

Elmbrook Schools LAUNCH turns to EchoSpan for students' professional development

LAUNCH, a program designed to connect students' academic knowledge to real-world business problems and projects, needed to provide students with multi-rater feedback to assist with their professional development. Educators believed 360-degree feedback aligned with the core values of the LAUNCH program so they turned to EchoSpan for help.

At a Glance:

73
Students

180
Business
Partners

384
Feedback
Providers

About LAUNCH

LAUNCH enhances the traditional high school experience by offering a non-traditional approach to building a culture that promotes tomorrow's innovators and entrepreneurs today. Students work in teams on challenges provided by both their instructors and business partners while earning high school and/or college credit. Students fast forward into their futures and become fully immersed in a professional culture, solving real-world problems, using industry standard tools and resources while being mentored by educators and actual employers.

Elmbrook Schools established LAUNCH to provide students with a combined focus on academic, career, and professional skills that will help prepare them for life. The program is structured in a way that allows targeted interaction between students, teachers, business mentors and organizations within the community. 2017 marked the first year of LAUNCH and included business partners such as ESPN, GE Healthcare, Harley Davidson, Johnson Controls, Milwaukee Tool, Manpower, and Northwest Mutual. The program started with 73 juniors and seniors from Brookfield Central and Brookfield East high schools.

The Challenge and Solution

Developmental feedback is a key component of any professional growth process, but for high school students in LAUNCH, who are immersing themselves in a business environment, it's even more vital. As instructors began planning the LAUNCH program, they met with a number of different business professionals, learned more about 360-degree feedback, and realized the value it could have in their own program. LAUNCH instructors needed a customizable

360-degree feedback tool where they could review students multiple times to measure the students' growth during the program and a tool that could help measure returns to their business partners.

EchoSpan was selected as the 360-degree feedback tool to use because it allowed LAUNCH instructors to customize the competencies they believed best fit the learning objectives of their program. An added benefit was that due to the intuitive design of the EchoSpan tool, it did not require any training for participants, which saved administrators and end-users time. EchoSpan also provided instructors a way to confidentially, efficiently and effectively gather feedback data. Finally, the tool consolidated feedback data into customizable final reports that were easy to read and comprehend for users.

Implementing and Utilizing the Tool

First, LAUNCH instructors analyzed the competencies and items from the EchoSpan library that best fit the professional learning objectives of the program. Their goal was to identify a manageable number of observable indicators that would give them and the students a basis for evaluating students' progress in skills and competencies related to success in the workplace. Instructors then met again to make adjustments to the competencies based on their initial experience and combined competencies from the EchoSpan library with their own custom competencies.

In advance of the program kickoff, instructors introduced the specific competencies much the same as they would typically address learning standards as articulated in rubrics of grading scales. They defined terms, looked at examples,

and discussed meanings. Students received feedback mid-way through the program so they could set a baseline. Students said, "The review wasn't too long, but thorough enough to get the message and feedback to our group members." Then, business coaches were asked to evaluate the students they worked with at the end of the program. Review response rates were as high as 90%, which indicated the review process was intuitive and well organized by administrators. As they prepare for the second year of LAUNCH, instructors will meet to modify the competencies again based upon students' and business coaches' feedback, the instructors' own observations, and other criteria.

Applying the Results

EchoSpan was a key tool for the LAUNCH program to provide specific and individualized feedback to students about their emerging strengths and the areas in which they could improve on their skills for future success. The feedback process was a way for students to learn about how peers and professionals perceived them as communicators, team members, and professionals. Students used the EchoSpan tool to learn how to improve their interactions with others, take on tasks that utilized their strengths, and reflect on their growth during the LAUNCH experience. Once students received their final reports, instructors had conversations with them about their results and had them set goals based on those results.

At the end of the first year, LAUNCH students were asked about the tool and its impact on their learning. The results showed that students valued the tool because it gave them specific and individualized information about what they needed to do improve. Students told their

instructors, "It is more comprehensive and descriptive than anything else I have taken" and "The tool does an excellent job on showing areas you need work in." Students also found 360-degree feedback to be an evaluation process that they preferred in relation to how they are typically accustomed to receiving feedback: "It was a good system and way better than traditional grading practices," and "It is definitely the most personalized and most specific online feedback system."

LAUNCH instructors, business partners, and students agreed that the EchoSpan tool was a truly significant value to the program, with potential to be even more valuable as the program moves forward and refines its use of the tool.

About EchoSpan

EchoSpan puts HR and business leaders in control of their employee performance management and leadership development programs with a suite of 360-degree feedback review tools. With EchoSpan's Web-based system, every aspect of a feedback process can be easily configured for a customer's needs, including review content, rating scales, workflows and report appearance. Founded in 2002, EchoSpan is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia and is trusted by over 4,000 clients on 6 continents. You can learn more about EchoSpan and their software at echospan.com.