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Career Exploration for At-Risk Youth

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Capstone for Bachelor of Arts in Human Development and Family Studies

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Too often disadvantaged students do not receive career development because the focus is placed on keeping them from dropping out. These students are simply encouraged to complete high school with little to no direction regarding what to do after high school and their futures. While implementing prevention programs to decrease the dropout rate is important, it is also essential to educate students about vocational and careers to prepare them for life after high school. To accomplish this, I will create a 3-day session that will be delivered to the Credit Recovery class at Greenfield High School to promote career awareness and encourage occupational exploration.

Need Statement

Schools across the United States have been implementing dropout prevention programs to increase high school graduation among adolescents (Picciano, Seaman, Shea, and Swan, 2012). Online credit recovery programs are programs designed to help students repeat a course they previously failed and complete it in a timely manner, have become popular among schools (Watson and Gemin, 2008). Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) also stated that online credit recovery programs are designed to expand high-quality educational opportunity and help meet the needs of diverse students. While it is convenient for students to redo a class they previously failed online and at their own pace, it should be noted that these same students continue to fail academically (Jones, 2011). Because of these reasons, students need career development guidance as early as they enter high school so that they can understand the link between their performance during their high school years and impact it has on their educational path after they graduate (Somers & Pilliawsky, 2009). The at-risk youth with whom I am working with at

Greenfield High School are a group of students who often need intervention because they are failing academically and have other factors like low socioeconomic status that may contribute to them dropping out. Early implementation of career development is essential for At-Risk youth because they will become aware of the issues they will face if they do become a dropout. Some of which are getting involved in crime, having economic problems, and having fewer job opportunities (Dupere, Dion, Leventhal, Archamgault, Crosnoe, and Janosz, 2018).

High school dropouts are more likely to be incarcerated, living in poverty, and unemployed when compared to their peers who graduated (Jones, 2011). Some At-Risk youth do not immediately understand the importance of completing a high school education or the negative impact it can have on their lives. In his study Phillip (2010), reported that there was a positive relationship between delinquency, violent felonies and school dropout rates.

Not all jobs require education after high school, but having that extra education opens doors to more career choices, bigger opportunities, and higher pay. According to Driscoll (2015), failing to obtain a high school diploma results in loss of income potential. Having skills and education is essential to be successful in life, and those that do not are more than likely to live in poverty or be unemployed. According to Hahn, Knopg, Wilson, Truman, Milstein, and Johnson (2015), 16% of students that drop out of high school are unemployed, and 32% of them are living below poverty. Also, people who work full time through the year earn approximately 78% of wages earned by workers who have obtained a high school diploma or GED. (Dupere et al., 2018). People who graduate high school and then go on to get training or vocation will have more career choices than someone who did not.

At-risk youth who will make the transition to full-time employment directly from high school are in great need of direction. Research shows that At-Risk students are engaged in less

career development activities and are the group of students who receive less guidance both at school and home regarding career (Somers & Pilliawsky, 2009). Career development is important for all youth, even more so for At-Risk students, who may feel directionless or unmotivated. Having career exploration will give students a better understanding of the education and skills they will need to meet their career goals and plan their future. In order to provide students with mentoring, I will be conducting a three-day lesson that targets exploration on different careers to juniors that are enrolled in a credit recovery class at Greenfield High School.

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Literature Review

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Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Erikson has been the most influential on exploring identity and explains how identity formation is a key element for development in adolescence. He called the adolescent stage of his theory Identity vs. Role Confusion because it is the time where adolescents are making important commitments like choosing careers. Expanding on Erikson identity theory, Marcia created his Identity Status Theory where he proposed that depending on the exploration and commitment done by adolescents, their identity is then classified into one of four identity statuses (Klimstra, Hale III, Raaijmakers, Branje and Meeus, 2010).   The four processes Marcia identifies as what adolescents face when they are experiencing identity crises are: Foreclosure, where adolescents accept what others want them to be. Diffusion, when adolescents struggle in deciding about their future and often leads to an identity crisis. Moratorium is the process of exploration and experimenting. Finally, achievement is the state of developing one's identity and making commitments (Kroger and Marcia, 2011). This stage of development is a vulnerable state, specifically for adolescents who are At-Risk and need a good sense of identity to pursue a career

or need a vocational direction. As an educator, one needs to be able and meet these students'

need to explore their identity (Klimstra et al., 2010). According to Negru-Subtirica and Pop

(2016), adolescents who have strong exploration in career planning are more likely to perform

better academically in school and have positive views of future careers. In contrast, the lack of

these type of experiences for At-Risk youth eventually leads them to feel confusion about their

identity and exploration can become stressful (Somers & Pilliawsky, 2009). Early intervention

of career exploration and identity development is essential for these adolescents because it will

better prepare them for their future after they graduate. Also, by having initial guidance may be

able to see an increase in school performance. Lever, Sander, Lombardo, Randall, Axelrod,

Rubenstein, and Weist (2004), also mentioned how addressing the needs of At-Risk youth

through career preparation, and character development can prevent dropouts.

