

MAXIMIZING COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS FOR SUCCESS SECME/TAME PARTNERSHIP

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SECME (Southeastern Consortium for Minorities in Engineering) is a well established partnership of industry, private sector organizations, teachers, universities and school systems. Since its inception in 1975, SECME has grown to include 37 member universities and serve over 100 school systems. They have become experts in the realm of pre-college education, and have earned significant positive outcomes in enhancing the engineering and science pipeline through teacher education.

TAME (Texas Alliance for Minority Engineering) is an equally well established partnership. TAME has 20 alliance locations throughout Texas, with approximately 1,000 active volunteers. These volunteers devote extraordinary amounts of time directly interacting with students, and engaging them in the pursuit of math and science oriented curriculum and activities.

Through the catalyst of an unlikely partner, these two organizations were brought together to form a unique collaboration in the city of Houston, Texas. Mr. James Carswell is the Education Director for a Florida company with little name recognition, Montgomery Watson. Montgomery Watson is an engineering consulting firm that provides "support systems" for such organizations as the Baltimore Aquarium. Mr. Carswell is a former science teacher from Brouhard County Florida. He joined Montgomery Watson to assist them in their efforts with community outreach, and help them to make systemic changes in the quality of life issues affecting their potential employee base. While still a teacher, Mr. Carswell had become aware of SECME, invited them to do a district wide program, and used them as a model for on-going efforts that still exist in that school district today. He now wanted to help Montgomery Watson emulate this program to other areas where they had a presence in the community. With his external view of things, Houston was chosen as an ideal site because he saw that SECME and TAME, together, could have a significant impact within that school system.

Ms. Barbara Foots became the key element for this partnership's future. As the Director of Science for the Houston Independent School District (HISD), she could choose to be a stumbling block to the initiative or a facilitator for success. She chose to be the latter.

With a high degree of energy and commitment, she rallied her school district constituents to buy-in to using this holistic approach to exciting minority students, and their teachers, about the advantages of maintaining an interest in math and science. Based upon her premise that they must be a team first, there has been involvement from all stake holders - students, parents, teachers, district administration, TAME and SECME, timely and consistent communication, and evaluative time at each step of the way. There is excitement in Houston about this collaboration. With very short notice, eight HISD teachers attended the SECME sponsored training conference last summer. Already this year, fourteen have signed up for this summer's session. There is equal excitement from the students to enter a co-sponsored engineering competition.

Ms. Brenda Simmons, Associate Director of SECME, pointed out that this is just a beginning. The association is just one year old, but in that short amount of time they all have learned a great deal about leveraging what is successful from each toward the attainment of their common goal -- more minority students pursuing math, science and engineering career paths. Prof. G.F. Paskusz of the University of Houston-Central Engineering Department reinforced this idea by saying that there are numerous programs, activities, initiatives available to HISD, but this is the first time a model has been presented that can bring structure to these stand-alone offerings and effectively track the outcomes.

All-in-all, everyone involved in this effort is excited about what has happened thus far, and are hopeful for the future success of this unique collaboration.