SREB | High Schools That Work

Best Practices Newsletter

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Counseling for Careers Is an Imperative

When educators counsel students to consider only college, they are doing these students a disservice by not offering them other postsecondary options.

Millions of students go to college having no idea what career path they want to take; many do not complete college and leave with a huge debt or graduate unable to find a job. Some accept a job paying less than what they expected — a job they could have gotten without a college degree. The problem isn't so much that jobs are not available, but their skills aren't matching the available jobs.

Employers struggle to fill vacancies in jobs requiring education or training beyond high school, but not necessarily a four-year degree. Many high-demand, high-wage jobs requiring an advanced credential or associate degree are plentiful in industries such as health care, manufacturing, computer technology and electrical engineering.

This newsletter explores how schools may better serve students by having a Counseling for Careers program to help students determine their interests and aptitudes and ultimately steer students toward a comparable high school career pathway and postsecondary program of study. Doing so will result in more students being supported and will address the gap between jobs available and the knowledge and skills of the future workforce.

Time for a Reality Check: 5 Million Jobs Waiting to be Filled

The nation is urgently in need of a qualified workforce able to fill the technology-oriented career positions increasingly dominating the job market.

Here is a sobering reality check: According to a U.S. Department of Labor, there were 5 million job openings in the United States going unfilled for want of qualified workers in January 2015. Of those 5 million jobs, more than 800,000 were in the trade, transportation and utility industries; another 800,000 were in health care and social services; and 300,000 were in manufacturing. Many of these positions require postsecondary education and training and carry annual salaries ranging from $35,000 to $85,000.

What are high-skilled, high-demand careers? These are careers in areas vital to the economy with more openings than qualified workers. These jobs typically require industry credentials or academic degrees and at least some postsecondary training. They typically feature a median wage greater than the median for all occupations.

According to SREB coach and Counseling for Careers coordinator Lynn Anderson, jobs are becoming more technical, requiring greater math, reading and comprehension competency. High Schools That Work's Advance Career (AC) program comprises a blend of academic, technical and 21st-century skills representing career pathways joining secondary and postsecondary studies.

"When students are making decisions, what is the proper order for working with students? The first is exposing students to career fields, and one way for doing this is to provide students diverse career pathways courses such as AC where they can experience authentic projects replicating the type of work professionals do. These experiences allow students to understand their own career interests, talents and aptitudes while undertaking a range of secondary and postsecondary learning opportunities," Anderson said

"Unfortunately, currently in the high schools across the United States, the first decision is college," she said.

Counseling for Careers

The critical question educators must ask themselves is this: Are we proactively and effectively introducing students to the vast range of careers available to them?

One effective strategy for helping schools and districts fill the gap in skilled labor and prepare students for high skill, high-wage careers is SREB's Counseling for Careers program, noted Anderson. The program emphasizes the following actions:

- Schools must expand their community partnerships to provide students with experiences that enable them to understand existing opportunities.
- Schools and students need to increase familiarity with sources such as the U.S. Department of Labor to become more aware of labor market needs, then plan their programs of study accordingly.
- Counseling for Careers recommends districts establish community partnership councils. These councils would support schools in providing students with experiences and information yielding a deeper understanding of career opportunities.
- Counseling for Careers assists all students in assessing postsecondary education opportunities including skill-specific and apprenticeship training.
- Counseling for Careers supports all students in selecting postsecondary education and training opportunities best fitting their career goals and interests.

Anderson said, "All of the schools that have begun implementing Counseling for Careers or even portions of the initiative are reporting greater student engagement in course selection, seeking extra-help mentoring and tutoring from adults in the community and stronger, more positive relationships with teachers and counselors."

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Connecting Work, School and Community

One way for students to determine what careers they want to pursue is to figure out what they like, what they are good at and find careers that match those skills. Another way is to determine what jobs are available and then acquire the skills, education and training required to meet the demands.

