Career, Community and Family Connections: Implementation in Family and Consumer Sciences Teacher Education

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New and emerging careers resulting from the changing global marketplace and technology require new ways of thinking in education. Today’s teachers are challenged to provide students with better, more appropriate learning experiences so they can successfully transition into advanced education or training or into immediate employment. Standard 1 of the National Standards for Teachers of Family and Consumer Sciences (National Association of Teacher Educators for Family and Consumer Sciences [NATEFACS], 2004), Career, Community, and Family Connections, addresses these challenges by suggesting that family and consumer sciences teachers create partnerships to ensure a meaningful and relevant education that connects student learning with knowledge and skills required in the real world (Paris, 1997). This paper suggests strategies for implementing Standard One into family and consumer sciences teacher education programs and assessing beginning teacher competence. A list of suggested strategies and resources is included.

Career, Community, and Family Connections is an overarching concept that frames the preparation of beginning family and consumer sciences teachers. This concept also is the focus of Standard 1 of the National Standards for Teachers of Family and Consumer Sciences, which states that beginning family and consumer sciences teachers will be able to “analyze family, community, and work interrelationships; investigate career paths; examine family and consumer sciences careers; and apply career decision making and transitioning processes” (National Association of Teacher Educators for Family and Consumer Sciences [NATEFACS], 2004).

It is essential that all family and consumer sciences practitioners make clear connections among the three ideas in Standard 1, for they enable individuals to understand and make choices that join seemingly disparate content into a meaningful whole. In essence, family and consumer sciences content assists in preparing individuals for the multiple responsibilities we have in life. In America, an individual who does not make clear connections among career, community, and family is unlikely to live a well-balanced and integrated life.

Theoretical Support for Standard 1

Our field focuses on individuals nested within families and by implication, how work and communities affect the precarious balance that keeps us centered. We help individuals and families maximize their contributions to society through their personal and professional lives. Since virtually everyone needs to earn a living, the choice of career is critical to an individual’s ability to survive, or indeed, to prosper in today’s economy. The changing world, including a global marketplace, new and emerging careers, and complex uses of technology, challenges family and consumer sciences teachers to provide more appropriate learning experiences so
students can have successful and satisfying lives. This requires a successful transition into advanced education or training or into immediate employment. In an economically-based society such as ours, this is essential to lift or keep people out of poverty. Standard 1 addresses these challenges by suggesting that family and consumer sciences professionals have the capacity to create partnerships to ensure a meaningful, relevant, and integrated education to connect learning in school with knowledge and skills required in the real world (Paris, 1997). This paper suggests strategies for implementing and assessing Standard 1 and includes a list of suggested strategies and resources to assist teacher educators in developing these connections in a preservice program.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) ecological model offered a way to understand this standard. Viewed as an ecosystem or a living organism, the balance between family, community, and career systems is in constant flux (Way, 2000). The ecosystem consists of a variety of microsystems such as an adolescent’s family or school. Any change in these microsystems influences one’s ecosystem. Using the previous example, a person’s view of employment or community-based issues might change as the result of a parent losing his/her job. Also, how an individual or family experiences employment is embedded in one’s culture, reflecting values that are called the macrosystem. Effects of social change on individuals depend upon their age at the time the change occurs. For instance, the term “labor” may connote hard physical work for some, an organization or voting block for others, or something you pay others to do for a third group. For curricular purposes, a teacher needs to see family, community, and careers as overlapping microsystems that interact with and influence each other.

Using the ecological or systems-based approach helps both teacher and student bring the world into a clearer focus. Accepting that most people operate within such multiple spheres helps one realize that centering and balancing these systems are their keys to success. This approach emphasizes that core issues within each microsystem must be explored and balanced to succeed in the ecosystem. Thus, one must try to understand one’s likes, talents, and abilities as one chooses among work options that may be satisfying.

