

Programs of Study

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Overview: Utilizing programs of study to facilitate school redesign

Programs of study can significantly enhance the effectiveness of the students' educational experience by strategic alignment of technical instruction and rigorous academic standards. The purpose for the development and implementation of programs of study is the following: (1) increase student engagement (2) improve academic skills (3) create purpose for going to school, (4) reduce drop-out, (5) improve retention and attendance, (6) create a college going culture (7) provide relevance and deepen understanding of potential occupations (8) create relevant curriculum, (9) support a student self-advocacy for college/career planning, (10) foster a school redesign framework by connecting to and leveraging current TEA initiatives.

On August 14, 2006 President Bush signed into law the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (PL 109-270). This act was the fourth version of federal legislation that carried the name of the Congressman who had been the field's strongest supporter from his election in 1948 until his death. This act, which immediately was referred to as "Perkins IV," introduced a new term into the education lexicon, "Programs of Study." Except for those who had been writing and attempting to influence Perkins IV, the term was new to field. While the term was new, the concepts that it incorporates were not. Programs of study have always existed in schools. For example, a student schedule may be considered a program of study; however, research shows that the development and implementation of a comprehensive education plan that connects secondary to post-secondary, school learning to outside educational experiences, and curriculum provide a framework for successful school redesign does effectively support school redesign efforts.

Developing a college/career culture in a school is a process, not just a destination. Unfortunately, not enough attention is paid to the developmental process that is required to engage in thoughtful, thorough career development tied to relevant academic curriculum. One of the issues facing schools is that students are confronted with substantial career and life decisions at an early age with modest opportunities for college/career exploration. In many settings students randomly select courses; however, students should be expected to choose and follow a program of study where the expectation is to exit high school with the skills necessary to continue their education and possibly enter the workforce. A program of study is much more than a schedule of courses, it is an opportunity for a student to connect curriculum to something that is real to them thus improving engagement and student achievement. Although the intention is for students to be prepared to continue with a career major upon completing high school, it is not a requirement for a student carry on in the same career emphasis upon completion of high school. Connecting curriculum to student interest and relevant experiences is the outcome expected for programs of study.

Programs of study, as specified by Perkins IV, require students to make decisions that, at a minimum, impact the last two years of high school and the first two years of postsecondary education. Upon review of state plans, many states extend such educational/career planning to earlier grades. The theory and research we have reviewed implies that virtually all high school students making these decisions are still in the exploratory stage of career development. Perkins IV emphasizes the need for career guidance, academic counseling, and professional development for educators in an effort to arm them with the knowledge and skills needed to assist students in the college/career exploration process.

The comprehensive guidance program is an integral part of a school district's total educational program. It is developmental by design and includes sequential activities organized and implemented by professional school counselors with the active support of parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, and the community. As a developmental program, it addresses the needs of all students by facilitating their academic, personal/social, and career development as well as helping create positive and safe learning climates in schools. At the same time, the program assists students as they face issues and resolve problems that prevent their healthy development. The program is delivered through the following four program components:

- Guidance Curriculum - structured group and classroom presentations
- Individual Planning - appraisal, development of Programs of Study, and successful post-secondary transitions
- Responsive Services - individual counseling, small-group counseling, consultation, and referral

System Support - program management, program evaluation, fair-share responsibilities, professional development, staff and community relations, consultation, committee participation, community outreach, and research and development.

Programs of study and comprehensive guidance/counseling redesign are connected and reinforce each other. Programs of study frame all school redesign efforts, are for all students, create one educational system at the campus level, and promote individualization of education for Texas students.