Providing Relevancy Through Teachers@Work Program

On your commute to work today, how many businesses did you pass? For how many of these businesses do you have a good understanding of their products and services, or of the skills the employees need to perform the work?

Now imagine being a classroom teacher responsible for preparing your students for careers in these same businesses. Without a strong understanding of their products and services and employee skillsets, how can you paint a clear picture for your students of what’s needed to build careers with these companies? How can you excite your students by demonstrating the relevancy of your curriculum to improved future employment opportunities?

Teachers@Work, a program of the North Carolina Business Committee for Education (NCBCE), is designed to connect educators to businesses for an experiential learning opportunity that can be transferred to classrooms and students. Sponsored by NCBCE in partnership with the North Carolina Association of School Administrators and the Department of Public Instruction, Teachers@Work places teachers with local companies so that teachers gain the insights they need to tailor parts of their
classroom curriculum to support skill development relevant to local employers’ needs. Teachers thus develop students who are well-prepared for local workforce opportunities.

Orange HS teacher Kentellia Wingate consults with Tommy Jacobson, MCNC’s Chief Operating Officer and Vice President.

Through Teachers@Work, teachers are placed with local companies for one-week summer visits. Once on site, teachers are paired with employees, given exposure to multiple aspects of the local employer’s operations, and allowed to develop insights concerning best practices to include in lesson plans and implement in their classroom for more efficient, effective, and relevant instruction. At the end of the week-long visit, teachers create a unit lesson plan showcasing both hard and soft skills needed for success with the local employer. The teachers execute these plans in their classrooms the next school year, then share the plans with other teachers in their school system and throughout the state.

Austin Reece, a Buncombe County high school science and Biomed Tech teacher, joined Mission Health for a week this summer through Teachers@Work. “I had a
lot of fun getting to know everybody and learning what goes on at Mission,” he explains. “I didn’t realize how many non-clinical roles there were. Now I can help my students think more about the many opportunities there are for careers in healthcare.”

The 2015 Teachers@Work cohort included eighteen North Carolina classroom teachers, representing each of the state’s eight education districts. They were placed with fifteen businesses across North Carolina, ranging from The Biltmore Company to Gerber Collision & Glass (two separate programs) to Google (which hosted three teachers in Caldwell County).

With an objective of producing a highly skilled, globally competitive workforce pipeline that strengthens economic development across the state, NCBCE’s Teachers@Work program demonstrates how real-world experience and local exposure to business practices and philosophies can be used to enhance student learning.

“This is a program that allows us to exchange ideas and dialogue,” notes Nancy Lane, Senior Vice President for Business Development at Wilmington’s CastleBranch, a Teachers@Work partner. “And for business leaders and educators to have that exchange is crucial.”

For more information on the Teachers@Work program or on becoming a member at NCBCE, contact Julia Mason at julia.mason@nc.gov.

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Do you know a teacher who is working hard to help students succeed? Let us know, and s/he could be featured in the next education issue!