

# DOINGWHATWORKS



**Video**

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Recovering Credits Through Project-Based Learning

Foxfire Center for Student Success, Ohio • January 2009

Topic: Dropout Prevention

Practice: Academic Supports

### Highlights

- Foxfire High School has developed a project-based learning system which allows students to earn credits towards graduation through high-interest projects.
- Students select project topics based on the academic area in which they are credit deficient.
- The completed projects include a creativity component such as a drawing or PowerPoint presentation.
- The many benefits of project-based education inspire students at Foxfire to earn the credits needed for graduation.

### About the Site

**Foxfire Center for Student Success**

**Zanesville, OH**

### Demographics

75% White

17% Other

9% Black

47% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

20% Special Education

Foxfire Center for Student Success is an alternative high school in Zanesville, Ohio. It serves as a dropout recovery school for students from the local and surrounding districts.

The school provides:

- Ongoing monitoring of student interventions and immediate adjustments in these interventions if needed
- Invisible mentoring for all students
- Extensive academic supports for credit recovery through project-based learning
- Wrap-around services with an on-site community health nurse
- Small, personalized classes
- Instruction that is relevant and provides opportunities for students to work in the community

## Full Transcript

Hi, I'm Ginny Strock. I'm an instructor in Project-Based Learning at Foxfire High School. Most of our students come into Foxfire very credit deficient, and we've developed a way for the students to earn credits quickly and with a high interest, so they want to perform the tasks necessary to achieve the credits. We have developed a project-based learning system for our students to come in and earn credits quickly. The projects are designed to be aligned with the State of Ohio but also to highly engage the students.

Strock to student: Oh, excellent, Ron. Are you working with Ms. Miller on this project, or are you doing this on your own independently?

Strock: Students choose projects mostly based on credit that they need to accomplish to graduate. For example, if a student needs an English credit, he may select a creative writing project where he would do some creative writing activities that are outlined and, again, aligned with the state guidelines. On the other hand, if a student needs an elective, there is a wide variety of electives he can choose from, from the history of rock and roll to Tupac to the history of hip-hop, sports history, all kinds of different high-interest, high-energy, very engaging topics.

Projects are developed by teachers from each particular discipline. In other words, a social studies team designs the social studies project. When the teachers develop the projects, they also develop rubrics to make sure that the student work follows the state standards and has met those standards.

Tupac is probably our most popular project initially, mainly because students are interested in Tupac.

There's a little controversy there; is he dead or alive, so that's kind of exciting to them. And they're able to do the research, and what's interesting about that project to me is that most students come in with a set opinion on what they think about Tupac. However, by the time they finish the project, the opinion has often changed, which I find rather rewarding. They're actually learning some new things about something they were certain they knew all about.

A lot of our projects help our kids with critical thinking skills too. That's a big part of the project-based learning. We want the students to be able to not just spit back math facts but to determine how they can use those math facts in their everyday lives and certainly when they graduate from high school. We also want them to be thinking about propaganda that they're bombarded with everyday on television ads, newspaper ads, those sorts of things and to be able to discern what information is valid.

Students are asked to create different kinds of projects rather than just take a test on information they've memorized. They may create a timeline based on the events that happened in the Great Depression, events that led up to the Great Depression, and the timeline would be perhaps a poster that would have pictures and drawings of situations and events that happened leading up to that time. Also students do PowerPoint presentations for a variety of different projects. Those also integrate computer skills.

Project-based learning has been such a wonderful success for our school and our students. We find that students who come in depressed because they have so many credits, an overwhelming amount of credits before graduation and they fear that they'll have to sit in an old-fashioned classroom and sit and listen and memorize and take tests and so forth. Students remember the situations they were in in their home schools, and these situations, perhaps sitting still in class whole day and memorizing information for a test, those weren't the ways that most of our students learned effectively. So by doing project-based education, the kids see that they can quickly move toward graduation. It's not the same old thing. It's something that provides interest to them, and it also meets their needs in a positive way.

Strock to student: Which one did you like the best?

Student: I think the voting one.

Strock: Really? How come?

Student: Yeah. Because we got to go up and actually vote...

Strock: My favorite part of teaching is seeing that light bulb come on with the kids and saying, "Oh I can do this and not only that, I can begin to do it on my own, and I can graduate from high school,"—something most of our students never really thought they'd do.