

High School District 214 Internship Program

Pathways Spotlight Brief

Asia Fuller Hamilton, with Collaborating Educators Krista Paul and Dan Weidner

pathways
resource center

High School District 214

Grade Levels: 9-12

Students: 12,129

Schools: 6 High Schools, 4 Alternative Schools

High School District 214 serves the communities of Arlington Heights, Buffalo Grove, Elk Grove, Mt. Prospect, Prospect Heights, Rolling Meadows, Wheeling, and Des Plaines. It is the second largest high school district in Illinois. Its student body is comprised of the following: 62.5% White, 25.4% Hispanic, 7.2% Asian, 2.4% Black, and 2% Multi-Racial. Approximately 4.8% of students are English Language Learners and 25.5% are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch. For additional information regarding High School District 214 (e.g., student and educator demographics, student achievement, revenues and expenditures), please visit the [district's website](#) or the [Illinois Report Card website](#).

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High School District 214 Internship Program

In this brief, we describe the implementation and scope of the High School District 214 internship program. More information about the High School internship program can be found on their website at: http://www.d214.org/educational_services/dip_home_page.aspx.

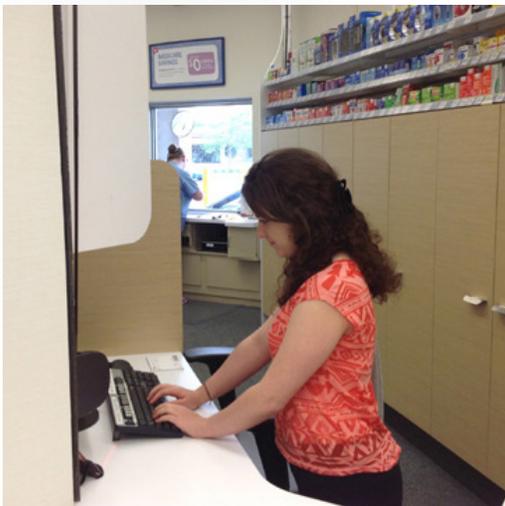
Creating Career Connections

Students in High School District 214 have the opportunity to gain experiential learning through the district's highly regarded internship program. By applying to be a part of the traditional 16-week internship program or by taking part in micro-internship learning experiences (1-3 week opportunities to spend within a particular career pathway), students are immersed in real-world learning environments that will assist them in deciding on a possible career path. District coordinator Krista Paul has been with the program since its inception and recalls its beginnings: "It started five years ago as a grassroots effort to have an external experience embedded in the learning process." Within that time the internship program has served over 600 students and continues to expand. Both Ms. Paul and Mr. Weidner attribute much of the growth of the program to the industrial partnerships they have garnered through this program. Mr. Weidner shares that several industrial partners expressed a need to increase the applicant job pool. The district has been able to increase the chances for those industry needs to be met while fostering rich learning experiences for students through internships.

Response to Intervention Model

One of the unique attributes of the D214 internship program is the Response to Intervention (RtI) lens through which administrators have aligned the program. Recognizing that the range of student learning exists on a wide continuum, leveled support is provided throughout the district's Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. Student learning experiences through school-wide events including classwork, exposure to career speakers, and career days and nights are universal supports that students can access to explore career options and possible pathways. Secondary supports for students include experiences through either micro-internships or Career Treks, experiences that expose students to multiple facets of a career pathway.

The capstone, traditional internship course is the tertiary support to which interested students can apply. Junior and Senior students selecting this course must have recommendations from parents, teachers, and counselors. Since students are expected to be as autonomous as possible within the internship experience, previous coursework, GPA, participation in offered experiences, attendance, behavior, and an interview are all taken into consideration to determine both interest and dedication to the internship program. Ms. Paul indicates that most students are accepted into the internship program and the selection is a good representation of the district's demographics. The goal within both the CTE and internship program is to ensure all students are being provided customized opportunities and access to the needs and desires they have toward achieving their postsecondary career and educational goals.



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Industry Engagement

The success of industry partnerships is a key component of the D214 internship program. Both Ms. Paul and Mr. Weidner agree that relationships with partners exist in many forms and they are creative in how they develop such partnerships. Industry partners are not only able to offer internships but also can serve on district advisory boards, can offer mini-lessons within the classroom, and are able to visit classrooms and offer ways to further support the curriculum. To better facilitate these experiences, communication, whether in person, through email, or by phone, is an integral part of the relationship. During the traditional internship experience, communication occurs throughout, including during initial check-in, the end-of-quarter evaluation, the semester evaluation, during a site visit, and during an exit visit conducted at the site or home school. It serves as a vehicle through which partners can express commendations and/or concerns and helps maintain a mutually beneficial relationship.

Strengths of the Program

Administrative support is one of the highlights of the internship program. District leadership has taken steps to alleviate roadblocks that often exist in many college and career programs. Transportation is currently provided for students enrolled in the internship program who indicate need. The district also has demonstrated commitment to the program by allocating resources to provide staffing to assist with program implementation, including employing a full-time coordinator and three part-time program staff. Another strength that makes the internship program successful is the ability of the coordinator to listen to the needs of all stakeholders. Surveys are provided to each student in the internship program and that data is used to make adjustments in future internship experiences.

“Our strength is our ability to provide a unique and customized experience for all of our students, whether they are attending a four-year college or going straight into a career field.”

Dan Weidner, Director of Career and Education Programs D214

Advice From the Field

Both Ms. Paul and Mr. Weidner offer the following advice for school districts interested in creating or refining an internship program:

- Be creative. When beginning an internship program, districts should be creative with resources they are allotted and understand that building a strong internship program takes time and a large amount of effort.
- Recognize the business gems within your area. Many businesses have many departments that fall within a variety of pathways (e.g., manufacturing companies may have a law departments, a finance department, etc.). Utilize all aspects that a company may have to offer within your demographic area.
- Timing is important. With competing courses, such as dual credit and AP, interested districts should consider when they would offer an internship experience so that students have access to all course options that are available.

Next Steps

Ms. Paul and Mr. Weidner note that they are continually seeking to refine the program to best meet the needs of students. Currently they are reviewing the supports that top universities are employing within their internship programs and are garnering ideas as to how to replicate successful models. Additionally, the district is reviewing any technology that is available that would assist in maintaining the quality of the internship program. Ms. Paul indicates that they would like for the program to grow from serving 600 to serving at least 3,000 students over the next few years. An office with full-time staff to support the internship program is the ultimate goal. Until then, a recognition event for business partners will be held during the Fall 2014 semester. The event is also a recruitment effort and will be marketed as a 1+1 event, asking partners to bring another potential business partner as a guest.

Also, the district is exploring the possibility of creating co-paid (includes partial payment from the district or grant source and a matching contribution from the industry partner) internship opportunities for students. Currently, manufacturing and culinary are the only areas that offer paid internships. Co-paid internships would possibly attract industries from least represented pathways in the area, such as Health Sciences and Information Technology, to offer more opportunities for students.

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