Marietta High School (MHS) in Marietta, Ohio, through its guidance and advisement program, made a concerted effort to prepare students not only for college, but for the workforce. "We hope to open doors and let kids know what's out there," said **Lisa Polk**, one of two guidance counselors at MHS who works with students to determine their readiness for college and careers.

The school and the community identified key problems: The city had a high unemployment rate and a skilled labor shortage; young adults were leaving to find jobs elsewhere; and many adults in the community were unable to pass a basic drug test during the job-screening process.

The lack of sustainable growth and professional and skilled employees prompted a grassroots movement involving educators, business and industry, and the local chamber of commerce to form Building Bridges to Careers (BBC) to keep youth local. "It's basically a meeting format where we do planning and brainstorm ideas," said Polk.

The goal is to give young adults who could meet the employment needs of local business and industry a reason to stay and work in the community. To prepare students, the school focused on new career courses, and business and industry provided job shadowing and internship opportunities for students.

Career Search I Course

To help students gain awareness about the myriad of careers available and start thinking about their own career paths, the school developed Career Search I in the 2013-14 school year. It's a full semester career exploration course required for all sophomores. "The sophomore year is pivotal," said **Kimberly Depue**, the Career Search I teacher and Job Shadow Coordinator. It's a good time for students to start focusing on what they want to do — a college path, a technical path or the workforce, she maintains.

> ***"Anything we can do to focus kids more so they have a better idea of what they want to do is good."***
>
> **Kimberly Dupue, teacher**

In Career Search Course I students are taught communication, research and interview skills and the importance of passing drug screening tests before and during employment. It also involves problem solving. School counselors ask businesses to challenge students with real-world issues to solve in class and, if possible, present their solutions to industry professionals and receive feedback.

The course requires students to take surveys to help determine their career interests and aptitudes. Once students decide on a career field, they must write an MLA-formatted research paper enabling them to learn more about the industry.

When the paper is completed, Depue arranges for students to job shadow a professional in their chosen field for four to six hours. Students get a chance to see what a day's work looks like, ask questions and develop potential networking connections. "It gets them focused. The goal is not to lock them in, but expose them to various careers," said Depue.

The job shadowing experience also serves as an eye-opener about the careers students have selected. Some realize their dream career may not be as glamorous as they initially thought. For example science teachers tell the story of students who want to be marine biologists and get paid to play with dolphins and swim in warm

water only to find out marine biologist are more likely to spend much of their time researching, analyzing, teaching or doing paperwork.

All of Depue's students who elect a health science career must take a field trip to a local college and visit a cadaver lab. One of her students who planned to go into pre-med couldn't handle it. She passed out. But there is a silver lining. Depue maintains it's better for students come to this realization in their sophomore year of high school rather than their sophomore or junior year of college.

Students who successfully pass the Career Search I course not only receive high school credit, but also earn three college credits that can be applied to any state-supported college in Ohio. At the end of the course, students must decide whether to attend the career center or pursue college- prep courses in their junior and senior years. The career center is a shared-time facility that serves all students in Washington County, Ohio.

Dupue pointed out many parents teach their children that to be successful, they must have college degrees. Yet, across the nation, skilled labor jobs that don't require college degrees, but do pay family-sustaining wages, are plentiful. The career center "helps students understand there are huge amounts of skilled labor jobs out there that they weren't thinking about," said Depue.

Job Shadowing Pays Huge Dividends

During the 2013-14 Career Search Course I, 211 students completed 243 job-shadow experiences with 51 local businesses and industries.

- 72 percent of students afterwards said they felt secure in their career choice.
- 76 percent said the course and/or job shadow influenced their career choice.
- 100 percent participated in a career experience.

Career Search Course II

To help prepare students for postsecondary studies, MHS created Career Search Course II in the 2014-15 school year, a college foundation course for seniors. It's a semester-long dual credit course that teaches students about college applications, financial aid, student loans and aspects of the college experience such as on-campus and off-campus living, scheduling classes and time management. A 20-hour internship is also required. Students who successfully complete the course receive high school credit and three college credits.

