

Overcoming Barriers to Career Education for Special Populations

Summary Findings | May 2009

The following summarizes the findings of a research study commissioned to examine barriers to success for Special Populations in Nebraska Career Education programs at both secondary and postsecondary levels. Special Populations, as defined by Perkins IV, include English Language Learners (including migrant students), students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students (including foster students), single parents/displaced homemakers, and students in programs or training that are non-traditional for their gender.

CAREER EDUCATION STATUS OF SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Transition to Postsecondary Education

- Nearly half of Nebraska high school graduates complete a career and Technical Education (CTE) program. Further, three-fourths of CTE graduates are enrolled in a postsecondary education or training program within a year of graduation.
- Among high school graduates, African American and Asian or Pacific Islander students are less likely than others to have completed a Career and Technical Education program.

Career Plans and Obstacles

- White students were more likely than racial/ethnic minority students to have a parent or sibling who attended college. Among minority students, Hispanics were least likely to have a family member who had attended college.
- American Indian and Hispanic 9th and 12th grade high school students were more likely than others to limit their education aspirations to a high school diploma or GED.
- A majority of students in each racial/ethnic group reported their parents were very supportive of their going to college; highest among African American students and lowest among American Indian and Hispanic students.
- Nearly one-third of ESL students indicated that language was a problem for them going to college.
- ESL students were more than twice as likely as other students to expect a high school diploma to be their highest level of education.
- Educational aspirations were lower for Special Education students than for others at the 9th grade level, and they were twice as likely as others to expect their highest level to be a GED or high school diploma.
- Lower still were the aspirations of 12th grade Special Education students, with more than half expecting to earn no more than a high school diploma, compared to only one-tenth of all 12th grade students surveyed.

Community College Enrollment & Completion

- Women are eight times more likely than men to earn awards in Health Sciences, three times more likely to earn awards in Human Services, and twice as likely as men to earn awards in Liberal Arts and Sciences.
- Nebraska community college award statistics for 2006-07 reveal stronger gender differences in both the levels of awards and program areas
- Women received slightly more awards than men, but the gender differences were especially large for African American, Asian, and American Indian graduates
- Men who graduated were much more likely than women to earn credentials requiring less than one year to complete
- White and Hispanic male graduates were three times more likely to earn awards in Industrial Manufacturing and Engineer Systems (IMES) fields than African American or Asian/Pacific Islander men, and twice as likely as American Indian men.

Community College Student Survey

- Three of six career clusters showed strong gender differences: females were twice as likely as males to be pursuing careers in Health Sciences or Human Services. One-third of male students identified careers in the IMES field, a rate more than six times that for females.
- Male students in the ESL/GED transition group were much less likely to be pursuing Communications and Information Systems careers and much more likely to be pursuing Health Science careers than males in the academic group.
- The educational aspirations of Support Program students were as high as for the General Population group, with about 60 percent in both groups expecting to earn, eventually, a four-year degree or higher.

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OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO CAREER EDUCATION

The examination of career education barriers for Special Populations, including students pursuing programs non-traditional by gender, revealed systemic issues with the delivery of career education to students overall. This strategic plan is based on the underlying objectives that all students should have some level of postsecondary education to prepare them for good career opportunities and that high schools should prepare the students to be ready to continue their education. The following broad strategies are intended to provide guidance on ways to strengthen career education for all students. These strategies aim to ensure that all students have knowledge of a broad range of career options, have opportunities to realistically evaluate their interest level and suitability for these careers, and can develop and successfully implement a postsecondary education plan to pursue their career goals.

Strategies

- Make college and career readiness an integral part of the elementary and secondary school curriculum by providing structured, on-going career guidance programs for students and parents
 - Incorporate career awareness and exploration into the academic curriculum, beginning in elementary school.
 - Establish district-level career guidance programs with dedicated staff, including career development specialists and school guidance counselors, to ensure that every student is on an appropriate path to college and career readiness.
- Increase reliance on Community Colleges for delivering career education classes to secondary school students
 - Develop an appropriate dual-credit curriculum across a range of career fields, specific to each community college, with instruction provided primarily by community college instructors.
 - Develop a funding plan that would allow students to take a specified number of dual-credit hours without a tuition fee
- Provide a broad range of Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) for secondary and postsecondary students
 - Expand the Nebraska Work-Based Learning Program to reach more schools and students
 - Establish partnerships with community employers to develop and promote a wide range of Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) for secondary, postsecondary and Adult Basic Education students

- Expand the availability and scope of student support programs for postsecondary education readiness and success
 - Conduct a gap analysis of existing college readiness support programs to identify student groups that are underserved
 - Work with existing programs in Nebraska to develop strategies to increase the number of college readiness programs and students served across the state
- Incorporate career exploration and planning into GED and ESL Adult Basic Education Programs
 - Work with career development facilitators to integrate career exploration and planning into the ABE curriculum for both GED and ESL students
 - Work with students to establish individual career plans to guide them toward further postsecondary education and employment

Implementation Efforts

- Establish career readiness measures for school district programs and for student outcomes
- Conduct a review and make recommendation for increasing dual-credit career education courses
- Conduct a review and make recommendation for incorporating career exploration and planning into Adult Basic Education Programs for GED and ESL students
- Design and implement pilot projects to strengthen K-12 and Adult Basic Education career education programs

To access the complete report visit www.education.ne.gov/nce/nontraditional.htm