

Osborne High School Tax Center



Georgia Employability Skills Task Force Recommendation No. 3 School Goal 4

- ▶ Identify integrated learning experiences that allow students to combine academic, technical, and employability skills learning.

Overview

Cobb County's Osborne Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Center allows students enrolled in business pathways and interested seniors to prepare for Internal Revenue Service (IRS) certification, learn to use tax law and preparation software, and learn standards of conduct and ethics to provide a service to the school and the community. Osborne High School students had previously been involved with the VITA Center in conjunction with the IRS and the United Way of Greater Atlanta. However, during the second semester of 2019, the program expanded to provide a closer emphasis on business operations and the application of employability skills. To accomplish this, the project established the following objectives:

- ▶ Educate and inform students about a very important and complex aspect of adulthood, and pass on this knowledge to clients during the tax return preparation process.
- ▶ Enhance the employability skills of students in interacting with clients of various ages, and provide skills that are easily transferable to any job field.
- ▶ Encourage students to plan for their next steps after high school.

Students began in January to prepare for certification exams on tax return preparation software and standards of conduct and ethics. The VITA Center began operations the first week of February and continued through the filing deadline of April 15. The target clients were students at Osborne High School with part-time jobs. The VITA Center's principal mission is to provide free tax return preparation for families with household income less than \$55,000.

The addition of the simulated workplace at the VITA Center was possible by the relocation of the center from a nearby church to the high school campus. In the previous summer, a classroom was expanded and remodeled to accommodate the center, including space for client preparation stations and a conference table for meetings. The center contains an office, a records room, and a breakroom, which add to the workplace environment. In addition, an exterior door was installed to allow clients to enter and leave without bringing them into the school setting. This allowed the Osborne VITA Center to schedule appointments, making the experience more appealing and convenient for clients who did not have to wait for tax assistance services.

Students ran the tax assistance center as part of a bigger simulation project, making it possible to incorporate employability skills on a much deeper level. Students were grouped into smaller "companies," working together on all aspects of running a company—using proper telephone etiquette, maintaining an office environment, fielding questions, greeting clients, managing time, and demonstrating professionalism. They learned to delegate responsibilities and to take initiative—skills that will take them into adulthood and their careers. The "companies" took turns leading weekly staff meetings, creating agendas, recognizing exemplary work by staff, and discussing their financial statements. This simulation was a semester-long experience.

Audience & Initiative Impact

Through this program, the VITA Center completed 56 tax returns for Osborne students and 20 for staff members within the school district. The remainder of the clients were members of the general public, primarily those living in Cobb County. The Osborne VITA Center completed 333 tax returns for the 2019 filing season, an all-time high for one season.

School/District: Cobb County Schools

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Georgia Employability Skills Task Force Recommendations

1. Integrate employability skills into curriculum and learning experiences from prekindergarten through postsecondary education.
2. Support educators and other stakeholders in developing employability skills instruction.
3. Develop deeper and stronger relationships between industry and education to enhance teacher and mentor roles in quality work-based learning and career development opportunities.

To learn more about college- and career-readiness work in the southeast states, please contact Beth Howard-Brown (bhoward-brown@air.org), Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) director, or visit the SECC website (southeast-cc.org).

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