



Adopt-an-Academy Program, Illinois

School Impact Story: Chicago Public Schools

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The Adopt-an-Academy Program in Chicago evolved from a long-time partnership between Cisco® Networking Academy® and Panduit Corporation to provide technology education to build the ICT workforce.

Panduit, with world headquarters in the Chicago area, wanted to expand its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) impact, emulating Cisco’s globally recognized CSR commitment to giving back through significant investment in education and community development. By tapping into local employee bases, the companies joined forces to build an engagement

framework which would help cultivate the future ICT talent pool, while making a difference in the local community.

Since 2009, mentors from Cisco and Panduit have worked with Networking Academy students in Chicago to provide real-world career exploration and exposure to state-of-the-art technology. The goal is to broaden awareness among young people by connecting them to industry professionals and inspire them to pursue an ICT/Networking career. In addition to providing mentors, Panduit also gives 9 annual scholarships of \$1500 each to post-secondary academy students, to

encourage them to continue their technology education. Adopted schools have included Chicago Public Schools, Jones College Prep, ASPIRA, Robert Morris University, Moraine Valley Community College, and DeVry University.

Debra Huttenberg, Panduit VP of U.S. Sales and academy mentor, says, “The Adopt-an-Academy program is an opportunity for us to ensure the continuation and growth of our industry. It helps drive innovative thinking and energy to our business, while exposing students to ICT professionals who can provide coaching, guidance and the benefit of their experience.”



As part of the focused initiative, students participate in a series of collaborative educational and social experiences that enhance academic performance and expand their understanding of ICT careers.

In the Cisco Networking Academy courses, students learn how to design, build and manage networks through theoretical and lab-based learning. The Adopt-an-Academy program adds a practical component to their skills development through exposure to industry professionals and real-world scenarios. Mentors provide tutoring and coaching on career goals, resume workshops, and job interview techniques.



In addition, students are invited to participate in job shadowing activities and hands-on technical demonstrations, which provide opportunities to learn about cutting-edge ICT/networking technology, including Cisco unified communications, security, mobility, digital signage, and TelePresence.

The impact the Adopt-an-Academy program is reflected in one particular student, Todd

Escalona, a graduate of the Cisco Networking Academy at Robert Morris University. As a mentee, Todd participated in various career and networking events hosted by Cisco and Panduit. His mentors encouraged him to interview for one of the coveted positions in the Cisco ASE (Associated Systems Engineer) program, an intensive year-long field training program that develops apprentices into professionals.

“As a mentee, I was able to develop the confidence I needed to pursue my ICT career goals,” says Todd. “My mentors provided me with invaluable advice and encouragement. The experience was great!”

Another important outcome of the Adopt-an-Academy engagement is seen at the administrative level at the Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

Although the CPS district is a strategic Cisco customer with annual purchases averaging \$6-8 million, the potential for a significant technology solution upgrade had remained untapped for nearly a decade. By engaging district-level decision makers in Adopt-an-Academy events, Cisco was able to demonstrate the positive investment it was making in the community, which helped open the dialogue for building ongoing technology development plans between CPS and Cisco.

Adopt-an-Academy is a powerful example of a public-private partnership (between education and business) that supports the community by leveraging financial and in-kind resources to establish a long-term engagement strategy, which allows organizations to build a pipeline of future talent for their company.

The program in Chicago now serves as a model for other partners to engage with schools at the local level to address their workforce needs while serving as good corporate citizens.

Cisco Networking Academy and Panduit continue to evolve the program, opening doors for diverse students through technology education across the nation.

