Pennsylvania's Guide to Best Practices in Cooperative Education

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Introduction

One of the greatest challenges school leaders face is identifying and enacting effective teaching methods to engage students. The cooperative education (co-op) method, developed in the early 1900s, aims to do just that – engage students by bridging the gap between classroom-based instruction and practical work experience. According to the research, this teaching method is effective. In a 2004 study, researchers found that co-op students benefited from higher academic grade point averages and subjective reports of well-being than non-participating peers.[1] Another 2012 study reported that co-op students, regardless of academic background, have a higher probability of obtaining employment post-graduation and making $10,000 above average starting wage in their field of study.[2]

Though today's co-op programs have evolved in practice since the teaching method emerged, the goal of providing students with a work-based learning experience and preparing them to meet workforce needs remains the same. Pennsylvania's career and technology centers currently offer innovative, cutting-edge programs, and this guide highlights some of the best practices taking place throughout the state. According to the National Commission for Cooperative Education definition, which has been adopted by Pennsylvania, a co-op program combines structured classroom instruction with work-based learning, directly relates to a student's field of study, and increases in academic and technical complexity as the student advances in the program.[3]

Key characteristics include:

- Career exploration activities,
- Student enrollment in a PDE-approved CTE program,
- Student receives pay for hours worked in the program,
- Student performance is monitored and evaluated at both their school-based and work-based learning experiences,
- Employer/employee relationships fall under all related state and federal laws, and
- Co-op teachers complete training agreements and plans with employers and students.[4]

The co-op programs profiled in this report represent a variety of best practices. They include:

- Workplace readiness,
- Integration of technology,
- Employer engagement, and
- Stakeholder buy-in.

Continue reading to discover a sampling of the inventive co-op best practices taking place inside Pennsylvania's CTCs.

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[1] Blair, B. F., Millea, M., and Hammer, J. (2004) "The impact of cooperative education on academic performance and compensation of engineering majors," Journal of Engineering Education Vol. 93, No. 4, 2004, pp. 333-338.
[2] Brock E. Barry et al. (February 2012) "Engineering Cooperative Education Participation." Purdue University.
[3] PA Department of Education. (2014, March). Cooperative Education Guidelines for Administration: How to Comply with Federal and State Laws and Regulations.
[4] ibid

Best Practice: Workplace Readiness

Eastern Westmoreland Career & Technology Center (EWCTC)

Key Findings

- Developed 19 Personal and Professional Development tasks taught over the course of three years.

- Students develop a comprehensive portfolio of their work covering the 19 competencies.

- EWCTC annually hosts an interview day for senior students to practice interviewing with local employers, industry representatives and school officials, exhibiting the workplace readiness skills they have mastered.

Workplace Readiness Defined

In 2009, [Eastern Westmoreland Career and Technology Center](#) (EWCTC) adopted 19 Personal and Professional Development tasks (PPDs) (see resources) that students complete while enrolled in a CTE program. Emphasizing workplace readiness, they range from learning time management skills and practicing proper social etiquette to developing a resume and preparing for a job interview. The PPDs were developed over the course of two years with significant input from local employers. After observing two instructors teaching career readiness lessons, the school leadership recognized the relevance of the lessons and tasked a group of instructors and support staff to develop a set of career readiness tasks to be adopted and implemented school wide. Once a task list was developed, local advisory committees and occupational advisory committees (OAC) provided input. Because the OACs complete a comprehensive assessment of EWCTC's programs each year and are familiar with what students are doing in the co-op program, committee representatives were able to provide valuable feedback as to what types of tasks would benefit students and businesses alike.

From 10th to 12th grade, students master the 19 PPD tasks in preparation for their co-op or another work-based learning experience, and eventually, full-time employment. Competencies are introduced by instructors in a variety of ways. Some are taught and assessed in a specific classroom lesson while other tasks are evaluated more broadly as a student progresses through a program of study. Using a 4-3-2-1 scale (4=advanced, 3=competent, 2=basic, 1=below basic), instructors rate students on each competency they attempt/complete in real time using an online software program.

