

Monday, 11 November 2019

The future of education: more business involvement

School leaders crave more input from businesspeople to excite students about the real world, according to a national survey conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and released on 11 November.

More than 90 per cent of respondents to the “What Do Schools Want from Engagement with Business” survey said they wanted to increase their current engagement. The top benefits were identified as increasing students’ career aspirations, boosting their engagement in learning and developing their “future of work” capabilities.

“Australian educators see business as having a unique role to play in preparing young people for their lives post-school,” said Allegra Spender, CEO of the Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN), which commissioned the research. “Schools have a great appetite to work with business to enrich student learning, open up career possibilities and develop the future skills of their young people. The changing world of work makes these linkages even more crucial, so we urge all businesses to find ways to support schools.”

The survey found that the most common ways schools currently engage with business is through work experience programs and career talks. When asked how they would like to enhance that engagement in future, schools nominated face-to-face mentoring, work experience and workplace visits as the top three items. These rated far more highly than sponsorship.

The ACER report points to the enormous potential for schools to pursue a much deeper relationship with business in future. “Schools with limited engagement do not realise what can be achieved,” the report says, noting that work experience often focuses on the ‘hard’ skills associated with short-term jobs, rather than ‘soft’ skills [such as problem-solving, critical thinking and teamwork] vital for a long-term career. “All schools need to understand that a school-business engagement is more than the provision of work experience or vocational placements; it is an opportunity for students to learn about the world after school.”

Many of the respondents wrote about the positive impact one-on-one interaction with businesspeople can have on students, citing skills development, confidence in speaking with professionals, experiencing the “real world” and a renewed focus on their school studies.

“Students have difficulty becoming what they don’t see,” said Cabramatta High School Principal Beth Godwin, who is launching the ACER report at ABCN’s end-of-year event in Sydney on Monday, 11 November. “Working with business mentors is so important – they help students see the future.”

Business engagement with schools also helps build a positive perception of business in the community, the survey found. The vast majority – 86 per cent – were extremely positive about engagement, with many saying they were surprised by how willing businesses were to help students. One common word respondents used to describe business was “generosity”.

The benefit flows both ways, according to PwC chief Luke Sayers, who commissioned separate research last year on more than 700 PwC employees who had mentored students over the past five years. That research found that participating employees had a 30 per cent lower attrition rate than the company average, and they were twice as likely to be promoted. “Business working with schools is a win-win,” said Mr Sayers, who also sits on the ABCN board. “Young people are learning first-hand about the skills needed for the changing world of work, and our volunteers are appreciating the world from a different perspective, becoming better leaders and coaches.”

The ACER research was partly funded by a grant from the Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

ENDS

Note to media: The ACER “What Do Schools Want from Engagement with Business” report will be released on Monday, 11 November at the Australian Business and Community Network end-of-year event in Sydney, hosted by the Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

You can access a copy of the report here: https://research.acer.edu.au/policy_analysis_misc/30

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About ABCN

The Australian Business and Community Network is a non-profit network of 200 low-socio-economic schools and more than 40 leading Australian businesses including Accenture, Bain, Citi, CBA, Energy Australia, EY, JP Morgan, KPMG, Lendlease, Macquarie, Microsoft, MinterEllison, Navitas, Optus, PwC, Stockland, TCS, UBS and Wesfarmers. Established in 2005, ABCN's purpose is to enable businesses to support disadvantaged students to reach their potential through structured workplace mentoring programs, reaching over 7,000 students and involving 4,000 volunteer mentors each year.

About ACER

The Australian Council for Educational Research is a pre-eminent research organisation in the education sector. Its goal is to support learners, learning professionals, learning institutions and the development of a learning society. The independent, non-government organisation was established in 1930.