Other opportunities for dual credit:

- Postsecondary educational option — Students take classes on the college campus.
- Dual enrollment — Students take college-level courses at the high school. The courses are taught by college credentialed teachers.
- Advanced Placement — Students take courses at the high school and earn college credit if they score high enough on end-of-course exams.

"We're trying to give kids an opportunity for college credit, help with student debt and get them used to the rigors of college. If they have a taste of what college courses are really like in high school, they will be more successful at the collegiate level," maintained Depue.

A Good Beginning

It's too soon to determine whether more students will go to college or stay at home and fill skilled labor positions, but already there are signs the program is the right track. Enrollment in dual enrollment courses is up; more students are registering to take classes at the career center; students are learning how diverse the job market is, and students are developing job and networking opportunities through their internships. "Anything we can do to focus kids more so they have a better idea of what they want to do is good," noted Depue.

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Making High School Matter: Helping Students Own Their Education

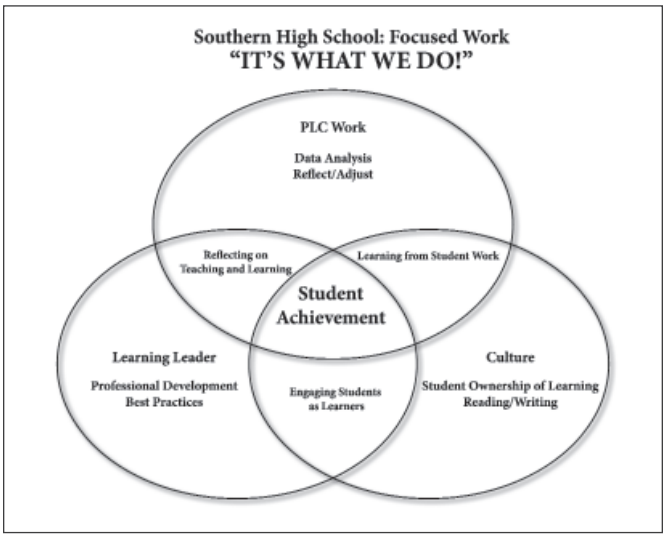
Getting students to own their education starts with adults interacting with the students. In 2010, when **Bryce Hibbard** became principal at **Southern High School (SHS)**, the Kentucky Department of Education deemed it a "priority school," which meant the school overall was not making adequate yearly progress regarding student achievement.

Southern High School (SHS), in Louisville, Kentucky, is one of 15 career-theme high schools in the Jefferson County public school system. SHS offers programs of study in business, automotive and machining.

In 2011, only 23 students met Kentucky's ACT benchmark for college readiness and zero students met the state's career-readiness metric. Many students were unable to complete career and technical education (CTE) programs of study because all make-up courses for failed classes were deferred until the senior year rather than the next trimester. Direct instruction, lecture and worksheets were the classroom norm. It was therefore difficult for students to see the purpose of their education.

The Keys to Success

The leadership team started with three key principles: professional learning communities (PLCs), learning leaders and, most importantly, culture. These principles are displayed graphically as three circles with one common central focus: student achievement. "We base all decisions about school on how they fit within these circles," noted Hibbard.



Hibbard and his team focused particularly on three key components for staff and students:

- This is "our house;" we have pride in our school and our education, and we walk the halls with character.
- We are all working to be college and career ready (CCR).
- Every class will be student centered and engaging.

These components comprise the school culture catch phrase: "It's What We Do!"

Students and staff tracked the progress of the school as a whole through a "thermometer" which gave a visual display of the number of students who were college and career ready, and students tracked their progress individually through their score cards. The score cards allowed students to record their academic and program of study course-taking plans, completion results, work-based learning plans, and their industry certifications and academic achievement exam results.

