

A New Role for the Seasoned Project Manager – Advocate for Project Management Ready Youth ^{1, 2}

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Abstract

In the Fall 2020, the Project Management Institute [PMI] launched their newest certification program – PMI Project Management Ready[®]. This revolutionary certification program targets high school students to immerse them in the project management industry and connects them with a very passionate community of professionals – the PMI membership. This entry-level certification does not require prior work experience or previous education/training in project management. Young people will be able to fast forward their careers as they prepare for entry level positions in project management at an early age.

Although this PMI Certification fills a critical void both nationally and globally, implementing this program within the American high school education system is a certain challenge. The program implementation will require the Project Manager to serve in a new role – *Advocate for PM Ready Youth*. Further, initiating this new certification program will require adept leadership of the key stakeholders, especially the HS educators who will need coaching in their new role of the executive sponsor. This program presents exceptional opportunities for PMI Chapters and PMI members to outreach to high school educators and their local community.

This paper will address these challenges and opportunities. Items covered include a review of the PMI Project Management Ready Certification Program content, a discussion of the individual requirements to serve as an advocate for the project management profession, and insights from the author's own advocacy journey initiating the PM Ready Youth certification program.

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Background

James R. Snyder, PMI founder and lifelong innovator, has long prophesied that the future of the universe requires a “generation of project-oriented people to solve project-oriented problems” to solve pressing global problems [Ginevri & Trilling, pg. vii]. This lofty yet realistic goal requires the integration of project management skills into the K-13 education system. The PMI Educational Foundation and an army of committed PMI volunteers have made great strides in providing project management awareness and training programs for youth, K-13 educators, and non-profit organizations. However, awareness is not enough for young people to enter the workforce; solid education programs for students with verifiable knowledge attainment is essential for project management ready youth.

If the reader is not already aware of PMI’s Project Ready Youth Certification™ program, check out the *Out of the Box* video entitled “Students Can Jump into Project Management Now with PMI Project Management Ready™ ” (<https://www.pmi.org/certifications/pmi-project-management-ready>)

This cutting-edge certification program was developed following sound project management practices by the PMI Certification Department. *Surprised?*

PMI Certification Program Development

The subject PMI Certification Study Item included the following parameters:

- a) the associated courseware, companion study tests and certification exam would be suitable for the target audience ["early age" future project managers] as the recognized entry level credential to project management,
- b) the course materials would be appropriate for the target audience [high school students] who can read and reason competently at a seventh-grade level,
- c) collaborate with the right education services partner who can refine the input from project management subject matter experts [SME] into the required package [course materials, prep tests and certification exam] for the target audience and administer the sale, distribution and execution of the PM Ready Youth Certification program.

PMI chose Certiport to be their partner to provide the full pathway solution that educators can use to prepare students for this PMI certification. The PMI Project Management Ready curriculum is divided into four modules that introduce the young learners to:

- Project Management Fundamentals and Core Concepts
- Traditional Plan-Based Methodologies

- Agile Frameworks/Methodologies
- Business Analyst Frameworks

Candidates for the PMI Project Management Ready Youth Certification Exam will be expected to have key conceptual knowledge and principles of project management through at least 150 hours of instruction, which the noted 4-module curriculum and the practice tests adequately provide.

The Project Management Ready Youth package [4-module curriculum, practice tests, certification exam] was developed in the Summer 2020. A team of four PMI volunteer subject matter experts worked with Certiport curriculum specialists on each of the modules crafting 8-session courses that could be tailored by the teacher to fit their instruction needs. The course materials and practice tests are sufficient for a CTE teacher to adequately prepare their students for the certification exam.

The 4-module courseware product was available in October 2020 with the certification exam launched in December 2020. The writer served as one of the four PM-SME volunteers, assisting on the Traditional Plan-Based Methodologies module. In the writer's experience, my volunteer activity on the certification program planning and design work was quite elegant. However, my efforts on helping to implement the Project Management Ready Youth program in my home state of Michigan has been quite a rocky road.

Dr. Bill's "PM Ready Youth" Initiative Attempts – Trials & Tribulations

A comical look at the phases of any project are excitement and euphoria, disillusionment, crisis, search for the guilty, punish of the innocent, accolades for the non-involved. Not that that the writer's efforts track in lockstep with these project phases, the implementation initiative has been a challenge.

Having invested a considerable amount of volunteer time and effort in the summer 2020 on PMI's newest certification program, the writer was very keen on ensuring its success. Personally, PMI's Project Management Ready Youth Certification program was considered the critical solution to Jim Snyder's vision for a generation of project-oriented people to solve project-oriented problems. The writer's goal was to make it happen in his home state of Michigan.

Initial interest was quite enthusiastic. Presentations to the Board of my home PMI Chapter and to my alma mater in the fall 2020 were very encouraging. The PMI Great Lakes Chapter [GLC] saw the PMI Project Management Ready Youth program as part of their ongoing outreach to Metropolitan Detroit High Schools. The College of Business & Information Technology at Lawrence Technological University [LTU-B&IT] considered including the curriculum as one of the University's on campus summer programs for high school students. As all project managers know, executing a cutting-edge project is fraught with peril.

The fall 2020 was the *Excitement* phase, 2021 has proven to be the *Distractions & Derailing* phase. Scheduling any project under uncertainty is always challenging. The COVID-19 Pandemic induced a series of delays that upended the entire world order. In early spring 2020, the Lawrence Tech administration cancelled the in-person summer camp programs. At that time, the LTU-B&IT considered re-scheduling their pre-college programs to the fall 2020 as alternative after school offerings. Come late summer 2020, with COVID-19 morphing into the Delta variant, all in-person programs for non-regular students were put on hold. The B&IT faculty considered the Project Management Ready Youth course suite potentially suitable for first year students. However, without a champion, the “grade 13” offering faltered.

