



Resources for Youth Programming and Policy

DESCRIPTION

- An intermediary among schools, businesses, and community organizations for school-to-career activities
- Serves approximately 20,000 students on an annual basis
- Provides internships, job shadows, career days, professional development programs, and many other school-to-career activities
- Serves elementary, middle, and high-school youth

The Workplace Learning Connection

Sustaining School-to-Career Activities

Overview

State and local leaders in Iowa, as in other states that received federal funds under the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, have been challenged to sustain and enhance school-to-career activities beyond the availability of federal resources. The Workplace Learning Connection, that serves schools and businesses in East Central Iowa, provides a model for sustaining regional school-to-career activities through the active engagement of educators and employers along with a results-based focus.

The Workplace Learning Connection (TWLC) functions as an intermediary among schools, businesses, and community organizations to provide career education and school-to-career activities to students in elementary, middle, and high schools. TWLC's activities and programs all aim to develop the future workforce by connecting business and education in relevant, work-based learning activities for K-12 students and teachers. In addition to serving the needs of schools districts, TWLC also provides school-to-career activities for local youth programs such as Upward Bound and Iowa-Jobs for America's Graduates.

TWLC serves seven counties and 33 school districts in the region of East Central Iowa. Internships, job shadows, career days, classroom career speakers, and worksite tours are the primary activities that TWLC provides to approximately 20,000 students on a yearly basis. TWLC

has implemented a K-5 program specifically designed for elementary school-age students to expose them to diverse careers and highlight the "real world" relevance of math, reading, and teamwork. For several summers, TWLC held a one week Career Exploration Camp for middle school students. Additionally, TWLC offers a Teacher @ Work professional development course during the summer to provide teachers with examples of how their subject matters are applied in the workplace.

History & Development

In under ten years, TWLC has grown from a start-up organization to an established, sustainable school-to-career intermediary. Before TWLC was established, federal funds under the School-to-Work Opportunities Act supported school-to-career activities in the region. However, there was little consistency and coordination among programs. Businesses in particular were subject to duplicative efforts to engage employers in school-to-career programs. In 1998, several major employers and large school districts, along with Kirkwood Community College and Grant Wood Area Education Agency, came together to form TWLC as a solution for educators and employers, to both create quality career education programs and provide a single point of contact for the regional school-to-career system. TWLC was established as a 501(c)(3) non profit organization in partnership with Kirkwood Community College and Grant Wood Area Education Agency, which are both represented on its Board of Directors. Additionally,

TWLC receives direction from its Advisory Council that includes key education, employer, and community stakeholders such as chambers of commerce, local school districts, the workforce development agency, and local businesses and industry.

Initial funding for TWLC came from federal School-to-Work funds – twenty-five thousand dollars a year for two years – and business matching funds. These original dollars allowed TWLC to become an established and credible organization in the region. During its early years, the organization’s director focused on building sustainable relationships with schools and businesses, and building quality programming. TWLC began working with 20 school districts and gradually built partnerships with the remaining school districts in the region. Currently, all 33 school districts have memoranda of understanding with TWLC.

As federal School-to-Work funds were time limited, TWLC’s director and key partners developed a plan to sustain the organization beyond the initial two-year funding period. Ongoing support would need to come from major stakeholder groups – school districts, businesses, and counties – while recognizing that TWLC would also need to demonstrate a positive return on investment to these same stakeholders. In the final year of federal funding, TWLC’s director began working with the local school superintendents’ Advisory Council (Area 10) to help them understand the value of and the need to invest in the organization’s services over the long-term. The Advisory Council’s chair then went to the larger superintendents group to garner their support. This resulted in TWLC negotiating a set

of per-pupil fees for school-to-career activities with the school districts. This direct financial support from school districts helped to leverage support from other stakeholder groups.

Financing

Maximizing Federal, State, and Local Revenue

By engaging key stakeholders and providing services that are valued by them, TWLC has been able to build a diversified and sustainable funding base. Funds from school districts, employer support, and economic development dollars from counties and the state comprise TWLC’s primary funding sources.

Funds from school districts provide the largest single source of support for TWLC’s school-to-career programs. The 2001-2002 school year was the first in which TWLC received school dollars under the negotiated fee structure. At that time, fees were set at \$1 per pupil for grades K-5, \$2 per pupil for grades 6-8, and \$4 per pupil for grades 9-12. In 2004, these fees were amended to a \$3 per pupil fee for grades 6-8 and a \$5 per pupil fee for grades 9-12; activities for elementary school students are now provided on a fee-for-service basis. Schools typically cover these fees out of their general school budgets and some use federal Perkins funds.¹ Early on, some schools used federal At-Risk and Safe and Drug Free School dollars or parent fees to support TWLC school-to-career activities. TWLC invoices all schools on July 1st and receives funds in a lump sum by September 1st of each year, allowing TWLC to budget for programming early in the school year.

