

High School Student Focus Group

Nederland High School

OCTOBER 31, 2001, 9:30 - 10:30

PURPOSE OF THE FOCUS GROUP

How do students make career decisions in high school? What was helpful in making a career decision and what would improve the career-counseling program in high school?

FOCUS TOPICS

- Have you made a career decision?
- How did you make the decision?
- Who had the most influence on your career choice?
- How effective were people and tools in helping you make a career decision?
- How would you improve the career decision-making program at your school?

HAVE YOU MADE A CAREER DECISION

Six of the eleven participating students indicated that they had made a career decision.

HOW DID YOU MAKE THE DECISION

- Influenced or encouraged by family member since childhood to concentrate on specific occupation
- Success in academic field led to a decision to concentrate on a related occupation
- Talented in a particular skill that relates to a specific occupation such as, music or writing
- Love of an activity related to a specific occupation -- "getting paid to do something you like to do"
- Involvement in extra-curricular activities led to an interest in a specific career
- Interest in career activities of an adult friend or family member
- Friends complimented student's work or a product of student's work

WHO HAD THE MOST INFLUENCE ON YOUR CAREER CHOICE

- Parent - 6 of 11 mentioned parental advice
- Observation of friends and/or family members at work
- Siblings
- Teacher - 4 of 11 mentioned teacher reference to a career that was connected with the course being taught
- Career models - student admiration of a person in a particular occupation caused the student to choose that occupation
- Work-based experiences - unpaid internships
- Involvement with extra-curricular school activity created an interest in a particular career
- People in student's field of interest complimented the student's work
- School counselor - 3 of 11 mentioned counselor influence in career selection

HOW EFFECTIVE WERE PEOPLE AND TOOLS IN HELPING YOU MAKE A CAREER DECISION

- Most participants felt that seeing and talking to people on the job was most effective in deciding what they might want to do or might not want to do.
- Deciding what you don't want to do is almost as important as deciding what you want to do
- Field trips were very effective
- Experiencing job activities on a work site is very effective
- Reading details about specific jobs is effective
- Aptitude tests are not very effective or reliable tools for making a career decision in high school. Aptitude tests may help some 8th grader make a decision about a career path to pursue but the experience of most participants was that aptitude test results were off target for them.
- Career decision-making pamphlets are not very effective.
- Participants agreed (11 of 11) that people are more effective than tools in career exploration. Students have no confidence in career decision-making tools

APTITUDE TEST DISCUSSION

- If a student is considering two different careers, the aptitude test may help confirm which career they will be best suited for.
- If a career decision has not been made by the student, aptitude test results are too vague, misleading, and can be discouraging to student.
- Participants felt that aptitude test questions biased their answers
- Students agreed that a variety of aptitude tests should be administered to eliminate bias.

HOW WOULD YOU IMPROVE THE CAREER DECISION-MAKING PROGRAM AT YOUR SCHOOL

- Students felt that there was no career decision-making program in their school. There was a concentrated effort to get 8th graders to make a decision for their four-year plan but nothing in later grades. The school should concentrate on more career awareness activities in later grades, particularly in the senior year.
- School should promote it's extra-curricular activities more to students
- The course descriptions should elaborate more on the activities of the course and relate course content to jobs. The description should offer examples of jobs that use the skills learned in the course.
- Schools should do a better job of marketing all of the career exploration activities available to students.
- Counselors should do more career counseling, not just make out the four-year plan and schedule classes.
- Counselors should concentrate more on helping students choose a four-year plan that relates to a career choice and the required post-secondary training or a job after high school.
- Counselors do a good job of helping students select a college, meet the college entrance requirements and deadlines. However, counselors don't do a good job helping students select a college that relates to their chosen career.
- School needs more career counselors