My Own Experience

Most students enrolled in the Credit Recovery class have not been exposed to any career

exploration before. Keeping in mind that because students are not fully developed at this age and

lack reasoning skills, many do not understand the importance of completed high school and

getting a career, and the impact this will have on their future. The purpose of this project is to

encourage students that are experiencing academic difficulties an opportunity to explore different

careers and help them understand how dropping out can impact their future lives.

Consideration of Diversity

My project will be conducted at Greenfield High School Credit Recovery

class. According to EdData (2017), In the 2016-2017 school year, there was a total of 1,157

students enrolled at Greenfield High of which 97.3% of those students were Hispanic or Latino,

1.6% White, 1% Filipino, 0.4% Asian, 0.3% African American, and 0.2% Two or more races.

Furthermore, 28.4% are English learners, and 62.2 % of the students are underprivileged. It is also important to note that, out of 62.2% disadvantaged students, only 36.2% achieved proficiency in state testing. Finally, during the 2014-15 school year, 9.8% of students became school dropouts (EdData, 2017). Based on the students' placement in Credit Recovery, I expect them to be English learners and disadvantaged because this class is meant for students that have failed two or more classes in the past and who are also failing current courses due to these and other risk factors. Because of this information, I am able to interpret that these students are not likely to have been exposed to any career exploration. I intend to complete the activities in English; however, there may be some that may need support in Spanish, which I can provide. This project was intended for high school juniors as they are in the age where they must start to think about careers and begin to explore their choices.

Learning Outcomes

The purpose of this study is to present to At-Risk students' information about career preparation to make them think about possible career paths, additional preparation after high school, and the potential financial consequences of not going beyond high school or graduating. To achieve this, I will conduct a lesson to a credit recovery class. At the end of my lesson, participants will be able to:

1.   identify three careers that do not require a college degree

2.   distinguish the financial difference between obtaining a high school diploma and being a high school dropout

3.   design a career plan

Methods

Day 1

On the first day of my lesson, I will briefly introduce myself and explain to the students

the reason why I am there, and what I will be doing for the next couple of days. I will start off by

asking students if they can identify different careers that do not require a college degree. Once I

have a few responses, I will proceed to present a PowerPoint (See Appendix G) to the class about

the importance of completing high school, having a career, and the steps they need to take to

achieve that. I will be focusing on vocational and training programs students can enroll in to

obtain a career that does not require a college degree. After the presentation, I will break the

group into three groups of 7 to conduct an activity about careers and the educational attainment

they need for each (i.e., no diploma, high school diploma and training, college degree). Once

they are in groups, I will give them a list of 20 careers and have them place each one under the

column of educational attainment they believe it belongs. To end the first day, I will lead

discussion, and asking each individual student to list three careers they learned about that do not

require a college degree.

Day 2

On the second day, I will begin by asking students what the difference between a career

and an occupation is. I will break up the class evenly, one focusing on occupation and the other

on career. I will then give students a few minutes to come up with an answer. After five minutes,

I will ask a student from each group to share their answer. If the students are confused, I will

address the question and make it clear. After I will present students with facts about dropping out

of school from https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-high-school-dropout-rates .

I will focus on the financial difference of obtaining a high school diploma and a career vs. being

a high school dropout. I will then ask the students to think about where they see themselves in five years. I will proceed to ask them a few questions (See Appendix A) to get them thinking about life after high school. To give the students a better idea of the impact dropping out has on their future I will lead an activity where students will learn more about careers, skills, and salaries for each career of interest. I will have each student log into https://www.cacareerzone.org/budget/to form a budget based on the lifestyle they wish to have. After they answer a series of question, a budget will be created and potential careers they can pursue to afford that lifestyle will be available for them to explore. I will also have them compare the budget they created with that of a high school dropout to get a better idea of the financial difference. After a few minutes of exploring the different careers and their educational requirements, I will ask students to partner up and share some of the financial differences they came across while completing the activity. To test their knowledge, I will have them identify three economic differences between being a high school graduate and being a dropout. I will lead a brief discussion on the activity to end the day.

