Overview of the Carolina Alliance for Technology YCC Program

Carolina Alliance for Technology (CAT) serves four high schools in three school districts in two counties in South Carolina. Our goal is to create a workforce that benefits students, businesses, and surrounding communities through meaningful engagement in academic experiences that link to future college and career pathways in computer science and engineering. The program redesigns the high school experience and creates more personalized, hands-on learning communities. We are addressing the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate by promoting rigorous standards in science, mathematics, engineering, and technology to prepare students for college, career, and future.

We focus on three areas:

- Individualized career and academic counseling
- Exposure to the world of work/employer engagement
- Integrated academics and career-focused learning

Participating schools:

- Laurens School District 56, Clinton High School
- Laurens School District 55, Laurens High School
- Richland School District 2, Westwood High School & Ridgeview High School

Program Highlight

Partnering with EngenuitySC, an economic development nonprofit which focuses on enhancing our region’s competitiveness and prosperity, has been a tremendous asset in connecting our schools to businesses as they collaborate with government, education, and community leaders. EngenuitySC has expanded the cadre of professionals serving as mentors to CAT students in Richland County School District 2. These mentors meet with students to provide real-world experiences in computer science and engineering careers.

Beyond mentoring, EngenuitySC has:

- connected students to internships with over thirty industry professionals;
- provided video conferencing with professionals in gaming and virtual reality;
and engaged the members of the engineering fraternity at the University of South Carolina in discussions on career and collegiate pathways.

Success Story
While we have many individual success stories of students entering college in engineering and computer science majors with scholarships and college credit, we have also celebrated the success of those students entering the workforce following an internship experience. Perhaps the best example of this can be found in the following anecdote about a student we’ll call “Billy”:

A rising CAT senior in one of our rural high schools in South Carolina, Billy attended his church service one week. Typically, he is quite reserved and never says anything when the youth minister asks, “Does anyone have anything to share?”

This time was different. Billy stood up and said, “I love my job! It is the best thing that ever happened to me!” (Billy is a CAT summer intern with the Information Technology (IT) department in our school district. Prior to CAT, our IT department would not allow students to work for them. With the CAT program, the IT department has changed that practice.)

Billy went on to tell folks at church that he was asked to work beyond his scheduled internship because they “really liked my work ethic.” Then he said, “Where I work, the guys I work with help me and teach me. Sometimes, they even offer to buy me lunch.” He smiles and continues, “Where my brother works, the guys just ask him to go for a smoke.” He concludes with, “I have been so blessed.”

We are evolving, and CAT has certainly been a difference maker for our students.

Community Impact
Youth CareerConnect (YCC) and Carolina Alliance for Technology (CAT) have been a tremendous boost to these four high schools and the communities they serve. Parents are asking to enroll their students in CAT, students are more seriously exploring their career pathways, and employers are asking how they can be more involved.

The common factor for all four high schools is the strong support they receive from their greater school communities in the success and sustainability of CAT. The students are being afforded opportunities unlike anything they have previously experienced. They are seeing relevance in the courses they take as they ready themselves for both college and career. They know that they are being well trained for the transitions ahead of them.

Likewise, leaders in higher education and industry are recognizing our efforts to better prepare students for college and the workforce with attention to rigor and employability. We are creating a culture of learning that is enabling students to meet the demands of the future with a greater guarantee of success.

Carolina Alliance for Technology (CAT)
Contact: Laura C. Koskela, laurakoskela@lcsd56g.com
https://www.lcsd56.org
https://www.facebook.com/carolinaalliancefortechnology/