

# Get Ready, Students Of the 90s

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he 1957 launching of the Soviet satellite Sputnik caused the United States to reassess its minimal investment in education, and an emphasis was placed on science and mathematics. Now, more than three decades later, with the United States' competitiveness challenged by both Germany and Japan, education once again is in the national spotlight. The need for educational reform has been called for by educators, parents, students, community leaders, politicians, and the media. Most recently, the business community has joined the bandwagon, claiming that a more highly skilled workforce is critical if the United States is to maintain its prominence in the world economy.

American students' inadequate preparation for the workforce greatly affects our country's economic vitality. Experts fear the United States' international competitiveness is being eroded as jobs now require more than the ability to perform repetitive physical tasks. Creative thinking, an ability to work in teams, and a knowledge of technology are skills needed by today's worker. Too many entrants in the laborforce do not possess these skills. The growing disparity between the skills of a typical high-school graduate and those needed for entry-level positions begs the question, "How must the educational system change to meet the needs of the 90s?" For ICMA members, the question is likely to be posed as, "What role can local governments play in preparing students to be effective employees and citizens?"

In May 1990, the U.S. Secretary of Labor's Commission

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on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) was established to examine the changes in the workplace and the impact of these changes on education. (ICMA has followed the work of the commission closely and participated as a member of the task force, which released a report entitled, "Government as a High Performance Employer.") In June 1991, the commission completed its initial report, defining the necessary skills students must gain to be competent workers. The commission also discussed the approach instructors must take to effectively teach these skills. The SCANS report identifies five competencies and a three-part foundation of skills and personal qualities that are needed for solid job performance. Competencies effective workers can productively use are:

- Resources—identifies, organizes, plans, and allocates resources;
- Interpersonal skills—works with others;
- Information—acquires and uses information;
- Systems—understands social, organizational, and technical systems; and
- Technology—works with a variety of technologies.

The foundation of skills and personal qualities are:

- Basic skills—reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, speaking and listening;
- Thinking skills—thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, and reasoning; and
- Personal qualities—individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, integrity.

According to the report, these requirements are essential preparation for all students. Teaching the SCANS competencies and foundation, however, requires a nontraditional instructional approach. The report

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states that "the foundation and competencies can not be taught in isolation...the most effective way of teaching skills is 'in context,' or placing learning objectives within real environments." Teachers must apply instructional activities to the real world and encourage interactive learning in which students demonstrate an ability to work in groups, conduct research, and solve problems. Teaching techniques need to extend beyond textbooks and lectures. One means of extending education beyond the classroom is by using the many existing resources in the community.

**Community Involvement In Education**

The move toward community involvement in education is a growing trend. Several businesses have initiated programs designed to offer students a glimpse of corporate life,

provide opportunities to learn skills needed in the workplace, and provide role models. These efforts include "adopt-a-school" programs, mentoring, and internship programs. The Boston Private Industry Council's Summer Jobs Program provides high school students with valuable employment experience in area companies. In addition to learning job skills and good work habits, students have a chance to try out different jobs and learn about various employment options. Administered at the local level by two- and four-year colleges and universities, the Career Beginnings Program brings together high schools, businesses, and local colleges in working partnerships to provide students with an opportunity to work in entry-level summer jobs with career potential in the private or public sector. Similarly, the INROADS Program is a national program that matches talented minority youth with corporate sponsors. Sponsors pledge to develop a career opportunity for each intern that prepares them for corporate and community leadership.

The public sector also has much to offer the educational system. In addition to introducing students to a wide array of career opportunities, local government/school partnerships can be powerful tools for engendering civic responsibility and exposing high school students to government processes and procedures. One way in which local governments can address the needs identified by SCANS and prepare young people for their roles as citizens is by establishing internships for high school students. Many local governments have programs for master of public administration (MPA) candidates and graduates, but few offer such programs for students still in high school. Internships familiarize students with the requirements of work, illustrate the skills necessary for career success, and give participants an opportunity to apply the

knowledge and skills they have learned in the classroom. Public-sector internships can provide students with a glimpse of government in action and ideas about how they might get involved.

The following examples of local government/school partnerships provide students with experience in an actual work environment and help them make better career choices in the future.

