Workforce Learning Summit Innovation or Best Practice

Catawba Valley Community College

Education Matters in Catawba Valley

Education Matters is a partnership between business, government, and education working together to increase the value of education and educational attainment in Catawba County. Through the commitment of each partner, students in Catawba County Schools, Hickory Public Schools, and Newton Conover City Schools plan for their future through an awareness of career opportunities in Catawba County with the knowledge of educational expectations and training needed to successfully gain employment. This effort is building the pipeline of educated workers that area businesses need.

DETAILS

Catawba Valley Community College, in collaboration with K-12 education partners, business and government, developed its “Education Matters” initiative in 2009 to elevate the value of education and increase educational attainment.

The initiative addressed the partners’ desire to raise the bar on educational attainment, as well as educators’ desire to be accountable to business customers. Studies showed that individuals who are better educated withstand economic downturns better, have a higher lifetime earning potential, and are more productive in the workplace. To address business needs, educators aimed to expose high school students to careers and career paths, show the relevance of education and training, encourage students to take the coursework needed for STEM careers and prepare students for the workforce.

Partner roles

Businesses commit to set a requirement or preference for young employees (ages 25 and younger and hired as of 2012) to have a minimum of a high school diploma or equivalency, promote “Leave for Parental Involvement in Schools” to their employees, and encourage their employees to get involved in schools and help connect students to the real world of business. Depending on the level of commitment businesses make, they can become certified as Bronze, Silver, or Gold members of Education Matters.

Education—

- **Catawba Valley Community College** gives a “Graduate Guarantee” to any business that hires a CVCC graduate. If the employer feels that the graduate needs further training, CVCC will retrain the student at no cost to the student or business.
- The **public schools** in Catawba County (Catawba County Schools, Hickory Public Schools and Newton Conover City Schools) each identified pilot groups of 100 students during the implementation phase of each grade level starting in 2009-10 school year. Students begin the process as sophomores by taking the ACT’s WorkKeys pre-assessment called KeyTrain.
During their junior year, students create a Career & College Ready portfolio which includes a resume, cover letter, plus other pieces which can be used to market themselves such as attendance records, awards or certificates, letter of recommendations, etc. The students also receive employability training by attending the Education Matters Career Prep Conference during their senior year which includes participating in mock interviews with Education Matters business partners and attending workshops to learn how to apply for jobs, interviewing techniques, appropriate dress, etc. Local community college and 4 year college programs and training opportunities are highlighted during the conference. Seniors also take ACT’s WorkKeys assessment to earn a national Career Readiness Certification. The students include the CRC Certificate in their portfolio. This past school year, Alexander County Schools started the Education Matters initiative by giving their 10th graders the KeyTrain assessment.

Government--
Catawba County Government and municipalities continue to provide financial support to the public school systems and CVCC, and as a part of economic incentive packages, new businesses are required to participate in Education Matters. In addition, Catawba County requires adoptive or foster parents to have their high school diplomas/equivalency and encourages Work First clients to obtain their high school diplomas or GED.

Related initiatives:

The EXTREME STEM Tour (for all 8th-graders) offers behind-the-scenes tours in business and industry to help 8th graders learn about STEM careers and the education/training needed to prepare. As a recipient of a Golden LEAF Foundation grant, Catawba County Schools (CCS) was required to introduce 8th graders to STEM careers. With the Education Matters partnership in place and over 160 business partners committed to supporting education, CCS turned to Education Matters to collaborate on creating the first tour. Now in its third year, an EXTREME STEM Tour for K-12 Teachers was added in June 2014.

The Career Prep Conference (for all 12th-grade students) is a half-day conference with six rotations that offers a variety of services:

- Business partners conduct mock interviews and provide feedback on portfolios presented by students.
- College and high school career development coordinators provide team-based activities to help students understand career resources.
- Human resources representatives lead workshops on interviewing skills and applying for jobs in a competitive environment.
- Hickory Young Professionals group members meet with students to share information about the career challenges they faced upon high school and college graduation.
- A mini college fair helps students learn about local education and training opportunities.


Partner Type(s):
- Business/Industry (direct involvement)
- Economic Development
- Public Schools; Community College; Universities
- Other: Local Government, Foundations, Nonprofit Agencies
Impact/Outcomes

As of June 2014...

