Curriculum Leadership: Curriculum for the At-Risk Student

Cynthia Lawry Berkins
PhD Student in Educational Leadership
The Whitlowe R. Green College of Education
Prairie View A&M University
Prairie View, Texas
Geology Instructor
Blinn College
Bryan, Texas

William Allan Kritsonis, PhD
Professor and Faculty Mentor
PhD Program in Educational Leadership
The Whitlowe R. Green College of Education
Prairie View A&M University
Member of the Texas A&M University System
Visiting Lecturer (2005)
Oxford Round Table
University of Oxford, Oxford, England
Distinguished Alumnus (2004)
College of Education and Professional Studies
Central Washington University

ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, between 347,000 and 544,000 10th- through 12th-grade students left school each year without successfully completing a high school program Status dropout rates represent the proportion of young people ages 16 through 24 who are out of school and who have not earned a high school credential. Status rates are higher than event rates because they include all dropouts in this age range, regardless of when they last attended school. (NCES, 2002).

The purpose of this article is to examine the reasons why students drop out and possible solutions. Findings suggest that students from career academies have higher academic achievement upon leaving high school, less need for remediation in English at the university, and a 4 percentage-point increase in graduation from the university than students who are not from academies (Naylor, 2004).

Introduction

Educational leaders are faced with the daunting task of resolving critical issues in education everyday such as low budgets, accountability, student diversity, teenage pregnancy, exist exams, and the dropout rate. Over the last decade, between 347,000 and 544,000 10th through 12th grade students left school each year without successfully completing a high school program. Status dropout rates represent the proportion of young people ages 16 through 24 who are out of school and who have not earned a high school credential. Status rates are higher than event rates because they include all dropouts in this age range, regardless of when they last attended school (NCES, 2002).

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to examine the reasons why students drop out and possible solutions. Willis (1986) discusses the following correlates of educational risk: family structure and poverty, race and ethnicity, language, residence, economic displacement, and gender. Indicators of educational risk, according to Willis, are student attendance, school continuation rates, academic performance, involvement in school activities, student behavior, attitudes toward school, need for employment, nature of family support, involvement in out-of-school activities, and involvement with the juvenile justice system.

This does not mean that dropping out is just a minority or urban problem; however it has been found that since 1970 the dropout rate for blacks has decreased nationally, whereas that for whites has edged up steadily, Brown (1985) prefers to categorize high risk youth as either alienated ("uninterested in or dissatisfied with the values represented by school and work" and lacking in "motivation to succeed in expected ways" (p. 9), disadvantaged and alienated, or simply disadvantaged youths. In this article, we will attempt to discuss the following questions to aid leaders' curriculum selection to reduce the drop rate:

1. What is the impact of Career Technical education on high school dropout rate?
2. What Career Technical education programs influence student success in high school completion?
3. What is the effect of Career Technical education on General Track students in regards to Grade Point Averages , Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) and high school completion?

Statistics

In October 2000, some 3.8 million young adults were not enrolled in a high school program and had not completed high school. These youths accounted for 10.9 percent of the 34.6 million 16 through 24 year-olds in the United States in 2000. As noted with event rates, status rates declined from the early 1970s into the late 1980s, but since then have remained stable (NCES,2002). The status dropout rate for Whites in 2000 remained lower than the rate for Blacks, but over the past three decades, the difference between the rates for Whites and Blacks has narrowed. However, this narrowing of the gap occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. Since 1990, the gap has remained fairly constant. In addition, Hispanic young adults in the United States continued to have a relatively high status dropout rate when compared to Asian/Pacific Islanders, Whites, or Blacks (NCES, 2002).

In 2000, the status dropout rate for Asian/Pacific Islander young adults was lower than for young adults from all other racial/ethnic groups. The status rate for Asian/Pacific Islanders was 3.8 percent compared with 27.8 percent for Hispanics, 13.1 percent for Blacks, and 6.9 percent for Whites (NCES, 2002). In 2000, 44.2 percent of Hispanic young adults born outside of the United States were high school dropouts. Hispanic young adults born within the United States were much less likely to be dropouts. However, when looking at just those young adults born within the United States, Hispanic youths were still more likely to be dropouts than other young adults (NCES, 2002).

Weber (2000) recommends the following to keep student in school: A more systematic and intensive efforts to identify and assist potential dropouts prior to and at entry into vocational programs; program activities to enhance school climate and reduce absenteeism, class-cutting, and drug and alcohol abuse; systematic awareness and educational activities directed toward enhancing parents' involvement in program planning and support; more extensive career exploration and related career education experiences, particularly prior to and at the transition into high school; improvement of transitions through a vocational program to direct dropout-prone students to job-specific skill training courses; review and evaluation of work study experiences for dropout-prone students to ensure that they involve concrete objectives and program experiences, clear linkages with students' overall school programs, and built-in evaluation activities; review of rules governing vocational program entry to ensure student access to and participation in vocational and work study programs with firm ties to overall school plans and goals; activities to increase dropout-prone student participation in the vocational program and enhance linkages between students' vocational experiences and their other school-related experiences and activities (Weber 2000).

In addition, several researchers have addressed the question about the drop issues saying that data are drawn from applicant and student records at a comprehensive, urban university for all individuals originating from a single district's high schools. The findings

suggest that students from career academies have higher academic achievement upon leaving high school, less need for remediation in English at the university, and a 4 percentage-point increase in graduation from the university than students who are not from academies (Naylor, 2004).   These findings suggest that school-to-work programs could facilitate positive outcomes in postsecondary education. However, the continued high rates of remediation and the low rates of graduation, even for students from career academics, suggest that their influence might not be enough to ensure success in postsecondary education. This analysis therefore suggests that further research should be done to identify program components that increase postsecondary education and determine how these components can be institutionalized and built on in subsequent reforms.

