



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

Published by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) • College of Education • The University of Texas at Austin

DUAL CREDIT TRANSMISSION

Cedar Valley College's Automotive Career Technician program has a solid history of success, but that did not stop us from shifting into a higher gear last summer. An invitation to conceptualize a way of offering this program to high school students from a southern independent school district in the Greater Dallas area met with open arms and receptive minds. It required that we rethink the traditional boundaries of both the dual credit program, whereby high school students receive concurrent college credit for their classes, and the automotive department. The result is a partnership that redefines the scope of the technical/occupational programs in our district and their target populations.

The spark that ignited this partnership was a discussion between an instructional associate *par excellence* in our automotive program and a forward-looking administrator at Wilmer-Hutchins High School. Wouldn't it be great, went the musings, if the automotive shop at the college could be used to train high school students in a skill that could keep them in school and help them get jobs?

The Proposal: Baiting the Hook

The details of the partnership were worked out meticulously to accomplish multiple goals: to entice favorable reaction from the high school principal and district superintendent; to provide a cost analysis of the program; to establish a two-year curriculum for the students; to articulate responsibilities of both parties in the partnership; and to establish a timeline for executing all stages of the agreement. A college team comprised of the director of high school programs, the dean of business, science, and technology, and all members of the automotive department put their heads together to anticipate costs, responsibilities, benefits, concerns, and a preliminary timeline.

Most critical to this proposal was a list of advantages to the students themselves:

- they would receive specialized advising and assistance;

- they would gain an understanding of multiple career options;
- they would receive personalized instruction and hands-on learning;
- they would be part of a cohort learning community during the entire program, working together with other college students with similar goals and aspirations;
- they would take all courses on a college campus where they could interact with advanced students currently working in the industry;
- they would receive a Level I Certificate with options for continuing work toward a Level II Certificate or an Associate's Degree, the latter available with three additional semesters of work; and
- they would receive valuable work experience and job placement services.

All costs for the program would be borne by the Wilmer-Hutchins Independent School District and were calculated based on the college's costs for facilities, supplies, equipment, textbooks, and tuition. The fee would be a lump sum for two classes of students with a maximum of 15 students per class. The proposal was accepted almost verbatim by the high school principal, superintendent, and board of trustees. The next step was the creation of a legal contract, hammered out by the Dallas County Community College District legal counsel.

The Contract: Delineating Responsibilities

The first year was considered a pilot for what could become an expanded program the following year. Both parties would evaluate the program after one year to assess its viability and cost-effectiveness. At that point, it would be renegotiated or renewed.

The high school would recommend students for the program; they would then be interviewed and either accepted or rejected by the staff of our automotive department. The staff was adamant that they have the last word on individual acceptance, deeming it critical to the success of the program. They would register



students and pay all fees, including tuition and textbooks, with the funds provided by the school district.

An on-site reception and orientation would be held for the students and their families, attended by college administration and faculty, and high school administration and counselors. This evening event would introduce and welcome the students and garner support from their families.

Each class would meet two hours a day, five days a week, for 18 weeks. The high school would provide transportation for both classes of students to and from Cedar Valley College every afternoon for the duration of the courses. Cedar Valley would grant seven college credit hours per semester for the courses according to the guidelines established for dual credit classes by the Dallas County Community College District, Texas Education Agency, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Wilmer-Hutchins would grant high school credit for the classes, according to TEA and THECB guidelines. Field experience, job shadowing, internships, and co-op experience were built into the program.

The Results: A Cooperative Experience

During a pilot of one academic year, the program operated like a well-tuned race car. Classes were hands-on from the start, involving equal parts classroom and shop work. Working as a cohort helped instill confidence and reinforce positive behavior. Older students at the college served as peer mentors throughout the program, modeling important skills such as shop etiquette and customer service, and providing valuable role models for the younger students.

Twelve seniors and 16 juniors were bused to our campus every day for 38 weeks. One student dropped out of the program, and the other 27 received Level 1 certificates. Some qualified students began working at area auto shops during the second semester of classes. Four students from the program were placed directly in full-time summer jobs, with salaries ranging from \$175 to \$300 a week. Ten of the 12 graduating seniors from the program stayed at Cedar Valley and enrolled in the program full-time, working toward an AAS degree. The other two went into the armed services. One junior high school student has enrolled in the summer AAS program.

We absolutely beam over the success of the first-year pilot and are revving up the shop engines in anticipation of the second year's cohort. What was the biggest problem during the entire year? The high school is on a block schedule with alternating A and B days. Busing two classes roundtrip while keeping in sync with every-

other-day schedules of both institutions proved to be a challenge, but high school administrators responded effectively. The buses were a few minutes late on occasion. That is a resounding success by any standard.

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