

SPOTLIGHT ON

Educational Service Center of Eastern Ohio



In this interview, **Sandy Furano**, director of Career Counseling Services at the Educational Service Center of Eastern Ohio, discusses how she and her team provided career resources to students during virtual learning, then provided more hands-on approaches to career guidance as students returned to in-person learning.

Q: What was your biggest challenge during COVID?

Connecting with students. **Before the pandemic, we were in the school buildings a lot. We were working within the classrooms.** Suddenly everything went virtual and that hands-on approach was gone. When we came back to in-person learning, we often wondered how much progress we lost. There was a disconnect. There's still some catching up to do.

Q: What kind of virtual career guidance did you offer?

We started small. We talked to students about things like team building or project management. But we realized we could incorporate more virtual options that were like the activities we typically conduct in person. We had a virtual career days conference. We even had virtual job shadowing. **Going virtual was tough, but it gave us an incredible opportunity to grow.**



Q: What did you do to help the students catch up?

COVID caused us to take a step back and explore other options with students. We try to make them more aware of the kinds of trades thriving in our region. **There are so many options out there besides college. Everything from health care to hospitality.** We also offer a Skills Accelerator program for students. They can take a self-guided certification program that can let them start an apprenticeship or earn college credits.

Q: How have the students responded to the additional resources?

We're so happy with the results. Before 2019 we didn't have career counseling service at our educational service center. We serve 22 districts, so the number of students we reach daily has grown so much. **The pandemic was tough, but it's not stopping us.** We're still moving forward. We're creating new opportunities that we know will make a difference.



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