

# Programs to improve education in the us



## Chapter 1: Introduction

Topic. The current education debate in the U. S. has centered on preparing all scholars to be college and career ready by equipping them with scholastic, technical, and employability competences by the time they graduate high school (Hein, Smerdon, Lebow & Agus, 2012; Stone & Lewis, 2012). However, the competences' gap between what employers seek and what scholars-future labor market candidates-possess has raised concerns about how the educational system prepares high school scholars to become college and career ready to meet the needs of the labor market (Stone & Lewis, 2012). Without providing the scholastic, technical and employability competences that will help American teens transition smoothly into careers and college, many teens will continue to be underprepared for the labor market while employers react by grieving the existence of a competences' gap among labor market candidates (Halpern, 2009; Stone & Lewis, 2012).

Lerman (2008) agrees that that policymakers have attempted to address the competences gaps and workplace changes, due to global labor market changes, by enhancing educational attainment through more requirements scholastic initiatives. These achievements though, have neglected the possibility for other learning models. Lerman thus alleged that more schooling does not make you more successful for careers. Similarly, Cappelli (2008) affirmed that, while education is a good fundamental for success, having scholars take more rigorous scholastic courses will not ensure that they will be prepared for the labor market and that should be a cause for distress. Cappelli (2008) has further alleged that there is a problem with competences gaps which ultimately lays in scholars work-based skills. Thus,

while scholastic competences are considerable, employers are fascinated in how scholars can translate their education into productive practices in the workplace.

### Overview of the Research Problem

Research shows that, despite reforms to raise scholastic achievement among high school scholars, approximately 40% of American teens, do not attend or complete college (Lerman, 2009) and subsequently enter the labor market inadequately prepared (Stone & Lewis, 2012). When the focus is getting more teens into college, despite the evidence that a large majority of scholars do not complete their degrees or get jobs in their fields, society risks creating scholars who neglect their vocational futures since their choices may lack a clear connection to their goals. Scholars sometimes enter college with no clear direction (Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2006).

Halpern (2009) agrees that the implicit assumption in the U. S. that everyone needs some type of traditional, post-secondary education to be abundant in the labor market since most of the educational reforms have rested on the belief that all scholars should be encouraged to pursue college degrees.

Symonds, Schwarz, and Ferguson (2011) and Skills (2010) agrees that identifying alternative career pathways is essential to preparing scholars as the traditional, scholastic, classroom-based method is not suitable for the majority of American teens as it often causes such scholars to disengage from learning and graduate from school without the competences to succeed in careers or higher education. In that regard, when scholars are well prepared for careers or education, high levels of unemployment are reduced,

scholars are given a sense of purpose and direction, and the time spent floundering after high school is reduced (Hamilton, 1990; Taylor & Watt-Malcolm, 2007). Focusing on college and career readiness means that all scholars at the high school level can be engaged in relevant learning experiences that meet their needs and learning styles, and ultimately the needs of the labor market (Stone & Lewis, 2012).

Recent reports by Center for Social Organization of Schools tell us that only 75% of scholars leave high school with a diploma. In nearly 2, 000 of the nation's high schools, graduation is not the norm. Only 69. 2% of the scholars graduate after four years (Barton, 2007; Center for Social Organization of Schools, 2008; edweek. org, 2009). Many scholars enrolled in schools are not fully engaged in the educational process due to lack of a clear connection between high school work and personal goals (Bottoms & Young, 2008). The Partnership for 21st Century Skills revealed in its 2007 survey that 80% of voters say the competences scholars need to learn to prepare for 21st Century careers differ from what they needed 20 years ago (Partnership for 21ST Century Skills, 2010, and Vockley-Lang, 2007).

Community and industry stakeholders also believe schools need to do a better job of keeping up with changing educational needs (Barton, 2007, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010 and Vockley-Lang, 2007, Walker, 2008). Successful learning to achieve life and career success requires active engagement. Engagement is defined as a school participant's involvement in both learning and overall activities.

