



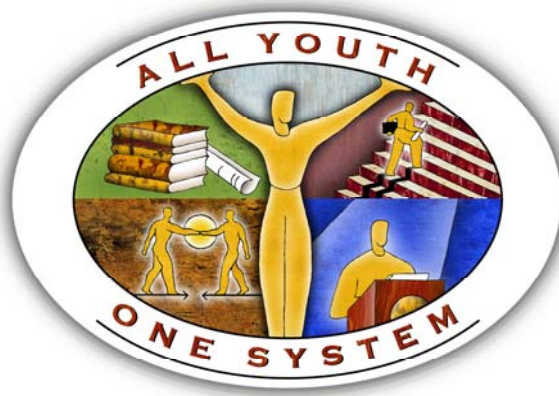
YCIDEAS

*A Compilation of Promising Practices from Youth Councils throughout California
2001-2005*

Youth Council Institute

Chapter Ten

Work-Ready Certificates



In this section:

- *Using Work-Ready Certificates to Align Career Instruction with Industry Needs*
- *Workforce Ready Curriculum and Certificate to Ensure All Youth are Work-Ready*
- *Work-Ready Certificates to Support Students and Business Leaders*

Using Work-Ready Certifications to Align Career Instruction with Industry Needs

Youth Council: Sonoma County Youth Education and Employment Services Council

Element: Career Preparation, Comprehensive Approach, Academic Excellence

Function: Cross Function

Subject: Work Ready Certificate

The Challenge: The Sonoma County Youth Education and Employment Services Council and the Sonoma County Office of Education have been working to align all career-focused instruction with high growth/high demand industry sectors in the county. Currently a wide range of programs exists to expose and prepare young people for life in the workplace. These programs, not always well connected to industry and rarely connected to each other, include Career Technical Education, Regional Occupational Programs, Career Academies, Work Experience Programs, Tech Prep, Career Pathways, and other career-focused instruction at the county's high schools, workforce preparation programs, and the community college. The two agencies wanted to find an effective means of aligning the career-focused instruction with industry needs.

The Practice and Evidence: Together, the partners in this initiative (the Workforce Investment Board, the Economic Development Board, and the County Office of Education) proposed a strategy that will form a county-wide work-ready certification system that will serve as a pipeline to both college and careers in identified high growth and high need industry sectors in the county. The Sonoma County Workforce Investment Board's Youth Education and Employment Services Council developed a plan to create a Work-Ready Certification that can ensure that work-readiness (as defined by business) is a goal within the systems that prepare youth, and that youth can earn a credential that will put them at the "head of the line" when seeking employment in the county. The Work Ready Certificate will build on and document basic workplace, academic, and employability skills that pertain to all industries at the entry level.

The purposes of the Work Ready Certification system are as follows:

- promote rigor and relevance by integrating industry standards into school curriculum;
- carry industry voice to schools;
- add value to the high school diploma; and
- align with the All Youth-One System goal.

The Details: A Work-Ready Certification (WRC) design team comprised of members representing business, education (both K-12 and post secondary), and government began by surveying employers throughout Sonoma County to identify the core skills necessary for entry-level employment.

(continued)

Over 200 surveys were collected, and data on the top 20 skills necessary for work readiness were disseminated at the county-wide Youth Symposium in March 2005.

Next the WRC design team created an assessment framework focused on measuring the skills identified by employers. The assessment battery includes multiple methodologies:

- observation rubrics for both worksite supervisors and other adults;
- skills tests in the areas of math, reading, customer service, and computer literacy;
- critical thinking and problem solving scenarios; and
- student-based performance portfolio.

The goals for the certification program are as follows:

- Ensure all youth are successful in the global economy.
- Align education and workforce preparation systems to the skills needed in the global economy.
- Prepare a quality workforce and promote a healthy economy for Sonoma County.

What's Next for this YCidea? To ensure maximum effectiveness of the Work-Ready Certification, a field test will be conducted during the fall of 2005, and the certification process will be refined. Before the certification is launched in January 2006, a county-wide awareness campaign will be launched with appropriate messages for each targeted group: business, educators, students, and parents. Window stickers for businesses such as “We hire Work-Ready”; certificates as recognized elements in student portfolios; “Top Fifteen Skills” posters, bookmarks, and other materials to be used in education and youth development environments will be developed to ensure that work-readiness stays in the forefront of the community’s mind.

