

## A SYFR PARTNER: Pitsco and STAR Academies

by Richard Erdmann, CEO and Founder, Syfr Corporation

---

In a Syfr summer retreat on Secondary School Reform research was presented on the dropout pipeline. It indicated that overage students entering the ninth grade had about a 1 in 6 chance of graduating from high school. Syfr immediately began looking for a successful project working with overage students at the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade. We found one in South Carolina coordinated by Pitsco in conjunction with two school districts, the South Carolina State Department of Education and other companies. They were working only with overage students enrolled in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade or entering the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Their goal was to bring these students back together with their peers in just one year and to have them graduate on time. It appears that they will be successful with over 70% of these students and a few of those missing have transferred to different schools but not necessarily dropped out. Pitsco is now moving their STAR Academy, as they have named this project, into additional states, another dozen schools in South Carolina and have expanded it to include students at substantial risk of not graduating on time and who have been identified as they prepare for the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Some of Pitsco's approach certainly reflects the small school movement. Class sizes are smaller – 20 per teacher. The school is small – only 40 to 120 in the grade level. There is a family advocate or counselor working with parents and students. Much of Pitsco's approach, however, reflects its own corporate background and is largely unique.

Pitsco's corporate background is in vocational and technical education. As a result they bring certain teaching and learning philosophies to the table that are uncommon. They require some collaborative work in all subjects and 100% of the work in the science courses is collaborative. The STAR Academy projects use multiple forms of assessment including tests, reports, presentations, demonstrations and videos. There is no single method of measuring student learning. In addition, students work with a hands-on approach wherever possible.

As a result of our work with Pitsco on the STAR Academy, we now also work with them on the marketing of other products including learning with LEGOs as well as their middle and high school science programs. These

three product lines are also hands-on, involve collaborative work and have varied forms of student evaluation.

---

To learn more about Pitsco, contact:

Robin White-Musa VP, Customer Service and Sales Support, Pitsco

[rwhite@PITSCO.COM](mailto:rwhite@PITSCO.COM) 800-828-5787