Since a scholar's engagement is often measured by a scholar's overall achievement and school involvement, a closer look is required. Engagement

is considerable for all scholars in school, whether urban, suburban, or rural, and regardless of socioeconomic background. Disengagement is a higher order factor composed of correlating factors occurring over a gradual period (Balfanz, Herzog, & Maclver, 2007). Scholars may experience a loss of scholastic motivation, which leads to detachment from school and its expectations, while reducing effort and classroom involvement. Scholars in prosperous environments, when they become disengaged, may learn less than they could or miss opportunities; however, they are often provided supplemental chances to meet expectations. The consequences of disengagement vary within different socioeconomic background. The scholars most affected are from disadvantaged backgrounds, in high poverty, and urban high schools. These scholars are less likely to graduate and have fewer opportunities for second chances and future success (National Academy of Sciences, 2003). According to Reschly and Appleton, “Engagement is the primary theoretical model for understanding the dropout and is, frankly, the bottom line in interventions to promote school completion” (Reschly & Appleton, 2008). Career and Technical Education programs engage scholars by providing opportunities for them to learn competences that lead to industry credentials or certification (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2008).

Despite current federal initiatives to spur reforms in American education such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and Race to the Top (2009), both containing goals of making American teens competitive in the global economy, the competences’ gap in the United States (U. S.) has not increased (Cappelli, 2008; Christman, 2012; Lerman, 2012). A mismatch

between the competences employers want and what scholars-potential employees-present in the labor market continues to exist. scholars, employers, and demographic changes, concerns with high school dropout and scholastic achievement, high college incompleteness rates, and a competences' gap in the labor market have generated interest in how best to engage scholars and make them college and career ready (Alfeld, Charner, Johnson & Watts, 2013; Darche, Nayar & Bracco, 2009b; Guy, Sitlington, Larsen & Frank, 2009; Lerman, 2012; Stone & Lewis, 2012). This challenge has caused policy makers, educators, and employers to seek solutions to the education and training of scholars that enhance their competences to meet employer needs. Calls have been made for educators to provide multiple career pathways for American teens and to provide work based learning activities that promote practical, and scholastic, learning (Symonds, Schwartz & Ferguson, 2011).

### Statement of the Problem

Over the past couple of years, several educational initiatives (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLB]; Race to the Top, 2009) have been developed to increase the scholastic achievement and presumably the competitive advantage of American high school scholars. Despite the well-placed intentions of these initiatives, concern still exists that the educational system is not adequately preparing scholars with the competences needed to enter the labor market or to pursue higher education as the effects of these reforms have been modest (Lerman, 2008; Stone & Lewis, 2012). The educational policy that emphasizes high-stakes testing and advancing the number of scholars entering science, technology, engineering, and math

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(STEM) fields has marginalized a considerable proportion of high school scholars whose learning styles, and scholastic and career interests, do not align with educational reforms or the needs of the labor market (Lerman, 2008; Symonds, W. C., Schwartz, R. B., & Ferguson R., 2011; Stone & Lewis; 2012; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Thus, even though enhancing schools is necessary, there is not a sufficient response to the labor market and global and technological changes. This study sought to address the gaps in the literature on internship programs targeted at teens in the United States.

Notably, while internships have been abundance in other developed countries, little research has been conducted in recent years on internships targeted at adolescents in the U. S. Research on internships in the U. S. has focused on adult internships typically in their mid- to late twenties Hence, this study sought to address the gaps in the literature on the internship program targeted at teens in the United States.

#### Deficiencies and Limitations in the Evidence

This case study will provide an in-depth description of one internship program. The study focused on one program could be perceived as a limitation. Although the findings may apply to other organizations, generalizations of the findings to other contexts such as an established program or another industry may have severe limitations. A single case would provide additional insights and boost the findings of the study.

#### Purpose of the Study

This study will describe an internship program targeted at adolescents and aimed at addressing the employer skill needs. Examining the experiences of scholars, employers and educators engaged in internships.

