



Indicator: The school provides all students with opportunities to learn through nontraditional education settings (e.g., virtual courses, dual enrollment, service learning, work-based internships). (5133)

Explanation: The evidence review suggests that high performing schools meet the needs of every student with a wide offering of both traditional and nontraditional education options. Setting high expectations includes all students having choices to participate in a wide range of options. These options include opportunities for virtual, technology based learning. In addition, high performing as well as at risk students benefit from dual enrollment options. For the at risk learner, simultaneous enrollment in both academic and occupational, or skills based classes, can actually increase their interest in post-secondary opportunities. For the high achieving student, schools can provide dual access to required high school courses as well as classes that result in college credits. Enrichment opportunities invite students to take academic risks through the investigation of a domain which does not reside within the traditional curricula. Structured internships provide students chances to apply their learning in a real world setting.

Questions: How will the school ensure that curricula offerings meet the needs of every student with a wide selection of both traditional and nontraditional education options? How will the school ensure that all teachers promote a culture of achievement that sets high expectations for student participation in enrichment offerings? How will the school offer and manage dual enrollment opportunities for at risk students? How will the school offer and manage dual enrollment options for high achieving students? What processes will the school use to design, implement and monitor student service learning projects? What training will the school provide to teachers to equip them to arrange, oversee and/or facilitate service learning? What processes will the school use to implement and manage a comprehensive menu of enrichment offerings? How will the school ensure that all teachers promote a culture of achievement that sets high expectations for student participation in internships? What processes will the school utilize to match students to viable internships?

As student engagement becomes a growing target in improving academic outcomes and graduation rates, many different approaches to learning experiences have emerged. These different approaches share many similarities – more applied thinking and learning, real-life or hands-on experiences, and strong relationships with adults at school. However, they also have developed into distinct models with strong research bases. Three of these models are: career academies, dual-enrollment programs, and service-learning opportunities. All three have proven to be especially beneficial to students at risk of disengagement and dropping out of school. Each of these models is detailed below.

Career Academies

Defined as small learning communities or “schools within schools,” career academies are typically subsections of a larger high school, where clusters of students work with a team of teachers around a common vocational theme. Students receive a full college-preparatory academic curriculum, supplemented by vocational coursework and first-hand experiences in fields such as healthcare, communications, technology, and more. Partnerships with local employers are critical for the success of career academies, as business owners and employees from the community serve as

guest speakers, mentors, internship providers, and field trip sites for students (Stern, et al., 2010).

Both Kemple and Snipes (2000) and Stern, et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of interpersonal supports for students as they navigate these real-world experiences. Through the programming and coursework of the career academy, students begin to learn how to apply their learning to real scenarios and what it takes to succeed in their field of study. It is critical for students to receive college and career counseling and to have positive relationships with adults within the academy as they make sense of their vocational experiences.

Because students are not bound to pursue their academy's field of study or work, general academic rigor and opportunity is equally as important as the vocational experiences. Academy coursework is designed to promote college readiness and ensure that students earn the credits they need to graduate and get accepted into college. Kemple and Snipes (2000) found that it was important for students to be grouped heterogeneously in these academies so that students, especially those at risk of dropping out, could learn with and from their peers of different achievement levels. Both sets of authors have seen quite positive outcomes for this type of model; they found that career academy students, as compared to similar peers, had higher rates of on-time graduation, lower rates of dropout, higher rates of credit attainment, attendance, and engagement within school (Kemple and Snipes, 2000; Stern, et al., 2010).

Dual Enrollment

Dual-enrollment programs allow high school students to take college courses, typically in partnership with a local community college, as part of their daily course schedule. Dual-enrollment courses are most often taught at the college by professors, giving high school students a true sense of what it feels like to be in college and what is necessary to succeed there. (Bailey, et al., 2002). Other models of dual-enrollment have teachers at the high school become adjuncts at the local college and teach the college courses on the high school campus (Hughes, 2010). These experiences provide students with more rigorous or discipline-focused course options that may not be available at their high schools, especially for students interested in vocational or technical programming (Bailey, et al., 2002).

Dual-enrollment programs differ from Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, which offer college-level material and an opportunity to potentially earn college credits, based on an end-of-year examination and the acceptance of those credits by the college in which they enroll. Dual enrollment courses are actual college courses, and students automatically earn the college credits when they complete and pass the course (Hughes, 2010). While these opportunities were historically tracked – with high achieving students taking college-level coursework and lower-achieving students taking vocational coursework – they are now encouraged for students of all achievement levels as a way to motivate students to stay in school and pursue higher education (Bailey, et al., 2002).

In order for students to succeed in a dual-enrollment program, it is ideal for high school staff to prepare students prior to the start of this coursework. Orienting students to what it takes to do well in a college class makes the transition to this program and eventual postsecondary enrollment much smoother (Hughes, 2010). As most dual-enrollment programs are free of charge to students, it is critical for them to be supported and prepared, so that they can succeed in accumulating college credits at no cost. Not only does this provide motivation for students, but it can eventually lesson college costs down the road (Bailey, et al., 2002).

Service Learning

While there is no universal definition for service learning, there is consensus in how it differs from traditional community service. Service learning is planned with purpose in order to both address a pressing and meaningful community need and to directly link to the academic curricula being taught. It is an especially engaging approach for students, as they typically have a significant amount of input and decision-making power in the project (Scales, et al., 2006; Bridgeland, et al., 2008; Dymon, et al., 2007).

However, one of the most notable features of service learning is the built-in reflection component. True service learning invites students to think critically about the issue they are addressing and the experiences they had providing service to the community (Skinner & Chapman, 1999). Scales, et al. (2006) write that:

Without strong opportunities for reflection on the experience, learners will tend to assimilate the experience into their existing models of meaning. But with the structured opportunity to reflect, describe, discuss, and construct meaning from the experience, learners have the potential to develop more complex understandings and more comprehensive intellectual functioning (p. 42).

Dymon, et al. (2007) write that a service learning project should include the following steps: planning, action, reflection, celebration, and evaluation. This framework highlights how the process of learning must be as prominent as the provision of services (Billig, 2000). Students not only get to apply their academic skills and concepts to real-world problems, but they also get to experience those concepts in a hands-on way. Both of these aspects help students truly comprehend the academic material in a memorable and meaningful way (Scales, et al., 2006; Bridgeland, et al., 2008).

Service learning can be implemented within schools in a variety of ways – as a whole-school model, as a tailored course, within a core class, or as a culminating project (Skinner & Chapman, 1999; Dymon, et al., 2007; Bridgeland, et al., 2008). No matter how it is designed, the experience should involve opportunities to not only connect with the community, but also to forge positive relationships with teachers and peers (Billig, 2000; Bridgeland, et al., 2008). Dymon, et al. (2007) highlight service learning as a means of inclusion for students with special needs, showing how the service experience allowed for better relationships between students with and without disabilities. Other benefits included improved school attendance, greater interest in learning, increased motivation towards school, more openness to diversity, and lower rates of dropout and risky behaviors (Bridgeland, et al., 2008; Billig, 2000). Scales, et al. (2006) found that students who were disengaged from school at the start of a service learning program were, in the end, the ones most likely to benefit and reap the positive benefits of the experience.

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