

By Lisa Berkey

Building a New Business Model

MONARCH HIGH IS ONE OF 25 SCHOOLS PILOTING THE HIGH SCHOOL OF BUSINESS PROGRAM, AN ACCELERATED BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM THAT USES A HEAVILY PROJECT-BASED PEDAGOGY TO TEACH A CURRICULUM MODELED AFTER COLLEGE BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION PROGRAMS.

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KATE HAGGARD DREAMS OF ONE DAY RUNNING HER OWN RESTAURANT, but first the Monarch High School senior must digest concepts like surplus, speculative risk, equilibrium and contingency plan. Haggard, 17, is one of 90 students from Monarch High in Boulder, Colorado, participating in the school's new High School of Business program.

"I am able to take a look at how businesses do things so that I can apply those techniques to my own endeavors in the future."¹

Monarch High is one of 25 schools piloting the High School of Business program, an accelerated business administration program developed by Columbus, Ohio-based *MBAResearch* and Curriculum Center. The program uses a heavily project-based pedagogy to teach a curriculum modeled after college business administration programs.

A Need for Change

MBAResearch regularly researches business-related careers, higher education, and secondary education as they translate into education standards, curriculum and other custom projects. While scanning the business and education environment a few years ago, we identified some troubling trends:

- Of the high percentage of college freshmen majoring in the areas of business administration, many have never taken a business or marketing course (outside of computer applications) in high school.²
- Key studies of business professionals

indicate that new hires (both high school and college grads) lack the skills necessary to perform well at work: problem solving, collaboration, oral and written communication, and other 21st century skills.

- College professors and business professionals are concerned about a lack of mental flexibility in young adults, making it very difficult for them to solve problems and deal with the ambiguity that often accompanies challenging projects.
- Many secondary students are unable to make the connection between their work in the classroom and its application in the real world.

Outside of the classroom walls, factors in the business world are impacting how future leaders should be educated as well:

- Lack of ethics in decision-making has led to the demise of multiple big businesses, often with catastrophic consequences. Think Enron, Arthur Andersen, and Tyco.
- Business has flowed out of the U.S. at a break-neck pace; other nations have gained strength both academically and economically. And this has only intensified in recent months.
- Poor business decisions by business executives resulted in the failure of countless companies and the downward spiral of the economy.
- Due to inadequate personal finance knowledge, many Americans have made poor personal financial decisions, resulting in growing numbers of foreclosures, bankruptcies, etc. The



▲ High School of Business students in Findlay, Ohio, start the semester by learning how to work as a team. They built this tower as part of a competition at Bowling Green State University.

evidence for change was substantial as it filled whiteboards on our conference room walls. From it, these conclusions were drawn:

High School of Business must be:

- Engaging
- Accelerated
- Focused on 21st century skills³
- Taught by committed, top-notch teachers
- Connected to higher education
- Supported beyond classroom walls
- Held accountable for learning
- Connected to real-world skill sets

Does this list look familiar? Some are probably issues you face every day. Here's

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includes a heavy dose of PBL, with each project built around a set of accelerated business administration standards. And, by its nature, project work demands that students use problem solving, teamwork, technology, communication and other 21st century skills. So, with one key decision to incorporate PBL, three goals were addressed: engaging students, incorporating accelerated content, and utilizing 21st century skills. Here's a snapshot of how that looks in the classroom.

High School of Business in Action

At Ellet High School in Akron, Ohio, students begin the program with "Leadership." This optional course is designed to introduce ninth- and tenth-graders to the program through a course-long, student-selected, service-learning project. It's here that teacher Tari Nockengost's students encounter project-based learning for the first time. "This year's "Leadership" students really struggled to decide which organization to work with," Nockengost told us. She went on to explain that the students' passion for helping others fueled their struggle.

In fact, they became so passionate that Nockengost introduced a decision matrix—a tool that is typically not encountered until the High School of Business "Business Economics" course—to assist them in selecting Akron Children's Hospital's Expressive Therapy Unit as the recipient of their service. The service-learning project will consist of a multi-faceted community event that mir-

Addressing the "What's in it for Me?" Syndrome

Can we really separate the content from the delivery? We decided early on that we didn't think so. No matter how "right on" our content is, if the students aren't interested and engaged, they won't experience meaningful learning. So, the question of "What's in it for me?" from the perspective of the student needed to be addressed in tandem with building an accelerated curricula. Standards-infused project-based learning (PBL) fit this bill. Each High School of Business course



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THROUGH A SERIES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS, TEACHERS ARE TAUGHT HOW TO GUIDE, OBSERVE AND ENCOURAGE STUDENT WORK. THEY ROLE-PLAY HOW TO PUSH STUDENTS TO GO DEEPER WITH THEIR LEARNING.

rors the expressive therapy that goes on at the hospital. Most rooms in the school building will house sessions in such areas as art, music and digital technology. As you can imagine, this event is a major undertaking. Managing the work involves the use of a project plan—a scheduling tool that is used in projects throughout the program. Following their plan, the students work in committees to accomplish such tasks as interfacing with the hospital, organizing building logistics with school administrators, determining event costs and pricing, marketing the event to the public, and so on.