Because certain tasks are more demanding than others, school leadership prioritizes offering individual support for students. EWCTC's Administrative Director Todd Weimer explained, "With only three sending schools, we are able to spend a lot of time with each student. This lets us check regularly on their PPD task progress and provide support if we see a need." For example, if a student is re-tasked with a certain competency, instructors and school support staff provide remedial instruction to help him/her get up to speed. Key to providing student support, EWCTC employs a full-time English teacher, part-time math teacher, and multiple teaching assistants. All these individuals work closely with instructors and students to ensure students demonstrate competency on their PPD tasks. Support typically occurs through general classroom assistance and one-on-one tutoring as needed. Further, the English instructor meets with each program instructor to review the rationale, requirements, and timeline for PPD tasks. They then provide assistance through co-teaching and lesson development.

Employer Participation

Co-op employers, though not tasked with teaching specific PPD tasks, contribute to a student's PPD completion. When in the workplace, students are expected to put into practice what tasks they have learned. Before hiring a student, employers are asked to review the PPD task list in detail to ensure they are comfortable assessing student proficiency and competency on PPDs. Employers regularly provide feedback regarding student PPD task proficiency to the co-op program coordinator. Feedback is primarily received through Occupational Advisory Committees where employers review the PPDs and portfolio requirements with instructors.

Depending on a student's level of PPD task proficiency, school leadership spends time purposefully matching students with employers who can meet that student's skill set and abilities. EWCTC's Cooperative Education Coordinator Lisa Newhouse stated, "Employer fit is key. All employers are part of PPD training, but some employers are willing to devote a little extra attention or finesse while others don't have time to do that. We do our best to match students accordingly so that everyone benefits."

Portfolio & Interviews

During their time at EWCTC, students build a comprehensive portfolio representing their progress and mastery of the 19 PPD competencies. This project culminates in their senior year. Due to the longevity of the project and demanding nature of the tasks, EWCTC leadership assigns four staff advisors to work closely with students and teachers to ensure portfolios are up-to-date and tasks are completed on time. All portfolio requirements are generated and stored digitally although select pieces are printed and compiled in a binder for Senior Interview Day. Upon graduating, students are provided a complete copy of all documentation during their time at EWCTC. The school provides graduates with cloud access to their portfolio.

At the end of each school year, seniors participate in a day of interviews hosted by EWCTC. After preparing and practicing to interview for months as part of the portfolio/PPD task requirements, students attend a formal interview with a panel of local employers, business representatives and instructors. Students present their technical knowledge as well as their workplace readiness skills. In addition to the preparation with instructors, seniors attend an interview workshop hosted by a local human resources representative from a local company. This workshop builds on the interview prep lessons which instructors share in class. During the day of interviews, students attend one formal interview with a panel of two to three professionals conducting the questioning. The interviewers are provided with sample questions and a scoring rubric in order to provide students with feedback.

Though the portfolio is primarily a tool to prepare students for interviews and workplace readiness, Weimer explained, "Employers appreciate getting a snapshot of what students have completed while in their program." Furthermore, because students are able to articulate their skills and goals so effectively, interviews – which are intended to be for feedback only – occasionally result in job placement. Also, of note, completed portfolios may be used to meet Pennsylvania's Future Ready requirements.

Value/Impact

According to the school leadership, local employers value and appreciate the workplace readiness skills that students bring to the job site. This is apparent in that the vast majority of co-op and work-based learning partners return each year to EWCTC to hire new students. Currently, there is a list of local businesses awaiting a student placement. Furthermore, of the students in a co-op position, at least 80 percent are hired by their employer for a full-time position once they have graduated.

In the future, EWCTC leadership hopes to send more students to local businesses. At this time, about 40 students participate in a co-op, and the school leadership would like to double that number. The biggest challenge facing the school is the lack of student transportation to and from a co-op. Students are prepared to work, businesses are waiting on placement, but there is not yet a solution remedying how students get to the job site.

