



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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West Virginia Simulated Workplace

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Dr. Kathy D'Antoni is the Associate State Superintendent of Schools with the West Virginia Department of Education – Division of Technical and Adult Education. She is the former Vice Chancellor of the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education.

D'Antoni began her career in education as a teacher. In 1992 she began working with the Tech Prep initiative at Marshall University and later became the program's state director. In 2008, she served as interim president of WV State Community and Technical College.

She has worked extensively with curriculum alignment and development projects, including the Simulated Workplace initiative. She is the past president of the National Association for Tech Prep Leaders and currently serves on the Governor's Workforce Council.

D'Antoni obtained her doctorate degree in higher education administration from West Virginia University.

American businesses struggle to find high-skilled workers for critical job openings. Teens and young adults entering the workforce often lack the skills, attitudes, motivation and education for personal or professional success. High paying jobs across the country remain unfilled because of a limited high-skilled workforce pool.¹ However, a perfect storm is brewing that may solve the dilemma.

Career Technical Education (CTE) is rising to the forefront of public education while simultaneously rising to the forefront of business and industry circles. The focus on and the advancement of CTE will make a dramatic impact on America's critical need for high-quality, high-skilled employees. The same critical need is also prevalent in West Virginia.

It is with utmost urgency that our education system provides both the academic and technical skill sets, as well as the soft skills, necessary to set the foundation for a competitive workforce. In West Virginia, this is happening in a very unique way via the Simulated Workplace Initiative. The West Virginia Department of Education, in collaboration with state businesses,



A Tiny Home constructed by Simulated Workplace student employees from Mingo Central High School



developed these powerful learning environments that are maximizing learning experiences by transforming the traditional classroom into student-led simulated workplace companies.

Students enrolled in simulated workplace companies master high-level academic and technical skills by participating in authentic projects that embrace real world business processes and expectations. The company environment provides each student an opportunity to achieve stackable, technical skill sets while allowing them to develop the soft skills necessary to be successful in any workplace.

Simulated Workplace started in 2012 with six pilots and has gradually added schools and CTE programs to the network every year since. The vision was to design a learning environment with outcomes that met the needs of employers in the state. A framework of 12 required protocols for Simulated Workplace companies was established to ensure consistency and quality when measuring the outcomes statewide:

- 1) Student-led company with organizational charts and assigned roles within the company
- 2) Application/interview process to join the company
- 3) Formal attendance system that mimics industry-related company



Simulated Workplace “employees” at Mingo Central High School in Delbarton, West Virginia fabricating custom parts for Tiny Home project

- 4) Random drug testing
- 5) 5S Quality Control
- 6) Safe work areas
- 7) Workplace teams
- 8) Project-based learning/project management
- 9) Student-developed company policy and procedures
- 10) Company meetings
- 11) Onsite business reviews
- 12) Accountability utilizing data review, reporting, portfolios and technical assessments

Today, all CTE programs in the state are Simulated Workplace companies. That translates to over 1,200 student-led companies with 24,000 students involved in the program. These companies embrace the processes and expectations of traditional businesses and industries while focusing on the academic and technical skill sets needed for future success. It is important to note that Simulated Workplace is not a curriculum; it is an environment which transforms the culture of CTE and empowers students to create and define their educational experiences.

Early outcomes from this program reveal many positives, including increased

participation in CTE, increased attendance rates and high passage rates of drug screenings. In fall of 2017, the state piloted a national technical assessment, NOCTI, in six simulated workplace sites. The majority of students scored above established work-force entry levels. All Simulated Workplace companies are scheduled to participate in the NOCTI during the spring of 2018.

Simulated Workplace not only changed the environment of CTE to real-world processes, but a variety of projects from these student-led companies are leveraging state career technical education funding to impact the economy in West Virginia. Three major projects that have evolved are: Tiny Homes, State Parks Partnership and an Economic Summit.

