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Exploring the Roles of Schools and Employers in School-to-Work Programs: A Case Study of
the City of Burbank's Youth Employment Programs

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Abstract

Exploring the Roles of Schools and Employers in School-to-Work Programs: A Case Study of the City of Burbank's Youth Employment Programs

By

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Master of Public Administration: Public Sector Management and Leadership

With the impending retirement of many baby boomers, it is vital to prepare young people for jobs in the public sector. The transition from school-to-work can be facilitated through programs such as apprenticeships, internships, job shadowing and mentorship opportunities. These various programs are usually coordinated through a partnership between the school district and a private or public agency willing to participate. However, the success of these programs is not entirely dependent upon a mutual partnership and it is possible for an employer to develop an effective program on their own. By examining the youth employment programs of the City of Burbank, California as a case study, we can see an example of a public agency that has developed a long-term successful youth employment program without the partnership of the local school district. By surveying participants who have successfully completed the program, data can be collected to represent the effectiveness of the program in its ability to aid students in obtaining employment.

Introduction

The demographics of the United States workforce are everchanging and the impending retirement of many baby boomers, defined as individuals born between 1946 and 1964, has caused a shift in the labor force once again. Millennials, or those born between 1981 and 1996, and their younger Generation Z counterparts, those born between 1997 and 2012, now account for the majority of the United States labor force (Fry, 2018). This shift in demographics will certainly apply to jobs within the public sector considering the United States federal government is the Nation's largest employer (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020). With the loss of key individuals and longtime employees, how do organizations, specifically public sector organizations, ensure that knowledge, skills and abilities are retained? In order to prepare for the new wave of workers, public sector organizations can implement and develop programs that benefit both the organization and promote the development of youth.

Recognizing the value of preparing youth for the workforce, many organizations have created opportunities for youth to gain real world, hands-on experience while simultaneously introducing them to various career options. Furthermore, the skills that employers are looking for in the 21st century differ from the desired skills of previous decades. Increasingly employers are placing value on non-academic skills such as creative thinking, decision making, work ethic and interpersonal skills when making hiring decisions (Lerman, 2013). As today's workplaces are becoming progressively complex, youth programs can provide students with work-based learning experiences that can help youth develop into successful employees and community members (Cochran & Ferrari, 2009). The process of developing and implementing youth employment programs can be complicated by various factors. The relationship between the school and agency or employer, defining the roles and expectations of the participants, garnering

the support, time commitment, and financing from an employer are all factors that contribute to the success of youth employment programs.

While many will say that the building of a good partnership between schools and employers is the best way to prepare youth for the workforce, this paper will explore whether the school's participation is always necessary to the success of a youth employment program, and not as critical as the role of the employer. By analyzing the youth employment programs of the City of Burbank, California as a case study, this paper will examine the success of student's ability to find employment following their participation in Burbank's youth employment program, which is run independently from the local school district.

Background

The need to prepare young people for the transition from school-to-work (STW) has been recognized by leaders and policy makers for quite some time. Many STW programs were developed following the passage of the 1994 federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA). The goal of this legislation was to create a partnership between school and work and to integrate work-based learning within the traditional school curriculums in order to better prepare youth to enter the workforce. STW federal funding was allocated to all fifty states to aid in the creation and implementation of these STW partnerships. The states were given freedom to develop their own plans as long as they followed certain general guidelines and requirements. The states were also required to report on their program implementation plans in order to receive the funding. Not only would the partnership between the schools and employers help to build skills to prepare youth for the workforce, but it would also expose students to various types of jobs, allowing them to determine a possible career path. At that time, it was also determined by many policy makers that legislation focused on educational reform was necessary since the existing school curriculums were failing to properly prepare young people to enter the workforce.

The umbrella of STW programs is vast, open to a wide variety of partnerships and opportunities that can be created for students and employers to come together. Some of the opportunities created by STW partnerships include apprenticeships, internships, job shadowing, and mentorship programs. For defining purposes, these various programs will all be referred to as youth employment programs and used interchangeably with the term STW programs throughout this paper. Since federal funding for the 1994 STWOA ended in October 2001,

organizations, both in the private and public sector have continued to develop youth employment programs and maintain partnerships with local school districts.