Best Practice: Integration of Technology

Franklin County Career and Technology Center

Key Findings

- Training plans and training agreements are created online by the student allowing them to be responsible for gathering and submitting information on their work-based learning (WBL) site.

- Students document their experience online through daily logs that are shared with their instructor. In addition to accountability, these logs are then able to be used as a learning tool that ties classroom instruction with real world application.

- Web-based solutions provide students with a quicker and more efficient application process, allowing them to begin their WBL sooner.

- A digital system, reduced the time spent by business partners on logs, feedback and evaluations.

- Student evaluations are sent immediately to the instructor for review and feedback.

Motivation for Change

In 2014, in order to increase efficiency, reduce time-consuming processes, and emphasize student responsibility, [Franklin County Career and Technology Center](#) (FCCTC) transitioned from a paper-based documentation system for its cooperative education program to a digital system for all work-based learning forms. This change created a paperless environment for program training plans, training agreements, and other work-based learning documents required by both the state and the school.

Two factors drove this change to a digital system. First, the new system would reduce the time that staff and students spent on paperwork required by the state. FCCTC's cooperative program director, Terry Miller noted, "So much time was being spent by staff on administrative tasks. Our time with students was minimized." FCCTC hoped that a digital documentation system would free up time for teachers and the leadership to emphasize and grow relationships with students, businesses, and parents.

The second factor that drove this change was FCCTC's goal to make the program less teacher-led and more student-driven. School leadership wanted students to assume greater responsibility for applying, participating in, and fulfilling coop requirements. The administrators believe that students invest more fully and diligently in work they initiate, and the student forms provide an opportunity to emphasize student ownership and responsibility. The program now requires students to sign-up and monitor their cooperative education experience entirely on their own. If a student chooses not to sign up for the program, they forfeit program participation – including the paycheck they typically earn for their work.

Digital Design

Built from scratch by Miller who had no prior experience with information technology, the program took about a year to develop, test and fine-tune. At the time, there were no digital accountability programs in existence that met student accountability requirements, state reporting demands, and business participation needs. To meet all of these prerequisites, Miller combined three existing programs (see resources section for programs used). These programs provided platforms for electronic signatures, application integration, data collection, evaluations, and logs. All three programs offered a free trial version, so there were no initial costs incurred as the program was designed. Eventually, however, a few programs required a paid upgrade, resulting in a current annual cost of $300 per year to run the

program. Program funding comes from FCCTC's general cooperative education program budget and, because the program is still a relatively small expense, it does not require additional fundraising or allocations.

Keep It Simple

With both instructors and end users in mind as he developed the program, Miller's primary goal was to make the program extremely easy to use for all parties. When testing the student use portion of the program, he asked middle schoolers to do a few dry runs to see just how intuitive and simple the program functioned. After a few successful trials, Miller achieved his goal and began transitioning all cooperative program students over to the new online platform. One key part of the design involved ensuring the front end of the program (what is seen by the user) seamlessly blended all three independent programs together, so the user only visits one website to complete all required tasks. According to Miller, students transitioned smoothly, used the program with ease in a short period of time, and eliminated interaction from anyone else which significantly reduced staff time and monitoring.

The Final Product

The program design is easy to use and makes efficient use of time, resources, data collection, and reporting. Virtually all aspects of state reporting requirements for the program are now digitized. Additionally, the cooperative program application completed by students drives all other documentation (training plans, training agreements, student logs, evaluations, etc.). The information is collected only once from students and is then distributed to multiple training forms and locations for all stakeholders to access. Students may also download an app that allows them to complete their daily report from their phone in about as much time as it takes to send a text message.

Moreover, the program eliminated the time-consuming – and often most challenging - task of collecting physical signatures from multiple stakeholders (instructor, students, parents, businesses) on every training agreement. Now everyone can sign agreements online using electronic signatures. All documents are then organized and stored electronically saving space and printing costs. The accountability system is well established at this point, and as Miller stated, "Students are no longer part of the process…they are the process. They complete tasks and requirements not because they have to do it, but because they want to do it. More time can be devoted to student achievement and partnership development."

