Overview of the KEDC Project ACHIEVE YCC Program

The Youth Career Connect (YCC) program is designed to assist high school students in gaining experience that will help them make smooth transitions into the world of work. By targeting ten schools and over 1,500 students in Eastern Kentucky, KEDC combines academic and technical subjects to provide training for specific industries and careers.

High School students in the YCC program are exposed to unique opportunities and activities that go beyond the classroom and that will enhance their career readiness:

- job shadowing
- internships
- leadership opportunities
- mentoring
- career counseling
- soft skills
- work and project-based learning
- employer tours and speakers
- The YCC program enables students to explore, apply, and expand classroom learning into career pathways.

Program Highlight

YCC Career Counselors maintain strong relationships with their local employers. In addition to job shadowing and on-site internships, Career Counselors partnered with local employers to create Project-Based Internship opportunities for YCC students.

The core idea of a project-based internship is that real-world problems capture students’ interest and provoke serious thinking as the students acquire and apply new knowledge in a problem-solving context. The teacher plays the role of facilitator, working with students to frame worthwhile questions, structuring meaningful tasks, coaching both knowledge development and social skills, and carefully assessing what students have learned from the experience. Project-based learning helps prepare students for the thinking and collaboration skills required in the workplace.
Even though the students performed their work within a school setting, they had the opportunity to meet with employers and communicate through Skype, e-mail, or phone. This was highly successful in creating networking opportunities for our rural school students who would otherwise not have been able to make such connections so easily.

**Success Story**

The schools participating in KEDC's YCC Program were challenged by their rural locations, and internship numbers were low for 2015 and 2016 as a result. In the spring of 2016, KEDC proposed the idea of a Project-Based Internship to employer partner Big Ass Solutions (BAS) in Lexington, Kentucky.

The engineers at BAS welcomed the invitation to work with one of the YCC high schools, Middlesboro High School. Throughout the stages of the project, engineers and students communicated through emails, phone calls and Skype. Once the students had completed their task, they visited BAS and presented to the Research and Development Engineers.

The success of this endeavor resulted in a larger collaboration for the next two projects. In Spring 2017, eight out of ten YCC high schools participated with BAS, and all ten YCC high schools joined in Fall 2017. The teams were required to submit Engineering Logs and questions/concerns to the BAS Engineers over the span of eight weeks per project. More than 70 students participated in these two Project-Based Internships and traveled to Lexington, KY, to participate in a culminating event where all teams competed and presented in front of a team of BAS Engineers.

**Community Impact**

KEDC Project ACHIEVE successfully empowers YCC Career Counselors to make decisions based on the needs of their students through YCC Advisory Group Meetings. Each High School hosts one meeting yearly for a total of ten meetings per year. Attendees represent students, employers, school administrators, and Kentucky Career Centers.

To build on success and share best practices, each host school showcases their most successful YCC activities. This has resulted in the newly published Achievement in Career Engagement – Career Counselor Info-Guide (developed in collaboration with the Career Counselors from Project ACHIEVE), which will be accessible to all Kentucky schools. The guide includes:

- best practices for developing career readiness programs;
- instructions for leveraging shared resources among schools and partners;
- advice on creating career readiness opportunities through job shadowing, internships, and mentoring opportunities that are relevant to and practical for school environments.

KEDC has continued the work-readiness support beyond high school with its development of Achievement in Career Engagement (ACE), a platform that gives students a digital profile page to show future employers their work-force capabilities. ACE is being enhanced with badges that lead into Endorsements around five skill areas. These can be used by employers and colleges wishing to endorse and recruit students.

_Kentucky Educational Development Corporation (KEDC) Project ACHIEVE_

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