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Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Providing Rigorous and Relevant Instruction to All Students

Monica R. Martinez, Ph.D. • February 2009

Topic: Dropout Prevention

Practice: Rigorous/Relevant Instruction

Highlights

- There should be a common core curriculum for all students.
- Educators must provide a rigorous and a relevant curriculum through applied learning and expanding students' content areas into application.
- The Student Empowerment Academy located on Jefferson High School campus in South Central Los Angeles provides an excellent example of applied learning through technology- and project-based learning.
- Teachers require professional development that is embedded and integrated into the regular school day.
- Schools that provide theme-based instruction and philosophy help students understand the relevance of what they are learning and apply it to their lives.

About the Interviewee

Dr. Monica Martinez, Vice President for Education Strategy, guides the KnowledgeWorks Foundation's work to transform the national education landscape, overseeing the development of new initiatives and coordination of strategic planning that result from the 2006-2016 Map of Future Forces

Affecting Education.

Prior to being named Vice President, Martinez was an advisor to the foundation as Senior Fellow, providing expertise on issues related to educational access and achievement for low-income and minority students.

Martinez founded the National High School Alliance—a partnership of more than 40 organizations sharing a common commitment to promoting excellence, equity, and development of high-school-age youth—while she was at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington D.C. She also served as a Senior Associate at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), overseeing IEL’s work with the Pathways to College Network. In addition, she was Project Director for the National Clearinghouse for School Reform (NCCSR), the Theme High Schools Network (THiSNET.org), and the Catalog of Core Research on Secondary School Reform.

Martinez has contributed to many policy and research initiatives to reform education, including a University of Maryland effort to improve the quality of teaching through engagement in collaborative action research and conducting research at the New York University Institute for Education and Public Policy to support the development of small schools in New York City.

Martinez received her Ph.D. and M.A. in Higher Education Administration from the School of Education at New York University and her bachelor’s degree from Baylor University.

Full Transcript

Hi, my name is Monica Martinez, and I’m the Vice-President for Education Strategy for the KnowledgeWorks Foundation.

There should be a common core curriculum for all students, and assuring that will help with equity, and there are many different ways you can start doing that. So, one thing you can do is you can look at your course scheduling, and you can really look to determine what are your core courses and what are the courses that you might need to eliminate from that curriculum. Because often we find that students are not enrolled in the appropriate courses that prepare them to go to college. In fact, most recent statistic was 25% of all students are actually enrolled in a curriculum to prepare them to go to college.

The other thing we can do is really work on pedagogy. Because we have students who are at risk, who may be first generation students, students who have not become accustomed to or are behind in grade level, we need to provide a very different kind of pedagogy for students. And this kind of pedagogy is one that is very student-centric, one that focuses on the individual needs of students, and one where a teacher can personalize instruction for that student.

And the other kind of instruction we need that is consistent with being a student-centered curriculum and instructional way is to think about applied learning. So, when we think about rigor, we often think about content. But we don’t think about rigor as a way to apply how kids learn content, and that’s also where

we're able to get relevance. So, we can provide a rigorous and a relevant curriculum by not only providing a core curriculum, but by coupling that with pedagogy that is applied learning and by expanding students' content areas into application. And therefore, people are applying the learning that they have, and this will make them prepared for work, and this will prepare them for college as well.

A great example of applied learning is one of my favorite places to visit, and it's a small autonomous school located on Jefferson High School campus in South Central LA. It's called the Student Empowerment Academy. And students are from the area. They're all first generation students. Most of them are English language learners; most of them have siblings who have never gone to college. Their parents may be not even completed high school, and they are learning in environment that is all project-based learning 24x7, where they're always applying content, and they are also using technology to do this. And with this kind of applied learning—and the teachers have to spend time to align all their projects to the California Exit Exams—the students participate in project-based learning, and they have outscored their counterparts with the same students on the same campus in SLCs (Small Learning Communities) that are co-located on the campus. And essentially, 65% of sophomores passed the California Exit Exam the very first time they took it, compared to 34% of the sophomores who passed the California Exit Exam who were co-located on the same campus but were not doing 24x7 project-based learning where the teachers were aligning the projects to standards and then facilitating groups of students doing this. Now, at the same time that the students are engaged in project-based learning in a very rigorous core curriculum, they are also taking college courses at the local community college, which is another way to provide academic rigor. And at the same time they're doing that, if they are challenged in some of their courses, then the teachers will do learning labs with the students after class, use Title I funding—so it's after school—to do a form of remediation. But when they do the remediation, it's still in a project-based format, and it's also in a very cultural relevant way.

Schools need to ensure there is a community of practice for all teachers who are in that school. And that means that teachers have to have planning time. This is a very difficult thing to do in your school. This requires professional development to be embedded and integrated in the daily lives of teachers. This means, therefore, the schedule has to change so that teachers have time to plan their work together as a unit, whether it's by discipline, whether it's by course offerings, whether it's by grade. But time has to be built in the schedules for teachers to work together. And with this, you have to do a lot of facilitation at the beginning to ensure that teachers are using this time to provide critical feedback to each others' instructional practices in terms of their grading, any kind of interaction they have with the student.

For all students, especially those students who are at-risk, they must be able to see a pathway to their learning experience. They must see a beginning and to an end, and they must understand the relevance of what they are learning to be able to apply that to their future life—whether that's work, whether that's a career or whether that's college. So, many of the schools are actually doing this by providing theme-based instruction or curriculum or philosophy to the schools that are created, and a theme might be curricular, it might be a career, it might be pedagogical.

Many of the theme schools are career-focused. Very popular right now are STEM schools: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. This is not only a need that we have in United States for more students to have this type of degrees in order for us to be more competitive, but is also an area where we need more students who have been traditionally—people of color or first generation—to be able to excel in these areas.

How can schools help students prepare academically and non-academically for college? Schools can do this by using outside organizations. There's groups who will come into your school once a week to help students prepare for college. It will help students to fill out financial aid forms, college applications, understand the course requirements, understand the financial aid forms, or schools can actually do this through very formal programs such as student advisories. Student advisories are very predominant in schools as a way to personalize learning experiences. A lot of schools have started to use advisories to help students prepare for college, so they start thinking about this when they enter as freshman, and they create a student growth plan or individualized learning plan that helps them design their learning experience to prepare them for work and to prepare them for college. So, advisories are really good structure to help students plan for college, again academically and non-academically. If schools do not have the luxury of putting an advisory into the structure of their classes, they might be able to provide a junior or senior seminar where the bulk of that time is committed to helping students prepare for college.