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School-to-work Programs Effectiveness

Kathleen Mary Kash
Eastern Illinois University

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Abstract

Most high schools provide programs to prepare students for college or employment after graduation. These programs, also known as School-to-Work Programs, are supposed to help direct students to the career field that they would like to pursue. Unfortunately, the programs provided by the schools are not as effective as they should be. One of the main reasons why these programs are unsuccessful is due to the lack of participation from local businesses. Businesses are unwilling to participate because of the cost to partake in the program, the time that is involved with the program and the loss of retention for the business. For most businesses, the concerns outweigh the benefits of the School-to-Work program but there can be and are very successful and effective programs from the partnerships of businesses and schools.

Introduction

In 1994, United States legislation passed the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) because, compared to other countries, the United States lacked a system to connect education with employment where four-year college degrees were not required. "The School-to-Work Opportunities Act is visualized as comprehensive efforts to help students better prepare for careers and college by providing work-based learning experiences" (Gordon, 2003, p. 211). Some of these experiences include apprenticeship, mentorship, internship, and job shadowing. According to Webster's Dictionary, an apprenticeship is when a person works for another in order to learn the trade, a mentorship is learning from a wise and trusted counselor or teacher, an internship is any period of time during which a beginner acquires experience in an occupation or profession, and job shadowing typically involves a student being present during a period time, observing a profession in the workplace.

During the experiences listed above, the School-to-Work Program established three components for the students; learning, work-based learning and connecting activities.

> These components were designed to: (a) encourage all students to remain in school and achieve high standards of occupational and academic performance; (b) make education more relevant to students by integrating academic and occupational activities; and (c) enhance students' opportunities for employment or further postsecondary education by building effective partnerships among K-12 schools, postsecondary school, employers, community agencies, students and parents (Collet-Klingenberg & Kenney, 2000, p.53).

School-to-Work programs help students transition from high school to the workforce. According to Newmark & Joyce (2001), these programs were created to integrate a system of youth education, job training, and labor market information to provide a faster and more successful transition from school to stable employment. These programs are not just for students who want to graduate with a high school diploma and go straight to the workforce. These programs also help give students a better understanding of a career that they may want to pursue during and after college. The programs are not necessarily geared exclusively toward placement of young workers in more permanent jobs, but also aim to increase information about labor markets and young workers' own skills, in order to enhance their career decision making (Neumark & Joyce, 2001).

School-to-Work Programs are very beneficial to students and businesses. Students benefit from learning about the career and a better understanding of the workforce experience. Businesses benefit from receiving newer skills and higher productivity from the students. This is where a relationship is formed between students and businesses. According to Neumark & Joyce (2001), "School-to-work programs have been advocated as a means of encouraging better matches of workers to jobs, via a two-way flow of information, including general information about the workplace and information about particular employers flowing to students, and also information about students flowing to employers" (p.671). The purpose of this study is to discuss the importance of business participation in the School-to-Work programs. Businesses often do not participate in School-to-Work Programs because of the cost to partake in the

programs, the time that is involved with the programs and the lost of retention for the business (Bailey, Barr & Hughes, 2000). This paper discusses reason for this lack of participation and suggests methods for increasing business participation with effective School-to-Work Programs.

Benefits of School-to-Work Programs

According to Gordon (2003), students learn most effectively if they are taught skills in the context in which they will use those skills. School-to-work programs are very beneficial to the students, schools and businesses. Students learn first hand how to work in the workforce, and learn what it takes to be successful while achieving an education. School-to-Work Programs also gives them the opportunity to try new things and find the career that they are searching for. The schools also benefits through recognition from the community for all the opportunities they offer to the students and to the local businesses. Participating businesses' benefits include: (a) the value of student labor, (b) reduced training and recruitment costs, (c) higher productivity of students hired as regular employees relative to other entry-level employees, (d) improved community relations, (e) improve productivity and morale of employees, and (f) increased diversity in the workplace (Bailey, Barr & Hughes, 2000). According to Wise (2007), "students are more likely to stick with the business that has employed and supported them early on. The business benefits in many ways; firstly, their process ensures that the best and brightest students are selected to apply for these internships. Second, it is the student's first job that promotes loyalty" (p.22).

Techniques like job shadowing or mentoring require minimal employer commitment (Bailey, Barr & Hughes, 2000). Firms are more willing however to provide internships because of philanthropic and self-interest motivations. Employers feel a commitment to their communities and look for opportunities to make some contribution to the general well-being of their towns and neighborhoods. Some of these employers try to do this through helping to strengthen the local education systems. "Some self-interest motivations would be that their participation will generate goodwill, which could bring them both political and economic benefits" (Bailey, Barr & Hughes, 2000). These benefits are also included in all fields of businesses including businesses that involve business education students.

