

Adams County Education Consortium

Westminster, Colorado

Focus on Employer Leadership in Work-Based Education

Colorado Innovation Profile

Colorado's Career and Technical Education programs are developing a seamless system of education that ensures ease in student transition from one educational system to another and from one level of instruction to another.

There are eight key strategies that Colorado CTE teachers and administrators are applying:

- *Implementing Career and Technical Education Plans of Study;*
- *Strengthening Accountability for Results;*
- *Moving To a Project-Based Focus for Local Planning and Implementation;*
- *Assessing Career and Technical Skills;*
- *Integrating Academic and CTE Skills and Knowledge;*
- *Transforming Professional Development, Recruitment and Retention of CTE Teachers;*
- *Ensuring Effective Instruction and Strategies for Special Populations; and*
- *Connecting CTE to Employers and Workforce Priorities.*

The Colorado Community College System has prepared a series of "Innovation Profiles" that describe how Colorado's schools, community colleges and community partners are creating innovative improvement strategies for their programs on behalf of students.

Key Innovation Activity

Related Strategy: Connecting CTE to Employers and Workforce Priorities

The Adams County Education Consortium is a well-positioned consortium consisting of key leaders in education and business. The Consortium has been formed to focus on creating a skilled workforce pipeline to meet regional employment needs. This Consortium involves senior leadership of all regional school systems, community and technical colleges, primary employers, economic development, regional unemployment and other community partners and organizations all working on a common agenda relating to bringing career relevance and knowledge to students, their teachers and families.

Background

In February 2004, Adams County Economic Development ("ACED") hosted a task force dedicated to addressing the workforce problems that area businesses have had – specifically regarding the quality of

applicants for employment openings in Adams County, Colorado. Key growth companies in Adams County expressed concern that the jobs they were creating could not be filled by local residents because many local students were not sufficiently skilled and motivated. Area education leaders also convened meetings to discuss instructional relevance and the need to enhance the high school and college completion rates of students in the county.

Key stakeholders from education, business, community-based organizations, unemployment, and economic development were convened to begin addressing the concerns. Over a three-week intensive planning period, key objectives were identified.

In June 2005, the Adams County Education Consortium (ACEC) was formed through an agreement adopted by the various stakeholders. Today the ACEC Board consists of: three community colleges (Community College of Aurora, Red Rocks Community College, and Front Range Community College); the five largest Adams County school districts (Adams 12, Adams 50, District 27J, Adams 14 and Mapleton 1); the business community (Wells Fargo, The Hanson Group, Fairfield and Woods, Denver Merchandise Mart, and Adolfson and Peterson Construction); the Adams County Workforce and Business Center; and Adams County Economic Development. Participation in ACEC events has now topped over 300 area employers annually and 11,000 students in the career exploration program alone.

The Consortium adopted three objectives:

Objective 1: Increase the overall successful completion rate for secondary and post-secondary Adams County students and **better prepare them for professions within the county.**

Objective 2: Incorporate the family into the student learning solution.

Objective 3: Improve support for teachers, guidance counselors and administration as workplace mentors and resources.

Based on these objectives, the ACEC has focused on a few key initiatives since its inception.

- **Career Exposition:** This event brings over 4,500 8th graders to a large exposition where students are introduced to employers in the region. Each employer representative has information indicating how their company fits into the career cluster matrix, and what type of education and training is required to work for the company. Students also complete the Bridges self-assessment prior to attending the event and the orientation of the facility aligns with the States Career Cluster organization.
- **Workplace/Internship Experience:** High School students are invited to participate in a multi-night job shadow experience called "Experience 9 to 5." Students pick one industry track and learn about four different aspects of that industry over a four week period. The eight total contact hours can earn them class credit, make them eligible for professional certificates, and provide an overall perspective from direct interaction with professionals in their field of interest.
- **WorkforceConnect** brings teachers, guidance counselors and administrators into the workforce. The educators spend 90 minutes in seven different business locations to gain a broad exposure to current work settings. This is particularly valuable to academic teachers, many of whom entered teaching directly from college and have never worked in a professional industry or

corporate setting. Teachers can earn graduate credit and contact hour credit for the experience.

- **Industry Tour:** Using a coach bus, business leaders are given tours of CTE programs across multiple schools on a single day. This experience provides an intense introduction to the world of CTE, direct contact with educators and students in each program and the chance to compare efforts across different schools.

Key Factors in Implementation

1. The business leadership of the Consortium consists only of “primary employers”-- those companies that are the economic drivers in the region and which pay the higher salaries. Service and retail employers are served and participate through the Consortium, but are not on the core leadership team.
2. School superintendents and college presidents served in the County are all part of the Consortium, as well as other key stakeholders. The Consortium has gained a “critical mass” of decision makers across a range of concerns.
3. Consortium leadership estimates it takes about three years to build credibility and a track record of making an impact. At the launch of the effort, there must be sufficient “seed money” on the table to get the initiative/organization through that three-year start-up phase.
4. The Consortium does not launch an effort unless the goal is create a “scalable” solution that can serve large numbers of participants over time.
5. The Consortium maintains its focus by only undertaking projects that directly relate to the established goals of the Consortium. Those projects that do not align with the mission are declined from Consortium involvement.
6. The Consortium gains credibility by making sure there are measurable outcomes or “deliverables” for each activity. Since it is difficult to measure educational outcomes, the measured outcomes typically have to do with numbers of participants and/or pre- and post-event surveys.
7. The Consortium takes a long-view of the problem, and recognizes that initiatives take time to get up and running. Some ideas have worked to a point, but may need to be revised significantly. At other times, when results do not match expectations, Consortium staff must make a judgment about the value of the effort and ask “is it the right idea at the wrong time? Do we need to do it better? Or do we need to drop it permanently?”

Results

The Adams County Consortium has reported the participation of hundreds of students and parents in its career awareness, and work-based learning activities. No specific results on long-term student outcomes have been reported.

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This Innovation Profile was created by **Meeder Consulting, LLC** (www.meederconsulting.com), a firm specializing in leadership and aligning education systems with workforce needs, on behalf of the Colorado Community College System (CCCS). CCCS administers and leads career and technical education in Colorado on behalf of secondary education, community colleges and other CTE providers. Information about CTE in Colorado can be found at www.cccs.edu and www.ColoradoStatePlan.com.