



## CONNECTING STUDENTS TO THEIR FUTURE CAREER

### The Challenge:

There is national recognition of the importance of preparing students for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Careers. It is imperative that we find innovative ways to engage young people in their education and their future career. A poll of California 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders conducted by the James Irvine Foundation found that six in ten students didn't particularly like school and weren't motivated to succeed. But, of those students at-risk of dropping out, more than 90% said they would be more motivated if their school offered classes relevant to their future careers.

### Currently:

- Students who make the connection between their education and their future career are less likely to drop out of school and more likely to transition to fulfilling careers. The dropout rate in California is 30% (higher in some areas).
- Schools are unable to meet the career and education planning needs of their student population. Current counselor to student ratios are 600 to 1 and will rise dramatically as recent budget cuts take effect.
- Many students lack focus on a career direction and are unaware of the necessary skills required in specific careers
- Students have a limited view of the career options available in a broad range of industries and how their individual skills, aptitudes and talents align with those careers

### Key statistics:

- 70% of Orange County high school students surveyed say they are concerned about their future career
- For every 20 Ninth Graders:
  - 6 graduate and are work bound
  - 6 drop out and are underemployed
  - 8 become college freshmen
    - 4 drop out
      - 2 get jobs and are underemployed
      - 2 enter high skills/high wage occupations
    - 4 graduate
- The current average age of financial independence is now 29 years of age (and rising)

Helping students focus on their future and identify a career that will allow them to reach their potential and achieve economic self-sufficiency is now more important than ever.

### The Solution:

Vital Link provides Career Exploration Programs for high schools and after-school organizations. Career Exploration Programs create a venue where students are able to gain valuable knowledge regarding a variety of careers and make the connection to how they fit in the world of work. Students are introduced to "networking" through interaction with business professionals, presenters, exhibitors and guests. These programs are a condensed form of job shadowing, giving the participants a view into a specific industry to show how professionals interact with each other to create and implement a project. Students become familiar with academic and work-based skills requirements and discover new resources and ideas to explore their future career choices.

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Vital Link is helping to make the connection between the world of work and the classroom. “The more numerous and diverse the students’ relationships with highly qualified teachers and other adults become, the greater their chances to match and develop their interests, aspirations, and identities with real-world competencies – for jobs, for advanced academics, and for civic participation.” (Oakes and Saunders, *Beyond Tracking: Multiple Pathways to College, Career, and Civic Participation*, Harvard Education Press,)

Vital Link’s Career Exploration Programs provide students and educators with a unique opportunity to observe professionals in action. Professionals demonstrate their skills in a way that maximizes a student’s understanding of the various careers in an industry.

Career Exploration Programs cover a broad range of industries including: Robotics and Engineering, Health Care, Innovative Technology, Advanced Manufacturing, Public Safety, Environmental Design, Digital Design and many others. We hold, on average, 10 – 15 student programs per year with attendance ranging from 300 to 1,200 per program. Some programs concentrate on one industry (Health Care, for example) while others feature presentations and exhibits from multiple industries.

For example, in partnership with UCI Department of Urology, Vital Link is assisting UCI to reach their goal of having 20 students from each of the 53 Orange County High Schools participate in a hands-on program at their Surgical Training Center. The program introduces the students to the latest surgical technology using the da Vinci Robotics and Laparoscopic equipment. Students, with a surgeon as mentor, have the opportunity to practice using the equipment and experience the surgical process. During the program, presenters from the Research Department share information about how UCI conducts Medical Trials. The Orange County Department of Education and Junior Achievement recognize the Vital Link Career Exploration Programs as official Ground Hog Job Shadowing Day events.

As the Career Exploration Program areas expand, we will create program materials that include new and relevant industry areas such as Robotics, Medical Technology and GIS Technology. As an extension to the Career Exploration Programs, we will develop a more comprehensive, multi-day program, the Career Exploration Summer Program. This new program will allow students to assess their skills, aptitudes and talents, explore industry areas of interest and develop a career and education plan.

#### **Through Vital Link’s Career Exploration programs:**

- Over 3,500 students will be better prepared to create their career and education plan after experiencing the Career Exploration Programs in the 2009-10 school year
- Participating students will be aware of career opportunities in their local community
- The business community will have an information pipeline to their prospective workforce
- Educators will be better prepared to communicate to their students the needs of employers, new technologies and skills requirements.

Encouraging students to understand the rewards of advanced education, training and employment will help all students, particularly those at risk, understand work ethic, personal responsibility, self-sufficiency, and self-determination so they can become a productive member of their local community and enjoy a successful life experience.

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