Concerns of School-to-Work Programs

School-to-Work programs are particularly difficult to set up and institutionalize because it requires significant participation of employers (Bailey, Barr & Hughes, 2000). According to Bailey, Barr and Hughes (2000), businesses do not like to participate because of the cost, it is time consuming, and there is a loss of retention for the company. The costs include expenses for the development and administration of the programs, the time of supervisors and mentors who work with the students, intern salaries, and miscellaneous costs, such as tools (Bailey, Barr & Hughes, 2000).

One area where this lack of participation is evident School-to-Work programs in high schools is job shadowing. Job shadowing allows students to follow an individual, for a day, to get a glimpse in the area that they are interested in. This, unfortunately, is hard for the business and business personnel. The business loses money because they are unable to be as productive for that day. A useful alternative for a business is an

internship. An internship allows smaller segments of the student work at the business. This allows the student to get a better understanding of the position and allows the business personnel more time to attend to their work instead of focusing on the student. However, these still can cause problems for the business because, many times, internships are paid. Internships can be completed two different ways. A long term internship is normally 4-6 weeks and involves 20+ hours per week. This kind of internship is normally a paid internship. A short term internship is considered anything less than 4 weeks. These internships require training for each individual student. If the student chooses not to stay with that business after his/her internship, the business loses the money that was invested in the student. This, of course, is money lost to the business if the student decides not to stay with the company.

 All of these programs are time consuming for both the school and for businesses. The process to set up an internship or job shadowing date that will work for the student and the business is difficult. According to Joyce (2008), some businesses select students through a hiring process. This includes a basic application, group interview attendance and discipline records, and letters of recommendation. Another issue would be the time to train the individual in the skill area. Some businesses just want an individual to already know how to complete different aspects that are required for the position. These businesses do not have the time to train the students in all areas of the position.

Retention is a problem in most businesses without adding these school-to-work programs. According to Bailey, Barr and Hughes (2000), businesses are finding a loss in retention even after taking the time and providing the resources for the students to learn the skill. A study conducted by Neumark and Joyce (2001) shows that students in paid positions arranged as part of school-to-work programs are employed in a wider array of industries and receive more training than other students in unpaid positions. It is from this additional training that the students are going to different positions and leaving the business that has invested so much time in them.

Some businesses just do not want to hire high school students because of their lack of attendance and skills. According to Kendall, Pollack, Schwols & Snyder (2007), "colleges and employers are growing increasingly concerned that high school students lack the knowledge and skills needed for success after graduation" (p. 1). This lack of knowledge and skills are influencing businesses' participation with the School-to-Work programs. Employers expressed some dissatisfaction with the job that high schools are doing to prepare their graduates for several workforce skills, saying that they are dissatisfied with graduates' ability to read and understand complicated materials, to think analytically, to apply what they learn to solve real-world problems and to communicate orally (Kendall, Pollack, Schwols & Snyder, 2007). Also, students who are involved in these programs do so voluntarily, which sometime causes attendance concerns, because students are choosing to attend the program periodically during the program (Armstrong, 2005). There, however, have been very successful and effective School-to-Work programs that have overcome the businesses' concerns.

Effective School-to-Work Programs
According to Armstrong (2005), the School-to-Work programs need to be more individualized with each business that participates. These programs are flexible and can work with any business who would like to participate. One of the most important

motives for businesses to participate is to fulfill a philanthropic goal (Bailey, Barr and Hughes, 2000). Participating in these programs gives the business free publicity and helps fill a quota of giving back to the community. There will however still be businesses who do not want to participate with these programs. According to Armstrong (2005), there can always be an arrangement or agreement between the school and business so that the business is not continuously obligated to participate in these programs all the time. These agreements can be specified to participate once a year or every other year. This way the business is still involved with the programs through the school but is also being productive.

School-to-Work Program using apprenticeships

Joyce (2008) discusses a successful School-to-Work Program. Students at South Houston High School in Texas learned invaluable workplace skills by participating in an apprenticeship program that utilized an innovative curriculum and forged a successful partnership between school and business. "This program allowed students to learn the necessary skills to be successful in a career, and reinforce them in a simulated workplace which provided authentic and relevant learning" (Joyce, 2008, p. 25). This certain program had a new partnership between South Houston High School and Siemens Building Technologies Division. Due to this new partnership, the school found that desks were needed in the building and the construction company was willing to assist with that need.

This program encompassed about 96 hours of job-skilled training and construction activity. Students were selected through a hiring process which included a basic application, group interview attendance and discipline records, and letters of recommendation. The program was four weeks long where students worked six hours a day, four days a week. The School-to-Work Program applied learning experience allowed students to incorporate academics in a real-world workplace scenario (Joyce, 2008). This program did not stop with training skills but academics were a part in this program. Students had a curriculum that consisted of five modules including 12 lessons in each module. Students learned critical skills necessary for obtaining employment and building a lasting career. Their projects included interpersonal skills, career preparation, communication, self improvement and on-the-job skills. All these modules helped reinforce decision making and building confidence while working in a group. Real life situations were used to help prepare these students to work with conflict and to do their best while in the workforce. Overall, the students did not learn just how to construct a desk but how to work effectively in the workforce in any position. They found that students were learning hard mathematics and acquiring better writing skills in the workplace than in the classroom setting.

