

The Whiteboard

The Whiteboard features articles pertinent to wood technology and design education and industry-education alliances.

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Forming an Advisory Committee

Establishing an official advisory committee for a school wood program is not as difficult as you might think. Mark Roberts is a woodshop teacher who, along with a group of industry supporters, launched the Metro Phoenix Wood Manufacturing Industry Advisory Council this past May. Mark found a template handbook from another group and used it to create bylaws and other important guidelines for his advisory committee. The template, entitled, "Developing a Local Advisory Committee," is available from the Nebraska Department of Education at

http://www.education.ne.gov/nce/Manuals_Booklets/AdvisoryHandbook.pdf

Roberts pushed for the development of the council to increase the participation of the manufacturing community in local career and technical education (CTE) training programs and to foster cooperation between industry and such training institutions, because they need each other. Intentions for the group are to gain awareness in matching educational efforts with business needs, to encourage improvements in the educational programs and to prepare students for the valid careers that do exist that are being vacated by a large boomer work force.

Here are some tips for wood educators in setting up an advisory committee, based on Mark's experiences:

- Creating relationships with (potential) local industry partners is a MUST first step, and to build these relationships, you have to get out of the classroom. Go meet local manufacturers and business owners at their location. Share with them your interest in career and technical education and how it affects them and the industry.
- Invite the industry members to meet with you, other instructors and school administrators on an agreed upon regular basis to discuss shared concerns as well as potential solutions and opportunities. For example, if there is a shortage of local CNC-trained workers in your region, you might identify ways to incorporate CNC training into the woodshop program-- along with the donation of a CNC machine from an industry partner.
- Set goals and objectives that are useful yet reasonable for your group to accomplish. Mark's committee is discussing and collecting data about educational standards and the local industry. How many jobs are available versus how many CTE programs exist to support them? How can the current math curriculum incorporate construction concepts to be more useful and applicable to students, etc?
- Each school district generally has a CTE Director. Ask him/her to participate on the committee. Having their participation will validate the committee for the purpose of Perkins funding. Each CTE program has federal Perkins funds that are available to support it, but in order to receive the funds, the program must have an active advisory committee. By involving the CTE Director,

your advisory committee will meet the official requirement and the Perkins funds can be released to the CTE program.

- Once the committee is established, ask each industry member to consider the option of offering a summer internship opportunity to a **teacher**. A lot of CTE instructors already spend their summers working in the industry and by doing so they learn the latest technologies and processes that they can take back to their schools in the fall to train their students. This also allows teachers to develop relationships with local companies and possibly obtain donations for their program. The long-term value of hiring a teacher for two to three months can be enormous to local businesses as the teacher is their connection to the students who are the skilled workers of the (near) future.

The Metro Phoenix Council's objective in collecting industry-education data is to demonstrate the impact of the woodworking industry to education policy makers and government. Roberts hopes to impress the message of a "diversified economy" --promoting different economic options and strengths rather than relying on only one to two dominant industries for the entire local economy. He also wants the committee to instigate participation from local colleges through the creation and support of compatible training programs.

A Message to the Industry

Roberts says most business owners recognize that the skilled labor market is dwindling and that partnership with education is crucial to reversing this trend, but don't know how to get involved and school district bureaucracy can be threatening to those outside of it. By having a wood teacher take the initiative, it bypasses some of the perceived red tape, allowing the industry-education groups to focus on the important issues. The Metro Phoenix Advisory Committee currently consists of 25 members, with the majority representing local businesses in architectural millwork, cabinetry, case goods, countertops and related aspects of woodworking and includes several teachers.

If your company needs skilled workers tomorrow, they must be trained today. Contact your local school district's CTE department and inquire about advisory committees for wood programs. You can also contact WoodLINKS USA to partner with a local school www.woodlinksusa.org.

Mark Roberts has spent much of his 30-year career as a high school instructor with the Mesa (AZ) Unified School District where he delivered the WoodLINKS program, the nationally recognized wood skills curriculum that awards student graduates a certificate reflecting specific skills accomplishment. He is currently an instructor at Mesa Community College and a full-time champion for woodworking programs and industry-education partnerships. Contact Mark Roberts if you have questions about starting an advisory committee in your area at (602) 206-4372 or robertsmarkd@msn.com.

Comments on this or previous articles? Suggestions for future Whiteboard topics? Please e-mail to education@awfs.org