

Promising Practice: Career Street

AT A GLANCE

Career Street is a program that connects Erie County, Pennsylvania schools with employers and organizations in order to provide meaningful career-related experiences to students in kindergarten through grade twelve. As stated on their website: “Career Street is a comprehensive career exploration and planning program linking businesses, nonprofit organizations, and schools to create and share experiences for students to job shadow, intern, tour companies, benefit from class speakers, and participate in career workshops and fairs. Career Street’s goal is to unite employers, schools and nonprofit organizations in the pursuit of a well-prepared future workforce, and to help better prepare students for the careers they want.”¹

ORIGIN / IMPLEMENTATION

Career Street was developed through Erie Together, a countywide movement working “to prevent and reduce poverty, elevate prosperity, and make the Erie Region a community of opportunity where everyone can learn, work and thrive.”²

Career Street is a community service program of the Erie County Vocational-Technical School Foundation. The ECVTS Foundation has established an advisory board of community leaders to ensure Career Street meets the needs of students and business alike.
- www.CareerStreetErie.org

In discussing regional unemployment, Erie Together stakeholders recognized a disconnect: employers were experiencing unfilled positions with few applicants while school leaders reported that graduates were not finding local work opportunities. As a result of these conversations, employers and school leaders collaborated to examine the qualities and skills employers need and the way in which these align with the knowledge, skills, and career exploration students have acquired upon high school graduation. Using grant funding, Erie Together members reviewed emerging and best practices in other communities and synthesized

their findings to create and launch Career Street in February 2014.

Career Street’s procedures are efficient and user-friendly. School districts, employers, and organizations register and create an informative profile on the Career Street website; employers and organizations indicate the type of career activities they are able to provide. All of Erie County school districts along with the Catholic Diocese have joined Career Street; 31 schools in total. Each district designates a program liaison, typically a high school guidance counselor. When a teacher wishes to arrange a career-related experience for students, he/she contacts the district liaison with a request. The liaison accesses Career Street’s interactive database to find and schedule a relevant experience.

¹ <http://www.careerstreeterie.org/about/what-is-career-street>

² <http://www.erietogether.org/about-our-initiative>

Career Street Executive Director, Ms. Jennifer Pontzer attributes much of the program's success to the high level of community buy-in, stating "I haven't had to sell the program to employers; they want to be involved."

To utilize Career Street, school districts pay an annual membership fee entitling them to unlimited use of the database and reimbursement for some related costs such as bus transportation and substitute teachers. Career Street also offers mini-grants.

Prior to Career Street, some teachers and schools developed partnerships with employers and organizations and engaged them to provide career experiences for their students. However, the benefits and rewards of these relationships were not often shared outside of a few classrooms or one school. Career Street allows businesses to reach a wide range of students while eliminating the time-consuming work that teachers dedicated to finding and establishing connections with employer and organization partners.

In summer 2015, a group of teachers came together to assist Career Street in developing resources designed to make every career experience a positive one for both students and the volunteers engaging with them. These include *Speakers in the Classroom: Tips for Speakers and Tips for Teachers*; *Workplace Tours: Tips for Teachers and Tips for Host Companies*; and *Presentation Talking Points*.

Career Street is facilitated by a full-time executive director and an active advisory board.

The opportunity to job shadow C.A. Curtze Food Service's Marketing Product Specialist, Marsha Rzodkiewicz, was an experience that has enriched my understanding of the duties and responsibilities of a research chef. I was able to see first-hand what her daily tasks included, allowing me to gain knowledge in a realistic corporate environment. The day that I spent at Curtze supplemented my understanding of potential career pathways for myself, widening my horizons and creating visions for my prospective career.
- Union City Student, Jason (retrieved from www.CareerStreetErie.org)

RESULTS / IMPACT

Career Street impacts multiple stakeholders:

- K-12 students gain a better understanding of the region's workforce and the skills and pathways that lead to these careers, helping them to make more informed postsecondary decisions.
- Teachers expand their awareness of the regional workforce and gain understanding of the skills and work attitudes employers expect.
- Employers and organizations engage with school leaders and students in a meaningful and purposeful way.

From its launch in February 2014 through February 2016, Career Street has assisted employers and schools in making over 200 matches resulting in 9,300 student experiences. Currently, over 100 employers and organizations are registered with Career Street and together they offer 135 experiences.

GOALS

At present, Career Street is most heavily utilized by high schools. One of Career Street's goals is to increase its engagement with middle school students so that 80% of all Erie County students have at least three career-related experiences by the end of grade eight.

Career Street aims to remain sustainable using three tiers of financing: private sector donations, grants, and school memberships.

Its success has generated interest from other communities and, as a result, Career Street is now trademarked with hopes of expanding to other communities in the future.

CONTACT



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Our experience with Career Street has been seamless and rewarding. The setup process was quick & easy, and setting up each experience has been a breeze as well. Both of the two office tours we have provided to high school students were well-received and have not taken too much time away from day-to-day business. Instead, the tours provided students with valuable information about working at a law firm and our attorneys and staff with a rewarding touch point to the next working generation. Thanks, Career Street!
- Sarah Holland, Marketing Director of Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett, P.C
(Retrieved from www.CareerStreetErie.org)

ABOUT PA-PIN

With backing from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and ongoing guidance from the Bureau of Career and Technical Education (BCTE), the Pennsylvania Pathways Innovation Network is coordinated by the National Center for College and Career Transitions (NC3T), an organization experienced in all aspects of college and career pathways development.

The PA-PIN is designed to identify and share promising practices and replicable strategies that help support the development and implementation of college and career pathways systems. By bringing together leaders from forward-thinking schools, adult and postsecondary institutions, business organizations, workforce development providers, and non-profit organizations effective and innovative pathways can be designed or expanded to increase learner achievement and address workforce demands.

By joining the PA-PIN, schools and organizations accelerate their efforts to develop scalable and sustainable solutions that strengthen connections between education, employers, and economic development in order to prepare today's students for tomorrow's careers. There is no cost to join the PA-PIN. Visit www.NC3T.com and click on the PIN tab to learn more.