“The students have taken ownership in the project,” says their teacher. “At home, many of these teens are still being told what to do.” But at school, they are making real business decisions. “They like having this responsibility.”

Teacher Training Plus

As Nockengost illustrates, teachers who choose High School of Business are mak-

ing a choice to, in most cases, radically change the way they’ve been teaching. In addition, many must learn advanced business administration concepts they didn’t encounter in college. That takes commitment. And so, as the program has grown, we’ve continually built in methods to ensure that teachers are well-informed about the program’s rigor and that they are well-trained in its methods.

Through a series of professional development sessions, teachers are taught how to guide, observe and encourage student work. They role-play how to push students to go deeper with their learning. And, they discuss when and how to build in scaffolding if necessary. The training becomes “training plus” outside of the official sessions. Through communication such as monthly conference calls and a teacher-focused wiki for sharing ideas and posting questions to peers, the exchange of ideas, problems and concerns among the teachers is encouraged. According to teacher Tina McCann from Lake

Travis High in Austin, Texas, “The collaboration between the teachers and the curriculum developers has built a learning community that provides support.” Opportunities for teachers like McCann to learn from their peers’ insights grow as the program grows. Additional school sites join each year.

Building a Postsecondary Bridge

As shown with teacher training, we quickly discovered that achieving most of our goals didn’t come neatly packaged in one “perfect” solution, but as a collaboration of several touch points. Such is the case with designing a program that links high school to college. While building in advanced content is a start, in our viewpoint, it is not enough. Getting college faculty actively involved at both the national and local levels provides insight that goes beyond content.

At the local level, college business faculty members serve on each High School of Business Steering Team. While the team itself is charged with implementing and continually improving the program, postsecondary faculty use their expertise to verify program rigor and identify areas for program customization based on the school’s locale (*e.g.*, heavier use of technology in Silicon Valley). The college faculty members are the bridge masters, identifying opportunities such as articulation and campus visits that emphasize and ease the progression from high school to college.

At the national level, college curricula is being used as a guide for connecting the dots between what’s learned in secondary and postsecondary education. Regular communication with a college faculty advisory council helps validate these decisions.

Build the Bridge—Then Break Down Walls

To prepare students for college, you need to involve colleges. To prepare students for business, you need to involve busi-

nesses. Likewise, to gain the support of school administrators, guidance counselors and academic faculty, you need to involve them. In Fort Osage, Missouri, Fort Osage High School and Fort Osage Career and Technology Center work together to offer the program. Assistant Principal Brian Noller believes it’s all about collective commitment.

“Administrators from the district, the career center, and the high school join with the teachers and others on the team to work together for the good of the students. This would not have happened like it did without the teacher buy-in as well as the support from building and district administration and our local school board. The Missouri Department of Education has really been supportive of our efforts as well.”

Answering the Tough Questions

While PBL has enjoyed its share of fame in the last few years, the pedagogy does not come without some very real concerns. Accountability is certainly one of those. We’ve found that a wide variety of assessments paint the truest picture for gauging the level of student learning. Specifically, rubrics are used to assess projects, including specialized rubrics that focus on oral and written presentations. Written reflection is encouraged throughout projects to keep students thinking about their learning and to give teachers insight into student takeaway.

We believe that standardized exams have a place as well. If students are learning standards through projects, they should be able to be successful on exams that measure higher-order thinking. Standardized exams are also beneficial to the program because they carry weight with articulating institutions and college admissions personnel. Because of this, each High School of Business course ends with an online exam. In addition, we encourage schools to offer the A*S*K Business Institute’s proof of learning exam. With



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five courses in use in classrooms and the capstone “Business Strategies” being rolled out during 2009, we continue to see positive results with this model. And this seems to be the case back in Colorado at Monarch High. According to Assistant Principal Mark Sibley, “I really see the students in this program being leaps and bounds ahead of the average student who wants to enter the business world.” **I**

End Notes:

- 1 Jones, C. (2008, September 25). “Monarch Students Get Edge in Business: High School of Business Program Prepares Students for College.” *The Daily Camera*.
- 2 According to a national survey conducted by UCLA, 17.7 percent of incoming college freshmen choose to major in business administration. That is the most frequently chosen major. In addition, the National Center for Education Statistics cites that 21.4 percent of bachelor’s degrees and 13.6 percent of all as-

sociate degrees conferred in 2006 were in business administration. Again, this is the most popular degree.

- 3 21st century skills, as described by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills in the white paper “The Intellectual and Policy Foundations of the 21st Century Skills Framework,” are written into the High School of Business curriculum and cross-walked with each course’s learning outcomes.

MBAResearch is a 39-state consortium of state education departments. Based in Columbus, Ohio, the center provides research and curriculum support for business and marketing programs nationwide. For more information about MBAResearch or High School of Business, contact us at 614-486-6708 or visit www.MBAResearch.org.

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