



Business Roundtable™

ISSUES

The Intersection: Business and Education Working Together to Improve Student Achievement



As an association of chief executive officers of leading corporations committed to advocating public policies that foster vigorous economic growth and a dynamic global economy, Business Roundtable is committed to improving U.S. education performance. CEOs and their companies are involved in partnerships and other strategic activities at national, state and local levels to help ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college, work and life.

Business is the primary customer of our nation's schools. In that role, business leaders often criticize the education system for not producing the results our nation needs and our students deserve. However, across the country there are examples of schools that illustrate what can be accomplished when education and business community members work together to improve student achievement.

That is why Business Roundtable is launching a series that will feature visits by former business and Administration leader David T. Kearns to successful examples of business-education partnerships around the country, to illustrate the enormous benefits of these unique partnerships. David T. Kearns not only was the former chairman and CEO of the Xerox Corporation (1982-1990) and deputy U.S. Secretary of Education at the U.S. Department of Education (1991-1993), he is also a living legend in the worlds of business and education for promoting a quality education for all Americans.

The first article in the series, based on Mr. Kearns' visit to High Tech High in San Diego in July 2006, follows.

"Educating Tomorrow's Workforce: The High Tech High Experience"

On a sunny afternoon in July, our bus entered a former Navy training center where young men and women once learned what it takes to serve our country. The center now is home to a few of the most sought after middle school and high schools in the San Diego area. Nowadays it is hard enough to find schools your children enjoy attending each morning, let alone schools for which families relocate to a new area with hope that their sons or daughters will have the chance to someday attend them, as in the case of High Tech High in San Diego.

To fully understand why High Tech High is so successful, it is important to know how this web of learning was spun. The mission of High Tech High is to develop and support innovative public schools where all students develop the academic, workplace and citizenship skills for postsecondary success. High Tech High's Web site, found at www.hightechhigh.org, provides a wealth of knowledge and history, explaining how everything began back in the mid-nineties. According to the site, High Tech High was originally conceived by a group of about 40 civic and high tech

industry leaders in San Diego, assembled by the Economic Development Corporation and the Business Roundtable of San Diego, who met regularly from 1996-1998 to discuss the challenge of finding qualified individuals for the high tech work force. Gary Jacobs, Director of Education Programs at Qualcomm, and Kay Davis, then Director of the San Diego Business Roundtable, were vital participants in these discussions.

In 1998, this same group voted to start a charter school and asked Larry Rosenstock, then President of Price Charities in San Diego, to serve as the founding principal. The founding group was clear about its intent: to create a school where students would be passionate about learning and would acquire the basic skills of work and citizenship, according to the site. Having formerly served as a carpentry teacher, lawyer and high school principal, and having recently directed the U.S. Department of Education's New Urban High School project, Rosenstock brought to the High Tech High project a vision and a sense of the design principles by which the groups' mission might be accomplished.

From January 1999 to the opening of the Gary & Jerri-Ann Jacobs High Tech High in September of 2000, Rosenstock and the founding group, led by Gary Jacobs, worked as one. Rosenstock then located a site, prepared the charter application, hired staff, and oversaw the development of the program, while Jacobs and the San Diego business community took the lead in addressing issues of financing and facilities development.

Without Larry Rosenstock, High Tech High would not have had the success it has experienced over the years. On that day of my visit in July I spoke with Mr. Rosenstock, who I find to be a perfect model of the modern educational movement! Spending time at his schools, listening to his students and teachers really helped me understand what makes Larry and his school tick. In his talk to me and members of the Business Roundtable, we learned what it takes to start a school like High Tech High.

During his research, Larry learned that there were three very important design principles to consider when starting a school. First, personalization is needed in order for students to perform at the top of their game. They need to be known and known well. Second, students need an adult world connection where they are not isolated from the world of adulthood. An example of this is the development of robust internships with businesses throughout the community. The third and most important principle is common intellectual admission. Schools should not segregate students socially, racially or by perceived academic ability. It was clear that Larry feels more strongly about this principle than the others from the alarming tone in his usual soothing voice. With these design principles always in the back of his mind, Larry went on to explain how you actually spin the High Tech High web.

The building and facilities are very important to High Tech High. They do not want to be nomadic, which is a problem among today's new charter schools when they are given land from the districts. High Tech High owns all their own buildings so families will not need to move around once their children are accepted. It usually takes twenty percent upfront in equity infusion in order to start a school, which is mostly done via private philanthropy. The Treasury Department also helps out with new market tax credits. High Tech High most recently was allotted \$35 million. All this equity goes strictly into the next facility and not a single cent is spent on the schools operating costs. Larry and his board made it a point to operate on the average daily attendance money that is given for each of their students by the state of California, which is \$6,800 per student. After the site is chosen and the facilities are up and running, the next step is staffing is the school.

