Sixth Grade Job Shadow

Las Animas Elementary School, Las Animas School District

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Las Animas Elementary recognized that it was never too early to start students thinking about their futures, specifically potential careers. The goal of the 6th Grade Job Shadow was to give the sixth-grade students an in-person experience to see what a particular career might actually look like.

The coordination team included the classroom teacher and two other staff members without students, which allowed for flexibility during the workday to contact current and potential community business partners.

The 6th Grade Job Shadow was part of a career project that students completed at the end of sixth grade. The students first completed an interest survey, from which a list of three possible careers was identified for each student. From that list, the coordination team reached out to potential businesses to see if they would be willing to host a student or students. Wherever possible, students were grouped together. For example, a tour at the local hospital included students with a career choice of nurse, doctor, surgeon, physical therapist, or psychiatrist. While on the tour, the students each asked previously prepared questions. The job shadows typically lasted approximately three hours. Students then sent a follow-up thank-you note to the participating organization, along with an invitation to attend the sixth-grade Career Exploration Night held at the school.

The students were all very excited to do their job shadow. The teacher reported that the classroom climate was one of positive energy and good behavior in the weeks leading up to the job shadows. When students returned, they were excited to share the experience with classmates. The 6th Grade Job Shadow experience took the career exploration project to a whole different level of student buy-in and participation.

The informal feedback was that the job shadow system was a huge hit. Formally, the organizations were contacted and asked for feedback on how the tours went and what should be kept in mind for the following year. The overall time commitment, in addition to being creative with connections in the community, were the biggest challenges.

Recommendations to replicate this practice include keeping a list of all contacts; scheduling all job shadows within a two-to-three-day window if possible, as this was much easier for the teacher to work around and less disruptive overall for the class; not expecting the teacher to be in charge of contacting or scheduling; and pre-coaching the students on expected behavior and common manners, such as handshakes and eye contact.