



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

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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.

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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

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Tool

[Work Readiness Certificate](#)

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