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Ohio teens gearing up to start own businesses



The following story is designed to show how Ohio secondary career-technical education is connected to the Ohio workforce pipeline. This is the first in a series of three articles related to an industry in this case, Finance that will be featured at the fifth annual [Ohio Economic-Education Summit](#), March 6-7, 2012, in Columbus. Representatives of this program will be among presenters at the Summit.



**Instructor Mandy Watts
with Student Josh Bryan**

When a national [Gallup Poll](#) provided data in October that entrepreneurship could be the answer to the nation's economic woes, affiliates of a program at [Miami Valley Career Technology Center \(MVCTC\)](#) were not surprised. MVCTC's research more than three years ago indicated a market exists for business start-ups, and that a generation of teenagers is eager to do the work and take the risks to create them.

Thus, in the small southwestern Ohio city of Clayton, a two-year, high school program called Business Ownership Tech Prep was born. Students from high schools in 27 school districts within five counties have the opportunity to be part of this new program the first aligned with Ohio's first [Entrepreneurship Pathway](#) standards that were finalized in 2010.

Whether virtual or actual, here is a sampling of current student direction:

- For 17-year-old Josh Bryan of Milton Union High School, the program opens a door for him to have his own fitness facility.
- Taylor Watts, 16, who hails from Northmont High School, wants to have an accounting firm.
- Brent Kinner, 17, Miamisburg High School, is pondering the start of a tree service business.
- Katelynn White, 17, Wayne High School, wants to start a daycare for handicapped children like her brother.

The diversity of student business start-ups is part of what makes the MVCTC learning model unique, according to Mandy Watts, instructor for the 24 juniors and 12 seniors in the new program that includes both online and face-to-face classroom learning.

In traditional marketing programs and high school business classes or clubs, a class conducts one business together; there is great value in that," she said. There is also value in focusing on your own passion. In Business Ownership, each student creates his or her own business with research, business card design, plan for finance and growth. They might see how their business could work with another one and consider changing a business type, but for more than nine of 10 students, they already know what their business will be before they walk into the room for the first time and don't change their minds."

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The Business Ownership Tech Prep program embodies a curriculum with 20 modules that start with career planning and personal money management and conclude with sales tax and e-commerce. Communications, accounting and personnel are among the topics covered in between. The modules were created with a combination of input from Ohio and national entrepreneur standards and input from an advisory committee of local business owners and business association experts who know that most of the nation's business takes place through "small business" like the ones these high school students hope to have one day.



Student Taylor Watts

While the definition of small business varies by industry up to a maximum of 500 employees, the U.S. Department of Commerce reports that small businesses have generated 65 percent of new jobs over the past 17 years. Roughly half of these small business startups survive after five years—a statistic the Miami Valley program intends to fight with an added bonus of an on-site, private sector employer that offers students real-world experience.

FirstDay Federal Credit Union operates as a business within the school—just down the hallway from the Business Ownership program. Shyra Thomas, manager of Education and Community Development for FirstDay and advisory committee member, serves as an employer and student mentor at MVCTC as well as with students at Ponitz Career Center (Dayton Public Schools) and at Fairmont High School.

Beyond the glass doorway and up to the counter in the small office, members (primarily MVCTC students, faculty and staff) engage in transactions and seek counsel from students with oversight by Thomas, who has regular contact with the instructor. All Business Ownership students have the opportunity to experience work with weekly evaluations related to efficiency, accuracy and appearance. Then two students are hired for the remainder of the year.



Student Katelynn White with Business Partner Shyra Thomas

What they learn in the classroom and at FirstDay go hand in hand with an added emphasis on customer service, confidentiality, professionalism, office skills, and public speaking" Thomas said. The expectation is not that they operate a credit union, but that they understand real work. It's important that they gain solid personal banking skills, which will carry over when they start their own businesses."

Rhonda Phillips, MVCTC supervisor for business, information technology and graphics career areas, said that this program, like all of the more than 50 programs at the career center have

multiple employment entrance options—right after high school and with further education. Employer and higher education partners, like advisory committee member Dave Siefert, are critical to a program's success.

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I am truly impressed with Miami Valley's Business Ownership program," said Siefert, associate professor of entrepreneurship and management at Sinclair Community College. I have found that over 97 percent of all people dream about the lifestyle they want to live. Miami Valley's program goes beyond by providing a supportive environment that promotes achievement of those dreams."

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For more information about the Business Ownership Tech Prep program, contact Rhonda Phillips at rphillips@mvctc.com. For more information about the Ohio career-technical Entrepreneurship Pathway, contact Dee Sturgill at dee.sturgill@ode.state.oh.us. Any comments/questions about this article should be addressed to Pat Huston at pat.huston@ode.state.oh.us.

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