

# **NASPE Eugene H. Rooney, Jr. Awards Nomination**

**“School to Employment at PennDOT (STEP)”**

**Pennsylvania Department of Transportation**

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## Summary -

Succession planning was identified by NASPE as the number one human resource issue in 2014. While it generally focuses on leadership positions, succession planning actually transcends and is inherently critical at all organizational levels. Scholarly research and career and technical education specialists emphasize the need to “start early” in career planning. Recognizing this, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation launched the School-to-Employment at PennDOT (STEP) Program, a cooperative education/internship program that focuses on high school students. Launched in March 2014, STEP offers participants meaningful work, career practice, skill development, and hourly pay.

Participants must:

- Complete the junior year of high school
- Be at least 17 years old
- Possess a grade point average of at least a B
- Have satisfactory attendance according to school guidelines
- Be permitted to work in the United States
- Attend a school that offers a co-op/internship program

Students may begin on the day following the conclusion of their junior year and finish on the day of graduation. Participants may opt to work a 9- or 12-month interval and divide their school day between school and work. Those under 18 may work up to 28 hours per week and those 18 or older may work up to 30 hours. During summer and holiday/seasonal breaks, students may work up to 30 hours per week, regardless of age. Students are offered at least three hours of work on each day in attendance and are paid \$7.75 per hour. Hiring organizations fill positions from their existing wage complement.

Managers interested in hiring a STEP student complete a work plan. Work plans are then matched to student applications, including job and location interests. High school seniors from any major are hired to support a variety of PennDOT functions, including work in skilled trades, professional/technical/business, and the administrative/clerical fields. STEP information and links to the application and statement of understanding may be found under the employment link at

<http://www.dot.state.pa.us/>.

## **1. Brief description of the submission**

The development of STEP was a collaborative effort between the Governor's Office of Administration, unions, Pennsylvania Department of Education, and the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry. Each of these entities offered resources and/or support for the program's development. In addition, engineering district human resource officers and program managers expressed interest in having such a program. Likewise, school cooperative education coordinators jumped at the chance to provide students with long-term, real-world job opportunity with the added benefit of paid compensation. Students can participate in a variety of placements, based on approved work plans, such as:

- Skilled Trades – includes trades and/or labor related work, such as auto or diesel mechanics, body repair, drafting (CAD), printing or signage, surveying, welding
- Professional/Technical/Business – includes areas such as communications, engineering, environmental sciences, Geographic Information System (GIS), human resources, information technology, and real estate
- Administrative – includes areas such as word processing, records management, data entry, and reception

Placements are to be academically and professionally relevant and rigorous; incorporate authentic workplace projects; be negotiated to the extent possible between the student, school, and hiring manager; be designed to build professional and personal discipline and skills; and be able to be completed within the designated time period so students can see the results of their work and be evaluated timely.

## **2. Duration the submission has been operational (month and year)**

STEP's inaugural announcement was released March 2014.

## **3. Reason why the program was created**

The intent of STEP is to:

- Introduce participants to the Department's operations for possible career candidacy
- Provide eligible high school students who have completed their junior year with meaningful work assignments based on established educational criteria of participating secondary schools
- Provide PennDOT with a supplemental workforce
- Increase pools of potential job candidates

Participation in STEP provides the student and the participating organization with:

- Work experience relevant to the student’s career interests, coordinated with school-based learning components
- Workplace mentoring by an individual who
  - Possesses the skills and knowledge to be mastered by the student
  - Instructs the student, critiques student performance, and challenges the student to perform well
  - Works within school-based guidelines
- Instruction in general workplace competencies
- Experience in and understanding of relevant and various aspects of the industry

#### **4. Reason why the program is new or creative**

STEP focuses on high school students. Typically, most career pathway programs focus on college-level students. By the time a student is in college, it is usually too late or financially challenging to change pathways. STEP offers high school seniors the opportunity to practice their skills in a “real-world” job setting, while getting paid to do so and giving them extra time to discern their career pathway before making a significant financial commitment to higher education. Unlike other career pathway programs such as job shadow days or week-long career camps, STEP offers longer-term career introduction and actual hands-on work.

#### **5. Start-up costs**

Start-up costs included supplies and postage to announce the program to 233 qualified schools in Pennsylvania that administer a certified cooperative education program as identified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

#### **6. Operational costs**

Operational costs are limited to the wages paid to STEP participants.

#### **7. Program funded**

STEP participants are paid through available wage funds within the hiring organization.

#### **8. Origin of the program**

STEP is unique to PennDOT and is the only Commonwealth agency to administer such a program.

**9. Awareness/difference of similar programs in other states**

We are not aware of any similar high school programs in other states. Research shows that other states have intern programs for college-level students and a career day or one-week career camp for grade school or high school students.

**10. Measurement of success**

**a. Quantitative measurement**

Quantitative measures include: number of applications and work plans received; number of matched applicants with work plans; number of schools participating; number of Department organizations participating; number of job offers, acceptances, and resignations; number currently employed; and student retention rate.

# Applications Received	# Work Plans Received	# Matched Apps/Plans	# Schools Participating	# Orgs Hiring STEP Students
133	30	28	60	14
# Job Offers	# Job Accepts	# Resignations	# Currently Employed	Retention
28	24	3	21	87.5%

(Note: Efforts are in process to replace those who declined offers or resigned in order to fill work plans through the end of this academic year.)

The quantitative assessment of student performance evaluation ratings and the number of job placements following graduation also offer meaningful assessments; however, the data will not be available until the conclusion of the academic year.

**b. Qualitative measurement**

Qualitative measures include: employee performance reviews; participant program evaluations; and feedback from STEP student-employees, school cooperative education coordinators, hiring managers, and agency human resource staff.

- (1) While still students, STEP participants must subscribe to the same work rules as any other employee, such as performance expectations, attendance, safety, and the like.

Part of this includes employee performance evaluations. Students receive three progress

reviews and a written performance evaluation to identify areas that are going well and those where opportunities exist to improve. Students are rated on 10 performance factors and are given an overall rating, along with written and verbal comments from the rater/supervisor. Students may use the evaluations as supporting documentation on job interviews.

- (2) Recognizing the value of feedback from the participants themselves, STEP participants are asked to complete a written STEP program evaluation with questions related to what went well, what did not, and how the program can be enhanced.
- (3) STEP supervisors and hiring managers, human resource staff, and school cooperative education coordinators are asked to assess the quality of the students and the value of the program, and make recommendations for enhancements.

These measurements provide valuable feedback and facilitate program changes.

#### **11. Program growth/change since inception**

Based on the positive feedback about the STEP program that has been received from managers, schools, and participants, thus far, the goal is to double the number of STEP placements for 2015-16. Announcements to hiring managers and schools for 2015-16 were distributed in December 2014. A planned administrative enhancement is the creation of an online, Web application process where applicant information will automatically populate the STEP program database. This will enable staff to focus more on program enhancements, outreach, monitoring, and reporting. A proposal has been made to the Department's Information Technology Office to assist in this effort.