Coastal Carolina Community College

Trades Day Champions

In 2007, Coastal Carolina Community College collaborated with the Jacksonville-Onslow Chamber of Commerce to conduct a workforce needs analysis of Onslow County. When completed, the workforce study provided a comprehensive snapshot of the workforce challenges of employers throughout the community. The study provided the impetus for community leaders, educators, employers, and workforce partners to participate in discussions concerning targeted growth sectors, skills gaps, and workforce needs of the future.

In response to the workforce study recommendations, the primary partners designed and implemented a highly successful, best practice program, Trades Day: Champions at Work. Trades Day relies on the collaboration of the public schools, Coastal, employers, and workforce professionals. Most importantly, it is successfully helping to identify and develop a pipeline of students, encouraging them into technical course pathways and training them with the requisite skills to fill high demand occupations in the community.

DETAILS

A workforce study conducted in 2007 identified a primary workforce challenge in Onslow County. Essentially, employers had significant employment needs for staff with the requisite skills to fill technical occupational positions throughout the industry sector. Employers reported vacant positions in high demand occupations such as electricians, auto mechanics, carpenters, plumbers, and HVAC technicians.

Further analysis and discussions, facilitated by the College and the Chamber, resulted in identifying primary goals as essential in meeting workforce demands. These included:

1) Preparing and developing a talent pipeline for current and future employers;
2) Communicating and marketing the positive aspects of employment in skilled trades occupations;
3) Showcasing and celebrating the accomplishments of students preparing for these types of careers;
4) Strengthening the collaboration of all partners toward the common goal of providing a well-trained workforce for the employers in the community; and
5) Providing well-paying jobs for individuals to remain in the community.

The College and Onslow County Schools had a successful history of collaboration through initiatives such as Tech Prep. Onslow County Schools and Coastal both had the essential career pathways in order to train the workforce; however, the technical pathways were not filled to capacity.

Upon further investigation, it was discovered that students and parents often do not identify technical careers as attractive livelihoods. The careers were identified as “blue collar,” with low wages, and parents were encouraging four-year degrees as the only pathway to success. The
implementation of Trades Day provided high school students an introduction to the College campus, an opportunity to interact with local employers, and a celebration of their talents and skill sets.

Trades Day is designed as a one-half day comprehensive event, in which high school students are given a technical problem which they must solve in two hours. There is a panel of judges including local employers, and the students win cash prizes, as well as tools and/or equipment. Employers fund prizes and provide lunch for students and two guests. As a result of this opportunity, employers meet talented students, and several students have been offered internships and/or summer employment. Furthermore, feedback from employers indicates strong support for Trades Day as a strategy to establish a pipeline of skilled employees for the future.

Implementation began in April 2007.

Partner Type(s):
- Business/Industry (direct involvement)
- Economic Development
- Workforce Development Board/One-Stop
- Public Schools
- Other: Jacksonville-Onslow Chamber of Commerce; North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions

Impact/Outcomes
The Trades Day event has numerous positive outcomes as follows:
1) Showcases support for skills and trades occupations;
2) Provides an opportunity to assist in transitions to post-secondary training and/or employment;
3) Provides opportunity for curriculum alignment between high schools and community college; and
4) Provides opportunity to showcase programs, facilities, and faculty to future students, parents, and workforce partners.

Since 2007, 687 students have participated, and 31% of those students have subsequently enrolled at Coastal.

Funding Source(s)
Funding sources are varied. The public school system provides transportation, serves as the communication link to distribute information in schools, and encourages participation. Some materials are also provided by schools. Coastal provides space in skills bays and organizes the event. Business owners provide food, prizes, and plaques.

REFLECTIONS

Innovation or Best Practice
Trades Day is a best practice because it is a collaborative effort that is contributing to the resolution of a workforce issue. As a result of the program, participating students (31%) are enrolling in post-secondary education, students are obtaining employment, employers are observing and identifying potential employees, and attitudes about the availability and viability of jobs in the technical occupations are more positive.
Lessons Learned
There have been many lessons learned during the eight years of operation of this program.

- Begin by setting capacities and limits.
- Don’t underestimate the need for volunteers to ensure safety, set-up, help with the operation of the event, and clean up.
- Schedule the event as a priority to ensure it continues.
- Listen to feedback and constructive criticism from all parties involved.

Scalability
The strategy is scalable because the need for technical workers is not unique to this community, and Trades Day is a solution that has been successful. There are positive outcomes and benefits experienced by all the major partners.

The message that supports students choosing career/technical pathways becomes easier to market. The message is: There are viable, technical, financially-lucrative careers available in Onslow County. Students can start early on their career pathway and acquire necessary skills through their high schools and Coastal. Employers are willing to support educational programs that produce a well-trained workforce.

RESOURCES

Workforce Learning Summit Presenters (names, titles, organizations):
- Marianne Herring, Division Chair, Industrial and Applied Technology
  Coastal Carolina Community College
- John Shannon, Director for Career & Technical Education
  Onslow County Schools

For Further Information
Sharon McGinnis, Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Innovation
Coastal Carolina Community College
mcginniss@coastalcarolina.edu
910.938.6230