Family and Consumer Sciences Career Pathways and Their Organization

Since most people spend their prime non-sleeping hours either preparing for or earning a living, guidance in understanding and choosing an appropriate career pathway is important. Career pathways are commonly thought of as “…clusters of occupations and careers that are combined together because many of the people within them share similar interests and strengths. All pathway clusters include entry-level, para-professional, and professional occupations” (AZ Tech Prep, 2006, n.p.).

Family and consumer sciences can offer a variety of relevant career pathways, all leading to future employment. Employment projections through 2016 indicate that all of the family and consumer sciences career pathways have positive employment possibilities. Population trends and how they impact the labor force as well as demand for goods and services will influence future job opportunities (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009a). Therefore, it is critical that educators responsible for planning and offering programs in career pathways stay apprised of the current and future job market.

While some careers show much greater growth than others, there are positive employment growth projections through the year 2016 for all family and consumer sciences (FCS) career pathways. According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009b), some of these job projections are: child day care (includes preschool
teachers, teacher assistants, and child care workers) to grow about 34%, educational services (includes private and public school teachers, counselors, librarians, and professors in higher education) to grow 11%, interior designers (includes interior designers and architects) to grow 19%, food and beverage services (includes chefs, cooks, servers, hosts, and bartenders) to grow 11%, the leisure and hospitality services industry (includes housekeeping, food preparation and service, desk clerks, guest services, and recreation) to grow 14.3%, financial related careers to grow 14.4%, real estate and property management to grow 14.4%, careers in retail trade to grow by 4.5%, clothing and accessories retail (includes managers and buyers) to grow by 7%, social and human services (includes assistants with relevant work service experience or post-secondary education) to grow 34%, and the health care industry (includes dietitians and diet technicians, personal and home care aides, food preparation workers, and recreation workers) to grow 49%. It is recommended that career education help students focus on potential jobs in various career pathways. In June 2007, 47 states, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam, were implementing career pathways (National Association of State Directors, 2007). Some states refer to these as FCS occupational or vocational programs while other states label them FCS career and technical education (CTE) programs.

The most common organizational model, developed by the United States Department of Education with validation by a collaborative approach among state departments of education, involves 16 career clusters along with 79 national career pathways (States’ Career Clusters Initiative, 2009). The ways in which career pathways are named and organized vary by states. For example, Arizona (AZ), California (CA), Indiana (IN), and Georgia (GA) have different and similar family and consumer sciences career pathway titles. They are organized either by career clusters (AZ and IN), industry sectors (CA), or neither (GA). Ideally, FCS career pathway programs build upon the content and learning outcomes of traditional FCS subject matter areas. For example, nutrition, food science, and food preparation concepts that are commonly taught in traditional FCS programs can provide important background information for FCS career pathway programs such as culinary arts, food service, and dietetics. Table 1 displays how FCS career pathways are named in four states (AZ, CA, IN, and GA). For purposes of this article, they are organized by traditional FCS program areas with the realization that career pathways related to food service could be listed under management and hospitality and textile design could be listed in the apparel and textile area as well as the interior design area. While the program standards, content, and learning outcomes of these FCS pathway programs may be similar, their similarities and differences will only be realized after careful examination of their state related curricular documents.