The City of Burbank, California offers three different youth employment programs for youth ages 14-21. The Summer Trails Enhancement Program (STEP) is a paying summer employment opportunity for youth ages 14-15 years of age. The STEP program is divided into two parts. During the first half of this program, students will learn a variety of professional and life skills, such as cover letter and resume writing, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) safety training and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) training, money management and budget training, and college knowledge training. During the second half of the program, under supervision of City of Burbank staff, students will clear dry brush working to beautify the hiking trails in the Verdugo Hills.

The City Resources Employing Students Today (CREST) program is another City of Burbank youth employment program. Under the CREST program, youth ages 16-17 years of age will receive job skills training and on the job training through placement in a city department. City staff will place students in various city departments that align best with the interests of the student. Youth in the CREST program are paid for their hours worked, and are also required to attend mandatory training sessions with the Youth Employment Office in addition to their working on-site hours. The training will cover professional skills including resume building, interview skills, and workplace ethics. At the end of the CREST program, students will be provided with a complete career portfolio including their resume, a cover letter, samples of work, and letters of recommendation.

The final youth employment program that the City of Burbank offers is the Burbank Employment and Student Training (BEST) program. The BEST program is intended for high

school and/or college students between the ages of 18-21, and is also a paid work opportunity. The BEST program places students in internship opportunities at local businesses or non-profit organizations, offering hands-on work experience. Students are also required to attend bi-weekly mandatory training sessions which allows them to participate in community outreach, marketing and research development, and special projects. At the end of this program, students will also receive a portfolio which will include their resume, a cover letter, samples of work, and letters of recommendation.

The STEP, CREST, and BEST programs offered by the City of Burbank are all temporary, formally structured, paying employment opportunities for youth. These programs combine real world, hands-on job experience with professional and life skills training in order to provide the participant with a well-rounded educational experience that will also prepare them to enter into the workforce. The City budgets for the positions yearly and typically employs a total of about 130 youth workers each session. The full descriptions for these programs can be found on the City of Burbank Website (Youth Employment Programs, n.d). The hiring process for all three programs is competitive with the recruitment processes mirroring that of a regular City position. Youth who meet the minimum requirements, must apply for these positions through the City's website, and may be required to participate in an oral interview and written examinations. These work opportunities are developed, overseen, and implemented completely by City staff members, independent of participation from the local school district. Student worker positions are fully funded by the City of Burbank, and are included as part of the City's annual budget. The City of Burbank does not receive any grants or federal funding for these programs. The success of the Burbank youth employment programs is completely dependent upon City staff and their efforts to administer and oversee the programs. The City of Burbank

does not partner with the local school district in order to hire students, determine the program's curriculum, or appropriate job placement of the students. To determine the best department placement for the student, City staff works directly with the individual student to understand their personal and professional interests and future aspirations. The BEST program was developed by City staff in 1996 with the CREST and STEP programs following a couple years later in 1998. All three of these youth employment programs continue to thrive to this day. By continuing to have these programs, and to devote the budget and the resources to them, implies that the City of Burbank sees value in these youth partnerships. One value of the youth employment program may be the success rate of job placement within the City of Burbank's own organization following a student's participation in the CREST or BEST program. By surveying participants who have completed these programs, we can study the effectiveness of Burbank's youth employment programs in aiding students' ability to find employment, and collect data on a STW program that does not rely on a partnership with the school.

Literature Review

The Roles of the Participants in Public Sector Youth Employment Programs

STW partnerships range from formal, structured, well-paying internship programs to more fluid, temporary work opportunities such as mentorship or summer employment programs. An early study that looked at the STWOA policy implementation within forty-four public high schools in the state of New York during the 1995-1996 school year, found that schools and employers had different interpretations on developing and implementing STW programs, which ultimately affected their roles in the program and overall program participation (Recesso, 1999). There is no one particular way to develop the right youth employment program since many factors will play a role in its development and implementation. Factors include the perception and intentions of the leadership involved in creating and developing the program, the commitment level of the participating employers and students, budget, and program structure. Furthermore, with so much variety it may seem that the effectiveness of youth employment programs is difficult to judge and is rather subjective, based on the review of that individual program.