High Schools That Work consultants assisted SHS in developing systems of support for personalization of learning through a number of programs, activities and initiatives. Student-led conferences, in which students met with adults other than teachers, are one example. The use of "iLit" technology, a reading intervention program for struggling learners, was another, and iPads were made available for student use for enhancing academic progress through research and doing assignments. A summer bridge program for incoming ninth-graders, allowing students to start high school with credit, is another great example of the changes implemented.

Now, the classroom instructional norm is engaging students. Teachers use a variety of instructional strategies including flipping, cooperative learning and project-based learning. CTE teachers embed academic core content in their instruction, and many CTE teachers work with colleagues teaching core content to provide students with challenging integrated projects. All of these instructional strategies have helped students see the purpose in their education.

The results are impressive. The school's ACT composite has improved 1.13 points over the last three years. The graduation rate has improved from 61 percent to 83 percent.

College and Career Readiness

"Kentucky has a major push for college and career readiness," said Hibbard. "College ready means scores of 18, 19 and 20 on the ACT English, math and reading respectively. Career ready is tougher to achieve. There must be an academic portion (ACT, Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery or WorkKeys), some sort of industrial certification and the proper course work while in school," he noted.

"My school was number one in the district for career readiness with 34 kids," Hibbard said. Schools are awarded one point each by the state for students who are career ready or college ready. An extra .5 bonus point is awarded for students who are both.

Student Accomplishments

SHS participates in the state's Governor's Scholars program; three students were in the program for 2013-14. Governor's Scholars is a state program attended by juniors prior to their senior year. Selection is based on diverse criteria, including academic and ACT performance, community service, writing samples, participation in a leadership camp and teacher recommendation.

The school also participates in the Henry Vogt Scholar Program, designed to attract Kentucky's best students to the University of Louisville. Recipients must have a GPA of 3.5 or better and ACT writing score of 25. Hibbard also noted and for 2013-14, 43 juniors met state standards (benchmarked) on the ACT, the most SHS has had.

Points Earned by SHS for Each of the Past Three Years

2012	63 college ready	0 career ready	63 pts
2013	88	10	103 pts
2014 to date	111 (67 both)	34	178.5 pts
Goal	120	25	140 pts

Programs

All three industrial tech programs at SHS — auto technology, auto collision and machine tool and die — are nationally accredited, and students can earn certifications. The school also provides a "hot spot" in the cafeteria plus an Internet café with nine iPads.

"Students may use the iPads in the café to use the Study Island program to work on ACT-like questions. They of course can do research as well since the space is wireless," noted Hibbard.

In Summary

The culture of the school has changed. No longer do SHS students feel as if school is something that is "done to them" as they passively sit in classes, but rather their time at SHS is a first step investment in their professional journey. Students realize high school truly does matter in their lives and futures.

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Empowering Minority Males to Achieve Success

All across the country, schools are challenged to address the black male achievement gap. The national four-year, on-time graduation rate of black males in 2009-10 was 52 percent and the graduation rate for white, non-Latino males was 78 percent according to the Schott Foundation for Public Education. The U.S. Department of Education reported the national overall graduation rate in 2010-11 was 80 percent. This disparity should be a wake-up call to all educators.

It certainly was for **Scott Faulk**, former principal of **Honeysuckle Middle School** in Dothan, Alabama. Honeysuckle has 633 students in grades six to eight; 97 percent live at the poverty rate and 54 percent are males (of which 72 percent are black). "When I looked at the data from my school and my state, I saw a connection between minority males, low test scores and behavior issues," Faulk said.

He set a goal to raise the performance levels of not only minority males, but all students who experienced academic disparities due to poverty. The first priority was building relationships. He told teachers: "If we can work on building relationships, then the other pieces will fall in place."

Building Relationships

Faulk contends school leaders and administrators must be the first to make changes; "Administrators must be seen and heard," he declared. "Doing little things in a big way makes a difference." He expected his staff to greet and recognize their students, so he modeled this by personally greeting every student every morning.

His three non-negotiables for teachers were:

1) Contact parents every day.

2) Speak positively to students and staff.

3) Implement advisory with fidelity.

