

Spotlight Strategy: Cultivate Relationships with Community, Business and Industry Partners

Mercer County Career Center

The leadership team at Mercer County Career Center (MCCC) emphasizes the need to build and sustain connections between MCCC and the community. According to Administrative Director Ms. Rachel Martin, "Developing associations that clearly communicate MCCC goals and identify the mutual benefit of solid business and community partnerships can result in staunch support for the school and advocates for our students."

To build strong relationships with the local community, MCCC engages key stakeholders through their participation in various committees. Representatives from business, industry and the local community participate on the General Advisory Committee, which oversees the career center's vision and strategies, as well as on each program's Occupational Advisory Committee. They may also provide enhanced learning opportunities for students, such as guest speakers, mock interviews and educational field trips.

Industry organizations utilize their resources to promote careers in construction and manufacturing, while encouraging prospective students to take advantage of technical education through MCCC. Promotion of occupations in these areas can be seen at the following websites, www.skillupcareers.com and at www.industryneedsyou.com.

Another facet of building relationships to engage and represent MCCC in the community. Ms. Martin participates with a number of organizations, such as the Workforce Investment Board and the Northwest Pennsylvania Cooperation Council, to foster a personal connection between the school and the community. She explained, "As educators become the face of the MCCC, the community gains a better understanding of the importance of career and technical education and students reap valuable benefits."

MCCC maintains "operator status" at Mercer County CareerLink, which is part of a state-wide system that links business and individuals to Pennsylvania's workforce development system through various employment and services agencies. "Operator status" means that MCCC serves as an equal partner with the other agencies who are mandated to participate in CareerLink under the Workforce Investment Act. By actively participating in the Mercer County CareerLink, MCCC fosters relationships with leaders in the community and creates an awareness of how the school can better meet the needs of business and community stakeholders.

Ms. Martin is the educational representative on the Competitiveness Council for "Oh-Penn," a workforce development interstate collaborative among five counties in Ohio and Pennsylvania. It is comprised of job placement and training representatives from the five counties and seeks to share resources and best practices across the region. Ms. Martin helps to oversee the region's implementation strategy to advance the economic and workforce development collaboration.

The efforts of the MCCC administrators and staff to build partnerships have resulted in additional resources for the school. For example, MCCC has received Good Neighbor grants from State Farm Insurance to purchase tools and equipment for the Auto Body Program. They have also received donations of materials and supplies from the National Tooling and Manufacturing Association and a local health care organization. Resources provided by the Mercer County Area Agency on Aging allow the Career Center to award tuition scholarships for adults in the community enrolling in Nursing Assistant classes.

For administrators who are trying to build or improve their relationships with the local community, Ms. Martin offered the following advice: "You need to become part of the community. Every community has strengths and it's important to identify and understand your community's resources."

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Mercer County Career Center (MCCC) is located in Mercer County, Pennsylvania. As a part-time career and technical center, it enrolls approximately 500 students in grades 10 through 12 and provides 14 career and technical education programs. MCCC serves 12 school districts plus one charter school.