

10 Steps to Creating a High School Entrepreneurship Class

By Susan Hanfland, SCH Consulting and Jeanne Dau, Business Solutions Center at Eastern Illinois University

Why do you need a class? - Communities are beginning to realize the value of growing their own entrepreneurs to secure economic viability in the future. One way to achieve this goal is to offer an experiential entrepreneurship class for high school students where businesses are actually started as part of the class. ClassE in Coles County and the CEO class in Effingham County give students the opportunity to view entrepreneurial success in their own backyard while connecting them to the community and building an entrepreneurial success network. These classes encourage entrepreneurial thinking, problem-solving and work skills development as well as an understanding of business and professional demeanor.

What does the class look like? – Juniors and seniors in high school actually start their own businesses and work together on a group business in these yearlong experiential learning classes. Students also develop their ability to write, speak and act in a professional manner: which is so important for success. They interact with more than 50 business owners as the students tour their businesses and hear from them as guest speakers and class visitors. There are no tests in these classes, students are expected to do their best work and they do. The students write a weekly journal to reflect on what they have learned and emphasis is placed on translating what they have learned from entrepreneurs and applying that to their venture. Leadership, teambuilding, problem-solving and lessons on how to achieve goals are also key components in the curriculum.

When does it meet? – These classes meet Monday through Friday from 7:30 – 9 am during both semesters of the school year. This time of day allows the students to travel to the site and still be able to maximize their participation in their home schools. It also allows local business people to stop by the class or give students a tour before or at the beginning of their workday.

Where does the class take place? - These classes take place in the community, not in a traditional classroom. The class is hosted in a local business meeting or boardroom; the host site is rotated at least once each school quarter. A community building or community college room can be used as a backup in case the company hosting the students would need to utilize their room during on a school day.

Who usually starts this class? – These classes are offered through school districts but are financially and instructionally supported by area businesses. People who are interested in kids, the future, the community, economic development and education are the ones who champion this class. They could be educators, business owners and community leaders. They could be people just like you!



3011 Lumpkin Hall • 600 Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL 61920
217.581.2913 • www.eiu.edu/bsc

How do I get a class started in my town or county? - The following steps will illustrate how the ClassE and CEO classes were created. Although there are many similarities in the process, each class formation varied and both committees were quick to identify the strengths of their county and used those strengths to establish their classes. Keep in mind that this process may take up to two years to get the class implemented.

1. Form a Community Exploration Committee

The committee should involve business, education and economic development representatives who are interested in entrepreneurship education and starting a class.

- **Coles County** - The Business Solutions Center at Eastern Illinois University served as the catalyst to generate interest for the class. An e-class sub-committee of the BSC advisory board was formed and an educator was recruited to the advisory board who had been employed by every school district in the county and familiar with the school systems. The team consisted of the BSC director, one assistant school superintendent, a community foundation director, an entrepreneur and a retired regional education administrator.
- **Effingham County** - A sub-committee of the already established education committee from the Vision 2020 community development initiative championed the class. The team consisted of one regional education administrator, one teacher, the chamber of commerce director, a community organizer, one community college representative and a representative from three different universities.

2. Expand the Community Involvement

The next step is to set the strategy and begin to broaden the stakeholder base to gain acceptance and support. Each potential school district superintendent needs to be shown the model and asked to allow the program to be offered for credit to their students. Area businesses need to become aware of the initiative and asked to become investors through financial contributions and by sharing their time and expertise with the students. School districts may have a lengthy process for course approval, almost all ultimately end in school board approval; this process may involve multiple presentations to the board and appropriate committees.

- **Coles County** - Coles County specifically targeted a team of community leaders with different circles of influence to champion the cause. They had a local corporation sponsor a luncheon where the plan of action was communicated to educators and the business community at one time. They presented the case to create the class and called upon an Effingham County student to provide a personal testimonial to the value of the class. At this lunch, they outlined ways to support the class. They were:
 1. Serve as a champion - actively solicit financial donations from their circle of influence Champions met after the luncheon and divided a list of prospective



donors and gave weekly updates on their progress. About ten individuals assisted in the fundraising and secured 60 investors.

2. Serve as a financial investor – invest \$1,000 per year with a three year commitment.
 3. Serve as a class host – allow the class to meet at your business for one quarter. You must have wireless access.
 4. Serve as a mentor - assist a student in the class as they create their business
- **Effingham County** – Effingham County had one teacher and one business person, both well-known and highly respected individuals, who met with potential investors to discuss the class and enlist their financial support. They asked each business owner to consider becoming an investor in the class by committing to an annual investment \$1,000 a year for three years.

3. Form an Advisory Board

This is a working board responsible for starting and maintaining the class. Membership on this board needs to be balanced between school personnel and business members. It is key to the success of the board that members realize that, as a working board, they will be involved in teacher and student selection as well as expanding community awareness and involvement with the class. They may also be involved in ongoing fund raising, mentor projects, finding business spaces for the class to meet and/or tour, and identifying community members who have expertise which could be utilized in delivering the curriculum to the students.

- **Coles County** – Their first advisory board was composed of one assistant superintendent, one principal and one guidance counselor. This gave them representation from each of the three schools in Coles County. The business community was composed of three entrepreneurs each from Mattoon and Charleston.
- **Effingham County** - Their first advisory board was composed of one superintendent, one principal, one guidance counselor, one teacher, three business entrepreneurs, the chamber director, one county board member, a community foundation director (fiscal agent) and a regional education administrator (administrative agent).