Implementation in a Teacher Education Program

In significant ways teacher education programs are bound by state mandates and credentialing requirements. However, programs are implemented using a variety of procedures, from a traditional approach with an added occupational emphasis to the creation of an entirely new approach, making career, community, and family connections the core. In the traditional approach, an occupational emphasis can be accomplished through an added course like “Career Education in Family and Consumer Sciences” such as the one taught at Purdue University (Fox, 2008). This course focuses on three major categories: (a) life and career exploration and planning, (b) analysis of career paths and opportunities in family and consumer sciences, and (c) career preparation through laboratory and cooperative education programs. In contrast, career, community, and family connections is the core of a recently reorganized program at the
Table 1
*Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Career Pathways, Organized by Traditional FCS Program Areas, in Four States*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional FCS Subject Matter Areas</th>
<th>Titles of FCS Career Pathways</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apparel and Textiles</td>
<td>Design and Merchandising, Option 1 Fashion (AZ)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fashion Design, Manufacturing, and Merchandising (CA)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Visual Arts: Fashion Design (IN)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Visual Arts: Textile Design (IN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Development</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education (AZ)</td>
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<td>Child Care (CA)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Education (CA)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Education: Early Childhood Education (GA)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Education: Teaching as a Profession (GA)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early Childhood Development and Services (IN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Education</td>
<td>Consumer Services (CA, IN)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family and Consumer Sciences: Consumer Services (GA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Studies</td>
<td>Family and Human Services (CA)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family and Community Services (IN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food and Nutrition</td>
<td>Culinary Arts (AZ, GA)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Food Science, Dietetics, and Nutrition (CA)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food Service and Hospitality (CA)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family and Consumer Sciences: Nutrition and Food Service (GA)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food Products and Processing Systems: Dietetics/Nutrition (IN)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support Services: Nutrition/Dietetics (IN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support Services: Food Service (IN)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Restaurant and Food/Beverage Service (IN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior Design and Housing</td>
<td>Design and Merchandising: Option 2 Interior Design (AZ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interior Design, Furnishings, and Maintenance (CA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family and Consumer Sciences: Interior Design (GA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visual Arts: Interior Design (IN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management and Hospitality</td>
<td>Hospitality Education (AZ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hospitality, Tourism, and Recreation (CA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travel and Tourism (IN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recreation, Amusement, and Attractions (IN)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Lodging (IN)</td>
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*Note: Arizona (AZ), California (CA), Georgia (GA), and Indiana (IN)*
University of Arizona (Kelly, 2008). In this program, students are required to take two related content courses and have a field experience in each of the four family and consumer sciences high school career pathway programs (Early Childhood Education, Design and Merchandising, Culinary Arts, and Hospitality Education). By working with established teachers in FCS programs in all four career pathways, Program Planning and Methods courses draw on both content and work experiences of university teacher candidates, helping them to understand and apply their experiences to career preparation programs. Although Arizona currently takes a decidedly occupational focus in its secondary programs, this approach for teacher education is sufficiently flexible to allow for future curricular adjustments that may add more family-focused content. Thus, it should be evident that despite differences in approach, there are common elements that are important to prepare competent FCS teachers. These include relevant occupational experiences and an ability to develop a career-based program that will prepare students to meet projected employment needs. Some strategies and resources to assist teacher educators in developing an undergraduate career, community, and family connection in a preservice program are listed in the Strategies and Resources sections of this article.

**Assessments to Ensure Competent Teachers for Standard 1**

Assessment is an essential component to ensure programs of quality and, thus, well prepared teachers. Plans for program assessment and preservice teacher assessment must be carefully designed to ensure that teachers have the competencies needed to plan and teach standards-based secondary and post-secondary family and consumer sciences career pathway programs.

Recommended steps in developing a plan for teacher education program assessment include (a) student learning outcomes that are based on national and state pathways and standards, (b) course alignments with the student learning outcomes, (c) course assessments matched with the student learning outcomes (embedded assessments), and (d) other assessments determined important to ensure teacher competence. Some important resources for program assessment would include an industry-based advisory committee, quality alignments with state adopted career pathways and standards, and the results of preservice teachers’ performance assessments.

