



Presentation

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Engaging Students and Providing Skills Needed to Graduate through Rigorous and Relevant Instruction

April 2009

Topic: Dropout Prevention

Practice: Rigorous/Relevant Instruction

Highlights

- By redesigning high schools and adjusting teaching strategies, districts can provide students with relevant workforce skills without sacrificing academic excellence or the preparation needed for college admission.
- Districts can incorporate college preparatory core classes, professional or technical classes, and field-based learning opportunities within a portfolio of high schools.
- Districts can also offer high schools of choice to further meet the needs of a diverse student population.
- Professional development opportunities for teachers and staff are necessary in implementing such organizational and instructional changes.

Full Transcript

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Welcome to the overview on Engaging Students and Providing Skills Needed to Graduate through Rigorous and Relevant Instruction.

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Ms. Murphy, the superintendent of Elm View District, reviews data on students who are dropping out and notices a range of issues. She wonders how the district can better meet the needs of its diverse student body, engage students more effectively in learning, and provide recovery options for students who fall off-track to graduation.

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One promising strategy to help students connect school to the rest of their lives is the integration of career and workforce skills with a rigorous academic curriculum. Blending academic rigor and “real world” relevance is not a small task, but it can result in stronger schools and curricula.

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By redesigning high schools and adjusting teaching strategies, districts can provide students with relevant workforce skills without sacrificing academic excellence or the preparation needed for college admission.

With a greater connection to the world around the school, students can gain a stronger sense of civic involvement that can, in turn, increase their motivation and result in improved achievement.

Students can also develop stronger problem-solving and analytical reasoning skills by exploring practical applications of academic subjects.

When considering long-term life choices, students are able to take advantage of enhanced career and academic counseling.

These are only a few of the possible outcomes created by schools that use complementary academic and career relevance to create stronger curricula.

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Districts can incorporate college preparatory core classes, professional or technical classes, and field-based

learning opportunities within a portfolio of high schools. In this way, students then have a choice in the type of high school they attend and the programs they participate in. Districts need to ensure that rigorous academics and relevant career development are available in all high schools, regardless of individual schools' programs.

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Smaller schools such as magnet schools and career academies choose a single area of focus, offering specialized courses in that field and drawing connections in core academic subjects when appropriate. With several such schools in a district, students can choose a high school based on their interests.

For large comprehensive high schools, district can create "schools within a school." Combining this approach with strategies such as advisories and small learning communities creates a personalized learning environment.

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In some schools, each small learning community takes on a career focus, such as health, business, the environment, science, medicine, or art.

In core academic courses, teachers use examples based on real-world problems experienced in the chosen field. Students are continually reminded of how their coursework applies to their area of interest.

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This focus on the interconnection between the classroom and the real world allows for expanded interactions with local colleges and businesses. Districts and schools can offer career days, visits to local college campuses, and summer institutes or bridge programs, introducing students to college environments and the workforce.

Visits to local businesses allow students to gain knowledge about their field and get a sense of the world they are entering after graduation, regardless of whether they enter it after high school or after college.

Schools can help students prepare for the next phase of their lives through courses or workshops on admissions processes, college course requirements, financial aid, SAT preparation, and employability skills.

Local businesses can also partner with schools to offer internships, simulated job interviews, and even long-term employment opportunities.

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Professional development opportunities for teachers and staff are necessary in implementing such organizational and instructional changes. The district can offer workshops covering instructional practices relating curricular material content and cooperative-learning strategies. Instructional coaches or mentors can be brought in to work with teachers, and faculty can form collaborative learning communities where they can work together on instructional design and provide feedback to each other.

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In addition to refocusing schools on career skills and rigorous academics and providing professional development to help teachers effectively utilize this approach, the district also needs to ensure that students unlikely to graduate from a traditional path have options. These options might include transfer schools, diploma-granting schools designed to serve students who are significantly off-track to graduation, or transitional schools designed to provide education and services to a specialized segment of students, such as pregnant or parenting teens, for a set period of time. Some districts are also turning to online learning to meet individual student needs.

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By designing a multiple pathways approach, schools can couple career and technical courses with an existing rigorous academic curriculum to improve instruction in all courses. Districts can also offer high schools of choice to further meet the needs of a diverse student population. In this way, the district's schools can better prepare all students for what lies after graduation.

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Elm View plans to develop a range of options to accelerate learning and credit accumulation while still providing rigorous and relevant instruction. After looking at other district models, Ms. Murphy wants to design a portfolio of high schools, which would allow students to choose a high school based on their individual needs and interests. She knows that this may require redesigning or replacing ineffective schools that have especially high dropout rates, but she is convinced that the changes will result in a stronger education for her district's students.

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To learn more about Engaging Students and Providing Skills Needed to Graduate through Rigorous and Relevant Instruction, please explore the additional materials on the Doing What Works Website.