Faulk stated emphatically, "If you haven't started an advisory program yet, you have to start one. Advisory is how we reach all our students." It's all about ensuring students are connected to adults and activities, he maintained.

GREEK House Advisory Program

"GREEK House made a complete cultural change for Honeysuckle Middle School," Faulk said. GREEK stands for Gaining, Reaching, Educating and Enlightening our Kids. The goal of the program was to ensure every student was part of something in the school. Faulk noted the school's only extracurricular activities were football, boys and girls basketball, girls volleyball, cheerleading and band. If students weren't a part of those organizations, they were not involved. Faulk maintained about three-quarters of the students were in this category.

GREEK House was loosely modeled after college fraternities and sororities — complete with Greek names and shields. All students belonged to a GREEK House. They were divided by grade level and gender with no more than 17 students in a group.

Teachers, counselors, secretaries, teachers' aides and custodians served as GREEK advisers or house moms and dads.

Over the summer, teachers and administrators met for one week to devise the GREEK House curriculum. During the first week of school each adviser was required to call each student's parents to introduce themselves.

Early in the school year, students met to brainstorm a name and design a shield for their GREEK House. Twice a month during the regular school day GREEK House meetings were held. Students and their advisers talked about grades or life-building skills, for example.

The only adults in the building who did not have a GREEK House were the principal and assistant principal. They monitored each group's meetings to ensure compliance with the pre-set agenda.

GREEK House members took part in community service projects; they competed with each other for things like best school attendance or most students making honor roll.

Having every student belong to something and connected to an adult had a positive impact. "I saw discipline referrals decrease; I saw attendance increase; I saw suspensions decrease," Faulk said.

Goal-Setting Day

This relationship-building program actively involved parents in their children's education. The school sent personal invitations asking parents to attend Goal-Setting Day and meet with teachers and counselors to learn about data crucial to their children's success. Teachers explained how to read state accountability exam scores, discussed where their child was academically, where they wanted them to be, and strategies to help get them there.

These meetings took place in the media center during the school day between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Faulk said hundreds of parents showed up, and as an added bonus, Goal-Setting Day spilled over and increased attendance at PTO meetings, which frequently lagged in the single digits.

Male Mentoring

Successful men from all walks of life were invited to come to Honeysuckle Middle School during the school day to speak to male students. Principals, television anchors, professional football players and businessmen were just some of the men who came out and spoke to the boys and lunched with them. Some of the men made significant impressions because they, like some of the students, came from impoverished backgrounds but managed to have successful careers against all odds.

> Faulk said years ago Honeysuckle Middle School had a bad reputation in the community. It was viewed as a violent school. Parents didn't want their children to attend. Even the school's logo, a hornet, looked vicious and ready to fight.
>
> Faulk changed the logo to a friendlier digitize hornet. He also invited people in the community to visit the school and see what it was like; it helped build relationships and change minds.

Hornet logo before

Hornet logo after

Relationship Building Works

In addition to greater student and parental involvement in school, Honeysuckle is seeing tangible results. In 2010–11, 41 percent of sixth-graders at Honeysuckle Middle School achieved a Level IV score (the highest level possible) on the Alabama reading assessment. Two years later, 60 percent of sixth-graders achieved Level IV. Additionally, poverty students out-scored non-poverty students schoolwide.

In the 2013-14 school year, The Alabama Association of School Boards recognized Honeysuckle Middle School as most-improved school in the state of Alabama.

Faulk has been promoted to the district office as director of secondary educational service. But he has certainly left Honeysuckle on the path to continued success.

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This newsletter describes best practices in implementing the High Schools that Work (HSTW), Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW) and Technology Centers That Work (TCTW) school improvement models based on presentations at the 28th Annual HSTW Staff Development Conference in Nashville, Tennessee in summer 2014. For more information about the school improvement models offered by SREB, contact: Gene Bottoms, senior vice president, at gene.bottoms@sreb.org or call (404) 875-9211.