Value/Impact

One of the biggest challenges has been the steep learning curve that comes with developing and implementing a program from scratch. Because there was no canned version of such a program, Miller spent a significant amount of time learning what the program needed to offer/include and then ensured it was easy to use for all involved stakeholders. He advises, "Focus on the benefits of the solution and not the challenges of the problem. Staying up late and spending long weekends was a small sacrifice for the benefits that students, myself, and future coordinators would gain. Planting the seeds today will allow others to sit in the shade tomorrow."

In the near future, Miller will work to eliminate the few manual requirements needed to complete a training plan. He and other school leadership want to ensure all training plans are automated for the cooperative education program director. Program leadership also wants to be more efficient by hosting monthly co-op stakeholder meetings online instead of in person as they previously had been. This small but efficient change reduces travel and saves time for all involved parties.

Best Practice: Employer Engagement

Parkway West Career and Technology Center

Key Findings

- School leadership expanded the role of cooperative education program director position to include focusing on workforce development, public relations, and fundraising.

- Instructors conduct visits to local businesses each year which has increased cooperative education program opportunities for students and strengthened the relationship between employers and PWCTC.

- PWCTC launched a foundation to provide businesses a tax-free method to donate items and money to the school.

A New Focus

In 2013, the leadership at [Parkway West Career and Technology Center](#) (PWCTC) set goals to better meet local workforce needs and help ensure students experience valuable cooperative education opportunities. These goals focused on how to intentionally engage more businesses in the community, increase employer participation in student learning, and focus more on workforce development. Specifically, through employer engagement strategies like planned industry visits, leadership wanted to double the number of occupation advisory committees for each career program.

As the first step to achieving these goals, PWCTC's leadership hired a full-time consultant to lead the cooperative education program. In order to retain flexibility with the position, the new cooperative education program director was hired as a contract consultant rather than as a permanent position. The job description was also expanded to include directing workforce development, public relations, and the foundation.

According to PWCTC's Executive Director, Darby Copeland, the school fortunately found a great fit when it hired consultant Natasha Johnston. Since arriving at PWCTC in 2014, Johnston has worn multiple hats. As the Workforce Development Coordinator, she engages and builds working relationships with local businesses, resulting in more co-op opportunities for students than the school can fill. As the Public Relations Coordinator, Johnston attends parent nights, open house events, and career days at sending schools during which she interacts directly with parents and educates them about the programs at PWCTC. Lastly, through her work with the education foundation, Johnston helps organize fundraising events like golf outings and wine tastings which allows her to make personal connections with the employer sponsors of the events.

Meet the Instructor

With a renewed focus on employer engagement, PWCTC's leadership decided that school representatives should start going out into the community to regularly visit local employers at their place of work. Copeland and Johnston asked PWCTC instructors to identify and schedule visits with two local businesses in the region that did not currently have a relationship with PWCTC. The purpose of these visits was two-fold. They gave instructors the opportunity to discuss the cooperative education program in a one-on-one setting with employers. Second, they provided employers the opportunity to share with instructors their current and projected employment needs.

Once instructors began visiting businesses, school leadership observed three beneficial outcomes in a relatively short amount of time. First, new partnerships formed between local employers and the school which served to grow cooperative program opportunities for students. Second, the visits renewed instructor exposure in a workplace environment through workshop tours and talking with industry technicians. Johnston explained, "Even though our instructors are experts in their field, they still benefit from occasionally visiting a workshop to see what new technology or methods are in use." Third, after learning how PWCTC students are trained to directly fill their employment pipeline, businesses willingly invested time and material resources to assist the education process. Copeland declared that when businesses upgrade equipment, "their trash becomes our treasure."