In the Career Technical and Education programs of the 21st century scholastic competences are stressed. In North occupations, educators, and Technical Education educators are accountable for both the skill proficiencies and scholastic gain of Career and Technical Education scholars. The indicators that require the blending of scholastic and Career and Technical Education are mandated through Perkins funding that North Carolina receives to fund local and state Career and Technical Education achievements.

Accountability in Career and Technical Education is guided by the Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 and other legislation, including No Child Left Behind. North Carolina is required to establish performance indicators in eight areas: 1S1: scholastic attainment: reading and language arts, 1S2: scholastic attainment: mathematics, 2S1: Technical attainment, 3S1: Completion, 4S1: Graduation rate, 5S1: Positive placement, 6S1: Nontraditional participation, 6S2: Nontraditional completion, Performance indicators 1S1, 1S2, and 4S1 are tied directly to No Child Left Behind. Because of this accountability model in place for North Carolina's Career and Technical Education programs, scholar enrollment is a major concern because enrollment can affect the formulas used to calculate performance levels.



The context of this case study of an industry education partnership, will take place in one public school district in North Carolina, its 28 schools serves approximately 17, 370 scholars. The Career and Technical Education department offers courses such as Apparel, Robotics/Tech Ed., Furniture/Cabinetmaking, Accounting, Health Science, Agriculture, Culinary, Marketing, and Business.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the most considerable legislation in school reform was passed into law. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001), promoted higher achievement standards, required schools to hire highly qualified educators, allowed for school choice, and changed school district spending. This sweeping reform in the education system caused considerable change and placed more focus on scholastic achievement using standards-based curriculum with standardized testing in core scholastic subjects (Rush & Sherff, 2012).

Since this change in education reform has occurred, a shortage of workforce ready individuals along with decreased confidence in the viability of Career and Technical Education programming exists (Gray, 2002; Bray, 2011). Further, high schools are forced to offer more rigorous, scholastic-focused courses to meet standards and high stakes testing requirements, forcing schools to forgo what has been a historically considerable part of secondary education (Siegel, 2009). Such focus on standards and raising the threshold for test scores results in insufficient time for hands-on activities and cooperative learning.

Further, the standards for high stakes testing, as required by the No Child Left Behind Act, narrow the enterprise of education (Lewis, 2002; Parkison 2009). At the school, district, and state levels under NCLB, schools' needs for meeting NCLB expectations have damaged the impact of Career and Technical Education programs. Some professionals view Career and Technical Education programs as an 'extra' and therefore Career and Technical Education programs maintain diminished value in helping to raise school achievement scores or encourage scholar success. Because of this perception, school administrators have been forced to reduce parts or entire Career and Technical Education programs from their scholastic offerings, decreasing the value and quality of Career and Technical Education programs (Hausmann, 2012).

The United States is experiencing a shortage in workforce ready high school graduates due, in part, to the change in curricular offerings in high schools across the country (McNamara, 2009). Employers have determined that teens entering the workforce lack basic soft competences such as teamwork, interpersonal communication, and organizational competences. McNamara's (2009) findings report that more than 80% of employers were concerned about soft competences deficiencies among workers.

On the technical side, secondary indicators for scholastic success included industry standards (Gordon, 2008). The increased funding on a local level has strengthened technical competences of scholars through integration and provide experiences in all aspects of an industry (Gordon, 2008). Besides, integration of curriculum and a broad program of study, the Perkins Act also sought to improve, expand, and modernize Career and Technical Education

programs. The funding provided for modernization of current Career and Technical Education programs has been given to provide activities to prepare special populations and mainstream populations for high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand occupations that lead to self-sufficiency (Gordon, 2008).

Throughout the last two decades, there has been a renewed belief that Career and Technical Education can impact the scholastic performance of scholars. Daggett suggested that scholars need both scholastic and Career and Technical Education competences. Daggett (2013) stated: If Career and Technical Education is to remain a viable program in secondary schools, it is essential that Career and Technical Education leaders and educators be able to prove that Career and Technical Education contributes not just to the applied workplace competency demands of business but also to the scholastic proficiencies of its served scholar populations on state scholastic tests.

