



PROFILE OF EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT  
Food and Finance High School  
New York City

**About the Food and Finance High School**

Food and Finance High School is the only grades 9-12 culinary school in New York City, based in Midtown Manhattan on West 50th Street in Park West Educational Campus. A number of other schools in New York City offer a shorter-term culinary experience, but Food and Finance's program is the only four-year culinary school in the city, and as far as Principal Roger Turgeon knows, perhaps the only four-year program in the Empire State. The name "Food and Finance" is meant to highlight both the culinary skills and business skills necessary to operate a successful food-based enterprise.

Principal Roger Turgeon was a long-time chef turned culinary arts instructor, and he responded to the opportunity to design a small specialty school in the mid 2000's as part of the Gates-funded New Visions project. He prepared the proposal with several colleagues, one of whom is Jessica Mates, who serves as the school's work-based learning coordinator.

The school opened its doors in Fall of 2004 with just a ninth grade class; the school now serves about 430 students, about 90 of whom are seniors. The program teaches culinary skills of commercial food preparation, as well as the business side of the food service industry.

**Partnerships: Work-based Learning**

From the beginning, FFHS aspired to offer extensive work-based learning for its students. In the 2012-13 school year, about 60 seniors participated in a work-based learning experience, with about 20 internships offered in the Fall session and another 40 in the Spring session.

The internships last 16 weeks, approximately 3 hours daily and totaling 180 hours. Since most students have not reached a professional level in cooking, their internship activities primarily consist of preparing ingredients for use by the professional staff. In most restaurants, preparation of ingredients happens in the morning.

Internships are currently offered through numerous sites, such as: Amy's Bread, ARK Restaurant Corporation (Bryant Park Grill, Carrot Top Pastries, City Bakery; The Candle Cafe, The Grill Room, Rio Grande, Polpette); Beacon Restaurant, City Crab, Craft Restaurant, Food Network, Great Performances, Gruppo Ristoratori Italiani (Il Gattopardo); Hero Boy/Mangianaro's, Make My Cake, Miss Mamie's Spoonbread Too, Pier 60, Sason, Soutine Bakery, Tom Cat Bakery, and Union Square Hospitality Group (Shake Shack, Blue Smoke, Gramercy Tavern).

These internships typically pay minimum wage. The wages are paid by the employer (unlike some internship programs wherein the school provides a stipend for students). Occasionally a new restaurant partner may be reticent to get involved and make the financial commitment of paying an intern. In these cases, FFHS may secure some Work-based Learning funding from the New York City Department of

Education. But once the restaurant sees the quality of FFHS' students, it is expected to pay the wages of future interns directly.

### **The Internship Placement Process**

As part of the FFHS internship experience, students are sent to prospective sites for interviews. The Work-based Learning Coordinator tries to send each student on three interviews and to have three applicants interview for each placement. Participating in a competitive interview gives the student a more real-world experience of competing for the job, and also gives the restaurateur the ability to choose the best fit for their establishment.

Some restaurants just want FFHS to choose and send an intern, but the FFHS coordinator tries to encourage the partners to participate the interview process for the benefits of the student and the host. Usually it is a human resources manager who conducts the interviews, but sometimes the executive chef gets directly involved in selecting the student interns.

To prepare students for a successful internship, FFHS requires students to participate in a 15-hour employability skills preparation program. The program focuses on workplace expectations for customer service, interacting with supervisors and peers, timeliness, and interviewing skills with extensive role-playing. The internship preparation is offered at the beginning of each semester for that session's prospective interns.

### **Partnerships: Recruiting business partners**

FFHS leaders indicate there is not a single strategy for recruiting employer partners. They gather possible placement prospects through referrals from board members, professionals who volunteer at the schools, and contacts from other school staff members. Sometimes the WBL coordinator picks up the phone and makes a "cold call," an approach which has yielded some very loyal partners.

Ms. Mates always offers to meet in person and also invites the prospective partner to visit and take a tour of the school. She said that many food service professionals expect to see an old-style "home economics" kitchen, so when they see a full-size commercial kitchen through the windows of the main hallway in FFHS entrance, they are quickly sold on the value of the program.

In some cases, the restaurant owner or manager has already heard good things about the school, and chooses not to receive a visit or make a visit to FFHS. But based on the good name that FFHS has engendered, they still host an intern.

Principal Turgeon indicated that during the first couple years of FFHS' existence, it was difficult to find business partners, because the program was an unknown factor. He said that the leadership team had "bloody knuckles" from knocking on so many doors. But by the end of the third year, partner development became easier as the school had a track record, and there was some positive word-of-mouth buzz. He even noted that some restaurants started calling him asking for interns. One of the school's more prominent partners is the New York-based Food Network, as well some of its high profile chefs and restaurateurs.

Still, even with the enhanced visibility and “star appeal,” Turgeon says that recruitment of new partners is something they will not let up on. “The more people (partners) we bring in here, the better. We should never outgrow that thinking.”

### **Partnerships: Advisory Board**

At its inception, Mr. Turgeon formed a board of directors to help guide the school. The board consists of multiple stakeholders, including owners and executives of some prominent food services providers in the New York area. The board provides general advice and helps with fundraising for the school's student activities. Board members also agree to host student interns.

In Fall 2012, the school formed an "industry advisory board" which provides more of a direct focus on the culinary arts classes within the school. Industry board members include some very prominent chefs in the New York community, and the restaurants these chefs represent have also agreed to offer internships and to support fund-raising for the school.

### **Partnerships for Resources: The Food Education Foundation**

When it became apparent that FFHS needed some additional resources for supplies and equipment, several board members and other school partners decided to form a non-profit foundation called the Food Education Foundation, established specifically for the benefit of FFHS. Mr. Turgeon and other staff have no operational control over the foundation and they strive to protect its independence. Still, he notes the value of the foundation because it can directly aid the school, whereas cash donations that are given directly to the school must be channeled through the NYC Department of Education, with some percentage of funding held at the central office for administrative costs.

Foundation funds can also be awarded to graduating students to help pay for college tuition, a use that is prohibited for funds that are allocated through NYC DoE.

### **Student activity funds**

The culinary program also allows the students to operate what is essentially a student-run business enterprise. In addition to the external placements for students, all students can participate in catering activities held in the school. These events allow older, more experienced students to develop leadership skills and manage younger students, creating a strong inter-grade learning experience. All funds that are generated through these student activities are used to replenish the Student Activities Funds and must be used only for the benefit of students, such as paying for competitions and certification tests.

### **Partnership with Community-Based Organization**

Under the criteria for opening a New Visions school, FFHS is required to have a community-based non-profit partner. FFHS formed a partnership with the Cornell University School of Food Science and Nutrition. As the state's land-grant agricultural university, Cornell has a mission to extend knowledge of food and nutrition across New York, including New York City.

This partnership has played out in several ways. First, Cornell's professors and scientists have founded two research labs within the FFHS facility, one for the growing of food produce through "hydroponics" and the other for cultivating farm-raised Tilapia through "aquaponics." With the direct involvement of Cornell professors interacting with FFHS teachers, hydroponics and aquaponics are incorporated into curriculum units across the school, and students are also invited to help with lab-based projects. The

food raised through these efforts is used in the school's culinary programs and is also donated to the New York Food Bank.

Cornell also sponsors several FFHS juniors for summer employment where they work with summer camps for elementary school children. During these paid summer internships, FFHS students help present nutritional lessons to young students. Cornell also sponsors the salary of the work-based learning coordinator, and while she is based at FFHS, she is officially a Cornell employee.

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