A Strong Foundation

In order to facilitate growth and to maintain employer outreach, PWCTC established an education foundation in 2014. The PWCTC Education Foundation launched primarily as a fundraising organization in an attempt to head off what school leadership sees as a future funding crisis. Copeland explained that CTE programs can be expensive to run, and replacing and/or repairing machines in a timely and affordable manner is often not feasible for the school district. A lack of proper equipment can result in a program not being up to teaching standards. This is a worst-case scenario not only for the school but also for local employers who are counting on properly educated students to work at their businesses. To combat this potential problem, PWCTC kicked off the foundation as a way to give businesses a tax-free way to participate in fundraisers, to provide in-kind donations (equipment, tools, etc.) and to donate money.

According to Copeland, the education foundation creates immense benefits for PWCTC. Not only has the school raised nearly $100,000 through in-kind donations and money and forged new relationships in the community through different events, but the participating businesses also have benefited. Companies who donate goods or sponsor a fundraising event earn free advertisement that comes from the school and local press coverage. Businesses are appreciative of this marketing and the efforts of Ms. Johnston to prioritize publicity in her role as the public relations coordinator.

Value/Impact

Since enacting these changes, Copeland and Johnston agree that the cooperative education program is growing at a healthy pace while serving and engaging the business community. PWCTC students placed in a cooperative education program are proving to be well-trained. In fact, the vast majority of PWCTC cooperative graduates are hired as full-time employees at their place of work. Furthermore, school leadership has witnessed an increase of employers who regularly visit the school. These visits serve to build relationships between students and employers and to support instructors through test evaluations, guest speaking engagements, and as substitute instructors. According to Copeland, these visits are invaluable because they aid in helping students gain comfort and familiarity with the employers for whom they will work.

However, one challenge remains – transportation. PWCTC has far more cooperative learning opportunities available to students than they can fill due to a lack of student transportation. Johnston explained that the school could place every eligible student (around 270) in a co-op program this year and still have around 30 unfilled co-ops. The school fields up to six calls each day from companies looking to host a student. Due to a lack of transportation though, only about 50 students currently participate in the co-op program. In the future, PWCTC leadership hopes to find alternative methods of transportation to fill this need.

Best Practice: Employer Engagement

SUN Area Technical Institute

Key Findings

- Building trust between the school and employers relies on SUN Tech sending students who are reliable, well-trained, and prepared for the workforce.

- Whenever possible, SUN Tech strives to make participating in their cooperative program as easy for employers as possible by offering flexible student schedules and reducing paperwork.

- SUN Tech regularly hosts events like BBQs and school tours for cooperative program stakeholders in order to build and strengthen relationships.

Workforce Ready

In order to engage employers in the cooperative education program at [SUN Area Technical Institute](#) (SUN Tech), school leadership places a strong emphasis on building trust among businesses and the school. The primary method of accomplishing this goal is by providing businesses with reliable, well-trained students. According to SUN Tech's School-to-Career Coordinator, Joe Weisser, "There is not a 'future' employment gap in our area– it is here now. Employers are demanding students." As such, SUN Tech leadership is intent on sending only well-prepared students into the workplace. Weisser explained that employers do not have time to host a student who is not prepared. It is up to the school to send only those students who have demonstrated an ability to meet workplace expectations otherwise maintaining employer engagement with the co-op program would dramatically decline.

Currently, out of the 240 students attending SUN Tech, 65 students participate in a co-op program. School leadership and employers both want this number to increase, but in order to be eligible to participate in a co-op, students have to maintain a 95 percent attendance rate and achieve certain benchmarks in the classroom. Also, every single student is interviewed by the co-op director to determine what type of work environment would be a good fit for the student and business both. Though strenuous, these expectations lead to successful placements in nearly every circumstance, and employers have continued to remain engaged with SUN Tech year after year, confident that each student sent their way will be successful in their workplace.

Flexibility Is Key

By offering flexibility, school leadership discovered that mom-and-pop type businesses can participate in a co-op program just as well as a big corporation. Weisser noted that the school leadership makes employer reporting requirements as flexible as possible. He stated, "As long as businesses are fulfilling their agreed-upon requirements to host a student, we try to reduce unnecessary rules and limitations."

