

# TRANSCRIPT

## The Thought Leader's Viewpoint Episode 6

**(Introduction):** Governors State University School of Extended Learning presents, The Thought Leader's Viewpoint.

**Felicia L. Townsend:** I am Felicia Townsend from Governors State University's School of Extended Learning. Joining me today is Myetie Hamilton the executive director of EPIC Academy college prep in Chicago, Illinois. EPIC Academy is a Chicago Public School Level 1, open enrollment charter high school. They rank in the 84<sup>th</sup> percentile for SAT growth. They are in the top 25 percent of CPS high schools in college enrollment. 33 percent of EPIC seniors earn college credit before graduation and they have awarded \$7 million in college scholarships from the last graduating class. To add to this list of accomplishments, they have a very successful career readiness program called Career Intensives that we will learn about in a few minutes.

Today we are going to discuss career exploration and the importance of exposing students to careers during high school. Thank you so much Myetie for joining me today.

**Myetie Hamilton:** Thank you for inviting me Felicia. I'm so excited to have this conversation.

**FT:** Fantastic. Let's get started. We know that in order for students to explore various types of careers they need to be given, as you stated in one of our previous discussions, "tangible experiences". Myetie, share with us how EPIC Academy is providing such experiences through its career exploration program?

**MH:** Thank you for asking that question Felicia. I first want to share a little background on what makes EPIC unique in providing these experiences to students. We define this uniqueness by the development of our career exploration program called Career Intensives. This program was designed and created by our amazing board of directors. Through Career Intensives we partner, every year and twice a year, with over twenty-five to thirty public and private organizations.

We have representatives come out to our school to talk to our students about their career fields, their path in life, and the education that was required for them to be successful in their career field. We also are providing our students opportunities to go out and visit these organizations to receive hands-on experience and grasp a deeper understanding of various career fields that are available to them.

In addition to this, since I've been onboard with EPIC, we have started a career internship program that we would like to scale where every graduating senior would receive a paid internship opportunity prior to moving on to their postsecondary path. We started this out with a couple organizations—ARCO/Murray, which is an architectural firm we partner with, and Claretian Associates. Through these internships, our children get the opportunity to truly experience and have that tangible experience in various career fields. This helps further prepare them for college and help make that connection with why and how the classroom and learning intersects with your career path and how important education is and the role that it plays to you being successful in your future career.

**FT:** Myetie based on what you're saying, it sounds to me that in order to have a successful program you have to have dedicated partners from corporations, nonprofits, and other areas to provide their time and resources. So what would you say to a corporation or other entity who is listening to this interview to encourage them to support career exploration programs like the one at EPIC Academy?

**MH:** The partnerships are essentially important. We could absolutely not do this work without our dedicated partners. I find that organizations are open to this. They want to give back to the community. I would say that improving education, our economy, our community and our city requires the investment in our youth and shared partnerships across sectors. Public and private collaborations are critical to ensuring the success of our youth and our city at large. So these partnerships are the core to our work and I'm happy to say that we have developed partnerships throughout the city of Chicago and most of our partners have reoccurring experiences with us, meaning they come back year after year to provide these awesome experiences to our students.

**FT:** If a school does not have a career exploration program, what can parents do to expose their child to different career possibilities?

**MH:** Parents can get involved by sharing and making that investment in their children. I know that as parents many of us do this by providing them with exposure to various career fields through their own careers, by sharing information with them about various careers, and tapping into their interests, and exposing them any way possible. This can be through education, historical resources or taking your kids to work day. There are many different ways that parents can also get involved and engage in this. This is something that the parents of EPIC Academy are really proud that we invest in their children in this way.

**FT:** What are some tips that you can give to high school educators who would like to implement a career exploration program at their school?

**MH:** I would say that the key to this is the investment and intentionality about aligning our schools with partnerships: private partnerships and public partnerships. This is essentially important. I think that if a school wants to start this, the framework is to begin that partnership and begin to invite those partners into our schools to expose our students to what they do, who they are, and various career fields that are available to them.

**FT:** Is there a positive connection between exposing high school students to careers and their motivation to go to college?

**MH:** Absolutely. It's important that we are making a huge investment in our students. For EPIC, many of our students are first generation college in their family and they are changing the trajectory of their families by launching into careers and by becoming first generation college and then passing that on. It changes the course of generations to come for our families and that is what changes our communities.

With that being said, yes, it gives them a greater level of motivation because now they are sitting in the workplace. They are building new levels of confidence. They are experiencing how to network, how to communicate effectively, how to collaborate, how to be problem solvers, and how to apply the learning from high school. These experiences are so important to our students and it gives them a sense of excitement. It gives them that sense of confidence so that they are more energized and empowered to seize the opportunities and reach their goals in life.

**FT:** What impact does career exploration have on a student's academic success?

**MH:** Career exploration gives our children the inspiration and access necessary to realize their purpose and launch them into their career and launch them into success in college, career, and life. It also gives them a tangible opportunity to make that correlation to why academic success is so important, why every subject matters, why their learning is so critical to what they will do in the future.

So having those opportunities are so critical to our students and it helps them to really make that connection between classroom and careers.

**FT:** Myetie what inspires you in your role as Executive Director of EPIC Academy?

**MH:** My inspiration is having the opportunity to contribute to making a lasting impact in the lives of our youth. I grew up in Chicago. I am a native of the city. I grew up on the south side. I am a product of Chicago Public Schools and I am first generation college in my family. So I know first hand what a solid education will do for one's future and for one's family. Every student that I look at I know without a doubt that they can achieve. It is incumbent upon us as leaders, as educators, as private and public sector partners, to make this investment in our children. Simply stated, our children and their success are my inspiration.

I am also inspired by the hard work and dedication of our principals, our teachers, and our staff without whom none of this would be possible.

**FT:** Myetie it has been such a pleasure talking with you about career exploration and the importance of exposing students to careers during high school. Thank you for sharing your insights.

**MH:** Thank you. It has been such a pleasure Felicia.

**(Closing):** If you want to learn more about the programs and services offered through Governors State University's School of Extended Learning, please visit [govst.edu/oce](http://govst.edu/oce), that's [govst.edu/oce](http://govst.edu/oce).

**(Music)**