

Business Education Compact Preparing Students for a Bright Future

High dropout rates ... underperforming schools ... insufficient preparation for the workplace—the list goes on. Business is concerned about its ability to thrive in a global economy with a workforce that won't be ready with the right skills in sufficient numbers. And education is challenged with the increasing demand for student performance even as resources are contracting.

About the Business Education Compact

It's a critical need that the BEC has been passionately pursuing since our founding as a nonprofit organization in 1984. Our mission to "Make Learning Real" is fulfilled through highly effective programs that prepare kids for their future—so they'll be successful in school and successful in work. We do that by:

- 1) Transforming K-12 education to ensure that EVERY student achieves academic success, and
- 2) Providing impactful experiences inside and outside the classroom to help students discover and pursue their career dreams and interests.

If future workers are to thrive in this world's new economy, rigorous academic learning is essential, but not sufficient. Students must also engage in experiential learning if they are to: 1) realize the relevance of classroom learning; 2) explore career interests; and 3) develop skills essential to life after graduation.

It's a need the BEC understands well. Our mission closely links educational reform, economic development and workforce development by making vital connections between the classroom and workplace.

Of course, making that connection between the classroom and workplace is no small matter. The worlds of education and business are very different. They speak different languages—are focused on different goals—have very different capacities for change and risk-taking—to say nothing of the different external forces that influence them.

Making those necessary connections demands skills that bridge the two worlds. That's role of the BEC. With decades of experience, we possess a profound understanding of the factors that define and drive business and education—and we navigate easily between them.

The BEC is unique among nonprofits in the depth and breadth of our education and business partnerships. Those highly functioning collaborations begin with a 30-member Board that equally represents both. They extend to our partners across all levels of the education system—both public and private. . . To our business, industry and government partners representing all sectors and a wide range of industries. . . To the more than 400,000 students, teachers and businesses that have been served across Oregon and SW Washington!



Photo courtesy of Vernier Software & Technology

The need to transform K-12 education

Understanding what's broken is important to understanding why the BEC's leadership in transforming the K-12 system is creating so much excitement among educators, students and parents. Consider that:

- High dropout rates persist with only 66% of freshmen entering Oregon high schools graduating, and considerably less for minority students;
- Of those who graduate from Oregon high schools, 48% enter college the following year, but only 50% of them earn a college degree within 6 years;
- Over 40% of freshmen in community colleges and 20% of freshmen in four-year institutions enroll in at least one remedial class, but remediation is not linked to a greater likelihood of college completion.

To be fair, much has been done. But until recently, education reform has been working around the edges. Transformation can not occur through continuous improvement of a broken system. What's needed is systemic change—a reengineering of K-12 education.

Understanding the broken K-12 system

It's time-based (teacher- and system-focused). Students progress through their academic journey by completing a prescribed amount of seat time for each grade level. When the proverbial bell rings, the teacher moves on to new lessons, regardless of whether students are ready or not. Those who haven't grasped the material that forms the foundation for subsequent learning get left behind. It should be no wonder that so many students drop out before graduating.

It's credit-driven (system focused). It's a surprise to many that students can earn graduation credits with grades as low as "D-." When it comes to graduation, an "A" and a "D" are the same, and there can be a wide discrepancy on what an "A," "B," "C," . . . means. In such a credit-driven system, students become highly skilled at accumulating points, often at the expense of knowledge. The inefficiencies and cost are particularly evident when failing students repeat entire classes, or are held back to repeat all courses for their grade level—to say nothing of the stigmatizing effect on the student!

BEC leadership of proficiency-based education transformation in Oregon

To address the above deficiencies, the BEC has been leading a grass-roots movement called Proficiency-Based Teaching and Learning (PBTL). It dramatically changes the current paradigm to one in which:

Learning is the constant—time is the variable (student focused). Academic rigor is ensured since teaching and learning are based on exacting state standards. Students clearly understand their learning targets and what they need to do to become proficient. They *own* their learning. They are graded and advanced based *solely* on proficiency in the standards, rather than non-content areas (e.g. behavior, extra credit, attendance, etc.). Recognizing that students learn differently, in a PBTL system students progress at their own pace through individualized learning. Failure is NOT an option.



Photo courtesy of Intel Corporation

What drives the BEC is a vision in which: 1) EVERY student earns a high school diploma that is a meaningful predictor of post-secondary success, and 2) EVERY student has the knowledge and skills to think critically, to communicate effectively, to innovate and to adapt in an ever-changing world.

To that end, the BEC has been training educators across Oregon in proficiency practice. Since we began in 2005, well over 2,000 teachers have received training—impacting an estimated 75,000 students! The results have been unprecedented, showing major gains in student achievement, reduction in dropout rates, improved attendance and major reductions in behavioral problems.

Impactful experiential learning

Experiential learning is the perfect complement to academic learning. The BEC fulfills that portion of our mission through *National Engineers Month* and *Student Internships*.

National Engineers Month (NEM)

Science, technology, engineering and math skills (STEM) are essential to the future health of our economy. The United States, long considered a global leader in technological innovation, is facing formidable competition. The key to long-term leadership lies in creating a robust pipeline of future STEM professionals—beginning in the K-12 system. But there's ample reason for concern. The *Nation's Report Card* (National Center for Educational Progress) reveals that only 21% of twelfth graders scored proficient or above in science in 2009 testing.

The goal of National Engineer's Month is to make math and science real to students by showing them, first-hand, the exciting and creative things that engineers do. Each February, the BEC orchestrates a statewide initiative that sends hundreds of professional engineers from dozens of private and public sector organizations into K-12 classrooms across Oregon and SW Washington. Through presentations and interactive demonstrations, they *enlighten* kids to a world of engineering careers. They *encourage* kids to maintain a sense of wonder and inquiry. They *excite* kids about the possibilities open to those who excel in science and math. Those encounters with engineer volunteers increase the likelihood that students will pursue the kind of careers on which our economy depends.



Photo courtesy of Intel Corporation

Results. In NEM's 17-year history, 6,370 volunteer engineers have visited 12,300 classrooms, impacting 346,400 students!

Student internships

Year-round, in-depth workplace experiences are integral to the BEC's mission to "Make Learning Real." As students apply their skills to the business world and bring that learning back to the classroom, they help shape the workforce of tomorrow.

High school students "sample" potential career fields while gaining a deeper understanding of how classroom learning is relevant to their future. Simply put, they help answer the question, "Why do I need to learn this?" College students meet their learning objectives with practical experience and advanced training in their field of study. Whether the intern is a high school student or a college grad student, the experience helps them make informed career decisions and curriculum choices consistent with their interests. With workplace learning that complements classroom learning, a BEC intern is more likely to stay in school and complete post-secondary education in less time than students who are not clear about their career objectives.



Students can choose from a wide variety of job opportunities. They are mentored in scores of workplace environments as administrative assistants, photojournalists, engineering technicians, website designers, logistics assistants, events coordinators, etc. With 32% racial/ ethnic population in our internship program, the BEC continues to build the level of student diversity.

BEC internships are offered year round. And because they are in-depth (typically 3-12 months), and create value for the host organization, all BEC internships are paid. We serve as the employer of record and make placement easy for the hosting organization. From start to finish, the details are handled—from recruiting to new hire orientation, payroll, progress monitoring, employee management, etc.

Results: Approximately 3,500 high school and college students have been placed in full-service summer/ year-round internships.

Learn more about the Business Education Compact

To learn more, contact:

Mary Beth Horton
Deputy Director
503.646.0242 x33
mbhorton@becpdx.org

Or visit our website at www.becpdx.org