Longitudinal data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to investigate whether the wage trajectories of male high school dropouts are affected by the acquisition of the General Educational Development (GED) credential, by postsecondary education, and by training. The authors show that acquisition of the GED results in wage increases for dropouts who left school with weak skills, but not for dropouts who left high school with stronger skills. College and training provided by employers are associated with higher wages for male dropouts.

Integrating academic and career tech curriculum is one of the primary objectives of the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act (1998 reauthorization) and a guiding principle of the School to Work Opportunities Act. It has proven to be an invaluable approach to teaching, and educators across the nation have experienced firsthand how the application of interdisciplinary and team teaching enhances student achievement. Yet, with all of these positives, there are still stumbling blocks in the process. How to make it work?

Looking to History for a Solution

Schools in the first decade of the 20th century largely held to the elements of a so-called liberal education. Preparation for college was the intended outcome-an outcome serving fewer than 10 percent of the population. Liberal education was not concerned with making efficient producers, although it did indirectly contribute to that end; however, it concerned itself with consuming (Snedden, 1910). At the same time, opportunities to work were very attractive to those youth who saw little value in further schooling. For those who chose to leave school for the workforce-and the numbers were large-there had been little or no preparation for work. Fewer than 10 percent of the 17year-olds received a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Labor 1968). By modern standards, 90 percent of the population were high school dropouts or had never attended high school. Typically, youth left the public schools by the age of fourteen, and less than half of these completed the sixth grade. School attendance laws for persons older than fourteen were just beginning to emerge. Schools did not adequately serve the needs of youth. The Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education (1914) stressed how public education was falling short. The equality of opportunity in the system of education was not afforded to the mass of children. Although the schools were freely open to every

child, the aims and purposes of the schools were such that a majority of the children were unable to take advantage of schooling beyond a certain grade, and hence did not secure, at public expense, a preparation for their work in life. The Commission held that the schools were planned for only the few who were preparing for college rather than the large number who would go into industry. Advocates of vocational education in the public schools believed that vocational education would make the schools more democratic. "The American school will truly become democratic," said Prosser, "when we learn to train all kinds of men, in all kinds of ways, for all kinds of things" (1913, p. 406). Establishing vocational training as an alternative for those who were leaving schools at 14 years of age would, it was hoped, vastly extend general education, provide a reason for the continued school attendance of more persons fourteen years of age and older, and democratize education.

Several additional benefits were expected as vocational education became a part of the system of public education. Not only would schools be meaningful for more students, but education for employment would help extend the years of education, thus increasing the level of citizenship of those persons. Vocational education would also make for greater efficiency in production and increase the wage-earning of youth-both boys and girls-by helping them move from noneducative occupations as unskilled laborers to positions as skilled workers sought after by industry. Similarly, training in the scientific principles of farming and the household occupations would contribute to greater efficiency in farming and would strengthen the American home (Marshall 1907). It was also believed that vocational training was needed for its indirect but positive effect on the aims and methods of general education (Commission on National Aid 1914). Accordingly, vocational education would develop better teaching processes through which children who did not respond to book instruction might be reached and education through learning by doing. It would also introduce to the educational system the aim of utility, which would take a place in dignity at the side of culture, and would connect education with life by making it purposeful and useful.

Researchers believe that responses to the problems of secondary school education must be predicated on reliable information on student participation in mathematics, science, computer science, vocational education, and general education. This analysis summarized 2004-2005 high school and beyond student transcript data to identify course-taking patterns relative to each of the above subject areas. Moreover, the responses to the First Follow-up Survey were used to identify characteristics of students exhibiting various course-taking patterns. Four distinct course-taking patterns were identified for science and mathematics students, and four others were identified for vocational education students. Student characteristics considered were socio-demographic attributes, school performance and experiences, and postsecondary plans and aspirations. Findings reported include the following:

(1) less than 10 percent of the students had concentrated in mathematics or science in high school;
(2) course-taking patterns in all subject areas were strongly related to socioeconomic status and to type of school attended;
(3) grade averages and cognitive test scores differed significantly across the course-taking patterns of each subject area; and

(4) In general, the immediate post-graduation plans of students were not related to course-taking patterns. (MNS)

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, there are activities designed for the educational leader facing the 21st century. They include an integrated vocational and technical educational training delivery system, reviewing inter-agency cooperation, institutional linkages, and an implementation plan.

These precedents give credibility to this researcher's Master Plan for the delivery of vocational and technical education in Texas, which was adopted by the State Board of Education (SBOE). The master plan details goals and strategies to assist in the development of a skilled and educated work force in Texas as the state enters the 21st century. As part of their mandated annual review processes, the SBOE and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board developed an update of the Master Plan. Following a brief foreword reviewing changes introduced in the update, part 1 of this three-part report addresses goals for elementary and secondary education, examining student performance standards, curriculum, attracting and retaining teachers, organization and management, finance, parental and community involvement, instructional innovation, and communications. Part 1 also includes detailed charts presenting the implementation plan for each area reviewed. Part 2 presents the master plan for higher education, reviewing the mission of higher education, the role of state government, state communications between public education institutions and the private sector, employer needs, student education and training needs, faculty and staff needs, community needs, and educational resources.

Providing leaders with the necessary tools to develop student with the best education and preparation is vital. Research of curriculum design is a daunting chore and appears obsolete when viewing inter urban school district that show diminishing vocational education academic track for inter urban youths. Educational leaders must take a look at reestablishing what is needed to save the urban at risk student Vocational education.

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