

helping schools excel | helping children learn

Growing Student Success:

Providing a clear path from theory to practice



In our results-driven society, traditional education can feel very abstract to modern students. Too often, the curriculum, materials, and assessments educators are using in secondary schools seem irrelevant to teenagers. Most core courses (science, language arts, social studies, and math) offered by schools in Berks County are aligned with state standards, use reputable textbooks, and are taught by extraordinary teachers, yet have content that leads students to question how it will affect them outside of the classroom. It would not be unusual to hear a student ask a question like, “Why would a scalene triangle mean anything to me other than to get a good grade on my geometry test?”

Many times this perceived divergence between subject matter and post-secondary opportunities is partially responsible for a narrow understanding of content rather than the more global perspective that is necessary outside the classroom. This disconnect was at the heart of the inception of the **Berks County Career Pathways Integration Project**, which began more than two years ago. It was apparent that there was a distinct need to incorporate career education standards into the work

that teachers are already doing in an effort to help bridge the gap between school and life after graduation.

A Collaborative Effort

The Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU) and the Berks Business Education Coalition (BBEC) partnered to assist Berks County school districts with the implementation of the PA Career Education and Work (CEW) standards through the Berks County Career Pathways Integration Project. This project, requested by Berks County school districts, was funded by a Wall Street West grant under Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) and the BBEC.

With the help of staff members from BCIU’s Office of Professional Development and Curriculum, teachers representing districts from across Berks County collaborated in their representative content areas to: 1) create end-of-the-year common assessments; 2) produce viable and PA-standard-aligned curriculum maps that outline the skill sets necessary for each student to be proficient on each of the common assessments; 3) develop relevant career activities for each content area that align with the PA Career Education and Workplace Standards; and 4) design exemplary performance assessment tasks for students to be able to demonstrate their understanding of both subject matter content and career education/workplace knowledge.

Providing the Tools for Success

Facilitators from the BCIU worked closely with math, science, and writing teachers during the summer of 2009 and into the 2009-2010 school year to create the materials that would later be edited and assembled into kits that were distributed to educators in all 18 Berks County school districts. The tools that were produced by this project were aimed at helping to “grow” secondary student achievement; fittingly, the project itself was renamed **“Growing Student Success.”**



Educator Jay McTighe worked with local educators to create a suite of materials intended to assist teachers in providing relevant, PA-standard-aligned career activities.

With the help of nationally recognized author and presenter **Jay McTighe**, teachers worked together to create performance assessments that measured students' application of both content area and career education/work standards. The tasks take students beyond restrictive textbook activities and ask them to think not as a student, but instead, as a professional who applies relevant knowledge in the workplace.

Creating a Dialogue

One important aspect of this project is that it sparked important discussions among educators about the need for authentic content area tasks that have relevance to students and that will equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful beyond the school setting. The materials included in the Growing Student Success kits are examples of how career education and workplace standards can be integrated into any content area to help provide the underpinning for future student success.

Colleen Lenett, a Fleetwood High School teacher involved with the project, remarked that the collaborative work "resulted in the creation of valuable performance tasks that enable teachers to connect content area instruction to specific areas of career development. Students will now be exposed to career paths that they might otherwise remain unaware of, and they will gain experience by completing realistic tasks that they can expect to encounter in their future careers. This approach is a highly effective method for teachers to deliver academic content in a manner that allows students to see its practical uses and its relevance."

Looking Ahead

As we forge ahead, we are doing so with the understanding that there is more collaborative work to be done to ensure that districts are meeting both the PA content area and career education standards. At the same time, while this is only the beginning of the process to align the common core standards recently adopted by the state, we are well prepared to meet the challenge. Coupled with the kits that were distributed to the 18 districts, the process itself will serve as a foundation for future work in creating maps for other subject areas and for districts wanting to expand and interact with the products that emerged from this project.

The goal of this work is to enable Berks County secondary educators to not only create a common collaborative instructional framework, but also to



The Growing Student Success kits included a wealth of helpful materials in a convenient binder and additional copies intended for duplication and distribution, all housed in a durable tote box adorned with distinctive, custom stickers.

integrate career education and work standards that will help prepare students for post-secondary experiences. Ideally, this program will help students see the relevance between what they are learning in school and what lies ahead of them after graduation.

To learn more about Growing Student Success, contact **Connie Skipper**, program administrator, at 610-987-8496 or conski@berksiu.org.



Jay McTighe has co-authored ten books and published more than 30 articles and book chapters in a variety of scholarly publications. His input helped to shape the Growing Student Success project.