Larry loves teachers and feels that, "We should judge teachers not by their quality of work, but by the quality of their students' work." With this in mind, the standards to become a teacher at one of the High Tech High schools are very difficult. They received roughly 500 applicants last year alone. The applicants are usually narrowed down into a group of twenty to twenty-five and are invited to the school in what Larry refers to as a "bonanza." A typical bonanza starts on every third Friday in the spring with a briefing and small breakfast. The prospective teachers are asked to teach a couple of classes while being observed and then meet with a couple of small groups of students who interview them. It's not necessarily up to the administrators, but if you don't make it out of the student groups in a positive light you will not be asked back. Only 10 percent of the prospective teachers are asked to the bonanzas, and out of the total number of applicants only one percent will be offered positions to teach at High Tech High under a strict one year contract. Nobody is tenured at High Tech High and all the teachers are under the same one-year contract. What was most interesting to me was that all the teachers are paid more than if they were members of the teachers union in San Diego. High Tech High teachers are not members of the union, partly because of the grievance procedure, but their lack of membership mainly results in a lack of tenure, not a lack of decent wages, hours and working conditions.

Another reason High Tech High receives so many applicants each year is because they can certify teachers. In 2004, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing granted the school the authority to certify teachers. High Tech High was the first independent charter school in the state of California to be granted this ability. This makes the school

more appealing to business professionals considering a transition to teaching. Instead of going back to school to meet the state's credentials, they can start teaching and become qualified at the same time while at High Tech High.

The program is the next step, which you might assume focuses more on math and technology. While High Tech High is very technologically advanced, it does not ignore the other core subjects. Larry best describes High Tech High as a liberal arts type of education and the program basically comes from the teachers. That's why you cannot develop the program before you have staffed the schools, according to Larry. Every year the teachers are required to post their syllabi on the Web site before the school year starts. It is an obligation to demonstrate to administrators, fellow teachers and parents that you have really thought about the entire year. An interesting point is that all High Tech High teachers have their own Web sites that parents and students can access at all times. It becomes very useful for parents to check up on their child's homework assignments and lets students plan their social life around their school obligations.

Filling the schools with students has never been a problem for Larry. Last year there were only 285 openings in grades K-12, but they received over 3,000 applications. Proposition 209 in California states race or ethnicity may not be used as a factor when accepting students for your school. As a result, High Tech High uses a computer to randomly select students proportionally by zip codes in the San Diego area.

The success of this formula is apparent: all graduates have been accepted to college for the past three years running and their test scores are among the highest in the state. Still, Larry stresses that he would rather give the students work that is worth doing than worry about preparing students for standardized tests.

Students are taught to not only think, but also to apply their learning by hands-on projects. The junior class recently published their third book entitled, *Perspectives of San Diego Bay: A Field Guide*. Perspectives allow students to publish their best poetry and research projects from the school year. Every ninth grader is required to make a documentary film, which they will later share with other students and parents at the "Taco Salad Film Festival." By editing their own films, students learn how manipulated they can be by the people who make films. The use of technology in schools is not about consuming, it's all about producing, combined with technology, according to Larry, who says, "It's about posing problems, recognizing them and then tackling them."

Another benefit the students of High Tech High have is the great relationship between the school and the businesses community. Larry believes internships are central to the school's program, and there are 240 businesses in the San Diego area who partner with the school to provide internship programs for their students. Every Tuesday and Thursday from 12:00-5:00 p.m., the school has carved out time where students have the opportunity to intern at one of these businesses. With so many businesses involved, one wonders why programs like this do not exist at more high schools.

After Larry's talk, Madeline, an eleventh grader at High Tech High, gave us a tour of the schools. Her parents wanted her to have the best education available, and after a short stint in a parochial school she luckily was accepted to High Tech High. Even though her brother attended and graduated from that same parochial school, she believes that High Tech High was the right fit for her, but not everyone, citing her brother as an example. She believes it takes a certain mindset at High Tech High, one that involves wanting to learn and explore. She says, "Teachers do not have the passion in public and parochial schools, but at High Tech High they do." Besides not being stuck at a desk all day, Madeline enjoys working at her own pace and setting her own learning goals. I asked her which school was harder for her academically. Without hesitation she responded that High Tech High was harder. She said, "My choice to make it harder makes me want to work harder," which made me smile from ear to ear! After all my school questions, I thought it might be a good idea to see how a High Tech High student spends her summer. Madeline actually started her first job this summer working at a museum, but enjoys sleeping as much as she can. "The breaks are good because we are so busy with school when it is in session."

I am happy to report that what Larry is doing with the students at High Tech High is phenomenal. The school's structure and philosophies definitely take risks and challenge old habits. With the strong competition from foreign nations, new ideas and breaking old habits is something more schools need to start doing. For more information about High Tech High, go on the web to www.hightechhigh.org. There is a link to their resource center where every document and idea behind their programs/philosophies is there for the taking. Larry encourages anyone with the slightest interest to explore the site. Meeting Larry Rosenstock and touring the school was an eye-opening experience. If he offered, this is one web I'd love to be caught up in!

Michael R. Elliott, Assistant to David T. Kearns, contributed to this article.

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