School-to-Work program using apprenticeships and mentors

Collet-Klingenberg & Kenney (2000) found that Youth Apprenticeships (YA) is a program that collaborates a manufacturing industry, public high school and a university. This collaboration offers an alternative education program to juniors and seniors who are not expected to graduate. At the manufacturing site, the youth apprentices spend about 20 hours each week at work and another 20 hours in the classroom at the site—all at pay. "This program allows youth apprentices to make a responsible transition to the world of

work" (Collet-Klingenberg & Kenney, 2000, p. 52). Nearly all of their competency-based schoolwork, from English to mathematics, involves some aspect of manufacturing and hands-on involvement. This program meets the manufacturer's demand for skilled high school graduates in a rural area where such candidates are scarce. After two successful calendar years in the program, youth apprentices earn a high school diploma.

This program also focuses on raising student achievement, providing equitable opportunities for achievement, and addressing the needs for workers with high skill levels. For students to be eligible for this program, they must follow the following procedure. First, the student is nominated by teachers or parents. Then they must attend an informational meeting about the program at the work site. Next is the application process which includes an interview and aptitude tests. Finally, the program personnel come and visit the student and student's family at their home (Collect-Klingenberg & Kenney, 2000).

The mentor training and morale building opportunities of the program exist for all employees. The manufacturing company gives the production-line supervisors the opportunity to be the mentors. These supervisors mention the importance of training the mentors who work with the youth apprentices. The mentors and manufacturing company found that the best solution to any problem that arose was to sit down and personally talk to the youth apprentices (Collect-Klingenberg & Kenney, 2000). When apprentices made mistakes on the production line, they are shown the correct procedure and how to prevent making mistakes again. This provided a learning environment for the youth apprentices and the rest of the employees.

> Some of the benefits that the youth apprentices achieved were: (a) the ability to earn a Certificate of Occupational Proficiency while acquiring a high school diploma; (b) the opportunity to demonstrate enhanced self-esteem, improve citizenship, and self motivated ownership of learning; (c) gainful employment with steadily increasing responsibilities; and (d) the chance to learn about various career opportunities (Collet-Klingenberg & Kenney, 2000, p. 62).

One of the benefits that the manufacturing company received from this program was a reduced turnover of entry-level employees through the hiring of apprenticeship graduates.

School-to-Work program using mentors and internships

Wise (2007) looked at a program is a partnership between Phoenix's East Valley Institute of Technology (EVIT) and Automotive Youth Education Systems (AYES). This school-to-work program partnership focuses on automobile technicians. These students learn the trade and then are able to find employment after graduation. "Due to a highly successful partnership with AYES, EVIT has been named the number one high school automobile program in the United States for placement of its students into jobs with dealerships" (Wise, 2007, p. 21). The program partnership ensures that the skills being taught in its classes are the skills that future employers are seeking.

The School-to-Work program partnership uses both internships and mentors. According to Wise (2007), a mentor is a master technician with extensive experience in the automotive trades. These mentors help show the interns the profession. It is so important to EVIT that the intern and mentor work well with each other that EVIT conducts a full day of training. In this training, both interns and mentors are told the

rules, roles, responsibilities, behavior and attitudes individually. Then they are paired together where the intern and mentor can talk about expectations of each other and the program. EVIT also provides students with a course of study that mirrors the world of work by living up to its core mission, to "provide a productive, technically trained workforce to meet the market-driven needs of business and industry" (Wise, 2007, p. 23).

Conclusion

School-to-Work programs can be very successful with businesses participation. If the businesses were unable or not willing to participate with the school then these programs would be unsuccessful or even nonexistent. It is difficult to find businesses that are willing to work with high school students especially when the students need to learn basic skills. It takes time, money and patience for both the business and students to have a good experience. The three examples of successful School-to-Work programs shows that the benefits of the programs out weight the concerns and that the programs are worth it in the long run.

Even though these School-to-Work programs were very successful and effective, not all schools will be able to administer these exact programs. All these programs were very costly for both the school and the businesses. All the students were paid at least minimum wage while receiving the education to pursue the career. Also, this put a lot trust on students. Students were responsible for attending class at the workplace and to complete all assignments from the curriculum. Also, these schools had more resources than some rural schools would have. These schools were very fortunate that they had businesses that wanted to participate in this program. Some school will not have that opportunity from local businesses.

This, however, does show that an effective School-to-Work program is achievable with a great partnership with businesses and a curriculum that trains and teaches students for the workforce. All of these programs can be tailored to any school program by creating a partnership with a local business and creating a curriculum that students will benefit from during class and after graduation.

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