

Career Builders

By Mary-Alane Wiltse

Help Your Children Plan Their Careers

Two years ago the Workforce Investment Board of Columbia & Greene Counties worked in cooperation with our local public school districts to conduct an in-depth survey among all 11th and 12th grade students. Some of the survey questions focused on the efforts students were undertaking to decide on their future career goals. The results suggest that we could all be doing a better job helping teenagers prepare for one of the most important decisions they will ever have to make – what they want to be when they grow up.

Based on the results of our survey, over half the juniors and seniors in our two counties had no definite career plans and less than half began thinking about career options before they were sophomores. You may think that expecting a 15 year old to know what they want to do with their life is unreasonable, but exposing teenagers to career information early and often can have a positive impact on their success as adults.

As our world becomes more complex and reliant on technology, the jobs that will be available in the future will require strong math and science skills. If students do not recognize the importance of these subjects and work to do well in these classes then their options will be limited by the time they graduate high school. Also, students that see the connection between school and work are more likely to do well.

The students that responded to our survey did not feel that they had access to the career information necessary for them to make an informed decision. For example, over 90% said that the affect of a job on their personal lifestyle was an important consideration for them in making a career choice, but less than half felt that they had access to that information. A little more than half felt they had access to information on career descriptions and job availability projections, with less than that saying they had enough information about career entry requirements or income and benefits.

On a positive note, parents were considered the number one resource students turned to for career planning advice. Parents can be excellent resources in helping youth evaluate their own strengths and abilities, but they also need access to accurate career and labor market information to be truly helpful to their children.

Fortunately, New York State runs a website called Career Zone that provides this information. The address is www.nycareerzone.org. This website provides vast amount of information and is appropriate for students in grades six through twelve. Users can create their own personal portfolio that can be continually updated throughout their school career. The portfolio can be used to help students organize and identify their activities, awards and academic achievements that will impress potential employers and college/technical schools admission staff.

At this site, students can also complete assessments on their interests, values and abilities. The results will provide them with links to occupational groups that fit each student's parameters. Users are provided with detailed job descriptions, and explanations on working conditions, educational requirements, other needed

qualifications, and advancement opportunities. They can also learn about the industries that employ people in that occupation, the future job outlook, average earnings, and related occupations. Finally, the website provides links to New York post-secondary schools that provide training in the occupational field under consideration.

Career Zone also links to a United States Department of Labor website called Career Voyages. This site dedicates an entire section to providing parents with all the information they need to help their children plan their future. This includes a very cool feature where you simply input a job title to get a listing of all the age appropriate courses, activities and work experiences your child should complete each year of their high school career to prepare for that occupation.

These websites are such excellent resources for parents and their children that we want to promote their use as much as possible. Therefore, we periodically offer free workshops for parents and their children to learn how to use all of their features. The next scheduled workshop is being offered by Maureen Boutin on Tuesday, January 23, 2007. It runs from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. in the college's new Professional Academic Center, room 707. Make a New Year's resolution to attend.

Mary-Alane Wiltse is the Director of the Workforce New York Career Center at Columbia-Greene Community College. For more information visit the website at www.columbiagreeneetworks.org, call 828-4181 ext. 5510, or visit them at their new home on the top floor of the Professional Academic Center on the college campus.