**Promising Practices - Monterey Bay Career Connect**

**Overview**

*Monterey Bay CareerConnect* is a free web portal providing educational, financial assistance, and career pathway information to residents of the Monterey Bay region. *My CareerCoach* is accessed through this portal and is a powerful new tool for accessing specific and local information on job opportunities, education paths, and job market data. Students, educators and parents now have a resource to discover local in-demand careers and educational opportunities, thereby closing the equity gap and provide equal access for all students.

The Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP) and Bright Futures worked together to bring Career Connect to the region and provide “local answers for local students” -- to support them as they chart their own course to higher education and career goals. Through the *My Career Coach* link, accessed through mbcareerconnect.org, students are able to assess their strongest traits for career alignment and choose appropriate educational options that lead to promising local careers. Counselors are able to access a user-friendly website to efficiently support student program, and career planning and college faculty can easily align curricula, certificates, and degrees with up-to-date employer needs.

**Regional Challenge**

Many 9th through 12th graders have a lack of direction during and after high school, struggling with taking the next step. There are also lower income families whose children could be first generation college students, but don’t know how to afford or navigate their child’s higher education. Students are not the only ones who can benefit from this resource -- there are also displaced workers who need information and direction to attain a livable wage.

Monterey Bay Career Connect (MBCC) helps to bridge the gap from high school to college for local students in Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito counties. MBCC helps young learners move from high school to high-demand, fulfilling careers by showing what college programs and careers are available in the local area. MBCC also provides a resume builder, links to local internships, scholarship/financial resources and personality assessments to best match a career path to the user. The website is useful for anyone looking to take the next step to chart their course to a productive and fulfilling career.

**Vision**

Every student and family has insights into jobs, careers and future salary opportunities, and local education and training programs that prepare students for local careers with livable wages.
Goals
● Prepare youth for promising careers
● Close the equity gap so first generation college students and the underserved in our region can more easily gain access to college and career opportunities
● Provide direct and free access to information typically accessed through counselors (whose student to counselor ratio in our region is 750:1)

Solution
A free, easy-to-navigate website helps guide college and career conversations between parents and students, and provides helpful information for displaced workers. Users can create a profile and take assessments to see what careers are best suited for them, and can access average wages for the jobs both locally and in California. After deciding on a career, the user can then see what colleges locally provide the best pathway to the career they have selected. Users can also use the website to help build their resume and link to the Monterey Bay Internships website to find internships in the field they are most interested in to gain valuable work experience.

Key Strategies
● Engage vendor with robust and powerful tool to enable exploration of local career and educational opportunities customized for our regional needs
● Create a flexible tool that serves students and their families, displaced workers, counselors and educators by showing them the most promising pathways to existing and growing jobs and careers in the local area

Results to Date
● Creation of customized site to reflect local labor market data, by county, the Monterey Bay region and state.
● Gained support of Monterey County post-secondary educational institutions through cost-sharing agreements, allowing their relevant program information to be directly available to users searching career.
● Soft launch in 2017 with select counselors, students, community organizations has led to over 8,000 visits to the site.
● Community outreach activities provided many tabling opportunities at schools, job fairs, community partner sites which lead to excellent student engagement.
● Student, parent, and counselor feedback has been extremely positive -- they found the tool informative, user-friendly, and engaging.
● High school counselors specifically felt that with Career Coach they will be better able to guide students to college-level academic programs that will help students achieve their career goals. With the current ratio of students to high school counselors of 750:1, Career Coach offers a new tool to achieve scale and offer direct access to information students need.
Pilots with 12th and 9th grade students at North Salinas High School, and with 12th graders at Gonzales High School in process, with expansion throughout the region planned for 2018.

Pilot participants completed a pre-survey with post-survey scheduled for February 2018.

Pilot results shared with participating schools so they can provide additional education and career planning support to students during the critical months prior to graduation.

“\textit{I had no idea what I wanted to be, but the assessment on Career Coach helped me explore careers I never would have discovered.}” - 12th grade student, Community Day, hosted by UCSC GearUP & Boys & Girls Club, Seaside

Role of Stewards and the Stewardship Approach

Bright Futures and MBEP worked together to help students and displaced workers create a path to a successful career locally in Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito counties. They identified EMSI, the vendor for Career Coach, and worked with them to customize their robust career exploration tool. Collaborative, community-based strategies can build win-win relationships and outcomes. MBCC was only possible through the combined efforts of Monterey Bay Economic Partnership, Bright Futures Education Partnership, and educational institutions: Hartnell College, Monterey Peninsula College, and CSU Monterey Bay. In addition to MBCC, MBEP is working on other Workforce Development projects in 1) supporting the Digital NEST, a tech training center for underserved youth, with locations in Watsonville and Salinas, 2) connecting employers and students through internships on Monterey Bay Internships, and 3) convening a multi-sector team to explore regional career pathways in order to maximize resources and bring additional ideas into our region to meet workforce development needs.

About MBEP

Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP) works with members and partners to find common strategies that support a thriving region with quality jobs, excellent education, health care, and a high quality of life for all residents while preserving the natural beauty of the region. MBEP and its affiliates affect change through focused initiatives – such as those related to workforce development.

About Bright Futures

Bright Futures Education Partnership is a community partnership of diverse members fostering progress in education outcomes for local students, from cradle to career, and improving the pipeline of quality talent within Monterey County. With a vision of a future where the youth finishes high school each year then goes on to complete the education required to launch them into promising careers, setting them on a course for a lifetime of prosperity.