



Best Practices in High School Vocational Education

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Research Request

- Vocational education best practices
- Success addressing workforce readiness
- Success addressing dropouts
- Overview of SFUSD vocational education program

What is Vocational Education?

- No longer primarily focused on entry level jobs directly out of high school
- Not limited to traditional trades
- Has developed a number of components
 - ◆ Sequenced tracks
 - ◆ New economy industries
 - ◆ Industry and postsecondary partnerships
 - ◆ Now referred to as Career Technical Education (CTE)

Vocational Education in Transition

- Continuing debate about what CTE should be:
 - ◆ Education through work
 - ✦ Contextual learning
 - ◆ Education about work
 - ✦ Social aspects, work world
 - ◆ Education for work
 - ✦ Technical skills
 - ◆ For employment-bound students or practical skills for all?

Vocational Education in Transition (cont'd)

- CTE adapting to address:
 - ◆ Changing workforce needs
 - ✦ Postsecondary training required for living wage job
 - ◆ Broader calls for education reform
 - ✦ US competitiveness
 - ◆ Challenge: Potential conflict between comprehensive academic preparation (and “college for all”) and technical education, given limited instruction time and resources

Vocational Education Best Practices

- Many emerging best practices
- In implementing best practices, “how” as important as “what”

Best Practices (Many, Interrelated)

- Career academies and pathways
- Increased academic rigor
- Career guidance
- Partnerships with postsecondary institutions
- Industry certification, partnerships, and focusing on growth industries
- Work-based learning

More Best Practices

- School-based enterprises and student organizations
- Programs for historically disadvantaged or underserved populations
- Improved facilities and equipment
- Improved teacher training

A Few Best Practices in Detail

- Career academies
- Partnerships with postsecondary institutions
- Partnerships with industry and work-based learning

Career Academies

■ Attributes

- ◆ Sequence of academic and technical courses focusing on industry sector
- ◆ Similar to pathways, clusters
- ◆ Often organized as "small school"
- ◆ Might have postsecondary or industry partnerships
- ◆ Among most popular
- ◆ Focus on "new economy" disciplines or those in demand regionally

Partnerships with Postsecondary Institutions

■ Attributes

- ◆ Address need for postsecondary training to get living wage job and meet workforce needs
- ◆ Sequenced, nonduplicative courses spanning high school and postsecondary institution
- ◆ Work on diploma and degree/certificate simultaneously
- ◆ Even fairly modest postsecondary training (6 months) can provide substantial wage boost

Partnerships with Industry and Work-Based Learning

■ Attributes

- ◆ Current technical material
- ◆ Industry skill certification
- ◆ Internships/employment
- ◆ Mentoring and job shadowing

Does CTE Effectively Address Workforce Readiness?

- ◆ Clearly, to some degree, by providing technical knowledge
- ◆ However, many studies have identified comprehensive academic training (and/or college) and soft skills as being the most important for workforce readiness
- ◆ Question: Is there enough time to provide students with comprehensive academic training and technical training? Do “content integration” and new teaching approaches address this?

Does CTE Stem Dropping Out?

- Research not conclusive
 - ◆ Appears to, up to a point
 - ◆ Not all CTE equal
 - ◆ Contextual learning and pathway choices engage students
 - ◆ Small schools increase support
 - ◆ But, some approaches to stemming dropping out are not addressed by CTE:
 - ✦ For example, bringing 7th and 8th graders up to grade-level proficiency and providing other support to ease the transition from middle to high school

Does CTE Address Education Reform?

- In many respects, yes:
 - ◆ Greater rigor, higher expectations
 - ◆ Integration of academic content
 - ◆ Small teaching environments
 - ◆ Student choices in pathway
 - ◆ Contextual/interest-based learning

Conclusions

- Academies a very popular approach
- Partnerships with postsecondary and industry associations seen as critical
- All districts face challenge: Deciding where (and to whom) to direct CTE resources and whether to allocate general district resources to CTE, given competing demands and often explicit prioritization of comprehensive academic training over other activities

Additional Information

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