



Inside Our Schools: On-the-job learning

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KIMBERLY WALKER, A RECENT Livermore High graduate, was afraid her summer would consist of TV watching and snacking. Instead she earned two college credits, job experience, and insight into her dream career.

Along with 96 other college and high school students, Walker participated in Las Positas College's new Summer Work program and had her first paying job at Kidango, a child development center in Livermore. This job not only gave her work experience but also fit her goals of becoming a preschool teacher.

The program was possible because Las Positas College, in collaboration with the Tri-Valley Community Foundation, was chosen to receive Federal Recovery Act stimulus funding for programs that combine training and education.

"The summer program gave meaningful employment to at-risk students who otherwise wouldn't have this opportunity," said Leslie Gravino, the coordinator for the college's work-based learning programs. Gravino worked with students from 17 to 24, and Ellen Turner worked with high school students, ages 14 to 17, from Livermore and Dublin. The students were either economically disadvantaged, learning disabled, foster kids, or teen parents.

"Not only was it a great introduction to the college campus but the students gained new friendships

and confidence. They learned life skills that will help them in any occupation," said Gravino.

The students were able to list their top three choices at nine different job sites and then interviewed for the positions. These community partners were key to the program's success and included PG&E, the city of Livermore, Digital Connectors, Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, AT&T, Alameda County Fair, Kidango, and California Youth Energy Services.

Students worked as welders, teacher aides, veterinary assistants, fair workers, business interns, energy auditors and computer technicians.

For most of these students, like Walker, this was their first paying job. They met with the coordinators weekly for a three-hour work readiness class on money management, life skills, interviewing, and communication. This class also included guest speakers, such as college president, DeRionne Pollard.

The program didn't just help students. Families in the Livermore school district benefited when students installed donated computers into their homes and taught them how to use Internet sites like School Loop. This partnership of AT&T, the school district and the college, creates a ripple effect of college students helping younger students succeed.

The college most likely received the stimulus funding because of its past success with similar programs, Gravino explained. Work-based learning courses help disadvantaged students succeed in the workforce by providing mentors who will visit job sites and coach them through challenges.

"The summer work program was an amazing experience," said Walker. "I learned a lot about teaching philosophies and am looking forward to

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pursuing my degree. I only wish it had lasted longer."

Walker's wish came true last week at Kidango's farewell party for the students in the program when she was asked if she'd be available to work in the spring.

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