

College and Career Motivation Week



Georgia Employability Skills Task Force Recommendation No. 2 School Goal 1

- ▶ Develop strategies to support instructors in integrating employability skills into classroom instruction.

Overview

The guidance department staff at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School (King Middle School) has worked to integrate aspects of its school improvement plan with Atlanta Public Schools' (APS) College and Career Motivation Week (CCMW). This has allowed King Middle School to support employability skills instruction through integration across district initiatives and to identify integrated learning experiences that allow students to combine academic, technical, and employability skills learning. Working to integrate school improvement priorities with efforts to ensure college- and career-ready students allows King Middle School to be intentional and to compound the effect of these initiatives on its students.

Every year, APS selects a new theme for the CCMW. The 2017–2018 school year theme focused on student awareness of vocational training opportunities, and the 2018–2019 theme focused on social emotional learning. King Middle School's priority focus is to improve student literacy and encourage the development of critical thinking skills. Teachers' instructional practices were supported with implementation of the RACE strategy, an English language arts (ELA) strategy that asks students to Restate, Answer, Cite, and Explain when responding to a text or prompt. As part of building student awareness of vocational training, students developed critical thinking skills while analyzing texts using the RACE strategy. In keeping with this year's focus on social emotional learning, the initiative was titled "SELebrating College and Career Readiness . . . Soft Skills in the 21st Century Workplace."

Implementing SELebrating College and Career Readiness . . . Soft Skills in the 21st Century Workplace

By working to align the district's CCMW theme with SEL initiatives, King Middle School highlighted and reinforced the employability skills students had learned as part of their regular SEL instruction. During CCMW, classroom advisory course teachers were asked to implement activities that aligned employability skills and SEL competencies. Students first defined employability skills and SEL competencies and completed a survey that helped them identify their own employability skills strengths. Students then designed their own "elevator pitch" based on a job or leadership position they would want to apply for in the future. Students also received information on postsecondary options and heard from speakers during the school's career day. Prior to the career day presentations, students formulated questions to ask speakers to elaborate on their own use of employability skills in their professions and jobs.

The school's guidance department leveraged student advisory meetings to make the integration of soft skills and SEL as seamless as possible, providing King Middle School students with 30 minutes of SEL through the school's advisory program. The guidance department staff also developed activities aligning employability skills and SEL competencies.

Guidance counselors made use of the school's instructional framework and incorporated the school's "I do, we do, you do in pairs, you do" steps to implement the lessons, which focused on hard and soft skills and their importance in the workplace as well as in students' personal development.

Skills Development

At King Middle School, activities focused on increasing the number of students exposed to meaningful career-readiness skills, including work-based learning and educator externships. Employability skills included team building, interviewing skills, presentation (public skills), problem-solving, communication, professionalism, elevator speeches, time management, and effective listening. By utilizing the school-wide instructional framework, students saw the connection of employability skills to SEL competencies and International Baccalaureate learner profiles.

Audience and Initiative Impact

Over 700 King Middle School students, almost the entire student body, participated in CCMW and events leading up to it. The activities were deliberately constructed to support students in identifying the connections between the critical employability skills necessary for professional employment and SEL competencies taught during their courses. Students recognized that they were already working on developing many of the soft skills needed to be successful in both middle school and their future postsecondary plans. These activities allowed students to combine academic and employability skills learning in a way that advanced the school's priorities but also benefitted students.

School/District: Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School

Contact: Shirley McCullough, Counselor

Email: smccullough@atlanta.k12.ga.us

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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