

Student Mentorship Program at Souderton High School

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Souderton Area High School¹ has developed a well-organized and highly successful career Mentorship Program driven by the needs and interests of its students. While mentorship experiences typically take place in students' junior year, the program plays a key role in the school's Pathway 360° Program and in students' culminating graduation project presentation. As stated by principal Dr. Sam Varano during a January 2015 community press conference, several students have described the mentorship experience as "life changing."

Formerly referred to as internships, the Mentorship Program, which has engaged approximately 200 regional business partners over time, is intended to provide students with relevant and authentic workplace experiences related to their career goals. While the majority of experiences take place offsite, the school offers several onsite opportunities. As a result of mentorship participation, students gain valuable workplace insights relating to culture, expectations, technical skills, and soft skills. For some students, mentorships are an eye-opening experience leading to a complete change in career goals. For others, the mentorship confirms their choice of career path. In either case, students who complete a mentorship are better equipped to make informed decisions regarding postsecondary education, training, and/or careers.

Souderton High School's Pathway 360° Program begins in grade eight and nine with a required course, Career Exploration. During grade eight, students begin developing a four-year plan on which their selection of ninth grade courses is based. During freshman year, students take the first steps toward building a portfolio for the graduation project presentation and choose a pathway option that will guide high school course selection. Sophomore students continue building their portfolio, may begin to investigate and engage in a job shadow experience, and are encouraged to research possible mentorships. During junior year, students take elective classes relevant to their chosen pathway and are strongly encouraged to complete a mentorship after school, during school breaks, or in the summer. Students are responsible for recording observations, activities, and

¹ Souderton Area School District of Souderton, Pennsylvania is located in suburban Montgomery County, 25 miles north of Philadelphia. The school's grade nine through twelve enrollment is approximately 2,200 with a graduating class of 500.

reflections in an online journal throughout the mentorship; this work becomes an important component in the graduation project. Those who complete the mentorship requirements earn one half of a credit toward high school graduation.

The work students begin as freshmen culminate in the graduation project presentation, an opportunity to share their high school experience, made during winter of their senior year. Students who completed a mentorship and/or job shadow experience begin the presentation with a higher score than those who do not. For those who completed a mentorship, the presentation score begins at 100%. Students who completed a job shadow start with a score of 93%, and students who did not participate in either a mentorship or job shadow start with a score of 89%. Seventy-six percent, or 362 students, in the graduating class of 2015 completed twenty hours of unpaid mentorship and ninety-eight percent passed the graduation project presentation.

Souderton Area High School staffs a full-time Mentorship and Transition Coordinator to network with regional businesses, meet with students, and oversee the program details. Seeing a need for a comprehensive, user-friendly computer program to manage the school's Pathway 360° Program, a teacher who also serves as a Pathways Coordinator developed the Pathway Management System which students and staff rely on to plan and track work and to monitor progress. Dr. Varano credits this highly effective program as a significant contributing factor in the success of the Pathway 360° Program; the Pathway System Management is now patented and available to other schools. Souderton Area High School's website offers detailed information and guidance for students, parents, and employers involved in the Mentorship Program including an online application for community partners, multiple guides, checklists, exemplars, and videos for students, and parent/guardian consent forms.