Boston College Mary E. Walsh Center for Thriving Children

Integrated Student Support and Workforce Development

When students develop the habits, skills, motivation, and knowledge they need to thrive in the job market, they have acquired the essentials of "workforce development."[1]

Students' workforce preparedness is driven by their experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Integrated student support addresses in- and out-of-school barriers to student success by systematically coordinating the resources in a school and a community to provide personalized sets of services and enrichment opportunities and strengthen the overall school environment. This can include connecting students to academic tutoring, after school sports and arts programs, mental health support, mentoring, internships, and basic needs like food, housing, and health care.

A school-based coordinator reviews student strengths, needs, and interests in close consultation with families, students, and teachers. The coordinator creates a personalized plan and ensures delivery of supports so that students are ready to attend, learn, and engage in school. Delivery of services and enrichment opportunities relies on coordinated local partnerships between families, schools, community organizations, and local employers.

By connecting students to resources and opportunities inside and outside of the classroom, integrated student support plays an important role in promoting workforce readiness.[2] For example:

- **Integrated student support ensures that students' basic needs are met so that instead of focusing on being hungry, cold, or sick, students can focus on learning and growing their skills.**

- **Because integrated student support is focused on addressing students' strengths, needs, and interests through targeted interventions, students gain exposure to in-school and after-school experiences that provide the early seeds of career development, promoting curiosity and motivation while helping youth build their talents and skills.[3]**

- **Many schools with integrated student support connect middle and high school students to mentorships, internships, and apprenticeships, providing real-world work experience and social capital.[4] These opportunities help them to develop the technical, interpersonal, and academic skills to thrive and shape their careers[5]**

- **Research shows that integrated student support can improve academic outcomes, attendance, and long-term success, ultimately leading to a more prepared and skilled workforce.**

Evidence of outcomes

High quality approaches to integrated student support improve student effort, attendance, and test scores, while reducing school drop-out rates. All of these outcomes align with workforce development habits, skills, and knowledge important for long-term success.

Evidence-based approaches to integrated student support contribute to workforce development by improving key indicators that correlate with career success, including:

- **Improved Academic Achievement**: Students who receive evidence-based integrated student support demonstrate higher academic achievement, including effort and grades.[6] These findings are associated with improved workforce preparedness.[7]

- **Increased Attendance and Engagement**: Select approaches to integrated student support have been shown to increase school attendance.[8] This leads to more engaged students and improved development of skills and career readiness.[9]

- **Lower Dropout Rates**: Students who receive evidence-based integrated student support are less likely to drop out of school, providing them with better chances of achieving long-term career goals when they stay in school.[10]

- **Improved Standardized Test Performance:** Select approaches to integrated student support significantly improve student performance on statewide tests in Math and English when compared to their peers who did not receive integrated support. Strong academic outcomes enhance opportunities for higher education and career pathways.[11]

- **Increase Post-Secondary Education Enrollment**: Select approaches to integrated student support are demonstrated to increase continuing education through college, vocational training, or other post-secondary education options that enhance workforce readiness.[12]

- **Higher earnings**: Students who receive integrated student support may generate higher earnings as adults.[13]

- **Long-term work benefits**: Integrated student support fosters the habits, skills, and knowledge crucial for lifelong success.[14]

Examples Across the Nation

When Kelley Miller, a City Connects coordinator, realized that the middle and high school students in Shakamak Junior-Senior High School struggled to envision their futures, she set out to create career exploration opportunities for students in this rural community of two thousand in Indiana. After she learned each student's interests, based on the deep knowledge of community resources cultivated through her job as a coordinator, she created job

shadowing opportunities: one student is shadowing a nurse anesthetist, and another student is shadowing a social worker. Other students are working or interning at Greene County Hospital. Additionally, Miller has arranged for some students to attend a career fair where they can learn about working for Marathon, an oil company that has a refinery an hour away in Illinois.

Springfield, Ohio has become a fount of opportunity for students, as City Connects coordinator Rosie Bond has created community partnerships to support the students of Catholic Central. These partnerships include Springfield-Clark Community Technical Center, where students can explore their futures by signing up for classes in a variety of areas, including nursing, technology, and construction. Another partnership is the University of Cincinnati, where Central Catholic students can take an engineering course.

Esteban, a student in Southern Nevada, was at risk of not graduating from high school. He was struggling with the pressures of soccer, work, and personal issues tied to a challenging home life. Communities In Schools coordinator Marco Mercado reached out and provided Esteban with unwavering support and mentorship. Esteban graduated from Canyon Springs High School with a 3.5 GPA. He began working and saving money for trade school. Today, he is enrolled at UEI College: A Vocational and Trade School studying to become a certified electrician.

Effective workforce development starts with listening to students and the goals they have for themselves. For one student at a high school partnered with the Heart of Texas Communities In Schools affiliate, her desire to work hard and go to college led her to the local CIS workforce development program. There, she got connected to a paid internship and a career coach. Her skills, tenacity, and passion made an impression and resulted in a part-time job as an administrative assistant. In that role, she sought out opportunities to contribute to the organization and to develop her professional skills, including taking a course in Excel. Today, she is enrolled at McLennan County Community College and is pursuing a Bachelor's degree.

Conclusion

In order for students to be well prepared for their future careers, exposing them to opportunities early on is crucial. Targeted interventions, career exposure, and workforce alignment skill-building are ways that integrated student support models enhance workforce development. When a student has their needs met, both in and out of school, they are able to be more engaged and ready to succeed. Integrated student support helps students gain the necessary habits, skills, motivation, and knowledge for lifelong success.

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