



The Houston **A+** Challenge  
Teacher Externship Program

*Making Classroom Instruction Relevant to the Workplace*

## The Need

As many as 70 percent of U.S. companies can't recruit enough skilled employees to meet their needs. Until the 1980s, there were numerous blue-collar jobs that could be filled by unskilled labor, but today there are few unskilled jobs as technology proficiency has pervaded the service, administrative and manufacturing industries. A 1999 study by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) cited technological training as the most important need of Texas businesses, a finding that mirrors national studies showing employers want to hire individuals with "hard skills" such as technological competency, reading, math and writing. The same TWC report also showed that smaller Texas firms considered basic job readiness, customer relations/service, teamwork, and responsibility/work ethics training as important. These skills are often included in the training provided by two-thirds of the state's larger firms and parallel national reports showing employers also want to hire individuals with "soft skills" such as critical thinking, problem solving and interpersonal communications.

In recent years, businesses have realized that if they work with educators to communicate the skill sets required for entry-level employees, educators can better prepare students to meet their needs. Since corporate training requires such a huge investment of time—particularly by large companies that must identify possible community, state and federal resources—the return-on-investment for training is greatest for small firms. Therefore, all companies, but particularly large ones, are realizing that time invested in business-education partnerships can reduce the training needed by new hires. Here in Houston, the Greater Houston Partnership began to look for ways it could use its resources as the city's leading business organization to address this issue. The GHP Education and Workforce Advisory Committee explored the idea of teacher externships to link business and high school. The committee contacted the Houston A+ Challenge to partner with it in creation of a new initiative to offer teachers the chance to see how what they teach is applied in the real world. One partnership that has been created is teacher externships.

Described by some as shadowing or immersion programs, externships are designed to connect classroom teachers with business professionals in their field of study in order to make students' learning experiences more relevant to the workplace. Externships put teachers in employers' workplaces to give them firsthand experiences they can share with students. Because most teachers go directly from college into the classroom, they don't have the opportunity to see how the skills they teach are applicable to the needs of business. In addition, externships help businesses understand the importance of classroom learning and the resources needed by students to help them prepare for the workplace. For teachers in career academy programs, externships are particularly important to ensure that they are preparing students for success in specific careers.

As you read this report, I hope you are inspired to participate in an externship, whether you represent a business or whether you are an educator. If our high school students are to be ready for what awaits them after they walk across the stage to receive their diploma, we must ensure they have the knowledge and skills to be successful in a global economy.

*Linda Clarke*

Linda Clarke  
Executive Director  
**Houston A+ Challenge**



Teachers involved in externships observe and practice current technology. They learn about career options for their students and they build a network of working professionals who provide real world input into their curriculum. Extern teachers are also re-energized and encouraged to know that they are impacting students for the future. On the flip side, companies understand that schools need more interaction between business professionals and students to help these future employees understand how their current schoolwork is preparation for the future.

*Examples of the impact of these partnerships and the changes teachers have made in their classroom instruction as a result of externships are:*

- observing the use of ratios plus weights and measures in the medical field provided a math teacher with medical examples to incorporate into her lessons
- reading corporate information manuals gave an English teacher the insight to emphasize more non-fiction reading with her students
- seeing how much Spanish was used in a business inspired a Spanish teacher to create more storefronts for students to purchase products and practice Spanish, rather than him telling them how to say words
- observing the search for oil and gas with 3-D virtual reality software made an engineering teacher realize that technology is changing so fast that students must be prepared for lifelong learning and not necessarily specific skills
- watching applicants be interviewed inspired a business teacher to conduct mock interviews in his classroom and emphasize the importance of written and oral communications skills, as well as a positive attitude
- seeing how a major corporation electronically tracked product sales and commissions motivated a computer teacher to rewrite lesson plans so students could do the same things when learning Excel



## Participating Campuses

In the summer of 2003, The Houston A+ Challenge invited area businesses to partner with Reagan High School teachers to pilot an externship program as part of a massive, three-year, district-wide high school redesign initiative called Houston Schools for a New Society. The pilot was so well received that The Houston A+ Challenge will expand the program in 2004 to also include teachers from Scarborough and Worthing high schools. The participation goal is have 20 extern teachers: 10 from Reagan, four from Scarborough and six from Worthing. These externships will help teachers develop a better understanding of the attributes needed by high school graduates to succeed in the workplace. These attributes, developed by area business leaders as part of the Houston Schools for a New Society, are part of the Profile of Houston's 21st Century High School Graduate and include:

- effective communicator
- proficient problem-solver
- self-directed worker and thinker
- culturally aware in a global world
- knowledgeable of worldwide issues
- cooperative team member
- efficient technology-user
- responsible citizen



**Reagan High School**, the largest of the three high schools, has an enrollment of approximately 1,700 students in grades 9-12. Eighty-seven percent of students are Hispanic and 84.3 percent are economically disadvantaged. The school's attendance rate is 93.3 percent. Career academies are offered in health science technology, business and technology, industrial arts and engineering, fine arts and magnet computer technology. Reagan is the only Houston ISD school to offer an Academy of Finance and a Computer Numerical Control (CNC) Machine Operator Training Program.