Where to Go for More Information

Sonoma County Youth Education and Employment Services Council

Paul Eelkema
Sonoma County Office of Education
Consultant to Career Development/ROP
peelkema@scoe.org

Steve Jackson
Sonoma County Office of Education
Interim Director Career Development/ROP
sjackson@scoe.org



Workforce Ready Curriculum and Certificate to Ensure All Youth are Work-Ready

Youth Council: Ventura County Youth Council

Element: Career Preparation

Function: Cross Function

Subject: Work-Ready Certificates, Educational Options

The Challenge: The Ventura County Youth Council was offering a work-ready certificate (WRC) for WIA- eligible youth, and the response from employers was very positive. In fact, they were asking for more work-ready youth. The challenge was how to develop and expand the work-ready certificate program and make it available to all youth in Ventura County. The Youth Council members recognized that a high school diploma did not necessarily prepare youth for entering the work force, so the work-ready curriculum could fill a need.

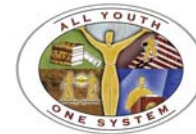
The Practice and Evidence: The Workforce Investment Board of Ventura County, in partnership with the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools Office, recently approved curriculum for a new work-readiness certificate program for youth. The 10-hour curriculum prepares youth for work through a series of workshops on employer expectations, self-assessment of personal qualities, job search and interviewing techniques, telephone etiquette, resumes and cover letters, and job and work permit applications.

The curriculum, which combines work readiness and life skills activities, helps students gain a work-ready level of proficiency in the areas outlined in the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) Report by the U.S. Department of Labor. The curriculum includes teaching youth to set goals and plan for the future, use the county's Job and Career Centers, search for a job and use the Cal Jobs online database, understand employer expectations, create a resume and cover letter, practice interviewing, consider the company's perspective, develop basic workplace skills, and complete job and work permit applications.

According to Amy Fonzo, Deputy Director of the Ventura County WIB, "After completing the work readiness program, the youth have a resume, cover letter and a portfolio with all the documents they need to start working." She notes that "Completing the work readiness program gives youth confidence when applying for a job. The certificate also acts as a 'hire-me-first card' because it gives employers confidence in a youth's abilities and potential."

Over 220 students have earned certificates through the program, which began as a pilot project during the 2004-2005 school year. The course has since been endorsed by several local school

(continued)



districts and is currently being offered to youth countywide through high schools and Job and Career Center locations. Work experience school credits are available for eligible students. “Local employers are responding positively to the certificate as a reliable way to determine the quality of an employee even before an interview begins,” says Fonzo.

The Details: Several years ago, the Ventura School-to-Career board merged with the Ventura Youth Council, enhancing the Council’s education/career preparation knowledge base. When the Youth Council decided to support a work-ready curriculum and certificate program for all youth in Ventura County, they were able to fund the pilot with some remaining School-to-Career monies.

The pilot program ran during the 2004-2005 school year, and two hundred and fifty youth participated. The earlier WIA-program curriculum was revised. The updated ten-hour curriculum can be presented in several two- or four-hour sessions. Participants end up with a portfolio, a cover letter, resume, and other materials, including a “hire me first” identification card and a certificate that lists the elements of the curriculum on the back. Participants are also prepared to get a work permit if they need one.

Now that the pilot has been completed, the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools is managing the program. This phase of the program is being funded through WIB with some additional funding from Superintendent’s office. The plan is for the program to become self sustaining. It is available to all youth in Ventura County, both in school and out of school.

Work Ready Curriculum instructors have been trained, and some superintendents of schools are training their teachers so that they can teach the curriculum as well.

Several marketing aids—a logo, the “Hire Me First” ID cards, and the certificate—were created to help build awareness of the program. Templates of the certificate and the ID cards have been made available to the different school districts so that they only need to fill in the blanks.

Breakthrough moment: According to Stephanie Luce, marketing specialist for the Ventura WIB, the breakthrough moment for the Youth Council occurred when the new curriculum was approved by the WIB and The County Superintendent. She says that once the approvals were in place, the plans for offering the certificate on a wide scale “really got going.”

