Jason Altmire ([00:04](#)):

Hello again. I am Jason Altmire, and this is Career Education Report. We talk a lot about the disconnect that exists between K-12 learning and the traditional system of education and then moving towards career paths and higher education and how we need to focus our national priorities more on allowing students to choose what is of interest to them, what their skillset and aptitude is, and what's most valuable for them, but also for the country with the workforce demand that exists. And there is an organization called YouScience, which many probably have heard of, but they are doing as much work in this space as anybody in the country. And we are fortunate to have Edson Barton, who is the CEO of that organization on the show today. So Edson, thank you very much for being with us.

Edson Barton ([01:00](#)):

Thanks, Jason. We're excited to be here with you.

Jason Altmire ([01:02](#)):

And you are the founder of YouScience, I believe, back in 2006. So you've been at this for a long time. Can you talk a little bit about what YouScience does?

Edson Barton ([01:12](#)):

You bet. We have been around for a long time and we've evolved quite a bit as an organization, but with always the focus of how do we help learners connect better with their future and really make sure that that's embedded into their learning. We know that learners, once they connect their education to their outcomes that they're going to achieve, everything improves. And so that's always been our focus.

([01:39](#)):

Today YouScience is really a very unique SaaS-based organization, technology company where we're bridging the gap between the education systems and the career opportunities that an individual has. Again, making sure that the individual is connected to their future in very real ways. And we do that through a series of different programs, but the concept there is that we start as early as middle school and we work longitudinally throughout their middle school high school experiences into post-secondary education. I choose that term very purposefully, post-secondary, because that can mean a lot of different things to different individuals and then ongoing into their career and upskilling individuals throughout their life as well.

([02:29](#)):

One of the key features is that we make the program very purposefully relevant to every single student. It doesn't matter if you're the top academic student or the lowest academic student, you have something to give to the world and it should be our job to help that individual find out who they are and connect that to something greater than themselves so that they have purpose, they have hope, they have something more in view of what their future can entail. And when we give that to them, all sorts of great things happen.

Jason Altmire ([03:02](#)):

And on your website, which we'll talk about in a moment, there's some very compelling videos with high school students who have gone through the program, who've taken the exam, who expressed this sense of wonderment at the opportunity that they were never told about or they didn't realize was out there in career schools. How do high schools get involved with the program? How do they learn about what you're doing? What's the arrangement that you have to be able to work with students at that level?

Edson Barton (03:31):

Yeah, it's pretty straightforward. We have a platform that they can implement again from middle school on, and it can be done at younger ages. It just gets a little bit more difficult from the classroom experience actually, is more of the need there. But schools can get involved very, very easily. All of our programs are SaaS-based, and so they just contact us and we can do an implementation with their SIS systems, with their single sign-on systems. And most importantly, they start in that career guidance area. We focus on aptitudes almost exclusively. We have interest-based surveys, but it all ties back to an aptitude assessment that the student takes.

(04:15):

And that aptitude, aptitudes are quite unique and distinct, which hopefully we can talk a little bit about because it makes a tremendous difference, but once we can truly understand who a student is, now we can be very personalized and guiding the student through their education process. We can start lining things up with the education system, the counselors, the teachers, the administration to ensure that that student is moving purposefully very intentionally towards what their goals are and what their success is. And that's not always what we want it to be, but it is what they need it to be. And by doing that, we have tremendous outcomes. So it's this process starting in middle school, very easy to implement. It's a single site license that they buy. And in fact, we have colleges that buy it for the districts to help them spur on greater usage and purpose in their K-12 learning so that it translates to greater purpose and learning in the post-secondary learning.

Jason Altmire (05:20):

And on this point, you have a report that you have put out, that the organization has put out called, the Student Ability Report. And we talk a lot at our association at CECU, and I personally talk a lot, about the skills gap that exists, which is the idea that there's so many unfilled jobs, there's demand and very important professions that are going unfilled, but your report talks about a little bit different angle of a gap that exists, and that's the gap in student knowledge of what their opportunities are to what you were just talking about. And you have a comprehensive report again called Student Ability Report. Can you talk about what the report shows related to filling that gap?

