

Case Study

Science City at Union Station



Mission Accomplished

Teacher's Expertise Helps Refresh Challenger Education Program

Situation

Science City at Union Station provides several themed discovery areas that offer students the opportunity to participate in hands-on learning activities. Each facilitated workshop is designed to meet state and national educational standards while also providing exciting and unique learning opportunities in an exploratory environment.

Opportunity

In 2007, Science City was preparing to develop new educational materials for its Challenger Learning Center Discovery Area. The project called for the expertise of a licensed educator on a contract basis, and TeacherTech proved to be a perfect hiring solution.

"Although we are involved in informal education, we offer programs that meet formal educational standards," said Sherry Tyhurst, Science City educator and TeacherTech supervisor. "So hiring a teacher extern helped us successfully identify cross-curricular activities for the Challenger program that are both interesting to students and meet educational standards."

After receiving dozens of applications for the position, Science City hired Michelle Nixon, a middle school science teacher from the Blue Valley School District, to fill the role of space science education program developer.

Ongoing Benefits

The partnership was a great success and continues to reap benefits today. While Science City gained valuable insight and a high-quality final product from having Nixon on staff, Nixon also learned several important business lessons that she now shares with her students.

"Working outside of the classroom is such an important bridge for teachers who are accustomed to working solely in the school environment," she said. "It helps us give our students a better idea of the skills they will need to be successful in the business world...skills such as typing, using PowerPoint and working in pre-established teams. Now I tell my classes, 'I know you

need to know how to do this because I had to do it at Science City last summer," she said.

Nixon thinks employers might be surprised by the skills a teacher can bring to their organizations.

"It's easy to think we're just warm and fuzzy because we're teachers," she said. "But we have a lot of strengths to bring to the business world. As teachers, we can organize and multi-task without ever skipping a beat. We're used to working on dozens of projects and with hundreds of students at any given time, so having the opportunity to focus on projects in the business environment is exciting for us."

Nixon also believes TeacherTech can create ongoing goodwill and community partnerships for sponsor companies.

"Not only are we telling our students what we've learned, we're telling them where we've learned it," she said. "Teachers become ongoing ambassadors for employers because we're getting the word out to hundreds of students, parents and teachers each year."

Tyhurst agrees.

"Employers can gain so much from TeacherTech, but the benefits are reciprocal," she said. "Teachers go into the business world and gain new knowledge and skills. They then share that knowledge with their students who are our future workforce. It's a circle that provides a valuable service to the entire community. It's great to have teachers be that conduit."

From left: Science City Educator and TeacherTech Supervisor Sherry Tyhurst and TeacherTech Extern Michelle Nixon