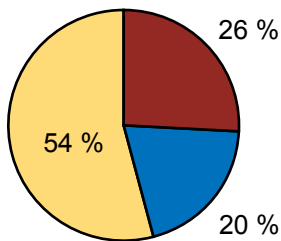
TWLC’s services benefit schools not only by providing needed career

Financing Strategies

- Making Better Use of Existing Resources
- Maximizing Federal, State, and Local Revenue
- Creating More Flexibility in Existing Streams
- Building Public/Private Partnerships
- Generating New Dedicated Revenue

1 Perkins funds support career and technical education.

Funding for The Workplace Learning Connection FY 2005



Total Budget: \$305,726

- Employer/Workforce Funds (includes H1B)
- Economic Development Funds (state and local)
- Funds from Educational Entities

The Workplace Learning Connection FY 2005 Budget	
Federal	
H1B	\$11,728
State	
Grow Iowa Values Fund	\$46,832
Local	
Area 10 School Districts	\$83,229
County Supervisors	\$13,720
Grant Wood AEA	\$30,000
Kirkwood Community College	\$42,135
Regional Tech Prep	\$11,024
Private	
Regional Employers	\$67,058
Total	\$305,726

development activities to students but also by helping superintendents meet state requirements. Recently passed Iowa legislation, for example, now requires all 8th grade students to have a career development component as part of their high school student academic plan. Additionally, TWLC provides data-driven reports to superintendents on student school-to-career activities and outcomes.

Whereas school districts fund TWLC to support career development activities for their students and employers fund the organization to connect with and build their future workforce, local county boards of supervisors have invested in TWLC in order to further economic development goals. TWLC receives county economic or community development funds from county boards of supervisors on a four-cents-per-capita basis, according to population data from the 2000 census. Though not a large source of funds overall, these contributions give county lead-

ers a stake in sustaining the region's school-to-career system through TWLC. Additionally, TWLC receives state economic development dollars from the Grow Iowa Values Fund through Kirkwood Community College's Career Edge Career Academy programs to support one full-time staff person.

Through its close working relationship with Kirkwood Community College, TWLC has received federal H1B funds and Regional Tech Prep funds to help support the work-based learning component of the Career Edge Career Academies that are available in many Eastern Iowa high schools. Career

Edge is part of Kirkwood's secondary programs department. TWLC also receives general operating support from Kirkwood (provided with Perkins funds) as well as in-kind support in the form of information technology support, human resources assistance, and other in-kind supports. While TWLC's main office is housed at the college, it does pay rent. Additionally, TWLC receives general operating support from Grant Wood Area Education Agency through its administrative budget.

Building Partnerships

Partnering with schools has been instrumental in both founding TWLC as well as in leveraging support from local businesses. TWLC's director approached school districts first for continuing funding so that she could then go to businesses with "cash in hand" to show the value of the services TWLC provides. In working with businesses, TWLC's director takes an outcomes-oriented, data-driven approach to demonstrate to employers

the positive impact that school-to-career activities have on current and future workforce development. For example, internships and job shadows help the majority of youth participants build awareness of local career opportunities and connect education and the world of work. These types of indicators along with the fact that approximately 30 percent of students are hired upon completion of their internship show current and potential business partners that TWLC provides a significant return on investment and makes a strong case for why businesses should support the regional school-to-career system.

Businesses provide TWLC with financial and in-kind support. Business dollars for TWLC are drawn from general funds and from areas relevant to workforce development such as funds for training and recruitment. Some businesses give funds as tax-deductible contributions or funnel dollars through vehicles like the area's community foundations. Businesses also provide invaluable in-kind support such as job sites for internships and employee time to work with students.

Next Steps and Future Challenges

In the coming years, TWLC hopes to grow and expand its work with middle and elementary school populations as well at the community college level. In addition, the director is deeply involved in the creation of a state-wide network for work-based learning which is being modeled on TWLC's system-building work. A policy framework has already been put in place by state legislation and next steps involve securing state revenue to help support the network. TWLC is also working to better engage small employers in rural counties in helping to fund school-to-career activities in their counties. The director is employing different strategies such

as using business-to-business outreach and having students speak to employers about the positive outcomes of school-to-career activities.

Keys to Success

- **Promote a collaborative environment.** TWLC has found an open, collaborative environment key to garnering needed support from an array of partners. By working closely with schools, businesses, and community leaders, TWLC has been able to secure sustainable funding and provide high quality services to as many students as possible.
- **Be respectful of programs already in place.** At the outset, TWLC's director was careful to promote the organization's services as an addition and support to the local programs already in existence. This allowed for greater acceptance by local stakeholders and eventually to stronger, more extensive partnering.
- **Take a business approach.** Recognizing the value of showing a positive return-on-investment to partners, TWLC has always taken a data-driven, value-added approach. TWLC provides its education, community, and business partners with data indicators that highlight, for example, the community economic and workforce development benefits that TWLC enables.
- **Plan for sustainability from the beginning.** TWLC's director has worked towards sustainability from the first year by building relationships with schools, local businesses, and community organizations in order to gain support and future funding.



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