

CREATING AND REPLICATING HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

A GUIDE FOR BUSINESSES AND SCHOOLS

CASE STUDY

West Virginia Simulated Workplace

Transforming CTE Through Simulated Workplaces



Carl Vinson Institute of Government
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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West Virginia schools do not teach career and technical education classes. Instead, the students and teachers run companies in simulated workplaces – approximately 1,500 of them.

The Simulated Workplace Initiative began in 2012. Kathy D'Antoni, assistant state superintendent of schools for the West Virginia Department of Education, said that during her meetings with businesses over the years, she kept hearing complaints that companies were having a difficult time finding qualified workers. What students were missing, she said, was the culture of what it means to be an employee or an employer and also what good customer service looks and sounds like.

These simulated workplaces help students learn that what one employee does can affect the whole company. Due in part to this high-stakes environment, attendance rates have risen from 60% to 90%. Students say they feel respected and that they have a voice; because they feel respected, they in turn show greater respect.

Students can create whatever kind of company they want. “Employees” are chosen based on interviews to ensure that they really want to be part of that particular company, rather than being placed there by a school counselor. The interview panels include the teacher and the company management team, which is made up of students. Students in these simulated workplaces are high school juniors and seniors. The companies they create can last the length of the school year, or the students can elect to continue the company. Most choose to keep their companies going.

Teachers do not teach; rather, they facilitate the companies. Any time there is a lecture, it is considered professional development, just like in the private sector. Also, similar to the private sector, all kids are drug tested. As West Virginia is plagued with one of the worst opioid problems in the country, many students have found that they now have an answer for peer pressure: If they test positive for drugs, they can no longer work for their company, and they want to continue working.

These companies are particularly important in very rural areas where there may be no businesses. By developing their own companies, students learn how to operate and act in a business setting, experience they might not otherwise get. The companies are wide ranging. One group of students designed technology that turns homes into medically smart homes, which won them a \$10,000 grant from Samsung. One sells children’s picnic tables (any money earned by the companies goes back into the program for material support). A rug manufacturer contacted one company to help them manufacture a part that is no longer being produced. One company built tiny homes for families left homeless after devastating floods in 2016. The students collaborate across companies – some run “payroll” services and others do advertising.