One specific review focused on developing successful internships within the public sector and emphasized the responsibility of the employer or agency to ensure that the interns were effective contributing members of the organization (Cupps & Olmosk, 2008). The Herndon Legislative Fellows Program is a long-standing successful internship program sponsored and funded by the West Virginia Legislature. Cupps and Olmosk (2008) took an in-depth look at the Herndon intern program exploring the importance of the agency's responsibility to recognize interns as valuable contributors and concluded with guidelines for maximizing the agency-intern partnership.

Also exploring successful components of internships, Szadvari (2008) stated that the most crucial component is buy-in from the management of the employing agency. Support must start from the top since the executive leadership of an agency will determine the amount of support, time, and resources that will be dedicated to developing and implementing the internship program, and ultimately determine its success (Szadvari, 2008). Szadvari (2008) emphasized that the role of the employer or agency within the STW partnership is critical to its success. Seemingly, the role of the schools in this partnership is largely assumed, in terms of their participation, since youth who participate in employment programs would most likely be students.

Similarly, Wills (1995) focused on engaging the employer community within STW partnerships. However, Wills (1995) proposed that a completely neutral third-party organization, led and managed by the employer, exist in order to identify work-based learning opportunities and serve as the conduit between education and employers in facilitating such opportunities. The third-party organization will still serve to build a connection between school and work, although they have a higher amount of credibility since they exist independently from the school or employing agency (Wills, 1995).

Conversely, Benavides et al. (2013) also stressed the importance of a collaborative partnership between the student, school, and employer as equal components to a successful internship program. A cohesive cooperation must exist in order for the internship to be meaningful as well as professionally valuable (Benavides et al., 2013). Through the support of educators and their ability to integrate the internship experience with the educational background of the student, the internship will reach its full potential (Hergert, 2009).

Cupps and Olmosk (2008), Szadvari (2008), Wills (1995), and Benavides et al.(2013) examined the specific roles of the employer and school within youth employment programs, and the partnership between these two agencies. Does this mean that this relationship must exist in order for the program to be successful? Should public agencies secure the support of a local school district in order to maximize the effectiveness of their program? Depending on the structure of the youth employment program, the school's participation or role may not be critical to its success. This paper explores one organization's longstanding youth employment program to demonstrate an employer's ability to create a successful program independently from the school's participation.

The Motivation of Participants in School-to-Work Programs

Partnerships between public and private agencies are common as they often provide mutual benefits for both participants. This collaboration between organizations, especially public service agencies and private entities, can produce great results, and often helps to achieve mutual goals. Through sharing the workload and knowledge, organizations can bridge the gap in delivery of services (Trafford & Proctor, 2006). According to Trafford and Proctor (2006), public and private partnerships will not just occur by happenstance, rather they will become the future structure of modern local government.

While youth employment programs can be effective partnerships with mutual benefits for the student and the employer, research also suggests that these programs can be costly for both parties, especially for the employing agency. Kash (2008) reviewed the effectiveness of three different STW programs, recognized the employer's participation as a key component for success, and explored the reasons for employer's hesitation to enter into such a partnership. According to Kash (2008), internship programs can be time consuming for both the school and

the employer. The employer will have to dedicate time and resources into screening and hiring an intern, commit the time to train the youth worker, and may not end up being satisfied with the intern's performance or level of competence (Kash, 2008). As literature reinforces the commitment needed from employers in the implementation of effective STW programs, we can then ask what motivates the employer to participate in such a program?

Parilla and Hesser (2008) explore the motivations of employers in STW partnerships writing:

Site supervisors report that their motivations for working with interns include: the need for inexpensive or free labor to accomplish the work of the organization, the opportunity to recruit and screen potential employees, the desire to contribute to the socialization of the next generation of practitioners, and their personal interest in serving as a mentor to a college student. (p. 317)

Many employers and businesses are crafting public-private partnerships because they see it as a win-win situation (Relave & Deich, 2007). Relave and Deich (2007) suggest that employers are participating in youth work programs as an investment in the workforce of the future, to build the talent pool, and that they recognize the benefits of sharing resources through public-private partnerships. Research reveals that organizations do benefit from apprenticeship programs and that they provide value to the organization, with the apprentice's contributions offsetting or outweighing program costs (Lerman, 2019).