**Scarborough High School** is the smallest of the three high schools with an enrollment of nearly 900 students in grades 9-12. Hispanics comprise 52.5 percent of the student body, followed by whites at 23.4 percent and African-Americans at 22.4 percent. The school's attendance rate is 94.1 percent and 55.7 percent of the students are economically disadvantaged. Scarborough will offer career academies beginning in fall 2004.

**Worthing High School** has an enrollment of approximately 1,325 students. Ninety-six percent of its students are African-American and 57.1 percent are economically disadvantaged. The school's attendance rate is 93.2 percent. Worthing will offer career academies beginning in fall 2004.

# Objectives

Teachers will:

- be introduced to modern workplace equipment and actual workplace problems
- have the chance to work together with employers to understand what students need for success in the workplace
- learn ways to connect the classroom to the modern workplace
- help employers understand the importance of classroom instruction
- have a real world experience in a career field related to their teaching field
- build alliances with local employers and gain personal mentors from the workforce

# Program Logistics

Businesses are asked to partner with a school to provide externship experiences for a teacher(s) during a designated week in the summer. Businesses are free to develop and deliver whatever Teacher Externship Worksite Learning Plan they feel is most beneficial for teachers, but should keep in mind that teachers particularly appreciate seeing the direct correlation between what they teach and the skills needed by businesses.

Externship schedules are as follows during the designated week:

**Monday Morning:**

Extern teachers attend orientation at their home campuses.

**Monday Afternoon:**

Extern teachers report to business workplace to become familiar with company procedures and receive an overview of the week.

**Tuesday-Thursday:**

Extern teachers report to work as if they were regular employees of the company and participate in their Worksite Learning Plan.

**Friday:**

Extern teachers complete their workplace experience and review it with their primary point of contact at their host business. In the afternoon, a company representative and the teacher extern attend a follow-up event sponsored by The Houston A+ Challenge to gain feedback and thank teachers and employers.

## Corporate Responsibilities

Businesses should have a primary contact person to work with the Campus Externship Coordinator in developing the Teacher Externship Worksite Learning Plan. Below are some of the materials needed by the Coordinator to prepare externs:

- overview of business including organizational structure, policies, culture, objectives, mission and goals
- copies of corporate materials that could affect classroom instruction, such as manuals, pre-employment assessments, job descriptions, job applications and other forms of written communication
- list of academic skills needed in the workplace, such as math, science, communication, etc.

In addition, teacher externs will be paid a \$500 stipend by the sponsoring business or other program supporters.

## Teacher Externship Responsibilities

- Submit an application to Houston A+ Challenge to be considered for selection for the externship program
- Attend a half-day orientation prior to the start of the program to learn about employer expectations, including appropriate dress, as well as campus expectations. Parking, lunch and other logistics will also be discussed.
- Keep a daily journal to reflect on the experience
- Provide feedback to workplace hosts to detail program's value and return on investment
- Develop an action plan to incorporate at least two workplace experiences into the classroom and share this with host business
- Provide feedback about the experience to Campus Externship Coordinator and Career Academy Coordinator
- Share externship experiences with colleagues at school staff meetings, career academy meetings and other presentations
- Attend ending event to thank host employers
- Attend follow-up meeting to share experiences

## Campus Responsibilities

Each school will have one point of contact, or Campus Externship Coordinator, for planning, implementation and follow-up. Campus Externship Coordinators will work with businesses, as well as teacher externs even though each extern may work with several company employees during their externship.

The duties of the Campus Externship Coordinator include:

- establishing goals
- identifying, recruiting and orienting business partners
- promoting the program to teachers and administrators
- overseeing teacher selections and matching teachers with business partners
- overseeing organization of the Teacher Externship Worksite Learning Plan and other program policies and procedures
- monitoring externship-related activities throughout the school year
- evaluating each worksite with the teacher extern
- working with teachers on curriculum to make it more relevant in relation to the externship
- organizing a culminating activity with the business partner
- reviewing and revising the program with business partners

One of the most important elements of the externship experience is matching teachers' instructional area with businesses' primary focus area. Since teachers are selected through an application process at each campus, it will be important to have the externships in place before teachers apply. Then the lessons learned from externships can be shared with students and fellow teachers, thereby impacting a large number of students.

## Program Results

The eight Reagan High School teachers who participated in the pilot externship program in the summer of 2003 cited their experience as useful for enhancing classroom instruction.

Andy Gibson, an industrial arts and engineering teacher who was placed with Apache Corporation, was unprepared for the respect he received as a teacher. For him, the experience “restored my faith in corporate America and made me proud to be a teacher.” In addition, he was able to explore job opportunities for high school and college graduates since he received the company’s job descriptions. “I’ve already done a lesson plan for my students in economics,” said Gibson shortly after the externship.

Mustapha Elmiloudi, a computer teacher who spent his week at Coca-Cola, has shared with students how their proficiency with Microsoft Office products is important in business. “The externship was a kind of motivation for students to show them they’d benefit from their computer class.” Elmiloudi, who spent time in nearly every department from sales to product production to financial, now emphasizes the importance of communications and math skills to his students as well.

Reagan High School Principal Robert Chavarria feels the externship program is a way to change how things have been done in the past and to reduce the dropout rate. “In talking with Coca-Cola, I see that what we are doing does have an impact on whether students are successful....We are going into a new realm and it will take all our partners to get there.”





# Teacher Externship Program

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