4. Consider Curriculum Content

Key components for a high school entrepreneurship class should include, but not be limited to: idea generation, feasibility assessment, marketing, management, risk assessment, legal structure, financial projections, customer service, business etiquette, economic principles, problem solving and leadership skills. The National Standards for Entrepreneurship Education can be found at www.entre-ed.org. Also, research state and local content standards and explore possible links to other entrepreneurship programs at community colleges and universities.

- **Coles County** – Much of the curriculum was created based on two models; the Effingham County curriculum and the Lake Land College Business 089 curriculum



3011 Lumpkin Hall • 600 Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL 61920
217.581.2913 • www.eiu.edu/bsc

since the Coles County class receives dual credit class from the local community college.

- **Effingham County** – When the first class began, there was only a framework for the curriculum and the National Standards supplied the foundation and framing components for the curriculum. During the first year utilizing local experts, the curriculum structure took place. At the end of the first year, the teacher in collaboration with an education administrator wrote the details of the curriculum, linked it to current state learning standards as well as the National Standards for Entrepreneurship education.

5. Select a Teacher

One of the first tasks of the Advisory Board will be to select a teacher for the class. The class needs to be facilitated by someone who is business education certified or has sufficient business experience to be provisionally certified to teach the class; 2000 hours of paid work experience in owning or managing a business.

Key characteristics of the “right” teacher include having an entrepreneurial attitude, someone who sees opportunities and possibilities outside of what exists. This person must truly care about students and is interested in learning, someone who is not intimidated by what he/she doesn’t know. The teacher must be able to communicate well with investors and partners and utilize the expertise each partner can share with the students. The candidate’s business community network is just as important as his/her educational background.

The Advisory Board Teacher Selection Committee needs to follow all regular protocol in advertising the position and following school procedures for hiring. To qualify for dual credit, each community must work with its local community college to determine the specific qualifications needed by the instructor.

6. Select Students

This process begins with informing the guidance counselors about the class, taking time to meet with them and also volunteering to meet with their students. An application process can give the selection committee valuable insight in the selection process and is a learning experience for each applicant whether they are chosen or not. The class size should be at least 10 and no more than 22. It should be noted that this class should be filled with entrepreneurial thinkers and students that learn by doing, not necessarily the straight A students.

A luncheon was held with the high school principals and guidance counselors to introduce the class and to discuss what type of student might be a good candidate for the class. An application packet was also disseminated and discussed. In subsequent years, a lead guidance counselor (member of the advisory board) has communicated with each of the participating districts counselors.



7. Organize the class meeting place and calendars

This is a true act of collaboration which involves all participating school districts in setting up a common calendar for student attendance. Many times the regional education consortium may set the calendar. The class is best served by meeting in area businesses determining where the class will meet as a home base each school quarter is essential prior to the beginning of the school year. The teacher will make calls to set up tour with the local businesses, nonprofits and manufacturers.

8. Host a Student Orientation

Meet the students prior to school to help set the tone that this isn't the normal high school class. A mandatory student orientation should include board members and investment partners as well as parents of the students as welcome guests. The orientation should be held in a relaxed setting. Allow time for informal mixing as well as a session describing the framework of the class and basic expectations. Students need to know that they will meet in a business setting and be expected to dress and act as if they were an employee of that business. Students should have chance to meet the teacher, fellow students and other community members involved in the class.

9. Build a Business Success Network

The Advisory Board needs to be in the class often so that students see them as part of the class. The business partners are encouraged to be with the class for informal activities as well as to share their expertise or just stop by. Mentoring students is an ongoing activity. Whether you formally match students or let informal relationships develop, both partners and students should be encouraged to continually communicate. This creates an anchor to the community. Alumni need to become part of an ongoing communication network. This can be achieved relatively easily through tools such as e-blasts, social media pages and messages. The Advisory Board will continue to work to expand the number of business partners to assure there is sustainable finance but just as importantly to have a community sense of ownership.

10. Communication With Education

The school districts are an equal partner in the business network and this program must be truly collaborative and requires excellent communication to be sustained. Schools need to understand what the class is all about and the opportunities available through this out-of-the-box way of delivering this information. Superintendents, high school principals and guidance counselors need to be a part of the team and invited especially to all class events. All events planned by the class should be coordinated to minimize calendar conflicts. School personnel should be encouraged to attend the class as often as they can.



The administrative agent for a community-based class may be a school district or a consortium of districts. They are key to student identification, recruitment and enrollment. They are responsible for accreditation, as well as processing student grades and attendance records. The counselors need to know as much about the class as possible to inform students and parents of this opportunity. The teacher is supported and evaluated by school personnel. Most state laws require accurate attendance records for multiple purposes. For this reason the teacher must report absences daily to the home school district. Each school district has specific guidelines for reporting grades so these need to be adhered to by the teacher. Keeping ongoing communication frequent and open is the best way to ensure school ownership of the class.

Additional Resources:

Business Solutions Center at Eastern Illinois University www.eiu.edu/bsc

SCH Consulting - consultsusanh@gmail.com

Midland States Entrepreneurial Institute - <http://midlandinstitute.com>



3011 Lumpkin Hall • 600 Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL 61920
217.581.2913 • www.eiu.edu/bsc