Hillside Encourages Academic Achievement and Community Partnerships

Wegmans Food Markets founded the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection (Hillside) in 1987 to address employee turnover and support at-risk youth in the community at a time when upstate New York’s high school dropout rate was increasing. Now serving grades 7–12 in Rochester, Syracuse, Buffalo, and Prince George’s County schools in Maryland, Hillside engages youth one-on-one to ensure success in academics and work.

Hillside offers a comprehensive approach to address student needs via case management. In addition to mentoring students through academic studies, Hillside offers individualized graduation plans, academic planning, and college networking through a youth advocate assigned to each student. The program also provides extracurricular activities and supports, offering after-school and weekend services such as college visits and career mentoring.

Students who meet two or more dropout risk factors, such as class failure or academic suspension, are eligible to participate in Hillside’s signature Youth Employment Training Academy (YETA). Taking place over five weeks for a total of 25 training hours, YETA provides hands-on computer literacy and software training as well as interview skills training and financial management. After completing the program, students are encouraged to apply for local entry-level jobs with Hillside partners.

Hillside staff members monitor and assess the progress its students make toward achieving their goals. They also track program goals and outcomes in order to constantly improve program retention and performance. Specifically, Hillside collects participant level data on the following:

1. School attendance
2. Credits earned towards graduation
3. Grades
4. Employment status
5. After-school enrichment attendance
6. SAT scores
7. All other data required by program funders and the state

This information contributes to the matching process that places students with the right Hillside employer partners, who often serve as facilitators or training seminar leaders. Only after the YETA students meet the “AAA” standards (attendance, academics, and attitude) are they then recommended to local employer partners.

In addition, Hillside ensures that rigorous career pathways lead to employment through close collaboration with local businesses. Through Hillside’s partnerships with local businesses, it has connected more than 100 YETA graduates with a variety of corporate partners providing entry-level jobs. Now serving nearly 4,000 students, Hillside continues as an example of what can happen when business joins forces with intermediaries to support students.

For more information on the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s work on youth employment, visit uschamberfoundation.org/CEW.