An Internship Perspective

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NAF LEADERSHIP FELLOWS
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Introduction

M-DCPS’ Strategic Blueprint Plan (Vision 2020) is rooted in relevant, rigorous and innovative academics that targets one goal—student achievement. Priority is to ensure that students graduate college and career ready by:

1. Ensuring that Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs of study align to the targeted industries identified by the Beacon Council
2. Ensuring that career pathway programs are implemented with fidelity to high standards for quality and have equitable student access to the curriculum, academic experiences and work-based opportunities in preparation for college and careers
3. Establishing innovative programs by continuing to engage business and higher education partners to strengthen the CTE curriculum and create a rich, work-based learning experience with real-world applications

This paper provides a glance from the perspective of two NAF Leadership Fellows, representing both the school level and district, on how a school district can provide high-quality internships to benefit its students, schools and the community. Please refer to the publication, Scaling Impact, for a succinct historical and current review of efforts currently underway using NAF’s educational design to assist with the strategies listed above to help meet our priority one goal of improving student achievement. (See Resources section at end of this paper.)

Background

As the fourth largest school district in the continental U.S., M-DCPS has a multi-cultural, ethnically diverse “high needs” student population that covers over 2,000 square miles of urban, suburban, and rural south Florida. M-DCPS has a student population of approximately 356,480 students enrolled throughout 465 schools. A truly global community, district students speak 56 different languages and represent 160 countries. (Reference: Miami-Dade County Public School Statistical Highlights 2015-2016.)

From one class of 30 students enrolled in the Academy of Tourism (aka Academy of Hospitality and Tourism) at Miami Springs Senior High School in 1987, M-DCPS now serves almost 10,000 students in 56 national career-themed academies in all five NAF career themes.
A Principal’s Perspective

For most students, the high school experience encompasses a series of academic courses embedded with the typical repertoire of community service activities needed to graduate. Although instructional staff attempt to make connections between academic content and the world of work, the actual relationship among concepts learned in school and real world applications is minimal at best. Generally, high school students graduate without a notion of what course of study to pursue in college. Most high school students lack the experiences needed to connect learning to real-life situations that help provide insight to establishing future goals. To help students connect the dots, student internship programs seem to be the vehicle to make those much needed connections.

Students who are fortunate enough to engage in an internship program benefit in a number of ways. From the onset, they learn the importance of fundamental skills such as punctuality, use of appropriate attire in the workplace, acceptable communication modes in a professional setting, and how to collaborate with colleagues toward a common goal. These simple skill sets are not readily obvious to high school students. Sarah Burrows, Director of Internship Programs at Lasell College in Massachusetts points out that, “Getting to know adults other than teachers and parents is a growth opportunity.” Collaborating with other adults in a professional work environment allows student interns to establish a second frame of reference independent of the home and school setting.
An effective internship program also enhances a student’s confidence to function in a professional setting. Any student who has had some type of experience in the work place develops an awareness of routines, procedures, and policies making him/her more adaptable when entering the work force, thus increasing the individual’s success rate to execute required job expectations.

Many internship programs created by private organizations are the result of a lack of talent associated with a particular industry. This situation prompts institutions to proactively seek potential candidates through internship programs. In many of these cases, interns are paired with work site mentors who provide guidance and support through a systematic approach which includes assessment of the intern’s performance. In turn, student interns benefit from valuable mentor feedback which allows them to make adjustments for improvement within a specific field of work. An added benefit of the internship experience is the strong professional relationships forged between both parties that may result in future job offers for interns.

Well-designed internship programs are a product of solid partnerships between the learning organization and the private institution. When business partners and educators develop common goals for the internship experience based on the needs of the business partner and the learning goals established by the educational institution, then a strong alliance is created that lays the ground work for high school graduates to compete in a global economy.

**A District’s Perspective**

Using NAF’s philosophy of what is defined as a high-quality internship (See Resource #2) and building on our 25+ years of experience in providing student internships, along with keeping the goals of our district strategic plan in focus, the district used the following criteria of a high quality internship to drive its plan for the internship program—the capstone experience in the Work-Based Learning continuum:

M-DCPS High Quality Internships must:

1. Be a compensated experience, paid at no less than minimum wage;
2. Consist of 150 hours in length to be in compliance with state of Florida requirements;
3. Be supervised by a worksite mentor and school level teacher supervisor;
4. Be assessed by the worksite mentor at the completion of the internship and reviewed with the student intern;
5. Provide the internship provider with a student intern who is ready to work on day one; and
6. Provide academic credit to the student intern (either high school and/or dual enrollment credit).
Historical internship placement data reflected increased numbers of students placed since 2009, however, our internship placement rates were not where they needed to be (60% summer placement). Therefore, to ensure fidelity to the elements stated above and to reach our goal of 100% paid internships, the following tasks were implemented:

- Launched an on-line pre-Internship preparation course using our own developed resources for all student interns (NAF and non-NAF) to complete prior to beginning their internship assignments. The course is comprised of 12 units designed to help standardize the preparation for all students to emphasize the work-based readiness that is essential for success in the workplace;
- Enhanced our website, developed by our NAF advisory board “Internship Task Force” Committee (https://miami.getmyinterns.org) that promotes the Academy internship program and serves as a site to match interns with companies;
- Created a Student Internship Handbook that includes academic assignments and forms to be used during the five-week internship;
- Communicated with Miami Dade College to implement and develop procedures for dual enrollment admission and reporting purposes;
- Worked on a community partnership (nine months) with the Miami Dade County government and the Children’s Trust to secure a grant to provide compensated internships for no less than 1300 students;
- Secured a grant from JPMorgan Chase to fund annual internships for NAF students;
- Reported data to funder and district leadership on weekly progress enrollment and employer sign ups;
- Developed and updated database of students based on application status and data element criteria required by the funder;
- Reviewed and submitted payment of student accident insurance for those students lacking insurance;
- Developed promotional materials, including banners, email campaign, co-advertising on board member websites and newsletters, attended community job fairs (to secure internship providers), and created information sheets to distribute to the community;
- Enhanced our “paperless” internship system via the use of digital evidence binders;
- Superintendent of Schools, Alberto Carvalho, appeared on a television program along with county government and Children’s Trust officials to discuss the purpose and overview of the Student Internship program;
- Conducted three Student Internship Parent Orientations throughout the county to review internship program rules/procedures;
- Conducted two Internship Provider orientations (north and south) to review procedures and ensure that needed documentation was secured;
- Trained a champion at all interested schools (NAF and non-NAF) on the Odysseyware learning management platform for the 12-unit pre-internship course along with review of internship rules and procedures including digital evidence binder training;
• Communicated with the South Florida Educational Federal Credit Union (SFEFCU) to set up dates/locations for opening of student bank accounts (14 of our schools have school based, student-managed credit unions) and informed schools;
• Ensured that schools scheduled mobile vans to visit schools for students to obtain official student IDs for needed bank account opening documentation;
• Submitted needed data to the SFEFCU for stipend distribution during established three payment periods;
• Planned and conducted an Internship Provider Reception with our Superintendent to thank all business and community partners. Speakers included: two (for profit and non-profit) internship providers, a recognized business partner and member of the Beacon Council and two student interns. Attendees had an opportunity to meet and hear from 10 students who displayed their internship projects;
• Mailed certificates of appreciation to all internship providers along with a personalized thank you letter and memento (paperweight);
• Created a hardback copy “photobook” of student interns with testimonials that was published and distributed to funders and schools for future promotional use;
• Created a testimonials flyer highlighting economic impact to the community for distribution to advisory board members and the community;
• Created a brief PowerPoint presentation featuring internship results and testimonials for advisory board members for members to use as a promotional tool; and
• Updated historical internship data for distribution to schools and advisory board members showing internship performance data by school, by program theme, etc.

Conclusion

The responsibility of operating a high-quality internship program is no easy task. It requires time as well as efforts and contributions from a well-trained and dedicated staff. When everyone works cohesively, including business/community partners, teachers, administrators, parents and students, the collaboration is a win-win for all.

As educators, we know the importance of reflection. Writing this paper has given us the opportunity to focus on challenges and initiatives for next year’s internship program, which will include:

1. Creating an Internship Provider Handbook for mentors;
2. Creating an online Internship Provider Orientation for those mentors who miss the face-to-face Orientation;
3. Utilizing NAF Leadership Fellow (School Principal) to promote school leadership to champion internship program;
4. Expanding internship opportunities throughout the year on an annual basis;
5. Increasing the number of eligible students who qualify for dual enrollment; and
6. Continuing to seek grant opportunities for funding to include work-based learning opportunities leading to an internship to ensure that students are ready to work from day 1.
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Resources

The following resources are just a sample of materials referenced in this paper and please contact us if you have any questions.

I. Scaling Impact
   http://tinyurl.com/hh6d873

II. NAF High-Quality Paid Internships
    http://tinyurl.com/j383f9e

III. M-DCPS Internship Handbook (posted on website & hard copy distributed at parent and internship provider orientations)
     http://tinyurl.com/hq7kcnu

IV. Internship Program Overview (Internship Information Sheet)
    http://tinyurl.com/h7pcxvb

V. A Guide for Mentors (distributed to internship providers)
   http://tinyurl.com/hgqz4k2

VI. Internship Provider Orientation Flyer (posted on Miami.getmyinterns website & sent via email)
    http://tinyurl.com/jk4twzd

VII. Internship Provider Reception Invitation
     http://tinyurl.com/jl8zgun

VIII. Internship Provider Reception Media Advisory
      http://tinyurl.com/zseb2r3
IX. Internship Results PowerPoint Presentation *(used to report to the Advisory Boards and the community)*
http://tinyurl.com/j8alxfu

X. Internship Testimonials Flyer *(used to report results, thank current & secure additional internship providers as a promotional piece)*
http://tinyurl.com/gveowjv

XI. Parent Orientation Video *(Note: It may take a few minutes to download)*
http://tinyurl.com/zbmecj7

XII. Parent Orientation Flyer
http://tinyurl.com/gtg629p