- 161 businesses are committed members of Education Matters.
- 1,353 students have graduated since CVCC’s “Graduate Guarantee” was instituted in fall of 2012, and zero businesses have taken CVCC up on its pledge to retrain workers if needed.
- 900 10th-12th graders were initially chosen to participate in the pilot phase of the program to prepare for workforce and/or further education. Began full implementation for all students starting with 1,712 10th graders during the 2012-2013 school year.
- 4,018 sophomores have taken and used ACT’s WorkKeys pre-assessment called KeyTrain. Two school systems included 9th graders in 2013-14.
- 849 juniors have created Career & College Portfolios.
- 443 seniors have taken the WorkKeys exam through Education Matters and have earned a Career Readiness Certificate with the majority scoring at the Silver and Gold levels.
- 450 seniors in pilot phase participated in Career Prep Conference since 2011; all seniors invited to attend in fall of 2014.
- 4,992 8th graders participated in 218 EXTREME STEM Business Tours, 42 Lunch and Learns and 42 Campus Tours.
- 10 companies received incentives to relocate or expand their businesses since the Education Matters requirements went into place.
- 99 K-12 teachers/administrators from 4 school systems participated in the inaugural EXTREME STEM Tour for K-12 Teachers in June 2014.

Community Impact/Outcomes

- Education Matters serves on the North Carolina Certified Work Ready Communities team because of the local partnership, Career Readiness Certification, and work ready preparation for high school students.
- Catawba County was one of two counties in NC selected to participate in The Center for International Understanding 2014 Global Leaders to Germany program due to the collaboration and innovative workforce approaches including Education Matters.
- One of the greatest accomplishments has been the increased awareness of local STEM related careers in manufacturing and businesses for students, teachers, and administrators.

Funding Sources

- Catawba Valley Community College – Education Matters staff salary and general operating costs
- Golden LEAF committed $5,000 to get Education Matters started in Alexander County
- Building Pathways to Prosperity Grant ($12,000) covered the expenses for the EXTREME STEM Teacher Tour
- Other costs:
  - High school programming costs: KeyTrain licenses ($2,525 per high school), WorkKeys assessments/portfolio supplies ($34/student)
  - Minimal costs for Career Prep Conference and Extreme STEM Tours

REFLECTIONS

Innovation or Best Practice

Noteworthy features of Education Matters include the following:

- Broad partnership: business, education (high school & community college) and government
- Commitments by all partners, required for participation
CVCC’s commitment to business to guarantee that CVCC graduates are fully prepared to work in their field of study and willingness to retrain any employee at no cost if they are not prepared sufficiently for the job.

Universal participation by 8th graders through 12th graders in related initiatives, from the EXTREME STEM Tour to the Career Prep Conference.

Students graduate from high school with a nationally recognized Career Readiness Certification and a Career & College Ready Portfolio, in addition to their high school diploma.

Large scale of initiative, including more than 160 committed businesses and over 5,000 8th graders and educators introduced to STEM careers through EXTREME STEM Tours.

Lessons Learned

- Education Matters takes a commitment from all partners (education, business and government) to be successful.
- Those involved in the initiative must have a willingness to go beyond the scope of traditional expectations or requirements in both the world of business and education.
- A change in leadership presents challenges in keeping Education Matters a priority.
- Utilizing the KeyTrain pre-assessment and related skill enhancement opportunities increase CRC scores for high school students.
- Including Education Matters initiatives in local graduation requirements has had a positive impact on participation and community perception for one school system.

Scalability

Education Matters could easily be replicated in other communities. The current model could be followed or communities could add or modify the commitments of each partner to best suit their region. The most important step is to bring dedicated community leaders together who represent education, business and government to work together to build the framework of the partnership. Education Matters then serves as the catalyst for the partnership by addressing the needs and concerns of all groups with the community college providing the resources for high school students to gain the education and training necessary to build our future workforce.

RESOURCES

Workforce Learning Summit Presenters
Catawba Valley Community College: President Garrett Hinshaw, Tracy Hall (Director, Education Matters), Scott Regenbogen (Research & Development Specialist, Manufacturing Solutions Center)
Hickory Public Schools: Trina Williams, Career & Technical Education Coordinator

Link: http://educationmattersincatawba.org/wordpress/

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