

Bridge to Employment Site Reflection

BTE Site Reflection

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
November 2024



Why BTE?

With the aim of setting students up for post-secondary education success and exposing them to exciting STEM²D career paths, the Bridge to Employment (BTE) program in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA, began in September 2021 with Mastery Charter Schools at the Shoemaker and Lenfest campuses. In partnership with Johnson & Johnson Global Supply Chain Technology, Janssen Supply Chain, the Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF), La Salle University, and Drexel University, the BTE Philadelphia program provided students with consistent mentoring, monthly workshops, campus visits, and a series of fun, hands-on activities—including designing a mindfulness room for their school!

The majority of BTE Philadelphia participants were students from underserved

communities with limited exposure to professional and post-secondary academic environments—and to the STEM²D world at large. “The goal was to provide these students with role models and mentoring, so that they could hopefully see themselves in those roles in the future,” said Johnson & Johnson’s site co-champion. Throughout the program, organizers leaned heavily on student feedback to improve activities and ensure program retention and success.

BTE: A Catalyst for Post-Secondary Education & Career

The BTE Philadelphia program started in 2021 with 37 students, aiming to provide greater exposure to STEM²D and the professional world to students who may not have any family members employed in STEM²D fields or who may be first generation college students.

Volunteers and program organizers worked hard to make the program feel less like an extension of school and more like an interactive, hands-on learning space that students looked forward to. On the topic, the BTE Site Coordinator reflects, “Students really enjoyed anything that was hands-on where they weren’t constantly being talked at or given presentations.”

An excellent example of the innovative, hands-on activities that BTE Philadelphia students participated in was collaborating in teams to design a mindfulness room in their school. With supplies that they were given, teams considered their peers’ mental health needs and designed prototype rooms for their schools. Thoughtfully considering student feedback, the BTE leadership team focused on giving students real-world experience into all of the different STEM²D careers available to them. These included a virtual surgery with the Liberty Science Center and interactive skill-building workshops on topics such as urban farming, AI, and graphic design.

Site Profile

Location

Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania, USA

Grant Period

2021 – 2024

Sponsor

Johnson & Johnson

Coordinator

Philadelphia Education
Fund (PEF)

Community Partners

Mastery Charter Schools,
Shoemaker & Lenfest
Campuses;
La Salle University;
Drexel University

IMPACT OF BTE

When it comes to generating interest in STEM²D careers amongst participants, the BTE Philadelphia site saw great results—at the end of the program, 25% of BTE graduates confirmed they would be pursuing a STEM²D career. Additionally, the program had a great impact on the students' high school journeys. According to BTE volunteers, BTE Philadelphia students not only discovered a world of possibilities in the STEM²D world, but they also picked up better habits for their day-to-day lives as high school students, including time management and study strategies. Aside from gaining exposure to different types of people, different backgrounds, and different STEM²D career paths, students significantly improved academically with support from tutoring and remedial education sessions. They also polished up their social and interpersonal skills by participating in community service projects and career coaching sessions.

An aspect of the BTE Philadelphia program that really resonated with students was how open and genuine Johnson & Johnson volunteers were. Many volunteers often talked about their professional background and journey, giving students inspiring insight as to how they got to where they are today. This added significant value to the program because by sharing their different experiences, volunteers showed students that there isn't always a straight path when it comes to pursuing a successful career in the STEM²D world.

Reflections

Incorporating student feedback and taking a thoughtful approach to volunteer recruitment were essential for the long-term success of the BTE Philadelphia program. Because the program operated in a hybrid model, students were very vocal about wanting the program to be as personal and hands-on as possible. "The funny thing is we have programs that are for students, but they're put together by adults who often don't get students feedback," reflects the BTE Champion, who saw great value in incorporating student feedback. In fact, she believes including a student in the planning committee would be a great asset for future programs.

Student Outcomes

80% of BTE graduates applied to a post-secondary education program.

90% of BTE students rated their time management, study, and communication skills as "very good" or "good".

25% of BTE graduates will major in a STEM²D field.

Rather than hastily recruiting volunteers from the very beginning, BTE program organizers focused primarily on fully setting up the program and identifying and agreeing on clear program goals in order to then recruit the most suitable volunteers possible. Having a dedicated set of volunteers also made it easier to design the best workshops and materials possible.

Lastly, establishing positive relationships with school staff also contributed to the program's success. The school counselor department was a valuable connection, regularly meeting with students and serving as an additional source of feedback for improving the program as much as possible. Additionally, forming positive relationships with students' teachers was key for carrying out day-to-day logistics as smoothly as possible.

Although the BTE Philadelphia program won't be continuing in the future, the program saw great success throughout its lifecycle, showing students a world of possibilities in STEM²D and equipping them with the necessary tools to succeed in their post-secondary education journeys!