Edson Barton (06:03):

Internally, we call it the exposure gap. And it is simply this, most of the programs that have been set up, in fact almost universally for the last at least 50 years, we have set up programs for guidance based on students' interests. And interest surveys are good tools and personality surveys are good tools, but it's like using a hammer to screw in a screw. You just need different tools for different purposes. This exposure gap really comes as a basis of a student's limited knowledge of what's out there and what's available to them. And interest surveys are built around what an individual knows about themselves and their surroundings. And so it's actually quite harmful for students to be taking interest based or personality based surveys and using that for guidance purposes towards careers. And that creates this gap.

(07:03):

So as an example, a student can only be what they can see. They have blinders on, if you will. Those blinders come from both their environment and their natural self tendencies and biases for themselves. So as an example, most students will look around their environment and they'll see mom and dad, or they'll see aunts and uncles or cousins or neighbors in certain careers. And those careers are largely dictated by their communities that they're in. And so a student naturally has the propensity to go

towards those types of careers or they see when we survey students, most of them want jobs in the soft sciences. So psychology, social work, patient care, which would be nursing. They want jobs in entertainment and sports because that's their world. That's who they are at that stage in life, and it's very hard for them to break out of that.

(08:03):

As an example, young women, when they're asked which careers would you go into a set of different career fields like computer technology, manufacturing or construction or healthcare technical, which would be doctors, surgeons, technicians, 12% of young women select they have an interest in computer technology, 7% in manufacturing, only 6% in construction, and only 9% in healthcare technical. Whereas in healthcare, patient care, nursing, those very hands-on type nursing jobs, 31% interests. But when we look at that based on aptitudes, what are their inherent natural capabilities? You actually have 26% of young women that have high aptitude fit for computer technology type careers. They have 26% of young women have high aptitude fit for manufacturing careers. And these are paying, high wage jobs that they can do. They're not physically intensive, they just require the right aptitudes. Construction, 24% aptitude. And technical healthcare, so again, surgeons, doctors 22% aptitude towards that.

(09:18):

When we can shift a young woman to, for example... And I'm using young women versus young men in this comparison, but when you can shift that focus to say, "Look at these careers that you personally, scientifically, we can prove you have capability to do," all of a sudden that student's world opens up because a young woman may never, ever, ever, ever have thought she could be a construction manager, and yet she has just as much capability to do that as a young man. And all of a sudden there they're just worlds are opened up to something way more significant. And that provides a sense of hope and capability and relevance to what they're doing that they've never experienced before and that's why in those stories that you've seen, we get those emails, we get those contexts all the time from parents, from students, from teachers saying, "My student has just, their world has been opened up to them and they're so excited about their future." I could just go on and on and on about all the cool and exciting types of emails that we get from people.

Jason Altmire (10:23):

That's why those videos are so compelling because it's those students right after they see their results, you just see the light bulb go off like, "Wow, I didn't realize that this was an option for me as a career path." Once these students have been identified, there's an interest on their part, they want to move forward, you have a relationship with a publishing company to create curriculum and textbooks and provide the schools the information that they need to then cultivate that student interest and give them the education they need to move forward.

Edson Barton (10:56):

What we're really focused on is helping to really do that identification of who that student is and then connect them with their next best stage. And the next best stage is always an education. It's what do you need to learn to get to that next level for you. And then finally that connection into employers, which is a fulfilling career for them. So we're always focused on understanding who you are, where you're at, and then moving you to the next stage. And then when you're at that next stage, understanding who you are, where you're at, and then moving you on to the next stage. So we work a lot with educators and education facilitating companies to help move the student along that pathway towards their personalized success.

Jason Altmire (11:40):

What I like a lot about your program is you also teach life skills as part of the curriculum, and that's something that our CECU member career schools take very seriously because you can be very skilled at the technical aspects of a certain profession, but if you can't communicate with people, if you can't build relationships, if you don't have that personal touch, you're not going to be nearly as successful as you otherwise could have been. Can you talk about how important that is as part of your curriculum?

Edson Barton (12:10):

Yeah, absolutely. You mentioned the heart of that, and I'm sure that your listeners understand that inherently. Every single business that we talk to will first come out when we ask them, "Okay, what do you need for future employees?"Every time the soft skills of comprehension, of working together with teams, of really all of those necessary aspects that we just use every single day of our life come up first. Now, as soon as I say, "Okay, is that what you need?" and they'll say "Yes," and then they'll say, "But I also need somebody who knows how to weld, or I also need somebody who knows how to program a computer or all these other things." And so those two work hand in hand just beautifully.

