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## **SNIPPET**

### **Supporting Alternative School Options: Opening a Charter Vocational School**

**Youth Council:** Madera County Youth Advisory Council

**Element:** Career Preparation, Academic Excellence

**Function:** Coordinating Youth Services

**Subject:** Educational Options

**The Challenge:** Madera County has had rapid population growth despite consistently experiencing a double-digit unemployment rate. Furthermore, new employment opportunities have been shifting from agriculture to services and manufacturing. The Youth Council recognized that not all the County's youth were being prepared for careers. In particular, youth who were not succeeding in the comprehensive school system and students who had dropped out of the school system needed an alternative option.

**The Practice and Evidence:** Madera County Youth Advisory Council, with the help of a Special Planning Committee, successfully opened the Pioneer Technical Center in the fall of 2002.

Pioneer Technical Center operates five days a week with a morning academic program and an afternoon vocational schedule. At this point in the school's history, there are three vocational programs offered: building trades, criminal justice, and a technical business program. Because of the partnership with the Regional Occupational Program, both out-of-school youth and youth attending comprehensive high schools can participate in the vocational program with the option not to attend the academic part of the day.

When Pioneer Technical Center was opened in September of 2002, there were approximately 30 students registered. By March of 2003 that number doubled to 60, with a capacity at this point for 160 full-time students. Fourteen students graduated in 2003. In May of 2005, 39 students graduated. "They might not have if it wasn't for our school," said Steve Carney, executive director of the school.

During the 2002-03 school year, attendance rates for the students went from 30 percent to 84 percent and grades shifted from D's and F's to B's and C's. Today Pioneer Technical Center boasts a 91 percent attendance rate. In addition, students have been involved in a number of community service projects. Building technology students constructed sheds that were sold, with the profits going back to the school. Other students have raised money to buy books for Madera first grade students and participated in Madera's Community Beautification project. The students were not only an integral resource in visioning, planning, and creating Pioneer Technical Center,

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but once the school was opened in the Fall of 2002, the Building Trade students turned the warehouse that was their school into a fully functioning learning facility.

**The Details:** Initial funding for planning the school was supplied by the Madera County Workforce Investment Board's Youth Advisory Council, which provided \$60,000. The Youth Council also created a partnership with the local school district.

The planning process for the Pioneer Technical Center was greatly influenced by the youth on the Youth Advisory Council and other Madera County youth. The school's name was chosen through a youth contest.

**What's Next for this YCidea?** Adding more occupational clusters to the curriculum at Pioneer Technical Center is a priority, and the County is currently researching labor market information and interviewing local businesses as to what other occupational areas will be the most beneficial for the youth, their futures, and the workforce of Madera County.

### **Where to Go for More information**

Madera County Youth Advisory Council

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