Day 3

On the last day, I will ask students if they are familiar with planning and setting goals. I will then explain to students the importance of setting SMART goals. As an example, I will show them https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ya53yhiOe04 . I will then ask students to put to the test what they have learned about goals and planning by individually choosing a career they are interested in and design a career path. I will then hand each student a SMART goal worksheet for them to begin (see Appendix B). This activity will help them develop a list of goals they need to achieve to reach their career of interest. Finally, I will ask students to tell me

three facts about dropping out they learned, two careers they are interested in, and five things they can do to prevent them from falling more behind in school.

Results

Learning outcome 1 was that participating students would identify careers that do not require a college degree. I created two groups and gave each a list of 20 careers, then had them categorize each one under education requirements. In Appendix C and D I have provided pictures of the group answers. Group A was able to successfully identify and place each career under the exact education requirements. Group B was only partially correct as they put three careers in the wrong columns. When looking at the responses, I noticed that Group B had social work placed under the college degree column, but then had it crossed out and moved to the high school and training column. When asked the reason behind this, one student said: "I do not remember you going over this career, and thought that social workers are people who just plan socials, so you do not need a degree for that." Individually I had each student submit an evaluation sheet listing three careers that do not require a college degree. Only 85% of students completed this, therefore my learning outcome was partially met.

Learning outcome 2 was that students would distinguish the financial differences between obtaining a high school diploma and being a high school dropout. After completing the reality check budget activity, learning about dropout statistics, and comparing incomes between a high school graduate and a high school dropout, participants were able to identify three financial differences. During the discussion, they had among each other participants got to share their thoughts about the activity, and the impact dropping out can have on their future lives. In the end, 100% of the participants listed three financial differences that connect with being a high school dropout, see Appendix E for example. Many of them mentioned unemployment, lower-

income, and fewer job opportunities. Their response indicates that all participants achieved this outcome.

Learning outcome 3 was that participants would design a career plan. The SMART Goal worksheet provided to complete this outcome consist of six steps, and only 71% of the participants were successful in achieving all six. After looking at their worksheet, I noticed that it was the same participants who missed more than one step. Table 1(See Appendix F) shows the percentages of students who completed each step. Explaining why their goal was relevant was the step all participants completed successfully. This indicated that the students were able to explain the objective behind their career plan. Because not all participants were able to achieve each part of the worksheet, I think this outcome was partially successful.

Discussion

At the end of this project, the participants met all the learning outcomes. While not every student participating completed all three learning outcomes successfully, the majority completed at least two. Most students showed an accurate understanding of the different careers that do not require a college degree, financial differences between a high school graduate and a dropout, and goal setting. Only a few showed lack of understanding. When completing my project, I identified several factors that contribute to the students having trouble achieving the learning outcomes and overall engagement. Some of those factors included the students always being on their phone while I was explaining the activities, arriving late to class while I was conducting my project, or being called out because the counselor needed to speak to them. I also had two students who were English learners and who did not want to engage in discussion due to their lack of speaking the language.

While conducting this project among At-Risk students, I was able to see their interest in career exploration as well as the lack of exposure and direction they have. That is important because At-Risk students are in great need of career exploration because they are the group of students who are more likely to work full-time right after high school. While conducting this project, I found that At-Risk students understood the importance of completing high school and some showed interest in career exploration. While not every single student participating completed the learning outcomes successfully, I still think they gained some knowledge from my 3-day session. When we had our last discussion, I asked students to share something they had learned. One student mentioned that he began to look at different schools that offer the career in which he is interested. Another student just said he completed a course on credit recovery and started to attend tutoring after school to get on track. I had many other students ask me questions regarding different career paths, tips on goal setting, or study tips. These actions prove that there is a high need for career development and guidance among At-Risk students.

Understanding the struggles At-Risk students face can also help to guide them better as they explore identity issues and battle with identity crises. Marcia's four statuses of identity was also something I noticed when completing my project. I asked my participants if they had yet established any commitments to a career or have experienced any difficulty decision making. Among the 21 participants, more than half of the students had not explored their career options or experienced identity crisis (diffusion/foreclosure); about one-quarter were involved in exploration (moratorium), and only three had explored and committed to one or more career (career identity achieved). This evidence paralleled Marcia's identity statuses.

