

Academic and Career Planning 2021-22 Evaluation Report Executive Summary

for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Academic and Career Planning (ACP) is intended to equip students in grades 6-12 with the tools necessary to make informed, career-based choices about post-secondary education and career readiness. As part of its evaluation of ACP, WEC conducted case studies in two large, multi-high school districts to examine equitable participation in “high leverage” ACP-related activities. WEC also analyzed school and student implementation and outcomes data. WEC’s findings and recommendations are as follows.



01 IMPLEMENTATION LEVELS OF ACP COMPONENTS

Based on data from the 2020-21 school year, implementation levels of some ACP/career readiness components increased, despite COVID-19 challenges.

Recommendation: Continue to monitor implementation trends and investigate possible reasons for increases in participation in some activities despite COVID-19 challenges.



02 GAPS IN PARTICIPATION

In some cases, gaps in key activities based on race/ethnicity, special education status, economic status, and English learner status have narrowed slightly; in other cases, they have increased.

Recommendation #1: Schools/districts should begin/continue to track disaggregated participation data.

Recommendation #2: DPI should continue/increase its data support and professional learning offerings around equity in ACP and career readiness on the state, regional, and local levels.



03 INCONSISTENT IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN DISTRICTS

ACP implementation at large case-study districts was inconsistent across schools, and district and school perspectives sometimes diverged markedly. Building and maintaining an all-school (and all-district) culture of ACP is necessary for success.

Recommendation #1: Multi-school districts should strive for a clearly defined and communicated, well-supported approach to ACP and career readiness that allows for contextual differences while still providing equitable opportunities and support for all students matched to their interests and needs.

Recommendation #2: Districts should consider ways to support communication efforts between schools and facilitate the transition between 8th and 9th grade to maintain momentum in career readiness activities from middle to high school.



04

THE PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

In addition to negative impacts on student (and staff) mental health, the past two years have seen an increase in student reports of hopelessness and lack of interest in their future.

Recommendation #1: In addition to increasing mental health supports overall, finding means to support safe and supportive adult/student relationships is now more important than ever.

Recommendation #2: When faced with the belief that ACP is “just one more thing that we have no time for,” working to shift to a philosophy of viewing student preparation for life as the rationale for everything that schools do addresses this barrier. Stimulating student interest by prioritizing “real-life,” hands-on, and interactive activities and a sense of purpose can increase student engagement.

Recommendation #3: Research suggests that the belief among young people that they will have no future can be countered by building resilience, self-efficacy, and agency.



05

KEY PARTICIPATION BARRIER

Student self-doubt in their abilities was a primary barrier to participation. Students consistently reported that “encouragement” from teachers and other staff to apply to, take on, and persist in activities such as AP classes, dual enrollment, and work-based learning can address this barrier.

Recommendation #1: The ACP and career readiness process should be student-centered and build upon the foundation of a positive relationship with an adult advisor.

Recommendation #2: Misperceptions and outdated beliefs about whom an activity “is intended for” among students, staff, and others need to be actively combated.

Recommendation #3: All staff need to be of the mind that all students can succeed. Training to help support inclusive mindsets as well as intentional efforts to diversify school staff to reflect student demographics will address equity.

Recommendation #4: Equity needs to be central to all ACP and career readiness efforts, including data collection and analysis related to participation in career readiness activities, recognizing and addressing gaps, and identifying and removing barriers to access and participation.



06

INCREASE IN SOME OUTCOMES

Longitudinal analysis continues to show evidence of an associated positive change in four-year high school completion rates and an associated negative change in ACT scores. Preliminary evidence exists of a positive change in post-secondary enrollment rates associated with ACP.

Recommendation: Continue to track ACP outcomes longitudinally to further understand any impacts of the program during the COVID-19 pandemic and forward.

View full report: https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/acp/pdf/2022_10_WEC_ACP_2022_Annual_Report.pdf