School leadership also makes a concerted effort to meet an employer's practical needs. For example, Weisser learned that some businesses wanted to hire students, but they were unable to provide them work during traditional school hours. Now, when possible, Weisser will adjust a student's schedule to fit the employer's preference – even if it means shift work on the weekends.

Engaging Events

SUN Tech's leadership also prioritizes employer engagement outside of the formal workplace. Each year, the school hosts a large, community barbecue for businesses, families, students, and instructors.

With over 300 attendees each year, this event gives the various co-op stakeholders an opportunity to connect face-to-face and to learn more about the CTE programs at the school. They can go on tours of the school during which businesses visit the SUN Tech "Wall of Fame," a photo display of all co-op students with their employers who successfully completed the program. Another wall displays "Signing Day" photos, recognizing students that have signed on to work for a business full-time after graduation.

Value/Impact

According to Weisser, a key lesson has been recognizing that every company has different needs and contributions to bring to the table. To effectively meet these needs and to build strong school-employer relationships, Weisser strongly encourages SUN Tech instructors to listen to employers without imposing the school's preference. While partnerships are certainly a two-way street, school leadership found that by listening and accommodating employer needs when possible, the opportunities businesses were able to provide to students expanded. Weisser also tries to schedule site visits when it works best for the employer – even if that time does not fall within school hours. As Weisser explained, "I might need to take a call or be in a factory at 5:30 pm one evening. And that's okay. Businesses don't operate on a school day schedule, and we need to acknowledge that."

Best Practice: Stakeholder Buy-in

Greene County Career and Technology Center

Key Findings

- School leadership introduced the role of the cooperative education program director position which included focusing on workforce outreach and development, and adult education.

- GCCTC partnered with two non-profits to fund co-op opportunities for students thus reducing risk and cost to host employers.

- GCCTC rented and later purchased transportation to take students to and from co-op placements who otherwise would not have participated in a WBL opportunity.

Non-Profit Partnerships

In 2014-15, the leadership at [Greene County Career Technology Center](#) (GCCTC) was determined to grow their cooperative education program to provide students with more work-based learning experiences (WBLE) while meeting the workforce needs of local employers. To enact this change, GCCTC first hired Jennifer Nix, a former CTE educator of 20 years, to manage and expand program offerings. When Nix arrived at GCCTC in 2015, the co-op program barely existed. At that time, there wasn't even a co-op education coordinator at GCCTC, and an average of three students participated in a co-op each year. Enter Nix. As a former instructor who is passionate about WBLE, she took on the positions of Workforce Development Coordinator, Cooperative Education Coordinator, and Adult Education Coordinator.

Understanding that stakeholder buy-in is crucial to building a successful co-op program, Nix looked for workforce development organizations and partnerships to engage. The first meeting Nix attended included representatives from [Blueprints](#), a local non-profit organization, formerly called, *Community Action Southwest.* Blueprints' representatives explained that the organization was in danger of losing grant funding unless they could locate a WBLE program to support, which was dedicated to placing students in WBLE programs. GCCTC entered into a partnership with Blueprints, committed to placing students in Blueprints-approved WBLE programs, and making them eligible to receive grant funding. Specifically, they planned to focus on co-op program development and growth. During this time, Nix also brought another stakeholder into the collaboration – [Southwest Training](#), a local, non-profit dedicated to workforce development with ties to the business community.

Outreach and Buy-In

Nix and representatives from Blueprints and Southwest Training first focused on outreach efforts. Together, they built a database of businesses to visit in Greene and surrounding counties. Then representatives from GCCTC, Blueprints, and Southwest Training scheduled meetings with business owners to share information about the co-op program and other work-based learning experience opportunities like internships and job shadows. According to Nix, employers quickly committed to join the co-op program for two reasons.

First, there was a workforce shortage that the co-op could help address. Second, taking on a co-op student presented minimal financial cost and risk to employers. This was because Southwest Training (at $9.00/hour) and Blueprints (at $10.35/hour) committed to paying up to the first 90 hours of student employment as well as covering the worker's compensation cost. Southwest Training used grant funding awarded from a local workforce board as well as from a group of county commissioners.