Even though I think my project was somewhat successful, if given the opportunity to do it again there are a few things that I would do differently. First, I would consider a smaller group

with which to conduct my study. The group of students with whom I was dealing can be tough to control and often a few of them caused many distractions for their peers. The time was also an issue. Having only 40 minutes to conduct an activity and lead discussion when it took ten minutes to get everyone's attention was limiting. Lastly, I would consider working with a more diverse population. The results of the findings were limited to Greenfield High students and may not generalize to other student population, perhaps only to schools similar to their demographics. Overall, I believe research must continue for At-Risk students to determine new and more effective ways to implement career exploration for them. Education is the key for reaching their goals and achieving success and having an earlier intervention so they can become academically successful is necessary.

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Appendix A

The following are a set of questions that were read out-loud to get students thinking about life

after high school and the different expenses that they will have.

1. Where do you see yourself in five years?

2. How many of you will begin work right after High School?

3. Will you get a training, go to school, or take a year off and simply work?

4. If so, where will you work?

5. How many of you own a car, or will get a car after you graduate?

6. Will it be a new car, or a used car?

7. Will you live with your parents, or get your own place?

8. Will your job be enough to cover rent, bills, food, transportation, insurance?

9. Will this job leave you with extra money to go out, or for those new shoes you
   wanted?

10. What is your game plan?

11. Will you earn enough to sustain the lifestyle you want?

Appendix B

SMART Goal Worksheet that was used for Learning outcome 3

SPARKPEOPLE ®
.com

SMART Goal-Setting Worksheet

Step 1: Write down your goal in as few words as possible.

My goal is to: _____

Step 2: Make your goal detailed and SPECIFIC. Answer who/what/where/how/when.
_____

HOW will you reach this goal? List at least 3 action steps you'll take (be specific):
1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Step 3: Make your goal is MEASUREABLE. Add details, measurements and tracking details.

I will measure/track my goal by using the following numbers or methods:
_____

I will know I've reached my goal when
_____

Step 4: Make your goal ATTAINABLE. What additional resources do you need for success?
Items I need to achieve this goal: _____

How I'll find the time: _____

Things I need to learn more about: _____

People I can talk to for support: _____

Step 5: Make your goal RELEVANT. List *why* you want to reach this goal:

Step 6: Make your goal TIMELY. Put a deadline on your goal and set some benchmarks.

I will reach my goal by (date): __/__/___.

My halfway measurement will be _____ on (date) __/__/___.

Additional dates and milestones I'll aim for:

Appendix C

Group A answers for Career Education Requirement Activity

Career Education Requirements

No High School Diploma

Field worker   Cashier
Waiter   Youtuber   Babysitter
tractor driver

High School Diploma + Training

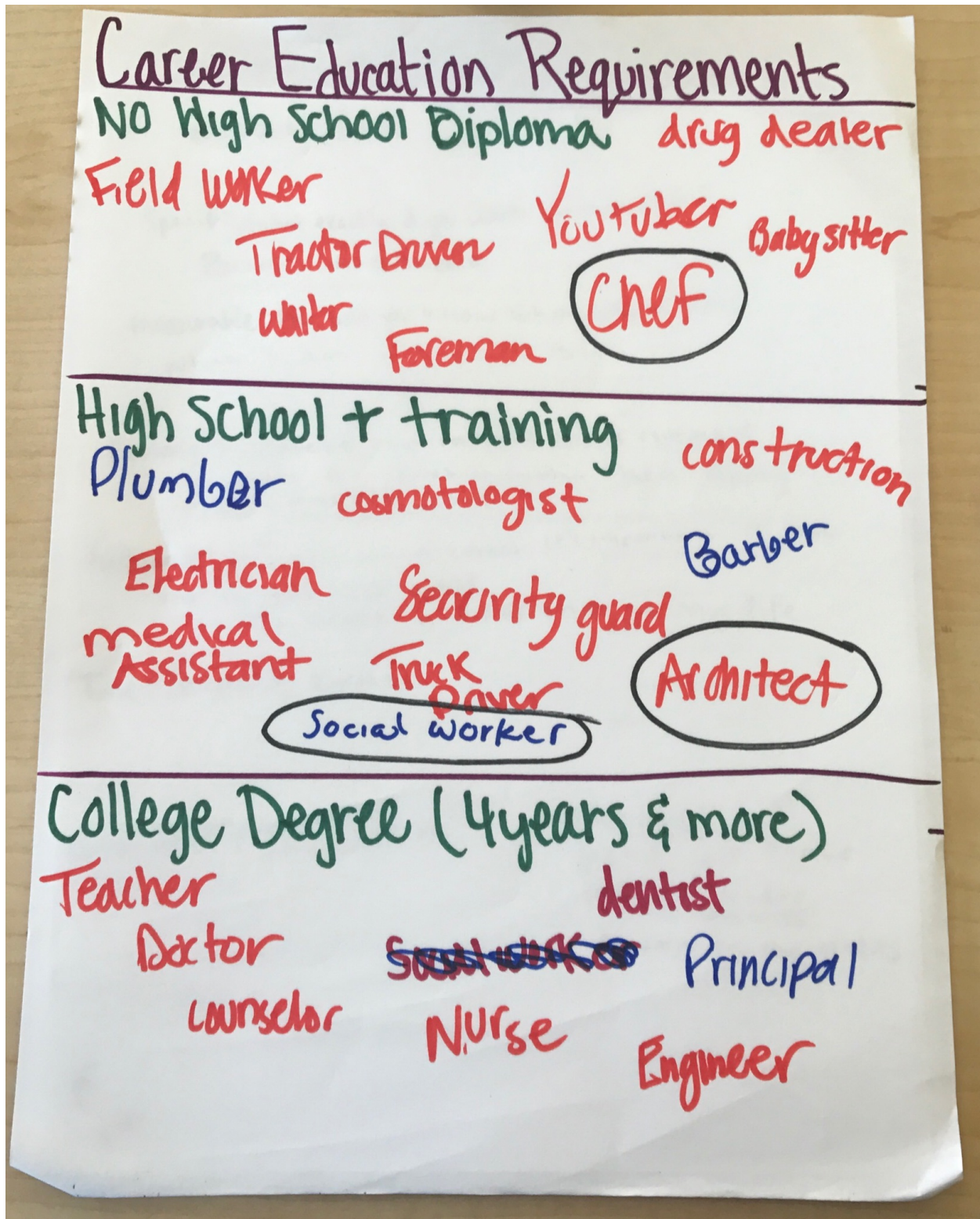Plumber   Dentist assistant
           Security guard   Truck
Barber   Drivers
        Electrician   Construction

Cosmotologist   medical assistant
           Flight attendant

College Degree (4 years & more)

Teacher   social worker   Engineer
Counselor   Architect   Dentist
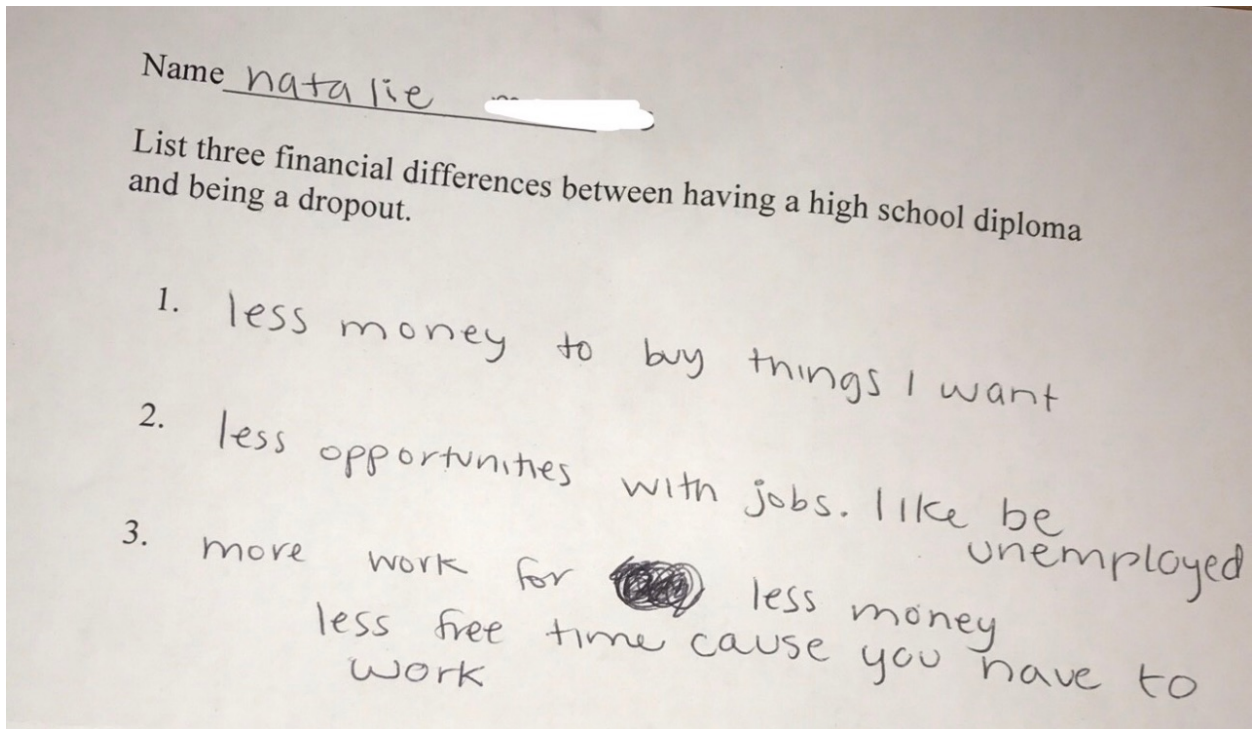Principal   Nurse   Lawyer
Doctor   Pilot