Preservice teacher assessments should be based upon the student learning outcomes and how well they are achieved. At Purdue University, preservice teachers are expected to complete a series of assignments in EDCI 356/547 including an electronic portfolio entry for a family and consumer sciences career area and a personal assessment of their readiness to teach three types of career education programs. Family and consumer sciences education program graduates must complete an employment record with documentation, to meet the state licensure requirement. In Indiana, preservice teachers must verify 4,000 clock hours of successful employment in FCS or 1,500 clock hours of supervised FCS work under an approved teacher education program, or a combination equivalent of these (Fox, 2008). In contrast, preservice teachers at the University of Arizona document their subject matter, work experience, and professional preparation in a teaching portfolio (Kelly, 2008). Two hundred and forty hours of documented FCS related work experience or a practicum is required. This begins in the two methods courses where they develop a plan for a coherent sequence of instruction for a student in a FCS career pathway (also called a plan of study), sample lesson plans, and active learning strategies for each of the four previously mentioned FCS career pathways. Assessment of these assignments involves carefully designed rubrics. An additional assessment could involve examination of existing FCS career
programs to determine their compliance with Perkins IV as reflected in the state plan and recommend improvements if needed (Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006).

Another important assessment of teacher competence is student teacher performance. At the University of Arizona, the student teaching assessment rubric includes family and consumer sciences career subject matter competence. This assessment involves ratings from both the cooperating teacher and university supervisor (College of Education, University of Arizona, 2009).

**Educational Reform**

Since the changes we make now in teaching and teacher education will affect those who will be employed through much of the 21st century, it is important that family and consumer sciences educators become major players within career education and in high school reform. Since almost all careers align with a career pathway the documentation on career pathways would indicate that FCS teachers should help middle and high school students explore their talents, interests, and abilities more thoroughly and thoughtfully than they have up to this point. Focusing on career pathways that are aligned with traditional as well as new and emerging careers will help students make sense of their choices. While not all of these students will further their education within a FCS program, we need to help students realize that there are personal, family, and community concerns that will influence their career decisions. These include challenging financial issues such as pay equity, the cost of living, and consumer debt.

The holistic approach of seeing the person, family, community, and careers as microsystems that overlap and are reciprocal is clearly the advantage we bring to career education. The state of New Jersey has already recognized that family and consumer sciences standards for consumer, family, and life skills represent key content that must be an integral part of their career and technical education (CTE) program. In fact, beginning in 2004, high school freshman are required to take at least five credits in career education and consumer, family, and life skills or vocational-technical education. Writing about their core curriculum standards for career education and family and life skills, New Jersey educators stated:

Rapid societal changes, including innovations in technology, information exchange, and communications, have increased the demand for internationally competitive workers and for an educational system designed to meet that demand. Today’s students will be employed through much of the twenty-first century and will, therefore, need increasingly advanced levels of knowledge and skills. To obtain and retain high-wage employment that provides job satisfaction, they will also need to continue to learn throughout their lives. The career education and consumer, family, and life skills standards identify key career development and life skills that students must accomplish in order to achieve continuing success in various life roles related to continuing education, career development, and personal growth. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2004, n.p.)

With respect to addressing the whole person rather than just one’s career, family and consumer sciences programs have a decided advantage. Teacher educators have the potential to influence proposed changes in the way schooling is conducted. When you think about it, one of the most important connections a person can make in choosing a career is learning to balance family and work. We need to emphasize our ability to teach such critical content along with the vital family and consumer sciences career occupational preparation embodied in the career pathway approach.
Support for a thoughtful, balanced family and consumer sciences CTE program can be found in *The Best Schools: How Human Development Research Should Inform Educational Practice* by Thomas Armstrong (2006). In this book, Armstrong identified the kinds of learning outcomes that students should achieve as they progress from early childhood education through high school. His recommendation for middle schools—to emphasize social, emotional, and metacognitive growth—is consistent with the holistic approach that comprehensive family and consumer sciences courses provide. First, one must connect to the larger society and find out what one is good at or enjoys. He criticized high school college preparatory programs because they do not prepare students, other than to pass tests, for the developmental tasks required of independent young adults. Armstrong wrote, “Educators should help students reflect on who they are, how to get along with others, how to nurture other living beings, and how to discover inner preferences and proclivities to fuel future career aspirations” (p. 139). He further added:

A Human Development Discourse is concerned with helping students understand their own development (where they have been, where they are now, where they are going in life) so that the decisions they make about higher education and career choices will be congruent with their inner needs. (p. 154)

He recommended that high schools provide a real world learning environment and implement developmentally appropriate practices such as small learning communities, career academies, internships, job shadowing, and apprenticeships.