While schools are aiming to integrate and modernize their Career and Technical Education programs to prepare scholars for these occupations, industry has helped shape their mission. Employers have been willing to pay higher salaries for higher levels of competences and certifications in the nonprofessional workforce (Ausman, 2009). Some schools and programs have recognized this and have reached out to industry to match the needs of their scholars' success and the needs of industry. Programs such as High Schools That Work (HSTW) have sought to increase scholars' readiness for college and better prepare their scholars who would seek immediate employment (Gibbs, 2006). These programs help meet the needs of industry, <https://assignbuster.com/programs-to-improve-education-in-the-us/>

while also matching the rigorous ambitions of current legislation for schools under No Child Left Behind (Gibbs, 2006).

In the PBS documentary “ Making Schools Work,” Joyce Phillips, principal of Corbin High Schools in Kentucky, shared that nearly 80% of all high school scholars need a ‘ hook’ – something that makes them want to come to school and have a desire to learn. She believed programs integrating high scholastic standards and rigor, and a comprehensive program for Career and Technical Education focusing on certification and skill development, are the answer to hooking those 80% high school scholars (Gibbs, 2006).

Integrating competences-based technical education with scholastic rigor in the traditional curriculum such as reading, writing, math, and science can give these scholars an opportunity in a variety of arenas following completion of high school. Hiring trainable employees is becoming increase difficult because most scholars seeking employment have little work history, limited educational credentials, and a brief résumé (Ausman, 2009). Experts predicted in 2010 over 80% of jobs would require scholars to have additional training beyond a high school diploma (Ausman, 2009). Current programs and curriculum in Career and Technical Education are cognizant of this alarming statistic and the need to provide scholars with competences and training in industry besides scholastic preparation for college and beyond (Ausman, 2009).

Despite Career and Technical Education of the past being thought of as a track for scholars who would not need the scholastic rigor and demands of the college preparatory curriculum, research has proven that Career and

Technical Education engages and motivates scholars by giving them real world opportunities and challenges that will enhance and provide connection to their education (Harris & Wakelyn, 2007). Recently, employers have communicated with educators to tell schools what competences are needed, and these collaborative achievements often include the scholastic rigor necessary to prepare for schooling beyond high school (Ausman, 2009). It is now estimated that over half of all scholars choosing to take part in some Career and Technical Education curriculum at their school are taking the bulk of their courses within the college preparatory curriculum (Harris & Wakelyn, 2007).

The achievements of schools to restructure curriculum and increase rigor come in the wake of high dropout rates and stagnant college completion rates over the past several years (Harris & Wakelin, 2007). Entrepreneurial philanthropists such as Bill Gates have been challenging public schools over the past decade to include more relevant experiences and real-world practical application to their curriculum, which some find obsolete. At a 2005 conference, Mr. Gates stated that nearly 70% of all scholars who dropped out of high school claim they would have stayed more engaged and not dropped out if the school offered more engaging, real world learning opportunities (Harris & Wakelyn, 2007). This call to action was just what Career and Technical Education programs across the country needed to hear because of their ability to give scholars the opportunity to learn in applied settings (Harris & Wakelyn, 2007).

Organizations no longer bear the primary responsibility for their workers' career development, instead expecting each individual to take on that responsibility (Adamson, 1997; Conlon, 2003; Graham & Nafukho, 2004).

Career Development, which has a long history and rich theoretical base and human resource development, a relatively young field of study still developing and refining its theoretical base (Lynham, 2000; Swanson, 2001; Torraco, 2004;). Contrary to what many people believe, theory is not intended to be haughty pontification about a scholarly topic. Instead, the development of theory, specifically in emerging fields such as Human Resource Development, should lead to explanations that aid practitioners and scholars alike in using and explaining issues that impact people and organizations. The refinement of theory is also an considerable aspect of theory building and in the established field of career development scholars are now calling for the convergence of existing career development theory into a framework to address the current theoretical inadequacies (Savickas, 2001; Zunker, 2002).

