

CREATING AND REPLICATING HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

A GUIDE FOR BUSINESSES AND SCHOOLS

CASE STUDY

Georgia United Credit Union at Academy for Advanced Studies

Using Experiential Learning to Bring Classrooms Alive

Henry County, GA



Carl Vinson Institute of Government
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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Is it safe to have a high school student handle her teacher's savings account? Why do we need bank tellers when most people bank online? Those were just some of the obstacles that Henry County officials and representatives from Georgia United Credit Union had to overcome when it came to opening a branch at the Academy for Advanced Studies, Henry County's College and Career Academy (CCA). But, as John Uessler, CEO of the Academy for Advanced Studies, said, "We wouldn't take no for an answer."

Students working at the credit union branch are required to adhere to the same confidentiality standards as any other employee. In addition, the school district and credit union recognized that although many banking activities take place online these days, many others can only take place at a branch, including opening and closing accounts and applying for loans. In addition, customer service is an important part of any job. The CCA wanted to provide students with experiences that were hands-on and not solely focused on technology.

The credit union branch is open normal bank operating hours, even when the school is closed. Students in the Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education finance pathway typically work about 2 to 2.5 hours per shift, usually about 10 hours per week, across three different shifts. In addition, some work after school as the branch closes at 5:00 PM. The students typically work at the credit union for two years, beginning with training in the June before their junior year (students must be 16 before training starts). As they take more classes in the pathway, so do their responsibilities at the credit union, going from tellers to opening and closing accounts. Because it does not have a large vault, the branch is also able to test out new technologies that can then be rolled out to other branches.

As the program finished out its third year in 2018, the biggest challenge continued to be getting more students interested. With 42 pathways offered at the CCA, including many with several state-of-the-art labs where students can use "cool toys," the finance pathway classrooms look comparatively boring. The pathway started with just four students, growing to seven in 2018, and more students are expected to participate in the coming school years.

Georgia United Credit Union has been involved in and committed to the CCA since the beginning, when representatives participated in the original steering committee. The credit union does not just touch the students working in the branch; bank personnel conduct mock interviews, participate in school career fairs, and work to educate all CCA students about financial literacy, including student loans and debt.