What Armstrong proposed is exactly what has been implied in Standard 1. Elements of successful partnerships must be both taught and modeled to all teachers as recommended by the developers of the comprehensive school reform initiative, “Achieve Texas” (Texas Education Agency, 2006). With shared accountability, a positive high school environment, and a committed team, family and consumer sciences can reach more students and empower the future generation of workers. Since the changes we make now in teacher education will affect those who will be employed through much of the 21st century, it is important that family and consumer sciences teacher educators become major players in reforming career education. As stated in *Reinventing the American High School for the 21st Century* (Association for Career and Technical Education [ACTE], 2006):

It will be a tragic miscalculation to pit academic course-taking against access to rigorous career-oriented and interest-based programs. Students need to be taught in a way that is rigorous and relevant to their areas of personal interest and career aspirations, and supportive of a learning environment that emphasizes connections and of relationships. (ACTE, p. 24)

**Strategies**

These strategies will assist teacher educators in developing career, community, and family connections in a preservice program.

1. Articulate the unique value of balancing career, family, and community connections (FCCLA, Career Connections, 2009)
2. Recognize that student skills for success in careers, families, and communities are embedded in the family and consumer sciences secondary curriculum (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences/FCS standards).
3. Embrace the mission, vision, and goals of a career and technical program, especially those of family and consumer sciences.
4. Use national and state career and technical education curriculum concepts such as career clusters, career pathways, plans of study, jobs versus careers, standards, program alignment, and authentic assessment.

5. Examine credible sources for local, state, and national labor market projections (Miller, 2008; United States Department of Labor in the 21st Century).

6. Identify and/or adjust programs based on labor market and community needs.

7. Convey the idea that career development is lifelong and can be achieved via multiple sources (DeRocco, 2006; Gray & Herr, 2000).

8. Recognize the qualities of rigorous and relevant career pathway programs.

9. Self-assess one’s competence to teach the family and consumer sciences career pathway standards, knowledge, and skills.

10. Create teaching strategies and resources that will effectively teach “soft skills” such as honoring your word, being prompt and courteous, following through, thinking ahead, using time wisely, resolving conflict, listening attentively, and being honest and flexible (Bancino & Zevalkink, 2007; The Conference Board, 2006).

11. Identify teaching strategies and resources to help students to make informed career choices (Gray & Herr, 2000).


Resources

Content codes
A=Analyze family, community, and work interrelationships
B=Investigate career paths
C=Examine family and consumer sciences careers
D=Apply career decision making and transitioning processes

America’s Career InfoNet (B & C)
Web Link: http://www.onetcenter.org
This primary source of online occupational information is continually updated by surveying a broad range of workers from each occupation. The database also provides career exploration tools and allows searches for occupational information, industry information, and state specific labor market information.

Directory of Online Resources for Classroom Teachers (A-D)
Web Link: http://www.aafcs.org/fcs/pages/ccf.html
Links to a variety of Web sites containing information, ideas, or lesson plans to facilitate teaching Standard 1, Career, Community, and Family Connections to secondary students. Links are organized by government, educational, organizational, and commercial sources and coded by content area addressed.

Family Economics and Financial Education (A)
Web Link: http://www.fefe.arizona.edu
Provides curriculum and fully developed lesson plans for units on career development, decision-making, paychecks, financial institutions, taxes, insurance, and transportation. Another spectacular resource is the simulation games that are available. The three
versions available are Life in the United States, Montana, and North Dakota. Each simulation is designed to emulate the budgeting constraints typical households encounter in that state when managing their finances.

