CAREER ACADEMY RESEARCH ON EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND RELATED SUCCESSES

What is the Problem?

High school graduates lack skills needed for success in both college and today’s high-tech and knowledge-based economy.

The IT sector forecasts a strong employment outlook with workers earning, in general, about twice the national average of $40,690.

However, colleges and employers have difficulties finding students and workers since IT-related programs have declined since the mid-1980s.

A Promising Design: Career Academies

To boost participation in IT-related careers, career academies represent a promising avenue to establish a pipeline of students interested in IT careers.

Career academies are theme-based smaller learning communities with integrated academic/career-related curricula, work-based learning experiences, and business/industry partnerships.

Participation in career academies has resulted in reduced dropout rates, improved attendance, increased academic course-taking, and positive labor market outcomes.?

The National Academy Foundation (NAF), provides a model of practice including four core elements: academic development and structure, integrated curriculum and instruction, an advisory board, and work-based learning.

Depending on how academies meet NAF standards, they are recognized as open, model, and distinguished.

Distinguished academies that follow the NAF standards of practice more closely often report better student outcomes.

What is the Project’s Purpose?

We seek to understand how IT career academies with different levels of implementation fidelity facilitates college and career readiness. Thus, the project is driven by three research questions:

1. What is the nature of organizational and implementation elements?
2. What are the student experiences in IT career academies?
3. What are the student indicators of college of career readiness?

Project Methods

IT Career Academies. We chose three academies with: (a) different implementation levels (open, model, and distinguished) and design configurations (e.g., wall-to-wall, within a school), (b) student diversity, and (d) geographically dispersion (CA, OK, TX).

Case Studies. In Year 1 we used a case study approach to document how the academies are implemented and identify factors which may moderate student experiences and outcomes.

Student Engagement Experiences. In Year 2 we plan to document students’ participation experiences through a survey of student engagement and aspirational transitions upon graduation.

College and Career Readiness. In Year 3 we plan to conduct a comparative analysis of student achievement and engagement factors related to college and career readiness.

Preliminary Findings

Nature/Role of Organizational and Implementation Elements

Development: Shared Understanding of Purpose.

Academies where stakeholders have a shared understanding of purpose and value the career academy model, show higher level of implementation fidelity/success. Key development factors:

• Magnet factor: Open enrollment
• Community involvement in the development process
• Understanding of implementation requirements

Integration of IT Curriculum and Instruction.

Academies with more coherent integration of IT and academic curriculum appear to have higher level of implementation fidelity and student success. Key related factors:

• Well defined IT pathways are required
• Motivated teachers with IT background
• Project-based learning and dual enrollment opportunities

Organizational Culture and Supports.

Academies with shared understanding of purpose and higher community buy-in show an organizational culture of acceptance and support. Key related factors:

• Role of smaller learning communities: Safety/indvidual attention
• Well defined administrative roles and support strategies
• Understanding student population traits and needs

Role of External Factors.

Academies with shared understanding of purpose, community involvement, and organizational culture of support show greater connection to and support from local partners. Key related factors:

• District support: All implementation aspects
• Role/impact of Advisory Board: Work-based learning experiences
• Parental involvement

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