The Carl D. Perkins Act (2006) specified that local education agencies applying for federal funding illustrate in their local planning systems how career guidance and scholastic counseling be provided to Career and Technical Education scholars including linkages to future education and training opportunities (US Department of Education, 2012). A career development coordinator can work with Career and Technical Education scholars to develop realistic plans of study, assist with registration, and serve as an advocate for Career and Technical Education scholars. During middle school scholars explore and understand a variety of careers while <https://assignbuster.com/programs-to-improve-education-in-the-us/>

developing a scholar portfolio that includes career interest inventories, learning style inventories, and the development of four year plans.

The transition from middle to high school can present challenges for scholars due to the increased in rigorous coursework and scholar expectations (Breakthrough Collaborative, 2011). Therefore, effective career development and advisement activities are an influential factor in Career and Technical Education course selections in secondary education. Career development and advisement activities can be provided from a variety of individuals including parents, educators, and counselors. In their study, Manzi, Palma, and Schultheiss (2005) found that “ to strengthen the connection between school and future result, choices, and school counselors could provide children with experiences that more clearly link scholastic subject areas with various occupations”. This concept supports the notion of a program of study that combines a rigorous Career and Technical Education and scholastic curriculum directed by a scholar’s career interest. According to Kalchik and Oertle (2012) “ program of study provide a means for exploring options, organizing course selections and planning for transition while developing knowledge and competences”.

Despite the presumed relationship between Career and Technical Education and career development, a gap continues to exist between the two because Career and Technical Education courses alone do not provide the essential components available within a career development program (Kalchik & Oertle, 2012). Therefore, comprehensive career development plans that incorporate scholastic and career courses meet the college and career readiness goals outlined in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS, n. d.).

A comprehensive career development program assists with the development of programs of study that are developed at the eighth grade with the help of the school counselor and parents with the scholar prior to transitioning to high school. However, emphasis on career development that could help steer Career and Technical Education programs have not been greatly emphasized in our educational systems, although early educators stressed the importance of vocational competences to a child's overall development (Gutek, 2011; Lewis, M. V., Kosine, N. R., & Overman, L., 2008). McComb Beverage (2012) suggest that when career development programs are not put into place during the adolescent stage, scholars may face difficulty making career choices upon graduation from high school.

Mei, Newmeyer, and Wei (2008) conducted a study on the factors that influence a scholar's career choices by analyzing the relationships among learning experiences, career self efficacy, career interest, and career choices. Mei, T., Newmeyer, M. D., & Wei, P. (2008) found that interventions are needed to provide scholars with a " comprehensive career development program that helps scholars develop self-efficacy in their desired careers through practical learning activities". In a study to understand the factors that influence enrollment in Career and Technical Education programs at an occupational center, Gene (2010) examined the human and other factors while exploring the most effective communication strategies that accurately present the advantages of Career and Technical Education. Gene (2010) found the " factors that influenced scholars to enroll were having a high school career plan, earning credits toward high school graduation, and a job shadowing someone in the field where they were fascinated". McComb-



Beverage (2012) found that self-efficacy can be an influential component to an adolescent's career planning process.

Super's (1992) life span theory depicts his life-span rainbow as a model for the practice of career development and counseling. The life span theory helps to develop conceptual design instruments for career assessments. A model of Career Development, Maturity, and Adaptability, Model of Importance and Determinants " seeks to draw on matching theory and its knowledge base, on developmental theory and its wisdom, and on phenomenology or personal construct theory. It seeks, too, to portray what we know about person-environment interaction" (Super, D. E., Osborne, L. W., Walsh, D. J. Brown, S., & Niles, S. G., 1992). Career assessments including The Strong Inventory, The Career Development Inventory, The Adult Careers Concern Inventory, and the Saliency Inventory conceptualize the career interest of an individual (Super, Osborne, Walsh, Brown, & Niles, 1992). North Carolina Career and Technical Education programs are required to provide a Career Development Plan (CDP) on all scholars when they are transitioning to postsecondary education that includes a variety of inventories to gauge the scholar's' career interests and learning abilities (NC 5-Year Career and Technical Education State Plan, 2008). Career counseling to enhance career development can be implemented within programs and institutions with the use of assessments and inventories as designed by Super (1992). McComb-Beverage (2012) found that lifespan coupled with an effective career development program can assist adolescents in creating realistic goals for the future.