Appendix D

Group B answers for Career Education Requirements Activity

Career Education Requirements

No High School Diploma   drug dealer

Field Worker

Tractor Driver   Youtuber   Baby sitter

Waiter   (Chef)

Foreman

High School + training

Plumber   cosmotologist   construction

Electrician   Barber

medical   Security guard

Assistant   Truck   (Architect)

Driver

(Social Worker)

College Degree (4 years & more)

Teacher   dentist

Doctor   ~~Social Worker~~   Principal

Counselor   Nurse

Engineer

Appendix E

Example of Results for Learning outcome 2

Name __natalie__

List three financial differences between having a high school diploma and being a dropout.

1. less money to buy things I want

2. less opportunities with jobs. like be unemployed

3. more work for ⬛ less money less free time cause you have to work

Appendix F

Table 1

Results for learning outcome 3

Smart Goal Worksheet

	21 Participants	Average
Create a Specific Goal	16	76%
Goal is Measurable	17	81%
Goal is Attainable	15	71%
Goal is Relevant	21	100%
Goal is Timely	21	100%

Appendix G

PowerPoint Presentation

Pdf lll

POST-HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

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WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE

Ask yourself :
- **WHO** do I want to be
- **WHO** inspires me
- **WHAT DO** I value
- **WHAT DO** I do to make it happen
- **SEEK MENTORS**

WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

DID YOU KNOW

People who do not participate in training are three times more likely to be unemployed than people who have some post-high school training?

MORE EDUCATION=MORE MONEY

MORE EDUCATION=MORE CHOICES

MORE EDUCATION= GET A JOB YOU ENJOY

VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

- gaining the skills for a specific job than taking unrelated courses,
- vocational schools exist to provide them with skills and knowledge directly related to their chosen vocation.
- These programs emphasize real-world experience, practical curricula and an accelerated learning schedule.
- Depending on the chosen path, most learners at vocational schools complete their programs in one to two years.

Pdf III

VOCATIONAL SKILLS
in High Demand Today

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-e_vaKsOfM
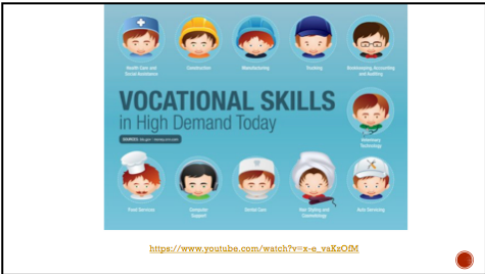
ON THE JOB TRAINING

On the Job training program completion. Receive formal training provided by an employer.

Jobs
- Flight Attendant
- Pharmacy Tech
- Medical Assisting
- Reservation & Ticket Agents
- Emergency Dispatchers
- Bank Tellers

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Work with experienced workers and complete some classroom training. Apprentices earn wages while learning. But wages are less than what they will make once the apprenticeship is completed.

Jobs
- Mechanics
- Carpenters
- Electricians
- Plumbing

INCOME

Less than a High School Diploma
- Weekly $493
- Annually $25,636

With a High School Diploma
- Weekly $678
- Annually $35,256

Bachelor's Degree
- Weekly $1,173
- Annually $59,124

Master's Degree
- Weekly $1,401
- Annually 69,732

REMEMBER...

MOST PEOPLE WORK 8 HOURS PER DAY

5 DAYS PER WEEK

FOR 40 YEARS