National School Public Relations Association  
Golden Achievement Award Entry  

Flexible Learning Options Campaign

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The Delaware Area Career Center provides career and technical education to high school and adult students in Delaware County, Ohio and surrounding areas.
Summary

The Delaware Area Career Center is the career and technical education district for Delaware County and surrounding areas. While the Delaware Area Career Center works in partnership with K-12 districts in the area, students choose to enroll in classes at the Delaware Area Career Center.

Enrollment at the Delaware Area Career Center has more than doubled over the last ten years. The district prides itself on maintaining a fiscally responsible approach to growth and has not returned to voters for new money for 17 years, despite the increase in enrollment and the construction of a new, 250,000 square foot high school.

As enrollment continues to grow, there are no longer enough seats for every student who wants to attend the Delaware Area Career Center. In order to offer more programming without going back to the voters for construction funds, the Delaware Area Career Center launched an initiative to offer its most popular courses only to seniors after the traditional school day. These boot camp-style courses would allow the district to utilize the classroom space and equipment it already owns to offer more seats to students in the county.

Research

The majority of programs offered at the Delaware Area Career Center are two-year programs for high school juniors and seniors. As enrollment has grown, the district has tracked which programs are seeing the most growth and are therefore turning away the most students.

Over the last five years, the programs with the largest increase in applications are the medical programs, technology programs, and the Cosmetology program. Over the last five years, those programs have turned away an average of 148 students per year, despite adding seats and similar programs where space allowed.

In addition to tracking data within the district, business partners reported to district leadership that more graduates are needed in the areas of construction and welding.
Research

This feedback was cross-referenced with feedback from school counselors at the associate K-12 schools who shared that many students who go into manufacturing careers do not make this decision until their junior year when they sit down with their guidance counselor to schedule their senior year courses. Providing these students with another chance to get this valuable education and training will help both graduation and placement rates.

Planning

Based on the research that was collected, district leadership determined that four program options would best fit the needs of junior students in the county:

- Application Development and Programming Technician
- Building Facilities Technician
- Healthcare Technician
- Nail Technician

These programs will be offered from 2:45 - 5:00 p.m. in order to utilize the space and equipment already available at the Delaware Area Career Center after the traditional high school day and before evening courses for adults begin.

The Delaware Area Career Center serves nine high schools in Delaware County, totaling roughly 4,250 families. In the fall of 2021, the Flexible Learning Options planning team sat down to plan out the Communications Launch for these new programs. The most daunting hurdle was explaining how this program would work since nothing like it exists in the state of Ohio.

Planning steps included:

1. Creating a name for the program
2. Creating a tagline and brief description of what the program is and can do for students
3. Determining the audience for the program
4. Identifying the most impactful means of communication
5. Setting up a timeline of events
6. Identifying goals for success

The Communications Plan, seen in its entirety here, included utilizing these communication methods:

- Website
- Printed fact sheets
- Targeted email marketing
- Live events
- Virtual events
- Mailed postcards
- News articles
- Guest appearance on local radio show
- Social media
- Video ads
- Partnering with associate school K-12 districts to publish information on their websites and social media platforms
Goals

As with any pilot program, we set reasonable goals for success that we could continue to build upon. Our goal was to have fifteen qualified applications for each of the four programs by May 1, 2022 in order to run the programs the following year.

Budget

The district hired a video production firm to produce five total video advertisements. The remaining communications plan was carried out in-house. The total budget was $11,000 over the course of five months. A breakdown of the budget can be seen here.

Implementation

The implementation of this campaign successfully followed the timeline laid out in the Communications Plan.

November 2022

- Launch website
- Print fact sheets and deliver to guidance counselors at all associate K-12 school districts
  - App Development and Programming Technician
  - Building Facilities Technician
  - Healthcare Technician
  - Nail Technician
Implementation

December 2022

- Mail letters and send emails to all students who were turned away the previous year for a related program.
- **Launch a multi-tiered email campaign to every parent of a junior student in the county**
  - Note that additional steps were taken to remove students who were already currently enrolled in the district in order to avoid confusion
  - After the initial email, only those who opened an email from the district about the Flexible Learning Options program and clicked a link were sent follow-up messages in order to adhere to SPAM compliance
- **Mail a postcard** to every household in the county with a high school junior
- Work with local newspapers to print engaging stories about the program:
  - Interviewees were provided with [media talking points](#)
  - Interviewers were provided with a [media fact sheet](#)
  - [Delaware Gazette](#)
  - ThisWeek News/Columbus Dispatch
- Offer two virtual information sessions hosted over Microsoft Teams for interested families to have direct access to the district in order to learn more about the program
  - Sessions were offered both in the afternoon and evening to allow for more accessibility

Throughout Campaign

Throughout the entirety of the campaign, social media was used to get messaging in front of teens who may feel compelled to enroll in these programs. Messages were targeted to social media outlets most heavily used by teens and scheduled late into the evening, promoting that the program allows flexibility in both lifestyle and learning style. Videos used in the social media posts include a thirty-second preview of each program and this sixty-second overview.

Evaluation

At the time of submitting this entry, the district has not yet reached its evaluation deadline of May 1st. However, enrollment for three of the four programs have already filled, allowing us to run this pilot program in the 2022-2023 school year.

We will continue to collect data on oversubscribed programs and find areas where additional after-school programs can be offered so that students have more choices and fewer students are turned away.