Blueprints used grant funding from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to assist in covering student cost. This meant that employers not only received free labor, but also an evaluation period to determine whether that student was a good fit to work at their business. If a student did not prove to be a good fit, Nix would pull the student after the 90-hour commitment. Fortunately, the majority of students were hired on for full-time employment once the work-based learning experience was complete.

These efforts proved successful. In the first year, the co-op program grew from three to 65 students, and from four host employers to well over 50. This progress drew attention from the school board members, who were surprised by the rapid growth of the program because Greene County is rural with no large industry in the area. The board, which eagerly supported the program, committed to providing funds to purchase materials and to support program expansion.

Transportation Challenge

Despite the co-op's growing momentum, there was a significant hurdle school leadership realized that quickly needed to be addressed – transportation. There is no public transportation in the county and a majority of co-op eligible students did not have a way to get to and from the workplace. However, Blueprints offered GCCTC unused grant money (from the grants mentioned above) that allowed for transportation costs. School leadership contacted Enterprise Rent-a-Car and negotiated renting a van for an entire school year. This one development provided transportation for 12 students to attend their co-op. Since that first year of renting a van, GCCTC Director Mark Krupa applied for and was awarded *The Job Training and Applications Program Grant* through the Pennsylvania Department of Education which paid for a new school van. Staffing van drivers was complicated at first. In fact, Nix primarily drove the van the first year, but soon after, the school director appointed two school maintenance workers to become van drivers and the issue was resolved.

Value/Impact

According to Nix, one of the primary reasons this program has achieved such growth in a limited period of time is due to the support of Krupa and school staff. She stated, "School leadership repeatedly tells me to come to them with an issue because they will do their best to solve it."

A key lesson learned has been the need to be flexible with time when dealing with both stakeholders and instructors. Nix explained that often meeting the needs of these key co-op stakeholders occurs outside the school day, but in order to build strong and trusting relationships, she tries to be as accommodating as possible.

As the co-op program continues to grow, school leadership would like to see 75 percent of seniors participating in a program within the next few years. According to Nix, "Word of mouth about the program and our students has gotten around. Now we have businesses calling us. We have at least 20 unfilled co-op positions and that number is growing." To increase student participation, school leadership has invited different business representatives to give presentations on what a work-based learning experience opportunity looks like at their companies.

Conclusion

The career and technology centers highlighted in this guide demonstrate the importance of how implementing multiple strategies and initiatives can grow, improve, and strengthen cooperative education programs. Whether looking to increase stakeholder buy-in, engage employers, or strengthen workplace readiness, CTC administrators throughout Pennsylvania are encouraged to draw from and consider the best practices shared in this report.

Resources

EWCTC PPD Task List

- PPD-001 Manage personal finances including understanding budgeting responsibilities.
- PPD-002 Practice time management techniques.
- PPD-003 Explain proper business and personal ethics.
- PPD-004 Practice appropriate social etiquette.
- PPD-005 Practice and respect human diversity.
- PPD-006 Practice interpersonal communication skills.
- PPD-007 Practice conflict resolution skills as they pertain to the workplace.
- PPD-008 Prepare and present a Portfolio.
- PPD-009 Prepare a post-secondary plan.
- PPD-010 Participate in a documented community service experience.
- PPD-011 Prepare a career research paper related to the field.
- PPD-012 Read and complete an employment application form.
- PPD-013 Write a cover letter to obtain a job in the field.
- PPD-014 Write a professional resume.
- PPD-015 Write a thank you letter after a job interview.
- PPD-016 Prepare for a job interview.
- PPD-017 Complete semester projects to demonstrate mastered skills.
- PPD-018 Participate in Senior Interview Day/Portfolio presentation.
- PPD-019 Acquire letters of recommendation from educators, employers, or community members.

FCCTC Technology Integration Resources
- Data collection, evaluations, and logs – www.wufoo.com
- Electronic signatures – www.signow.com
- Application integration – www.zapier.com