



WHAT IS SCHOOL-TO-WORK?

What does the Department of Labor have to do with my child's school?

Goals 2000 is the first of a framework of policy changes that emerged during the first Bush administration and then was passed during the Clinton administration. School to work (STW) was another piece that creates educational/business partnerships, by changing the purpose of education from acquiring knowledge to acquiring specific skills for businesses. The Department of Labor determines what the work-place needs are and schools then prepare workers for the workforce. Schools become job-training centers instead of training students in traditional academic skills. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) completed the partnership by creating a nationwide network of workforce boards that are appointed to implement the system of partnership between the schools and the labor force. Students are viewed as resources, a puzzle that needs to be fitted in with the needs of the marketplace. School-to-work is defined by the National School-to-Work office as a "new approach to learning in America's schools that links students, schools and workplaces." The School-to-Work Opportunities Act provides venture capital to states and communities that complete to bring school-to-work into their neighborhoods according to J. D. Hoye, Director.

School-to-work identifies "clusters" of different industries. For instance, the health care industry is divided into (1) the therapeutic that provides treatment over a time, (2) the diagnostic cluster which creates a picture of health status, (3) the information services and (4) the environmental cluster that provides a therapeutic and supportive environment. Children typically will be asked to identify clusters of interest by the eighth grade.

What are some of the other aspects of STW?

- **Block Scheduling:** A reconfiguration of the school day, departing from scheduled 55-minute classes to "blocks" of time to allow for special projects, etc.
- **Career academy:** A "school-within-a-school" that offers student academic programs organized around broad career themes. It also may include work-based learning.
- **Career Awareness:** These activities take place at the elementary level and are designed to make students aware of broad ranges of careers, including options that may not be traditional for their gender.
- **Career Development:** This is the process through which an individual comes to understand his or her place in the world of work. This is accomplished through exposure to workplace activities, awareness

of careers, and formatting their school experience to meet that goal.

- **Career Major/Pathway:** A Career Major is a "coherent sequence of courses or field of study that prepares a student for a first job and integrates academic and occupational learning and establishes linkages between secondary schools and postsecondary institutions." This provides the student with strong experience in the workforce as well as supplies them with a high school diploma or a certificate.
- **Local Partnership:** This is a local entity that is responsible for local STW programs and consists of employers, representatives of local educational agencies and local postsecondary educational institutions.
- **Mentors:** "A professional employed at a school that is designated as the advocate for a particular student and works in consultation with teachers, counselors, and the employer of the student to design and monitor the progress of the STW program of the student."
- **National Skill Standards Board:** This board serves as a catalyst to stimulate the development and adoption of a voluntary national system of skill standards, assessment and certification of attainment criteria.
- **SCANS:** Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills convened in 1990 to examine the demands of the workplace. It was commissioned to define the skills needed and to propose acceptable levels in those skills for the workplace. [National School-to-Work Office, Washington, D.C.]

What STW is not:

It is not the inclusion of vocational programs, apprenticeship programs or career counseling in our schools. According to Texas policy analyst Chris Patterson who described STW in Texas:

"At this time there are many school districts in Texas and whole regions of the state that have fully implemented STW. These schools, school districts and regions have eliminated the tradition, college preparatory liberal arts education and replaced it with academically-enriched vocational programs for all schools."

Samuel Blumenfeld describes STW: "Now the government will plan your life for you. You are steered into a specific vocational area and trained for that . . . a servant of the state, of big government and the economy. You will not become a highly literate, independent individual." [Investor's Business Daily, August 27, 1998, p.2]