In early 2022, LTU-B&IT considered offering the Project Management Ready Youth program through a grant from MICHIGAN-Works as a *job-entry* initiative. This idea was derailed by a change in the State’s funding philosophy for MICH-Works to *job retraining*.

The PMIGLC Community Outreach to area high schools is fueled by eager Chapter volunteers wanting to make an impact with youth. Their headline offering is the “*PM101 Skills for Life*” program, which is available for free from the PMI Educational Foundation. (Incidentally, the PM101 1-day course materials were developed by the PMIGLC.) The PMIGLC targeted three high schools located in the city of Detroit, who initially expressed interest. The *unknown-knowns* of this Chapter outreach initiative project are: the specific scope, adequate funding sources for the course materials and instruction, and identified in-house champions at the targeted high schools. The Chapter initiative has stalled for now.

Finding Traction. In ongoing discussions with Certiport, a promising opportunity was identified. In November 2021, Certiport participated in the annual conference of the Michigan Business Educators Association [MBEA]. The attendees for these business educator events are Career & Technical Education [CTE] Teachers of Business in high schools and community colleges - the appropriate target for potential champions of the PMI Project Management Ready Youth Certification program.

Career & Technical Education (CTE) is the practice of teaching specific career skills to students in middle school, high school, and post-secondary institutions. CTE is split into **16 career clusters** that apply to different high-demand careers. Business is listed at #2 and Information Technology comes in at #5 in the order of preferences among CTE programs.

It is common practice for CTE teachers to couple their courses with companion professional certifications. This makes their graduates very attractive to business and industry for entry-level jobs. The Certiport representatives advised soliciting CTE teachers of business and information technology subjects to determine how the four modules of the PMI Project Management Ready Youth program could augment and blend with their current course offerings. Better to start with a receptive audience [CTE teachers] than to attempt to sell a totally foreign product [project management] to a skeptical market [high school administrators].

Looking Ahead. The writer’s efforts continue. Two activities are planned for the summer /fall 2022. First, arrangements are underway for a 1 to 2 day “Project Management for Educators” [PM4EDU] workshop at the MBEA Fall Conference. The book *Project Management for Educators-The Bridge to 21st Century Learning* (Trilling and Ginevri, 2017) published by PMI Educational Foundation will be part of the workshop materials. Second, the LTU Blue Devils Toastmasters Club [which the writer is an active member] will present the “PM101 Skills for Life” workshop along with the “Youth Leadership”[®] program from Toastmasters International, will be offered at Lawrence Tech University as a 2022 summer camp and/or after school program for interested teenagers.

The writer’s personal objectives for presenting the PM4EDU workshop for CTE teachers [potential PM course instructors] is to gauge acceptance and cultivate commitment for the PMI Project Management Ready Youth Certification program. The LTU program/s for high school students [future project managers] is to raise awareness among the attendees and their parents about project management as a profession. We shall see.

Lessons Learned Thus Far. The subject implementation initiative has not followed a linear path. Rather, the pandemic-induced havoc has caused changes to the traditional project management ‘plan the work / work the plan’ planning and execution mantra. Some critical learning lessons that have been gleaned from the bleeding edge. The working list of Lessons Learned includes:

Use an Agile versus a Traditional Approach. Be nimble to function within the variances of uncertainty [unknown unknowns], which the initiative and stakeholders have no control over.

Engage the Right Stakeholders. As the biblical parable extols on “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 20:16), cultivating champions for the cause is an arduous task. The lesson learned is to partner with CTE-Teachers of Business and Information Technology to blend the PMI Project Management Ready Youth Certification program into their existing education courses.

Utilize PMI Volunteers in the Right Way. The PMI volunteer best serves the CTE educator as their “guide on the side” providing technical advice about project management, as opposed to acting as the “sage on the stage” preaching to high school students about the virtues of PM. To best leverage their project management expertise and enthusiasm, let PMI Volunteers exhibit their stuff conducting “PM101 Skills for Life” training workshops.

Sponsoring PM for Education [PM4ED] Requires the PM’s Solid Commitment. In a bacon and eggs breakfast, what’s the difference between the chicken and the pig? The chicken is involved, but the pig is COMMITTED. On becoming an advocate for project management for education [PM4EDU] broadly, and specifically being a zealot for the PMI Project Management Ready Youth Certification Program, requires the interested project management professional to exhibit the commitment of the pig bringing the bacon to the farm breakfast party.

Conclusion

Becoming an Advocate for the PMI Project Management Ready Youth Certification program is not for the casual project management volunteer nor the faint of heart. As noted previously, the key recommendations the writer suggests are from the following lessons learned:

- Use an *Agile* versus a *Traditional Plan-Based* Approach
- Partner with CTE-Teachers as their “Guide on the Side”
- Project Management as Life Skill Requires PM’s Solid Commitment

In addition, spread the word to other project managers on how professionally rewarding and personally uplifting it is to be a mentor to youth (Ginervi & Trilling, 2017). Helping to create the next generation of project managers will be the best long-term project you will ever work on.

References

Ginevri, W & Trilling, B [2017] *Project Management for Education – The Bridge to 21st Century Learning*. Project Management Institute Educational Foundation (Newtown Square, PA).

Publications available from the PMI Educational Foundation [pmief.org/]: *PROJECT MANAGEMENT FOR CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION - Business Projects*.

Project Management 101 Skills for Life.

About the Author



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