Family, Career and Community Leaders of America
Web Link: http://www.fcclainc.org/fccla.tmpl?pagename=store
This Web site features many resources. As quoted below from their 2008 resource catalog, these two should be especially relevant:

*Career Connections and Leaders at Work CD-ROM (C & D)*
Shows students how to link options and skills for success in careers, families, and communities. Through individual, cooperative, and competitive activities, students can discover their strengths, target career goals, and initiate a plan for achieving the lifestyle they desire. This new program offers activities in six unit areas.

*Inspire! (Team Building and Group Development CD-ROM) Activities, Games, Events, and Adventures for Helping Youth Learn Team Building and Group Development (A)*
This volume includes 20 activities for teaching effective group communication and team building skills. The activities on the CD-ROM address critical thinking, leadership, collaboration, individual self esteem, competition, group dynamics, and team confidence. You can watch it, hear it, and read it. The interactive multimedia program, *Inspire!*, shows users how to set up, lead, and process each activity. In addition to watching and hearing video, users can read and print instructions for any activity.

*Interest and Personality Inventories (B & C)*
Strong Interest Inventory Web Link:
http://www.hollandcodes.com/strong-interest-inventory.html
Holland Self-Assessment Web Link:
http://www.brunswick.k12.me.us/bhs/guidance/Careerdocs/Holland%20SelfAssessment.pdf
ASVAB Career Exploration Program Web Link: http://www.asvabprogram.com
There are a number of existing resources to assist secondary students in exploring and identifying careers. The three most commonly used are listed above. Results of these aptitude tests and the interest inventories enable students to evaluate their skills, estimate performance in academic and career and technical endeavors, and identify potentially satisfying careers.

Kelly, M. E. *Rubrics for analyzing program, unit, and lesson plans.* Unpublished document, Norton School of Family and Consumer Sciences at University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ. Available on request from mekelly@cals.arizona.edu (A-D)
Two- to four-page rubrics based on a four-point Likert scale. Although specific to Arizona State standards for teacher preparation, this could easily be modified to meet other state’s requirements.

Real Games (A)
Web Link: http://www.realgame.org
To facilitate middle school students analyzing family, community, and work interrelationships, we suggest using this 8 to 10 week activity based unit. By role playing single adults 10 to 15 years older than themselves, middle school-aged students experience the outcomes of career preparation, work weeks, wages and/or salaries, transferable skills, and leisure time of a hypothetical person in the community. From there, they select housing and transportation options based in their monthly income and form neighborhoods. As they learn about their daily routines (or lack of), they pay bills, balance budgets, and learn about career options and limitations. Students regularly draw chance cards that illuminate career development options or change personal lives. Later, a natural disaster or a regional development opportunity for the community is revealed and acted upon where the impact on personal lives and transferrable skills are re-examined.

Available as a stand alone or digitally enhanced simulation game, these resources can be customized to almost any situation or level from middle to high school. The considerable impact of these simulation games on career and academic outcomes is reported on the Web site. Other games available are “The Be Real Game” for 9th to 10th graders focused on career planning and “The Get Real Game” for grades 11 and 12 focused on career training.

States’ Career Clusters Initiative (B)
Web Link: http://www.careerclusters.org
This Web site serves as a clearinghouse for research, products, services, and technical assistance regarding career clusters.

United States Department of Labor in the 21st Century (B & C)
Web Link: http://www.dol.gov
Provides extremely important resources for family and consumer sciences CTE teachers. Includes the top 20 requested items such as: Occupational Outlook Handbook, wages by area and occupation, state labor laws, state minimum wage laws, compliance assistance related to the Family and Medical Leave Act, statistics on professional and related occupations, connections to state labor offices, and information on state labor laws.

References


Bancino, R., & Zevalkink, C. (2007). Technical professions increasingly require a broad skill set, but career and technical educators can help their students add soft skills to their hard-core


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