On the other hand, literature also suggests that the motivation of employers to participate in STW programs is to develop human capital as firm specific capabilities rather than to enhance education through a partnership with schools (Linnehan & Carolis, 2005).

An organization may also not have the resources nor the budget to create a youth employment program without the partnership of a school, in which case they would benefit from a relationship with the school. However, for those agencies that do have the ability to create a youth employment program, independent from a partnership involving a school, it may be a worthwhile endeavor.

The Impact of Youth Work Programs

There is considerable evidence that participating in a certain amount of work has positive academic and psychosocial benefits for youth (Weaver, 2011). Research has also found that the more structured and formalized an internship program is, the stronger the correlation is to positive outcomes following the program (O'Higgins & Pinedo, 2018). O'Higgins and Pinedo (2018) found that internship programs that are structured similar to the conditions of regular employment, are even more likely to lead to better outcomes following the program. Additionally, some internships can also have a positive effect on participant's ability to secure immediate employment and medium-term employment following the program (O'Higgins & Pinedo, 2018).

According to Neumark and Rothstein (2005), there is some evidence that participation in STW programs is advantageous for those who are less likely to attend college, especially for males, but not for females. Neumark and Rothstein's (2005) research focused on youth who are less likely to attend college, often referred to as the "forgotten half" within the context of STW literature. They found that among the "forgotten half" male population, "mentoring and coop programs increase post-secondary education, and coop, school enterprise, and internship/apprenticeship programs boost employment and decrease idleness after leaving high school" (Neumark & Rothstein, 2005, p. 20).

In a similar vein, research has found that STW programs have a positive effect on youth from disadvantaged communities and those determined to be at-risk (McMurphy et al., 2013). Effective STW programs can contribute to participant's self-awareness and help them to identify and develop skills in a particular area of interest (McMurphy et al., 2013). Effective programs can also increase participant's self-esteem and confidence, motivating and inspiring them to work towards a set of goals (McMurphy et al., 2013). These program effects are especially beneficial to at-risk youth who may not otherwise have the opportunities for such development.

Participation in youth work programs can also ensure that the right type of skills required for today's jobs are being taught (Cunningham & Villasenor, 2016). There are certain skillsets that employers consistently find valuable above others and research has found a gap between those desired skills and those taught to youth in schools (Cunningham & Villasenor, 2016). Participating in an internship or work program benefits students by ensuring that they are properly trained and possess the necessary and desired skills for today's workforce.

Participating in STW programs can benefit employers as well as students. A partnership with the school district may benefit certain organizations who may not have all the time nor resources to dedicate to the program, but wish to collaborate in order to create opportunities to develop youth. Youth employment programs are useful tools to cultivate the workforce of the future. They provide an opportunity for youth to develop both personally and professionally, encouraging them to become engaged members of society.

Methodology

Research Design

By utilizing a non-experimental, correlational research design, focusing on the City of Burbank's two youth employment programs, the CREST and BEST program, we can explore whether the lack of school participation is related to the effectiveness of these programs. Program effectiveness in this case is represented by the student's ability in obtaining employment shortly following participation in the City's CREST or BEST program. The CREST and BEST programs will be analyzed specifically since they focus on actual job placement and providing the participants with real, hands-on experience whereas the STEP program serves as more of an introduction for youth to the public sector workforce. The data to be collected will consist of quantitative data collected through a survey of closed-ended, yes or no questions. This study will involve purposive sampling, as the population to be sampled must fit the criteria of having successfully completed either or both the CREST and BEST programs from January 1, 2013 through January 1, 2018. The survey will be distributed to individuals via email through a survey software, such as Survey Monkey, and the results to be collected will be from those individuals willing to participate in the survey. By selecting the range of January 1, 2013 through January 1, 2018, it provides an adequate number of possible survey participants. Also, by establishing the cutoff in the year 2018, it allows enough time to have passed from the end of the program in order for participants to find employment. Based on previous program enrollment estimates, the total possible number of survey participants will be 475 individuals. In order to collect the data, the following survey questions will be asked:

1. For individuals who completed the CREST program only, were you able to find fulltime employment within three years after completing the CREST program?

