School-To-Career: A Historical Perspective

Miami-Dade County Public Schools is proud to build on a thirty-year history of accomplishments in the area of School-To-Career (STC). Roger C. Cuevas, Superintendent of Schools, has been instrumental in the development of the concept. In 1971, then Senator Robert Graham proposed a “School-To-Career” position for “industry-based personnel” who would come to the school district and work as occupational specialists (presently known as career specialists) to bring the world of work to the students. Through Mr. Cuevas' unwavering support, today, thirty years later, there are 184 career specialists in senior high, middle, adult/vocational/technical schools, Exceptional Student Education Centers, and kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8) schools. From the 70's through the 80's, the concept of career education provided a framework for efforts of student services personnel and vocational/technical teachers and staff to provide career guidance and development for our students. Additionally, M-DCPS showed its commitment to the School-To-Career movement by providing numerous educational theme options to its students through the establishment of industry-focused magnet school programs.

During this period the School Board approved a series of "Master Plan" documents which moved the concept forward. In the early 80's, Mr. Cuevas' staff led the school system efforts toward the development of Career Awareness Labs in the elementary schools, a career-related basic skills program in English and Spanish, career guidance curriculum materials, career course plans as part of the computer scheduling system, a major Career and Job Fair which provided a week-long activity for all 9th and “career-ready” 12th grade students at the Miami-Dade County Fair & Exposition, the development of unique dropout prevention programs and in 1986, the first and only International Conference on Careers which brought together 26 national organizations in Miami for career and dropout prevention programs.

In the 1990's, the Superintendent and School Board provided the model for high school reform in the nation, William H. Turner Technical Arts Senior High School. Turner Technical Senior High School became the first academic and technical high school developed based on the Career Academy model and won the first New American High School award from the United States Department of Education. Since that time, this high school has become one of the first Millennium High Schools in the State of Florida. Mr. Cuevas continued his leadership in the School-To-Work (STW) movement, first as the Assistant Superintendent of Vocational Education, and then as the leader of the STW effort with the business community. He oversaw the development of 22 senior high school careers and professions magnet programs, including the mega magnet at Coral Reef Senior High School. He also, pioneered work with the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce (GMCC) and the National Alliance for Business, developing the first districtwide Job Application Portfolio for students in grades 9-12, through the leadership of the One Community One Goal® (OCOG) Initiative for Workforce Development.

In 1994, the system led the nation in STW (later renamed STC) efforts receiving the first two national STW grants through collaborative efforts with the Jobs and Educational Partnership (JEP) Board. A standards-based student career development program was designed in response to the recommendation of a task force established by former Board member and current State Representative Fredericka Wilson. The standards define skills in the area of personal/social, careers, and educational development in students. Mr. Cuevas relocated the STW initiative into the Office of Educational Planning, to require a “School-To-Career” objective in the School
Improvement Plan (SIP) for every school, which led to establishing the school system’s first Strategic Goal as "School-To-Career", which includes the academic and technical programs of the school district.

As part of this substantive effort with the business/industry community, the Superintendent formed the OCOG® Initiative and realigned STC with the Office of School Reform, charged with the establishment of academies. The One Community One Goal® initiative began the process of developing the South Florida Annenberg Challenge grants for the community identified key industries, through collaboration and the realignment of resources with other departments throughout the District. The establishment of the Office of School Reform has assisted schools in the development of career academies as a vital part of the STC agenda, which is a major systemic reform effort. Many strategies began through STW and/or the OCOG® initiative since 1994 are as follows:

- Received Federal funding to implement STW (LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION AND URBAN RURAL OPPORTUNITIES GRANTS) as one of eight localities in the nation.
- Developed the Benchmark "data elements" to assess the concept of "School-To-Work" in senior high schools.
- Developed and implemented the Job Application Portfolio (JAP) for all M-DCPS students in grades 9-12. This initiative was supported by the GMCC and M-DCPS and has over 300 signature companies.
- Responded to the OCOG® Initiative Committee of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce outlining the seven key industries of job growth and incorporating education into its key industries through STC. This allowed for the creation of industry-focus academy grants through the South Florida Annenberg Challenge grants for One Community One Goal® in the following five industries: Film and Entertainment, Biomedical, Financial Services, Visitor, and Information/Technology/Telecommunications.
- Assisted Miami-Dade Community College in realigning its curriculum to support the key industries.
- Fostered interdepartmental collaboration in M-DCPS through the development of a business partnership database to document all business participation in the Office of Community Participation and linked to the State of Florida STW Clearinghouse for the data assessment.
- Developed “matrix functions” in order to re-emphasize the job functions of school-based teams for STW through the STW department.
- Developed a requirement to include work-based strategies in the Community Service requirements.
- Developed a requirement that all Federal grant applications include STW strategies.
- Received approval by the School Board of the report “Preparing Students for the 21st Century,
as Learners and Workers”, by the Career Education Work Task Force, for personal and social, educational, and career development.

- Implemented the Standards-Based Student Career Development program for Pre K-12/Adult.

- Collaborated with all offices and departments to develop curriculum and the public match to create industry-focus academies to provide a focus for all restructuring efforts Pre K-12.

- Creation of a School-To-Career Department through district funds.

- Career Academy strategies by all offices in partnership, e.g., Schools of Choice; Applied Technology Program; Vocational/Technical schools; Life Skills and Special Projects; Alternative and Dropout Prevention; Bilingual Education and World Languages; Office of Exceptional Student Education and Psychological Services; and core academies areas including the District Comprehensive Mathematics and Science Plan.

- Provided professional development for teachers and staff to learn the reform strategies and the integration of industry standards into the core academic subjects, through various conferences and implementation meetings.

- Developed the legislative strategy for inclusion of Career Academies in the federal legislative proposal for Miami-Dade which generated over $600,000.