

## LOCAL BUSINESSES LINK WITH SOUND SKILLS

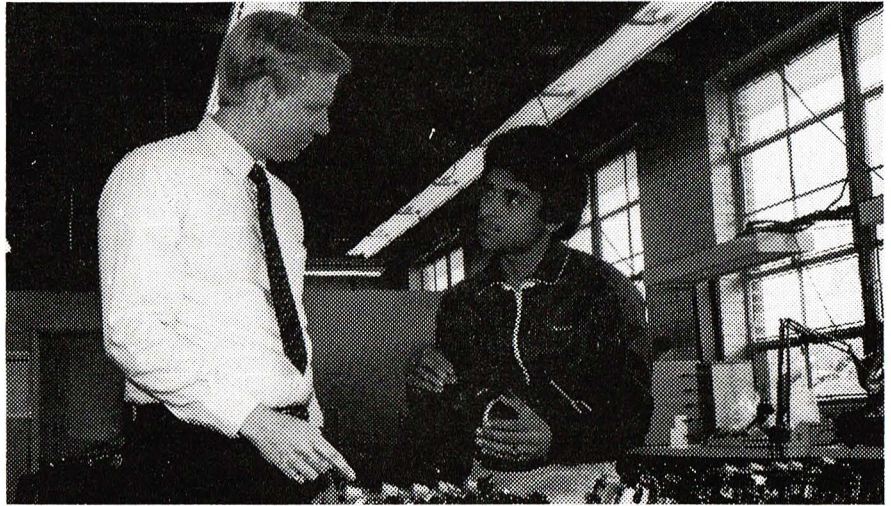
Until recently, Business-Industry was a relatively untapped resource for local school districts. Likewise, area businesses did not readily turn to the local high schools to prepare students for many of their entry-level positions. Today, increasing demands for qualified entry-level employees and cuts in school budgets have, in part, prompted school districts and area businesses to examine vehicles for working cooperatively.

The Sound Skills Training Project at CES is one program that has had great success in its ability to work cooperatively with area industry. Awarded a competitive grant by the Connecticut State Department of Education to become a model program for our state, Sound Skills provides vocational training and employability skill development for handicapped high school students. Unique in design, the project works closely with local businesses to determine job areas that are in high demand, training needs, and resources that are available to and from handicapped students.

A two-year program, Sound Skills prepares students for entry-level jobs in Business-Computing, Electronics, Building Trades and Building Maintenance. The curricula for each vocational area has been developed with input from businesses employing people in these areas.

### Businesses Benefit From Involvement

Just why do businesses become involved with local educational programs? According to William Kelley, Vice-President of Manufacturing at Science Accessories in Fairfield, "It helps the company find qualified potential employees while at the same



Bill Kelley, Vice-President of Manufacturing at Science Accessories in Fairfield, takes time out to explain printed circuit boards to Sound Skills Electronics student Angel Correa.

time helping the community's educational services." Science Accessories, a small international company that produces sonic digitizers, has been actively involved with the Sound Skills project since it began two years ago.

*"Students come in confident and positive. The project gives the student a goal and direction. I am extremely impressed by their enthusiasm."*

Prior to its participation in Sound Skills, Science Accessories was experiencing difficulty recruiting entry-level employees. Many of those applicants the company did hire demonstrated poor work habits, and were later released. "Smaller companies have difficulty competing with the benefits and salaries that larger companies can offer" states Mr. Kelley who highly recommends that other small companies get involved with Sound Skills to address their own staffing problems.

Although most of the participating companies prefer to train employees in their own methods, they do provide suggestions for curriculum content. And, in many instances Sound Skills staff have been able to offer suggestions on ways the companies can improve their own training programs. Participating businesses are assured that Sound Skills students are skilled in the basics of their vocational field and have developed proper work habits.

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### FEATURED INSIDE

- Assessment Center Takes Its Show On The Road
- EPIE Evaluates Teaching Tools —New Resource For Teachers
- Meeting the Challenge —Students Prepare For World of Work

# Computer Labs Can Be School Models

In a new book to be published this year, John Naisbitt, the author of *Megatrends*, describes changes affecting corporations in America. His theme, that the hierarchical structures of our corporate institutions are giving way to networking structures, is stronger than ever. This trend, along with another of his observations regarding the inevitability of a shrinking workforce within this decade and the subsequent "seller's" market of talent, will impact adversely on our educational institutions.

Many chroniclers of our changing society have noted the strong grass roots innovations that are reshaping societal institutions. Some futurists are predicting that institutions that don't recognize the efficacy of networking and the commitment of workers to their tasks that networking encourages will have problems in this new society. In fact, Naisbitt postulates that institutions must provide opportunities for employees to feel an "ownership" about their work or these institutions will not be able to hire personnel in the coming "seller's" market. One corporation that he describes turned its bleak financial picture around by turning its corporate structure upside down. The top and executives became the facilitators for the low end, the people who dealt with the public. This dramatic reversal could and should be replicated within our schools.

Networking theorists indicate that in a network each person feels an important contribution, so that at a point in time the energy and effort of the tasks at hand revolve around that individual. The individual is always important on a continuing basis and on occasion is the center of activity. Each person thus feels an "ownership" toward the activity and a personal commitment to the task. It's a rare hierarchical system that produces these feelings in employees. There's a growing consensus that the administrative staff of a school district, like corporation executives, should become facilitators for the educational delivery system; but, in fact, the individuals who hold these posts have generally viewed themselves as the omniscient, perhaps benevolent, dispensers of

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*"The computer laboratory can be the model for change in our educational delivery system. In these laboratories, the students and teachers are partners in learning."*

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educational pabulum. More often than not these individuals impede the delivery system, lower morale, stifle creativity and are only the facilitators of ennui, paperwork and misguided concepts of equity. Of course, there are those exceptional administrators who can encourage the individual to feel important in a hierarchical system. These are the insightful leaders who should be asked to restructure the school system to reflect the changes reshaping our society.

The computer laboratory can be the model for change in our educational delivery system. In these laboratories, the students and teachers are partners in learning. It's very rare to find a successful computer teacher who doesn't admit to learning from his/her students, networking with them in such a way that each of these individuals feels important and committed.

Now is the time to creatively redesign and retool the education

enterprise; to invert the structure and re-examine accepted tasks. Staffs should network in intra-school and inter-school arrangements. Teachers and lower level administrators should be encouraged to develop personal commitments to what they teach and oversee. The dispassionate fiat of the "old" model administrators should be of historical interest only; education must proceed as a cooperative venture between students, teachers and "facilitators"—formerly administrators.

If Naisbitt is correct and societal institutions are only going to survive if they change their attitudes toward the value of the human being, then the educational system will have to do more than offer larger salaries.

Entrepreneurial enterprises in our society are gradually embracing Naisbitt's new model and so must society's entrenched educational institutions.

by Irwin Hoffman, Chairman of Computer Science at George Washington High School in Denver, CO. Reprinted with permission from *Electronic Education*, Vol. 4, No. 5/February 1985.



**Cooperative Educational Services**  
11 Allen Road, P.O. Box 2087  
Norwalk, CT 06852  
(203) 847-3873

Peter T. Willner, Ed. D.  
Executive Director

CES PRESS STAFF  
Carolyn Hall, Editor  
Pamela Harris

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