

Niswonger Foundation

CareerConnect

Project Overview

The Niswonger Foundation proposes the development of a project to guide and support students in building the critical skills necessary for future workplace success. This project will focus on high school students who are most in need of developing an understanding of career opportunities. Other than jobs held by family members, friends, or seen on TV, students are limited in their understanding of careers available to them. Often, they have had little or no support for considering personal options and identifying their unique skill sets. Students who are not viewed as “college bound” are, historically, among the least likely to receive career counseling in their school environments.

These students will be provided simulated and real-world work experiences, as well as mentoring support. There will be a focus on the critical skills that will help to ensure their successful transition to work. This project will allow them to more broadly explore career options and will better credential them for future job opportunities with such tools as the *Career Ethic Diploma* and *WorkKeys* assessment. The program will provide an opportunity for the students to have excellent role models and personalized support.

Rationale

According to a recent report from the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council entitled: “*Bridging School to Career in the Workforce of the Future:*”

- An estimated one million high school students will fail to graduate this year, a loss of 5,500 students for every day on the academic calendar. The number one reported reason is that they see no connection between their academic work and how it might prepare them for a good job.
- By the year 2020, approximately 13 million students will have dropped out of high school, contributing to an economic loss of more than three trillion dollars and a less globally competitive country.
- Nearly 15 percent of those aged 16 to 24 (almost six million) are neither in school or working.
- About 3.6 million jobs are left unfilled due to a lack of relevant knowledge and skills in the workforce.
- If the United States could achieve a 90 percent high school graduation rate, the projected economic benefits would include as much as:
 - \$16.8 billion a year in additional new home purchases.
 - \$1.3 billion annually in additional federal tax revenues.
 - \$661 million a year to state and local tax coffers.

Program Design

This program will support five high schools in Greeneville and Greene County: Chuckey Doak High School, West Greene High School, North Greene High School, South Greene High School and Greeneville High School. Additionally, the program will draw support from the Greene Technology Center, and the Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) in Elizabethton and Morristown.

As soon as this program is approved and the budget is established, a coordinator will be selected. Ideally, this person will have an experience base that will include an understanding of the needs of employers, knowledge of career opportunities, an understanding of career technical education, established relationships with schools and educators in the program region, instructional and supervisory skills, and experience working with students from various backgrounds.

With assistance from other Niswonger Foundation staff, the coordinator will establish relationships with educators in each of the five high schools. The program criteria will be presented and student selection plans will be refined and established. General information materials will be developed and student/parent information sessions will be held.

One hundred students will be identified to participate in this program, annually. The goal is to have 20 students representing each of the five high schools. NiswongerCARE advisors, school counselors, community agencies, will be among those participating in the identification and selection process. The focus for identifying potential program participants will be students who, due to class performance, personal background, or other personal factors, would be least likely seek guidance or have the ability to explore options on their own. Strong candidates will be students who have, in the past, exhibited high ability, but have become disengaged in the learning process. It is recognized that these students may have special needs to make their program participation possible. As an example, transportation needs will be taken into consideration and assistance provided.

Following selection for the program in the freshman year, an initial hands-on orientation session will be held. At the beginning of the sophomore year, students will move through a three-year series of activities that provide personalized support, develop characteristics of quality work ethic, have hands-on experiences in the workplace, participate in real-world competition for paid internships in regional businesses and industries, and receive assistance with the transition from high school to the workplace or post-secondary education. Each year, an additional 100 students will be added.

In the fall of the junior year, students have a “real-life” process of applying, interviewing and competing for paid internships. The goal is to have at least 20 students selected by businesses

and industries in the region. Selected students will complete 100-300 hour internships, with the possible opportunity of moving to part-time fall and spring employment, or full time summer employment, with the company. When fully operational, the sequence of participation will be as follows, and will continue in a rotating manner:

Freshman Year	100 selected and oriented
Sophomore Year	100 student participate in planned programming
Junior Year	20 students selected for internships and work begins
Senior Year	20 student complete internships and planned programming

For the 2016-17 school year, it is proposed that the selection of the first 100, for Cohort I, be completed among the members of the sophomore class in order that the process can be expedited. Cohort I will complete the planned sophomore activities in 2016-17. Cohort II will be selected in the spring for 2017 from the freshman class. Cohort II will begin the sophomore activities in 2017-18.

The attached listing of CareerConnect proposed activities outlines the initial plans for the four-year program.

Partnership Support

CareerConnect will rely on strong partnership support from regional businesses and industries; the Greene County Partnership; and Greeneville and Greene County School Systems. Businesses will be identified that have interest in providing support for the development of the program participants. Methods of support will include:

- Provide tours of facilities
- Participate in information sessions to increase the students' knowledge of available careers and skill requirements
- Provide locations for shadowing experiences
- Participate as student mentors
- Participate in interview process and intern selection
- Provide paid internships to selected students
- Provide other means of financial support or in kind contributions.

Program Support

The CareerConnect coordinator will report to the Director of Programs and Outreach at the Niswonger Foundation. All activities, policies and procedures and the budget for the program will be reported and, as appropriate, approved by the Niswonger Foundation Board of Directors. An Advisory Council will be established with representation from the Niswonger Foundation Board of Directors, each of the participating schools, technical school and TCAT's, business and

industry representatives, and student representatives. This Council will make recommendations to inform the work of the coordinator and assist in Board decision making.

A proposed program budget is attached.