(12:54):

One of the examples that I just love is out of a small HBCU called Denmark Technical College out of South Carolina. They are a rural HBCU and their community is relatively small and has really been on the poor side on the economic scale for a long time. What they have done utilizing our products and some others that they've put together and just really their process is to do what you kind of mentioned, Jason, every single now incoming freshmen that they bring into their system, they put through what they call and term their Panther Path, and it starts with every student understanding who they are, so they go through our systems to get there, utilizing the information on both what their aptitudes are, what their capabilities are, what their interests are, what their personalities are.

(13:48):

Then the school looks at that and says, "Okay, let's match that up with our career programs now and then let's connect all of these pieces together to provide you the learning system that will build on where you already are and where you're going so that you can round out these pieces. So let's grab some of these soft skill type courses. Let's grab some of these very hard skill courses and let's combine those together so that the student has an individualized path." And I think that's what we're able to do is really help the school systems, whether they're K-12 systems or college systems, really align the students up with their futures in the very best way. It's what makes it really powerful.

Jason Altmire (14:35):

And you are also sort of a clearing house for career and technical education certifications. You do certification exams. If I understand correctly, you have over 200 certifications that are offered in various fields of study. Talk about the process that goes into deciding how that works and how a student or a school would be able to participate.

Edson Barton (15:00):

I think the number one thing to think about, again, if our goal is to help connect a student to their future and make that meaningful, then you have to find ways to make education meaningful as well to the student. Every class has to be meaningful, or else we look back at our education, which so many of us did and said, "Why did I learn that? Why did I take that class? Was that relevant to me?" And so many of us are questioning the value of post-secondary education now because we looked back at our history

and said, "I don't know that I got anything of value." So certifications become this real direct link between the reality of what I'm learning in the classroom to the reality of how those skills translate to the marketplace.

(15:50):

We create our library of certifications together with industry partners and education experts. We sit down with them and create these pathways so that a student can know, "Okay, if I'm taking this class this semester, when I finish that class, I can have a credential of record, a certificate that I can leverage now to go to an employer and say I have these skills." If you take certificates out, then the individual has a really hard time identifying what value that class actually had for them.

(16:26):

Now, I'm a huge believer in all education programs, but those programs, we just do a really terrible job in general at helping the individual understand what the value is of what they learned. So a certificate is just a simplified way to make that value stand out for the individual, but it also helps the school understand the value that they're providing both to the individual student and to the community at large. So when you can connect all of that together, it makes a really powerful offering to everybody involved, employers, students, and the schools that serve them.

(17:05):

The process for connecting with that is really quite simple. And one of the reasons why we have so many certifications is because we want to meet the needs of every school and every student. And so we have certifications and all of the different national career clusters from construction trades to computer sciences to healthcare across the board. All of our certifications are an entry level to mid-level qualification sets. So one of the things that we're really trying to do is help a student and a teacher move people up the skill level one level at a time.

(17:40):

One of the things that the certification industry doesn't do very well is help the individual and the teachers understand how to get to these professional level certifications. So we've kind of closed the gap in between the professional level certifications and all of the steps that go in between that. So now a student can start at having no knowledge and can learn one step at a time, certify that. Another step at a time, certify that. Another step, certify that. And now by the time that they're done, they're ready for those high level professional certifications.

Jason Altmire (18:15):

A really important service that you provide or you work with post-secondary institution is the help schools in recruitment, student recruitment and retention services, which is a critical issue of course. Students need to be aware of schools that they exist, they need to know what their options are so they can make the most appropriate choice for them. But then once they're in school, helping them be retained and complete the program, not just start it, but actually finish and then find a job afterwards, how do you work with schools related to those issues?

Edson Barton (18:50):

It's one of my favorite questions because this is such a huge issue. In our upcoming economy and in the economy today, every individual is going to have to have lifelong learning experiences, and those are best served in our learning institutions of higher education. Those can be anywhere from technical schools, what we've termed vocational schools in the past to community colleges to 4-year universities.