Tiny Homes

In 2016, flooding in the central and southern areas of West Virginia left many people homeless. Reports that the homeless flood victims would have difficulty surviving the winter sparked an idea for Simulated Workplace companies to build tiny homes for the victims. A total of 12 Simulated Workplace companies, within a three-month period, delivered 15 tiny homes to the governor for his

issuance to identified flood victims. Simulated Workplace companies that focused on welding, plumbing, electrical, general construction and nursing worked together to construct and furnish the tiny homes. Not only were economic needs of the state addressed, but students also gained valuable technical and soft skill sets.

State Parks

A partnership was recently established between Simulated Workplace companies and the West Virginia State Parks in their region to refurbish and enhance park properties. A total of 485 projects are underway at this time.

Student-led Economic Summit

In September 2017, an economic summit was held in Charleston, West Virginia, for 50 Simulated Workplace student leaders from across the state. The mission of the summit was to provide a venue for students to understand the positive and negative assets of the state’s economy and to brainstorm ideas within their Simulated Workplace companies on projects that would positively impact the future. Prior to the summit, the company leaders were charged to meet and talk with business leaders and economic development personnel about the positive and negative issues impacting the economy in their respective regions and bring the findings to the summit.

The first 18 ideas emerged at the opening meeting. Simulated Workplace student leaders reconvened at the end of October to vet and discuss the 18 proposals. Four ideas were selected from the group and the next meeting will be held in the spring of 2018 to further refine and develop the projects. The goal is to meet with West Virginia’s Governor and Secretary of Commerce to present the projects.

Simulated Workplace is making a significant difference in improving the educational and economic environments

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in West Virginia. The lessons, skills and attitudes acquired by the emerging workforce gives hope and direction to our youth. Reaching these students as they begin making decisions regarding their future exposes and engages them with industries relevant to West Virginia's economic growth.

It is important that West Virginia's emerging workforce – its youth – have the opportunity to reach their individual potential and to have a voice in creating their future. Therefore, it is critical in growing the economy of West Virginia that education focuses on nurturing, training and retaining our state's emerging workforce. ▽

¹Crotty, James. *How to Solve America's Low-Skills Crisis*, Forbes, 2015.



Coalfield Development and the Need for Economic Diversification

Brandon Dennison
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Much of the employment potential in renewable energy and energy efficiency is in “middle-skill jobs,” which require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree. Surprisingly to many, our West Virginia hills have favorable solar resources. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory estimates 4,200 MW of technical capacity for solar power in West Virginia. Former coal mines and other types of degraded lands are highly suitable for this use. And demand for solar power in West Virginia is growing, as evidenced by the number of solar cooperatives that have recently formed around the state.

It's time to finally diversify our economy, especially in southern West Virginia. Sustainable construction, reclamation, arts-based entrepreneurship, local agriculture and renewable energy are five viable strategies to achieve this long sought-after goal. ▽



Attitude Defines Our Altitude: Changing the Conversation About Broadband

Robert Hinton
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These two components form the basis of West Virginia's Interactive Broadband Mapping System. This integrated system will generate the information needed to strategically address the digital divide in West Virginia.

The West Virginia Speed Test Portal was launched in October 2017. The speed test is available at: **broadband.wv.gov**. To date, more than 25,000 speed tests have been collected, and speed tests have been conducted in each of West Virginia's 55 counties.

West Virginia can no longer settle for service that does not meet the needs of our residents and businesses. The Council has long maintained that the FCC reports lack the user data needed to precisely measure service. The West Virginia Speed Test Portal will enable the Council to identify unserved and underserved communities and, in turn, assist them in moving forward with broadband development projects.

State and Federal Policy

With the 2017 enactment of House Bill 3093, our state leaders

signaled the willingness to develop policies that encourage broadband development. Following this lead, we are identifying areas for improvement, including the utilization of road rights-of-way and fiber installation in conjunction with road construction projects.

At the federal level, the Council submitted comments to the FCC in 2017 concerning the requirements of the Connect America Fund II. The Council requested that the FCC give special consideration to the identification of eligible areas. The Council also requested that the FCC grant maximum flexibility to provide the greatest level of competition possible.

The Council is committed to the bold pursuit of broadband on behalf of residents and businesses throughout West Virginia. Join us in this endeavor by learning more about broadband's importance to West Virginia and getting involved in community efforts to establish or enhance broadband. It is time for West Virginia to get connected. ▽