What’s Next for this YCidea? The program development is progressing on several fronts. The program manager in the County Superintendent of Schools Office is seeking endorsements from additional school districts, and establishing more sites throughout the county where the curriculum is offered. They are also working on tracking the policies and procedures that are in place, and exploring ways to track certificate holders after they finish the program, looking at whether they get a job and how well they do.

(continued)



They are planning a public launch of the program for August or September of 2005, once more locations are offering the curriculum. Luce explains, “We want to have the curriculum workshops available all across the county. We’re hoping to offer a lot of different workshops at more places in the fall.” Once these additional places are lined up, the launch will proceed. “We’ll invite officials,” notes Luce. “A local employer is going to host to create awareness of the program.” They hope to have some youth there, but the launch will mostly be directed toward the community, the school board, the teachers union, the chamber of commerce, elected officials, and top staff of the city and county.

They are also planning a mailing campaign. Luce says, “We will be mailing postcards to market the certificate to the employers. We want the employers to look for and ask for Work Ready Certificate youth. We also will have a postcard to send to youth. We will mail 12,000 to youth and to career counselors, as well as other counselors.”

Where to Go for More Information

Ventura County Youth Council

Amy Fonzo
Ventura County Workforce Investment Board
Deputy Workforce Area Director
(805) 648-9524
amy.fonzo@mail.co.ventura.ca.us

Dr. Charles Weis
Ventura County Superintendent of Schools
Superintendent of Schools Office
(805) 652-7684

Tool

[Work Readiness Certificate](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yci/ycideabook/venturaworkreadycertificate.pdf>)



Work-Ready Certificates to Support Students and Business Leaders

Youth Council: Yolo County Youth Opportunity Council

Element: Career Preparation, Academic Excellence, Comprehensive Approach

Function: Cross Function

Subject: Work Ready Certificates, Comprehensive Approach, Educational Options

The Challenge: Business leaders in Yolo County were anxious to hire graduates who possess and can demonstrate work-ready skills. Students with proven work-ready skills want to find employment more easily. The Yolo Youth Opportunity Council wanted to help both business leaders and students.

The Practice and Evidence: The Yolo Youth Opportunity Council, Workforce Investment Board, business leaders, agencies, and educators came together to develop the standards and criteria for earning a Work-Ready Certificate (WRC). The Yolo County Work-Ready Certificate indicates the student's readiness for the school-to-work transition. It reflects important skills, attitudes, and values that are essential for success in the workplace. The Work-Ready Certificate does not replace a student's diploma, but enhances their personal employment/career portfolios.

The Work-Ready Certificate has been officially adopted by the Yolo Youth Opportunity Council and provides students with an opportunity to demonstrate their work readiness while giving employers an opportunity to provide input on the work readiness of a student.

Students have indicated that the WRC helps them focus on their future. Employers have stated that they have the opportunity to hire students who are focused and have already demonstrated accuracy and initiative.

The Details: Readiness indicators are reviewed and approved by the business and education community. Each participating high school has a process for verifying school indicators required to earn the certificate.

Students must submit an appropriate resume, cover letter and three letters of recommendation. Work ready standards to be verified include a 90 percent attendance rate, 2.0 or better grade point average; basic computer skills and basic math and language skills; participation in community activities, completing a minimum of 10 hours of community service in the past 12 months; and an overall positive behavior history. When this evidence is presented, the student is granted an oral interview from the business/education community. When all of the above criteria are met, and the interview committee agrees, the student is awarded the Work-Ready Certificate signed by the business partner interviewers and the principal.

(continued)



What's Next for this YCidea? The Yolo Youth Opportunity Council and its partners will continue to support the Work-Ready Certificate program. They also are looking to have conversations with other Councils that are using or preparing to use Work-Ready Certification since the work ready certificate idea is being adopted throughout the state and the country as a certificate of distinction for those students who have proven to be work-ready.

Where to Go for More Information

Yolo County Youth Opportunity Council

Gayle McLevich
Yolo Youth Office of Education
ROP/Career Preparation
Coordinator
(530) 668-3710
Mclevich@ycoe.org