### **Washington, D.C.**

The Public Service Academy at Anacostia Senior High School in the Washington, D.C., public schools is a unique public/private partnership of business, education, and government agency leaders designed to help high school students' transition to careers in public service or government directly after high school or college graduation. The program, now in its third year, provides students with internships and a curriculum that emphasizes public service. The Public Service Academy provides an academic program that emphasizes basic work-related skills, knowledge, and abilities; paid internships in public-service agencies during the summer and school year; college-level courses and job skills training; shadowing programs in which students learn by observing the daily activities of managers in government; and professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators. For further information, contact: Dr. Mary Johnson, Public Service Academy manager, Anacostia Senior High School, Room 305, 16th and R Streets, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20020; 202/767-8327.

### **Broome County, New York**

The Youth Apprenticeship Demonstration Project was created to help high school students see direct connections between school learning and paid employment. Participating

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employers cooperate with schools to provide a challenging education and training experience, which thereby assures them of a high-quality workforce. Juniors from five high schools spend between 10 and 20 hours each week (plus full-time work during the summer, in some cases) in newly created, supervised apprenticeships in manufacturing and engineering technology, administration and office technology, and health care. Students are released from school for part of the day, and are given opportunities to relate their academic classes directly to their work experience through special projects. Successful apprentices are qualified for employment following high school graduation. For further information, contact: Stephen Hamilton, professor and project director, Cornell Youth and Work Program, G94 Martha VanRensselaer Hall, Ithaca, New York 14853-4401; 607/255-8394.

### **Broward County, Florida**

A cooperative effort between the county and the local school board

(22 high schools, four vocational schools) was undertaken to help selected, graduating high school seniors get a start in developing a career with county government. As public-service interns, the individuals are given one year to qualify for a permanent position with the county. In the meantime, they gain valuable work experience, perform responsible, full-time work, and earn a good entry-level salary, with county benefits. The students also serve as the program's ambassadors by assisting with the recruitment presentations given in each high school. After one year of service, students become eligible for full college tuition reimbursement while remaining a full-time county employee. For more information, contact: Susan Dell-Cioppa, coordinator, Employee Development Section, Personnel Division, Broward County Government, 115 South Andrews Avenue, Room 508, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33301; 305/357-6588.

### **Charlotte, North Carolina**

Through the Academic Internship Program, high school students in the 11 Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools can elect to take a portion of their educational program outside the classroom with an approved community sponsor for the purpose of exploring a career option or pursuing an academic study. Academic credit is earned according to the number of hours served; 45 hours is the average length of an internship. Each student is paired with a teacher who has a background in the student's area of focus. Students meet with their teacher sponsor regularly and are required to complete a final project on their placement. For information, contact: Joyce McSpadden, lead coordinator, Academic Internship Program, M. A. Thompson Staff Development Center, 428 West Boulevard, Charlotte, North Carolina 28203; 704/343-5400.

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### **Des Plaines, Illinois**

The city of Des Plaines and high school district 207's "Clinical Government" program is a three-week, intensive summer course that acquaints high school juniors with local government. The program operates five days a week for four hours every morning. Students attend a two-hour classroom session conducted by the school's social studies instructor with local officials serving as guest lecturers, followed by two-hour work sessions arranged with city department heads and elected officials. Every year, approximately 36 students participate. The course fulfills the students' government course requirement. Contact: Al Rolla, social science chairman, Maine West High School, 1755 South Wolf Road, Des Plaines, Illinois 60018; 708/827-6176.

### **Fairfax County, Virginia**

The Fairfax County public schools offer a political science course that applies the classical theory of the classroom to the practical experience of an internship. The course is divided into two semesters. During the first semester, students examine the complexities of political ideals and investigate the extent to which the operating political system seems to uphold them. This investigation includes a consideration of political science processes and methods used in political analysis. During the second semester, students participate in after-school internships for eight or 10 hours a week in government or government-related agencies. Students meet once a week in a seminar with their teacher to discuss readings, analyze the decision-making

process at the intern site, discuss political issues, and prepare a report on a contemporary issue related to the internship. Contact: Mike Wildason, Fairfax County Public Schools, Lacey Instructional Center, 3705 Crest Drive, Annandale, Virginia 22003; 703/698-7500.

ICMA would like to play a role in promoting partnerships between local governments and high schools. If you are aware of similar programs in your local government, please send information to Lydia Bjornlund, Citizenship Education Coordinator, ICMA, 777 North Capitol Street, NE, Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20002-4201. **PM**

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