But they really need to be focused on what an individual needs to be successful in their career. Too often, our higher education institutions have been focused on their own needs rather than on the needs of the students. And I love the real career focused education institutions because they've realized, "Hey, if we can provide a service that meets the needs of the students better faster, then they will be more likely to say the ROI of my education was worth it."

(19:49):

Now, how we help with that is it's the same principles. If you can help an individual understand what their personal aptitudes are, what their personal goals could be, or career goals could be within that, now we can line up every education possibility or opportunity with that. So now their high school becomes more meaningful to them and more relevant. Now we can point them, if we did a good job with them in the high school arena, now we can point them towards the post-secondary institutions that are going to help them be more successful in their chosen career. And naturally when you do that, when you line those things up, enrollment rates go up for colleges. And so we're able now to take all of the data that we've gathered on a student and what their capabilities are, what their interests are, what they've earned skills in, all the classwork that they've now taken, and we can line that up with a post-secondary experience that aligns with that.

(20:54):

Now, naturally, when they get into post-secondary, they're more motivated to first get there, and colleges can place that student better. Then that student now has a purpose for why they're there, instead of just going into the post-secondary institution and saying, "What do I need to do?" And the post-secondary institution saying, "Well, you got to take your general education courses first." And then the student saying, "Well, why? I just took four years of general education. Why am I coming here? And I have no purpose anymore." As soon as you lose that purpose, you lose the student. That's why the dropout rate's been so high in post-secondary. So if we can align those things up, now the student has that very personalized purpose. And we've been able to prove that enrollment rates skyrocket, persistence rates skyrocket as well because the student now knows why they're there and it's just personally meaningful to them.

Jason Altmire (21:55):

And to kind of tie this all together, we've talked about the K-12 track. We've talked about students becoming aware of their opportunities and then how they're educated both in the K-12 and the career college setting and post-secondary setting. But the final piece of course is employers. And you have great relationships with employers large and small, National Fortune 500 all across the country to local auto shops and so forth. There's just dozens, I'm guessing probably hundreds of employer relationships. Can you talk about how that works?

Edson Barton (22:31):

We have currently over 16,000 employers inside of our system. Those are groups that have personally come to connect with the students of their future, right? Their future employees. We have a saying inside, so our product set is called YouScience Brightpath. And we have a saying internally that Brightpath is a path to nowhere without employers. So everything that we do is to help connect to that final stage, if you will, which we believe it's ongoing stages, but connect to that employer piece because the student is thinking, "Well, what's my objective in education?" And while there are some good aspects of generalized education and things like that, but a student has a really hard time connecting the value of that education to the value of their life. But if we can connect that value of their education to

their future career and their happiness in their career, not just their earnings but their happiness, then all of a sudden everything comes alive.

(23:37):

So connecting two businesses becomes really critical. And one component of that that you met, we do have Fortune 500 companies all the way down to small mom and pop shops. We used to say that all employment was local employment. Now, that's not true anymore because you can work for companies all over the world in some jobs. But what is still true is every job opportunity has to be tangible and real to me as an individual. So having local employers becomes a really important part of that, is those employers that when they're driving to and from school, when they see them on billboards, when they see the shop, the student has to say, "Oh, I'm now connecting that brand, that local person, that local group that I drive by all the time with the education that I'm actually doing." And when we can make those relationships very real, then the students move to those types of employers faster than they move to other types of employers.

(24:40):

And I will mention that's also the same type of concept that works with the recruitment on the post-secondary side. If the student can see that, "Oh, this particular institution actually helps me achieve my goals better, faster, then I have this connection. And is that school more local or is it a national school? Or how do I make that connection?" And the more real and tangible that we make that for a student, the greater the recruitment becomes both for post-secondary institutions and for employers.

Jason Altmire (25:13):

And if somebody wanted to find out more about YouScience, how would they find you?

Edson Barton (25:18):

Certainly go to our website, youscience.com, and that is spelled Y-O-U-S-C-I-E-N-C-E.com. You can think of it always as the science of you, how to make you more viable for your community, how do we make the community more viable for you. That's the best place to go always. And you can also find us on LinkedIn through all the social media networks as well, to search for YouScience.

Jason Altmire (25:47):

Our guest has been Edson Barton, who is the CEO at YouScience. Edson, thank you for being with us.

Edson Barton (25:53):

Thank you, Jason. Pleasure.

Jason Altmire (26:03):

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