given to show how parents and families can be brought into the process. Each classroom or school plans a family night. If done correctly, parent/family night generates great interest. For example, one of the schools had 125 student participants with 70 plus parents attending the family night. Overall, more than 50 percent of the parents attended. Teachers report they are shocked to see how much support there is from parents. At this event, parents get involved in using the hands-on activities. The program also allows for a process of reflections on educating the child is everyone's business.

The culmination activity is for all the students, regular and special education, to visit a store and put their math, communication, and workplace readiness skills to the test. Students are accompanied and evaluated on this activity by parents, grandparents, school board members, community-based organizations, and elected officials. This activity is priceless as it gives the business partner the opportunity to connect with the student learning community. Most of the business partners provide T-shirts, lunch, or snacks to all attendees. The culminating project truly unites a community.

In summation, the Young Consumer program is a framework that provides a new design for organizing and implementing instruction. The teacher as curriculum leader with the assistance of parents, community leaders, and business partners plan a unit of study that culminate with a learning experience at the local shopping center. The New Jersey Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards, based on the SCANS report, has the potential of extending learning beyond the classroom door. The Young Consumer program, as used in Salem County, extends learning into the community, and the program shows that learning must be a shared responsibility among school, home, and business.

How do we know this program works? There are numerous ways. First, we know assessment scores in math and science have shown improvement. Second, it has gotten community involvement from business, parents, grandparents, and local volunteers. Third, the word has spread among the classroom teachers. Those not participating want to be involved. Fourth, the Young Consumer program and Cogmotion were very important for some school districts to contribute financially to keep school-to-career systems in existence with termination of Federal money. [Contact: Phyllis Garnant, New Jersey Department of Education, Office of School-to-Career and College Initiatives (Phone: 609-292-5870; Fax: 609-984-7048; E-mail: Phyllis.Garnant@doe.state.nj.us)]

## Network Time: Connecting Classrooms and Businesses: An Oklahoma Best Practice

Making the connection between classrooms and business partners is no small task. With teacher workloads and business focus on customers, partnerships are difficult to identify and foster. Oklahoma's Career Resource Network and the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education have developed an online business partner database called "Network Time: The School-to-Business Connection" to address this common challenge for teachers and businesses. Teachers have the opportunity to search for business partners by activity, grade level, location, and career cluster. Businesses may volunteer online to provide a plethora of services such as job shadowing, classroom speakers, apprenticeships, teacher internships, field trips, mentors, etc. Business information is reviewed before going online to insure quality opportunities for teachers, students, and business partners. Teachers receive contact information to facilitate communication with the business partner.