

MicroSociety at Penn Hills Charter School of Entrepreneurship

Penn Hills Charter School of Entrepreneurship (Penn Hills) is a grade K-8 charter school serving close to 400 students just outside of Pittsburgh, PA. The mission of Penn Hills is to provide a world-class education for the students in the Penn Hills community that will not only prepare students academically but will also develop them into informed and responsible world citizens, creative problem solvers, and effective communicators. Penn Hills received its charter in 2012 and currently has the proud distinction of being the first *MicroSociety* school to open with only a kindergarten to second grade cohort of students.

The Program:

The innovative concept of *MicroSociety* was created in 1967 as the result of Dr. George Richmond's effort to restructure his New York City classroom into an academically challenging and interactive place to motivate students to want to learn and succeed. Dr. Richmond introduced the idea of creating a functioning miniature society in his classroom as a tool to bring relevance to learning and to teach individual responsibility.

The *MicroSociety* program at Penn Hills is designed to be a hands-on, engaging program designed to bring entrepreneurial and economic concepts to life for students. This begins each spring, with the election of a student body government for the upcoming school year. The students running for office must conceive of a platform and campaign. The student body elects a President, Vice President, and a legislature with representatives from each grade. The results of this election provide the foundation for the next school years student society.



The beginning of the new school year marks the beginning of a new cycle of the society. Prospective entrepreneurs begin formulating their ideas for businesses. Their idea must be conceptualized into a business plan which they will present to a committee of school leaders in 'Shark Tank' style. The most promising and original ideas are given the green light to move forward. Once approved, the young business owners are responsible for building their businesses from the ground up. They hire staff, purchase supplies if needed to make products, and plan for the day-to-day operations of their business.

Students without a selected business plan (or those that did not submit one) then become part of the job pool. In this society, all students have jobs. The students are taught in the classroom how to market themselves to employers by learning to complete job applications, create resumes, and master interview techniques. The student business

owners and the members of the job pool come together at a job fair where students can interview with the businesses they are most interested. The business owners can then offer positions to the students they find most fitting with their available positions.

The selected students are then presented with offer letters from

the prospective employers where they can choose to accept or decline the position. If one candidate gets multiple offers, it is their decision to accept the job they prefer. Any student who did not receive an offer is then placed with a business or into one of the many other jobs within the society.

Innovation Spotlight:

Penn Hills Charter School of Entrepreneurship

Once the business plans are completed and staff is hired, it's time for the real work to begin. Within weeks, these students, with the guidance of teacher facilitators, are actively participating in a complete society where young entrepreneurs produce goods and services, elected officials establish laws, Crime Stoppers keep the peace, judges arbitrate disputes, and reporters track down stories. Students earn 'wages' through their jobs and can then purchase goods and services from the established businesses, deposit and borrow money from banks, and pay taxes, tuition, and rent.

Outcomes:

A *MicroSociety* school puts learning theory into practice throughout the school daily. Incorporating real-world experiences into basic curriculum helps students apply what they learn in the classroom to real life and helps teachers and principals transcend the 'stand and deliver' daily routine. The lessons related to the core elementary and middle school curriculum of science, math, social studies, and English language arts are incorporated through basic economic and entrepreneurial concepts. The classroom concepts are further reinforced with the students applying their curriculum as they problem solve the risks and opportunities that arise daily within the agencies and ventures of their own society. In this way, *MicroSociety* becomes an accelerant for the school's intended outcomes.

"The Penn Hills Charter School of Entrepreneurship's MicroSociety program enables our students to discover their potential as leaders. We are proud of our success in developing leaders through empowering students to take charge of their education."

--Wayne Jones, CEO, Penn Hills Charter School of Entrepreneurship

By making learning relevant, kids not only want to be in school, they want to succeed. Over the course of the school year, the society becomes progressively more sophisticated and students grow into aware and responsible global citizens, and dynamic collaborators and communicators. Together, students face real challenges that arise, experiment with different strategies for addressing them, and embrace failed attempts at risk taking until new solutions are discovered.



Thank you to Jessica Zuk and Penn Hills Charter School of Entrepreneurship for sharing their story. For more information on this program, please contact Jessica at jessica.zuk@phcharter.org or visit www.microsociety.com. If you would like to submit a suggestion for a future Innovation Spotlight, please contact Brandie Karpew at b.karpew@pacharters.org.

MicroSociety is a legally trademarked name. Penn Hills has been granted a license to use the name and the model from MicroSociety, Inc. in Philadelphia, PA.