

Seventh Grade Students' Perceptions of Career Awareness and Exploration Activities in Arizona Schools: Three-Year Trends and 1999 Results

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Businesses, educators, and community members throughout Arizona have participated in developing a system of School To Work (STW) opportunities for students during the past four years. In accordance with the STW Opportunities Act of 1994, the state system is comprised of partnerships that support School-Based Learning, Work-Based Learning, and activities that connect the two. Arizona's STW system is supported by a grant from the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education and administered through the School To Work Division of the Office of Workforce Development Policy under the auspices of the Arizona Department of Commerce.

An annual survey of seventh grade students is one component of the statewide evaluation plan designed by the Morrison Institute for Public Policy. Seventh grade is a benchmark year for students' attitudes toward and participation in career activities according to the STW Opportunities Act.

This briefing paper presents results of the third administration of the seventh grade survey. Results are compared to data collected in 1997 and 1998.

Survey Design and Methodology: An Overview

The student survey is used to measure systemic change over time in the regional STW partnerships. It is posited that as the STW system is developed statewide, students' ability to define career interests will improve, participation in career-related activities will grow and adult mentoring will increase.

In 1999 the seventh grade survey was used in the newly formed Maricopa County STW partnerships to determine if there is a difference between participating students and non-participating students. It is posited that STW participation will make a difference in student indicators.

The survey, designed by a cadre of evaluators from each of the state-funded regional STW partnerships, was

designed to:

- 1) Measure student participation in career awareness and exploration activities appropriate for their grade level,
- 2) assess the overall impact of such activities,
- 3) explore the extent of adult mentoring in students' lives,
- 4) gauge student interest in high school classes that teach job skills, and
- 5) examine student opinions regarding the role of gender in career selection.

Each state-funded STW partnership is responsible for collecting survey data on a sample of schools and students in their partnership. The survey is administered to general studies classrooms in randomly selected schools in regional partnerships each spring. General studies classes rather than classes with a vocational or STW emphasis are surveyed in order to avoid biasing the results. Surveys were received from 2,000 students in 1997, 1,020 students in 1998 and 1,078 students in 1999. Survey results are representative of student enrollment by gender and region.

In Maricopa County students from classrooms in schools participating in a STW partnership were compared with students in the same school who did not participate. There were 294 participants and 296 non-participating students compared.

Summary of Results from Regional Partnerships

Participation in Career-Related Activities

Students reported their level of participation in eight career awareness and exploration activities in all three years. The results, summarized in Table 3, suggest student participation increased significantly in five areas from spring 1997 to spring 1999. More students used a computer to learn about jobs (+7.6%), toured their own



school to see people doing different jobs (+6.2%), attended career fairs (+6.0%), worked on a project in class that helped with career understanding (+5.8%), or took a career inventory (+5.7%). On average, students participated in 5.34 activities in 1999 compared to 5.09 in 1997, a statistically significant change. Four activities have been reported by more than half of all students across the three-year period: class projects, field trips, school speakers, and job shadowing.

Few changes were seen between 1998 and 1999, however. The relative share of students using career inventories and computers decreased significantly. Further, the mean number of activities per student decreased from 5.59 in 1998 to 5.34 in 1999.

Impact of Participation

Students were asked what job or career they wanted in the future. Although there has been a slight upward trend in the share of students who have at least some idea about their career, the increase is not statistically significant. The share of students who know for sure have some ideas has risen from 85.0% in 1997 to 86.8% in 1999. Similarly, slight, but not statistically significant, changes have occurred in the share of students who believe that STW activities have helped them think about careers (from 61.2% in 1997 to 63.3% in 1999). See Table 3. When analyzed by gender, more girls report having an idea of their career interests than do boys. This finding was also true in 1997.

As in previous years, a relationship between the number of STW activities that students participate in and their ability to define a career interest is shown in Table 1. The share rises from 68% for students with one activity to 92% for students with 6 or more activities.

Table 1
Number of Activities and Career Definition
Arizona STW Seventh Grade-Spring 1999

Number of Activities	Share of Students Able to Identify a Career Interest
0-1	68.4%
2-3	79.3%
4-5	85.9%
6-7	92.1%
8+	91.1%

Source: Regional Partnerships

Adult Influences on Students Career Interests

The survey asks students to report on the role of adults in helping them to identify their career interests (see Table 3). Over the three-year period significantly more students report discussing topics such as homework, life and career interests with an adult. The share of students who spoke with someone at school remained relatively constant, however. Table 2, below, shows that nearly half of students (44.3%) report talking to a teacher in 1999. While less than one fourth (21.4%) of students spoke to a counselor, this nonetheless represents a 5% increase over 1997.

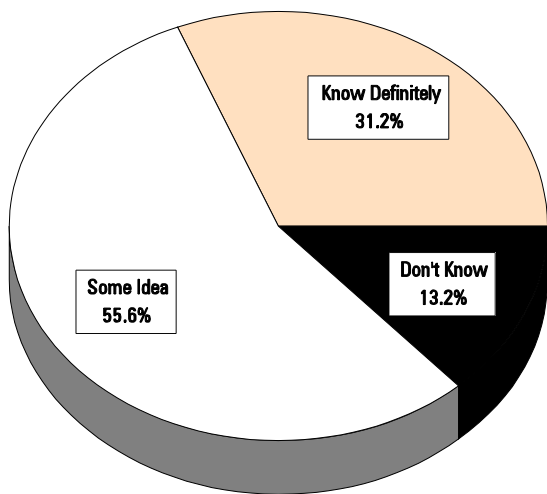
Table 2
Mentoring Adults
Arizona STW Seventh Grade

Adult mentor	% Students		
	1997	1998	1999
Other adult	56.8%	61.7%	58.1%
Teacher	45.3%	37.9%	44.3%
Counselor	16.4%	17.8%	21.4%
Principal	9.7%	4.1%	9.1%

Source: Regional Partnerships

The significance of mentoring adults is evident. The share of students unsure of their career interests drops from 26% to 10% if students talk to someone at school. Similarly, fewer students are unsure of their career interests if they talk to any adult. The share drops from 29.4% to 9.8%. This finding was also true in the previous year.