The learning style of individuals can also play a vital role in their course selections and their career and college goals because style of learning determines how an individual processes each new experience. As a model, Career, and decisions are influenced through lived experiences. Kolb and Yeganeh (2009) explained, “ For many, this learning style choice has become relatively unconscious, comprised of deeply patterned routines applied globally to learning situations. Mindfulness can put the control of learning back in the learner’s hands”. Therefore, assessing scholar learning styles during the career development process can help guide scholars in making informed decisions during and after high school. Career guidance and a variety of inventories are essential tools for transition from school to work where Friedman (2007) suggests that individuals should be provided with tools that make them lifetime employable.

In order for scholars to gain both Career and Technical Education and scholastic competences, scholars must be recruited into Career and Technical Education programs. If low enrollment becomes an issue for a Career and Technical Education, they could be held accountable for various performance standards, including scholastic gain. Low or declining enrollment is a concern for Career and Technical Education educators and administrators due to the standards mandated in the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act of 1998. Administrators in state agencies and local Career and Technical Education departments agree that accountability is the key aspect in Perkins III. Because Congress gave more flexibility to the states in dividing funds, they expected in return to see positive results from the supported Career and Technical Education

programs. Therefore, through the accountability model, Career and Technical Education must show its contribution to scholarly achievement, program completion rates, and the placement of scholars in postsecondary education and the workforce. To meet accountability expectations, states had to develop systems that measure performance using three or four specific indicators.

Social literacy contract. Historically, vocational education, now titled, Career and Technical Education began as an apprenticeship agreement for individuals to learn a skilled trade prior to entering the workforce (Lynch, 2006). In the early nineteen- hundreds, Career and Technical Education expanded into a program that was ultimately offered in schools to supply both the industrial and agricultural workforces with skilled workers. School reforms, such as the Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act of 1917, required specific skilled training to retain scholars in secondary schools and provide trained workers for semiskilled occupations (Gordon, Daggett, McCaslin, Parks, & Castro, 2002). The landmark legislation, The Carl D. Perkins Act of 1984, confirmed politicians' belief that Career and Technical Education is an considerable contributor both economically and socially. According to Gordon, Yocke, Maldonado, and Saddler (2007), the Perkins Act emphasized improvement in scholastic achievement and the preparation of school-aged individuals for postsecondary education and work.

Career and technical education is often viewed as way to prepare scholars of lower socioeconomic standing for the work force. This belief was characterized when a U. S. Department of Education employee characterized Career and Technical Education programs as preparing scholars for careers

as shoe repairers (D'Amico, 2003). The Career and Technical Education stereotype prevails in the minds of many administrators with the thinking, as Gray (2004) stated, " It prepares scholars only for work after high school, and its scholars are mostly male, too often minorities, economically backward, and destined for dead-end jobs". The attitudes of administrators may not be overt in those stated beliefs. Those attitudes are unrecognized paradigms as deeply ingrained as are underlying sexist attitudes and racial attitudes.

On April 24, 1997, former Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education Patricia W. McNeil addressed the Senate Labor and Human Resources' Committee. In her statement, she discussed the importance of career and technical (vocational) education for the 21st century. McNeil stated: We need a new vision of vocational education if we ensure that scholars are prepared for the information age of the 21st century. That vision must reflect the rapidly changing demands of our economy and society brought on by new technologies, global competition, and changes in the organization of work. Our vision must reflect the knowledge and competences that workers, citizens, and family members will need to be abundance in a world that is dramatically different than the one that existed when we got our formal education. We must envision new kinds of schools. I believe it is considerable that we think about vocational education as an integral part of our achievements to reform secondary schools and improve postsecondary education.

There has been an expansion of Career and Technical Education in the United

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