



National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity Education Foundation

“Swappportunities” Abound at CCTCHS

By Elizabeth Tran

In response to the results of the Program Improvement Process for Equity that Chester County Technical College High School, Pennock’s Bridge Campus (CCTCHS) completed with NAPE, school administrators decided to create a fun-filled day for students to explore nontraditional careers, or what the school calls “Swappportunities.” Promoting gender equity in career and technical education (CTE) is embraced by all CCTCHS faculty and staff; therefore, when Principal Mike Katch, Assistant Principal Brian Hughes, and Perkins Assessment Coordinator Stephanie Everett garnered support for Swap Day from Mame Linford, Project Manager of School to Careers Programs for Chester County Intermediate Unit, the team went into immediate action to plan the event.

CCTCHS serves five Chester County area school districts, and administrators wanted to ensure each student had the opportunity to participate. The school day was divided in half and then each half into three 30- to 45-minute modules. Young men cycled through a variety of programs like cosmetology, early childhood education, health occupations, and the finance academy, while young women cycled through automotive technology, carpentry, and the school’s criminal justice and police science courses. The event exposed students to careers they “never gave a second thought about,” generated excitement throughout the school, and even changed some of the students’ perceptions about how difficult some professions once assumed to be “easy” really are. After participating in health occupations, a male student remarked, “I learned that classes aren’t just for males or females. In [health occupations] I learned a lot about different bones and where they are located [in the body].” Another male student washed a mannequin’s hair and was surprised to find that “not everything is as easy as it looks” and that “there is a lot that goes into the [cosmetology] program.”

Female students had similar, stirring experiences. Assessment Coordinator Stephanie Everett, who spent Swap Day with students, recalls the look of pride she saw on a young woman’s face after she successfully operated a circular saw in the carpentry module: “She was terrified at first, but once the instructor assured her that she was capable of using a saw, she did it. She was so proud of herself; her face just lit up!” The CCTCHS faculty and staff prove that sometimes it is a matter of sharing the confidence they have *in* their students *with* their students to help them recognize their own potential.

The Swap Day planning team attributes the event’s success to Principal Katch, who is known for leading the school with a positive attitude and is credited with modeling the sort of excitement required to motivate students to participate in programs that are nontraditional for their gender. Mame Linford notes, “This all started with Principal Katch’s leadership and his embracing of all we learned from NAPE.”

Assistant Principal Brian Hughes was just as eager to expand his students’ minds about gender equity in CTE. When Swap Day was first introduced, “there was a little pushback



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from students, but they were in the minority.” He continued, “Once they got involved, they loved it. There’s definitely a fair percentage of students who are now open to thinking about pursuing nontraditional careers.”

Expanding students’ minds was one of the main goals for Swap Day. Principal Katch and Assistant Principal Hughes set a reasonable benchmark: get at least one student to change his or her program to a nontraditional program. The school met that goal, and two other students are ready to move into other programs. One male student has transitioned into CCTCHS’s finance academy, another male student is poised to enter into early childhood education, and one female student is slated to enroll in the carpentry program for the 2012-2013 school year.

The effectiveness of Swap Day was bolstered by students who are already enrolled in nontraditional programs, serving as ambassadors and demonstrating to their peers that gender should never be a boundary to success or prohibit exploration of one’s interests. Assessment Coordinator Stephanie Everett emphasizes, “A female presence is important in changing gender climate.” Project Manager Mame Linford agrees, “One of the barriers identified in the root cause analysis is peer to peer pressure. Swap Day helps to eliminate some of the pressure students feel when they are considering a nontraditional career.”

CCTCHS is committed to making Swap Day an annual event, moving the date from May to earlier in the school year to give students more time to reflect on pursuing a nontraditional career. To guarantee that students are exposed to new careers and their minds broadened, Assistant Principal Hughes is tactical in his approach. “When we do this again, we will go through the class assignment list and make sure that students are going into nontraditional programs that they didn’t get to swap into the year before.” Principal Katch is certain that Swap Day is a great way to break down gender assignments in professions and reveals, “I would like to say that gender assignments will eventually go away completely. We’re behind Swap Day to break down barriers for our students and have program participation become more even.”

CCTCHS’s Swap Day was a complete success. Teachers were thrilled to teach students they had never met before, students were instilled with a sense of pride in completing new and exciting tasks, and administrators were pleased to witness their students’ perspectives broadened. Teamwork, dedication to the school’s students, and recognition of the importance of gender equity are what helped to make what Assessment Coordinator Stephanie Everett calls “Swappportunities” abound at TCHS.