IGNITE Projects Begin in Virginia

New energy for nontraditional careers is IGNITE-ING in Virginia, thanks to seven pilot projects in schools across the Commonwealth. (Names of school districts involved) are leading the way by pilot-testing project IGNITE, a program designed in the Seattle Public Schools to inspire girls to pursue classes in technology. Each participating school district will start a chapter of IGNITE and participate in an online community where they will share ideas and success stories.

Virginia’s IGNITE initiative is funded by the Virginia Department of Education, Office of Career and Technical Education, with assistance from Career Prospects staff at the University of Virginia.

Two chapter coordinators, along with PJ Dempsey (newly hired Career Educator at Career Prospects) represented Virginia at the first annual IGNITE Conference in Redmond, Washington, sponsored by Microsoft. Ann Emerson, School-to-Career Specialist, represented Stafford County Public Schools and Jane Sumner, IT Specialty Program Coordinator, represented Prince William County Public Schools.

Since the beginning of IGNITE in the Seattle Public Schools, Microsoft has actively supported girls’ exploration of technology. In addition, Microsoft is known as an advocate for women rising to executive positions in this, one of the best-known companies in America. During the conference, several female Microsoft employees described their experiences in choosing a nontraditional career path. To learn more visit IGNITE- www.igniteworldwide.org.

Cathi Rodveller, founder of the IGNITE, discussed starting a chapter, planning activities, supporting chapter members, and the benefits of being a member. For more information on Virginia’s IGNITE chapters, and how you can become involved, email PJ Dempsey at pjf5a@virginia.edu.

Conference attendees also heard about other projects, including the Gender Chip Project, which created a video following four young women from high school to college on their journey to nontraditional careers.

Closing the Gender Gap for girls in Nontraditional Careers is the goal of IGNITE. Making the choice to pursue a nontraditional career will change the lives of many young women and their families. Together we can help make that happen.
Increasing Enrollment for 2008-09

- With class registrations just around the corner, students are making decisions about which classes to take, sometimes based on the career they expect to choose, some based on whether and where they want to go to college. This is a great time to have conversations with students about their choices – and about their dreams.

One step is to break open the doors to careers that are “nontraditional” by showing students the opportunities and introducing them to role models in the field. Events featuring speakers who are in nontraditional careers is one way of making that connection. Additionally, having a “mentor” – a nontraditional role model who is willing to meet with students in a smaller classroom setting, talk with them individually, and show them their place of work, all serve to motivate students to take these steps, which may feel pretty risky at first.

The National Research Center report on Improving Performance on Perkins III Core Indicators provides a summary of strategies to help overcome gender bias and improve nontraditional participation—www.napequity.org/pdf/Improving_Performance_of_Perkins_III.pdf This report suggests seven main strategies: collaboration with community-based businesses; pre-tech training programs to help catch up; role models/mentors; recruitment activities; personal invitations to activities; outreach/fieldtrips; professional development for teachers and administrators.

Wakefield High, Arlington

In the fall of 2007, when the IGNITE program was introduced to Virginia public schools, Wendy Maitland, now a second year Fundamentals of Technology teacher, volunteered to start an IGNITE Chapter at Wakefield High. Wendy is a dedicated, determined young educator and an advocate for girls. Although funding presents barriers to many activities in which she would like her girls to participate, Wendy continues to look for ways to open doors for them. This spring, the Wakefield IGNITE Chapter is having three events with speakers:

- March – an Account Executive from 3Com
- April – an Engineer from Space Generation
- May – a Systems Analyst from Northrop-Grumman

These events will be held during lunch and the first half of the next block. Pizza and door prizes provide incentives for girls to attend. The speakers will captivate participants by telling stories and sharing the excitement of their careers. Flyers, the school newspaper, The Chief-tain, the club page of the school website, and the school TV network will be used to advertise each event. The objective of each event is to increase an awareness of careers in technology and encourage girls to investigate new possibilities. The girls attended Microsoft’s DigiGirlz Day in March and more fieldtrips are being planned for spring and summer.

SPRING 08 CAREER FAIRS:

- Invite nontraditional presenters to your fair—women working in technology, men in health care. Current nontraditional students can be great spokespeople for your programs too.
- Encourage hand-on activities. Simple things like trying on a firefighter’s uniform or trying out a stethoscope can give students the confidence to try something new.
- Connect presenters directly to CTE courses. Give presenters forms showing interested students exactly how to enroll in relevant courses.
- Provide Giveaways as incentive to visit a nontraditional career booth.
- Ask us about ways to find business partners, speakers, and videos.

TRAILBLAZERS...

The Trailblazers staff is here to help you promote non-traditional activities in your schools and classrooms – and to improve your nontraditional enrollments. Please call us for ideas, support, and access to a network of colleagues who are doing the same thing. Let us help you achieve the success you desire.

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“I took the road less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.”
Robert Frost