- A. If yes, did you work for the City of Burbank within two years of completing the program?
- B. If no, did you decide to pursue higher education?
- 2. For individuals who completed either the BEST program or both CREST and BEST programs, were you able to find fulltime employment within two year of completing the BEST program?
 - A. If yes, did you work for the City of Burbank within two years of completing the program?
 - B. If no, did you decide to pursue higher education?
- 3. In your opinion, did your participation in either the CREST or BEST program have a positive impact on your ability to find employment?

The survey results will provide correlational data regarding the relationship between participation in Burbank’s youth employment program and whether or not individuals secured employment following their participation in the program.

Limitations

Limitations on this study include the fact that this is a case study focusing only on one particular organization. The results of this individual study will not reflect the outcomes and results that other organizations will have. The data collected by this case study is specific to the participants of the City of Burbank’s youth employment programs. Additionally, although the results may produce findings that show a strong statistical correlation between participation in Burbank’s youth programs and the ability to secure employment, it does not mean that participation in the program is the cause of securing employment.

Further limitations include factors that impact the job market at that current time. The ability of participants to obtain employment following their participation in the program may be affected by various economical or sociological factors impacting the job market during that time. These factors may have an effect on participant's ability to find successful employment and may not be an accurate reflection of actual youth employment program outcomes.

The results of this case study however, do have implications for organizations seeking to develop, implement, or structure their own STW opportunity. The data collected through this study can help other agencies determine if developing and implementing a work program for youth will be beneficial for their own organization and whether or not a partnership with the school is necessary.

Expected Findings

Results to the survey questions can be tallied and categorized to represent the number of individuals who were able to find fulltime employment following their participation in Burbank's youth employment programs. Additionally, the survey results will also produce data that represents the number of individuals who secured employment with the City of Burbank after participating in either the CREST or BEST program. Finally, the survey results will also display the number of individuals who chose to seek higher education rather than fulltime employment following their participation in the program. This last survey question is strategically placed so that the answers from individuals who decided to pursue higher education rather than a career, do not impact the number of individuals who were not able to find employment following their participation in the program. Based on the literature regarding the successful components of STW programs and internships, and the formal structure and design of the City of Burbank youth employment programs, I expect the data to reflect high numbers of

individuals who found employment following their participation in the program. The results of the survey will reflect the correlation between participation in Burbank's youth employment program and student's ability to secure employment following participation in the program. The survey results would demonstrate whether or not the City of Burbank has been successful in administering and managing its own youth employment programs without the assistance of the schools.

Conclusion

It is necessary to prepare today's youth for the transition from school to work and for careers within the public sector. With the retirement of many baby boomers and long-term employees, how do we retain organizational knowledge and the skills necessary to continue operations effectively? STW or youth employment programs provide an opportunity for youth to gain real world job experience as well as applicable life skills, while also creating value for the employing agency. There is great variety to the types of youth employment programs available. The opportunities can range from structured, formal apprenticeship or internship programs, to temporary, informal mentorship or job shadowing opportunities. Existing literature focusing on STW programs emphasizes the importance of a collaboration between academia and the participating agency or organization. The role of the employer in this partnership is critical to the success of the program to ensure that the experience is valuable, practical, and educational for the student. The employer's role is so critical, that it may not be necessary to rely on a partnership with the school district in order to create a successful program. Far less research exists that analyzes successful youth employment programs created by agencies without the collaboration of the school district.

The youth employment programs of the City of Burbank provide an example of an organization that has established a successful youth employment program independent from the local school districts involvement. By designing a survey for willing participants who have successfully completed the program, data can be collected that reflects the relationship between student's participation in the program and their ability to secure employment soon after. Results of this case study can be beneficial in assisting other agencies who are interested in creating and developing their own program whatever their motivation may be.

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Appendix A:

Survey Questions

1. For individuals who completed the CREST program only, were you able to find fulltime employment within three years after completing the CREST program?

Yes No

- A. If yes, did you work for the City of Burbank within two years of completing the program?

Yes No

- B. If no, did you decide to pursue higher education?

Yes No

2. For individuals who completed either the BEST program or both CREST and BEST programs, were you able to find fulltime employment within two year of completing the BEST program?

Yes No

- A. If yes, did you work for the City of Burbank within two years of completing the program?

Yes No

- B. If no, did you decide to pursue higher education?

Yes No

3. In your opinion, did your participation in either the CREST or BEST program have a positive impact on your ability to find employment?

Yes No