Figure 1
Student's Career Goal Definition
Arizona STW 7th Grade—1998



Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Spring 1999 data.

Table 3

**Arizona STW Seventh Grade Regional Partnership Survey Results:
Participation in Career Awareness and Exploration Activities**

Activity (ranked by 1999 % Yes responses)	1997	1998	1999	Significant Differences	
				1998-99	1997-99
Have people ever come to your school to talk to you about the work they do?	83.2%	81.5%	84.3%	-	-
Have you ever worked on a project in class that helped you understand jobs?	63.7%	68.3%	69.5%	-	+5.8
Have you ever taken a field trip to a workplace to see people doing different jobs?	63.3%	65.2%	63.8%	-	-
Have you ever job shadowed?	60.2%	58.5%	56.3%	-	-
Have you ever used a computer at school to learn about or see people doing different jobs?	36.1%	55.3%	43.7%	-11.6	+7.6
Have you ever taken a tour of your own school in order to see people doing different jobs?	31.0%	35.0%	37.2%	-	+6.2
Have you ever taken a Career Inventory or other test to help you decide what kind of careers or jobs you might be good at?	30.2%	46.4%	35.9%	-10.5	+5.7
Have you ever gone to a Career Fair?	23.3%	30.7%	29.3%	-	+6.0
Overall impact of participation					
Have any of the activities listed on this survey like Career Fairs, guest speakers, or talking with someone made you think about choosing a career?	61.2%	62.4%	63.3%	-	-
Do you know what job or career you want in the future? (Yes, I know for sure or Kind of- I have some ideas)	85.0%	86.5%	86.8%	-	-
Adult Mentors					
Not counting someone in your family, has an adult ever talked with you about things like your homework, life, and career interests?	66.5%	68.8%	70.3%	-	+3.8
Has anyone from school talked to you individually about your career or job interests?	43.6%	43.1%	45.2%	-	-

High School Plans

Students were asked: Do you plan to take classes in high school that teach job skills? Slightly more than half of the students said that they plan to take these classes in high school. In 1998 there were significantly fewer students who felt that they would take a class in high school. However, the results for 1999 are nearly identical to the first year at 52.2%.

The majority of students agree that all jobs are equally good for both men and women. (65% in 1997, 68% in 1998, and 65% in 1999).

Summary of Results from Maricopa Partnerships

Participating versus Non-Participating Students

A separate study conducted in 1999 for partnerships in Maricopa County sought to answer the question: Do School To Work students differ from their peers? Participating and non-participating seventh grade students in the same school were compared.

Significant differences were apparent between the two groups in participation and adult mentorship. Students who are involved in a STW program more often report participation in:

- ◆ career fairs,
- ◆ computer assisted career exploration,
- ◆ career guest speakers at school,
- ◆ career inventories, and
- ◆ class projects related to careers.

Further, STW students more often report talking to someone from school about their careers or talking to any adult about careers.

Conclusions

Arizona students were polled in 1997, 1998, and again in 1999 to determine the extent of their participation in career awareness and exploration activities, the impact that the activities have had, and how they were delivered. The survey results provide evidence of systemic change in the regional STW partnerships. Further, the data suggest that the way career awareness activities are delivered makes a difference in their effectiveness. The comparative survey conducted in 1999 supports the contention that STW students differ from their classmates and that STW makes a difference for students.

The regional analysis compared randomly selected classrooms over three years. Changes between the baseline year 1997 and 1999 were measured in participation metrics and the role of adult mentors. The relative share of students who have at least some idea of their career interests has been consistently high (86.8%).

The mean number of STW activities per pupil has increased significantly and the share of students participating in five types of activities has risen. One of the key findings that have been supported over the three-year period is that students who participate in a variety of activities are better able to identify their career interests.

The role of adult mentors has also intensified. The share of students who talked to adults about careers increased significantly between 1997 and 1999. The share of students who discussed careers with a counselor has also increased significantly. Students who talk to an adult, either at school or outside of school, are better able to identify a career interest.

Opportunities for future growth and implications for STW partnerships include the following:

- ◆ Encourage student participation in a variety of STW activities. Survey results show that the number of activities is directly related to the ability to define a career interest. Job shadowing and career related field trips are reported by more than half of the students but have not increased over the baseline year.
- ◆ Promote the use of mentoring adults to help further career exploration. Survey results show that adult mentoring increases students ability to define a career

interest. While the share of students who spoke to an adult increased significantly, the share of students who spoke to someone at school increased only slightly. Further, more than half of the students did not talk to *anyone* at school about their career interests.

There is increasing evidence that STW makes a difference for students. The comparative study found that STW students were exposed to a wider variety of STW activities, found activities to be more helpful, and were more likely to have talked to an adult or someone at school about their career choices.

The three-year study reflects the systemic changes that have occurred since the inception of the STW partnerships. This information, in concert with outcomes from individual programs, promotes efforts to sustain career awareness through school and business partnerships.



For additional information about
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School To Work is a division of the Arizona Department of
Commerce, Office of Workforce Development Policy.

The primary author of this briefing paper was Judy Vandegrift, who passed away in September 1999. It was edited posthumously.
