

action RESEARCH Insights

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Investigating a Workplace Pathway for Students

In October 2007, a team of educators at St. Joan of Arc High School came together to begin the process of examining data with the goal of establishing an improved workplace pathway at the school. The team's efforts were directed at improving the current grade 9 cohort's potential for success both leading up to, and beyond, graduation.

In a proposal submitted to the Barrie Region MISA Professional Network Centre, the team agreed to analyze the academic progress of grade 9 students vis-à-vis credit accumulation, report card and other achievement data at the end of Semester 1. As well, the team planned to conduct a survey to examine grade 9 students' attitudes, perceptions, challenges and aspirations after high school.

Accordingly, data related to current grade 9 student achievement and perceptions was gathered and analyzed by the school team at the outset of Semester 2. The team is using this data to examine ways to modify courses and offer programs that support the development of a workplace pathway at the school. For instance, the school team has conceptualized the idea of an 'interdisciplinary course' that will expose a greater number of students to local workplace opportunities prior to graduating.

It is hoped that fostering student success in the workplace pathway will lead to more rewarding opportunities for all students within the school's community.



Grade 9 students at St. Joan of Arc participated in an online survey regarding their attitudes and perceptions toward their learning and career aspirations.

About St. Joan of Arc High School

- Relatively new Catholic high school
- Opened in 2001 with initial enrolment of 450 students in grades 9, 10 and 11
- Like the surrounding community, school has experienced rapid growth; current enrolment is 1450 students in grades 9 through 12
- Located in southwest end of Barrie
- Demographically characterized as a "bedroom community" with high proportion of working and commuting parents
- Catchment encompasses diverse "urban influence" of southwest Barrie as well as "rural influence" of the communities of Angus and CFB Borden (military base)
- Administrative turnover; school has had three principals and seven vice-principals in seven years



Grade 9 Student Survey Details:

While various programs at St. Joan of Arc High School have been put in place to foster effective school-to-college and school-to-university transitions for students, the school team felt that its school-to-work pathway was underdeveloped.

The purpose of the survey within this action research project was to help the school team better understand current grade 9 student perceptions and attitudes toward learning and career aspirations.

The specific objectives of the survey were to identify current grade 9 students':

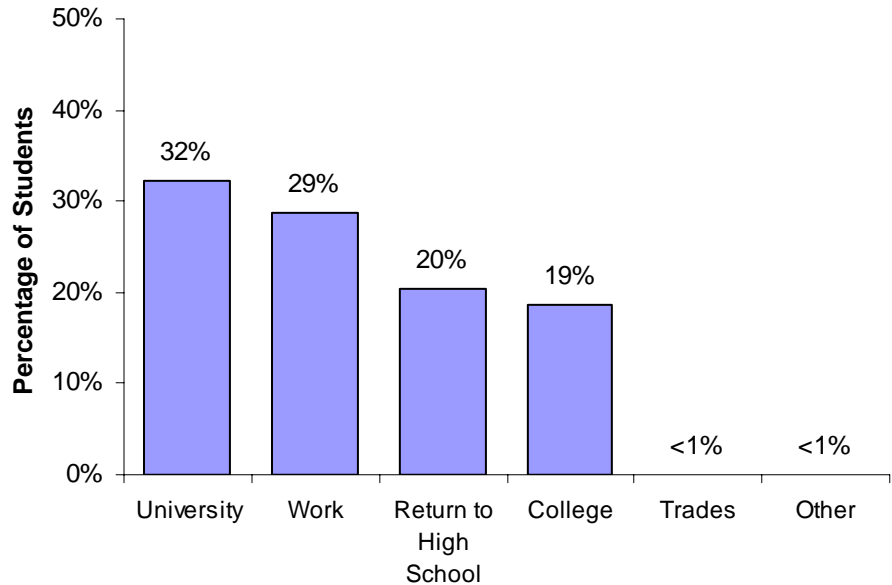
- perceptions about their learning and interpersonal development;
- attitudes about their experiences of high school to date;
- awareness of currently available school programs (e.g. co-op);
- beliefs about positive and negative influences on their learning (e.g. barriers and enablers);
- aspirations regarding career plans, goals and intended destinations.

The survey was administered in an online format using SurveyMonkey. All grade 9 classes from one period of the school day were brought to a computer lab over the course of a week to complete the survey. An 84% response rate was achieved.

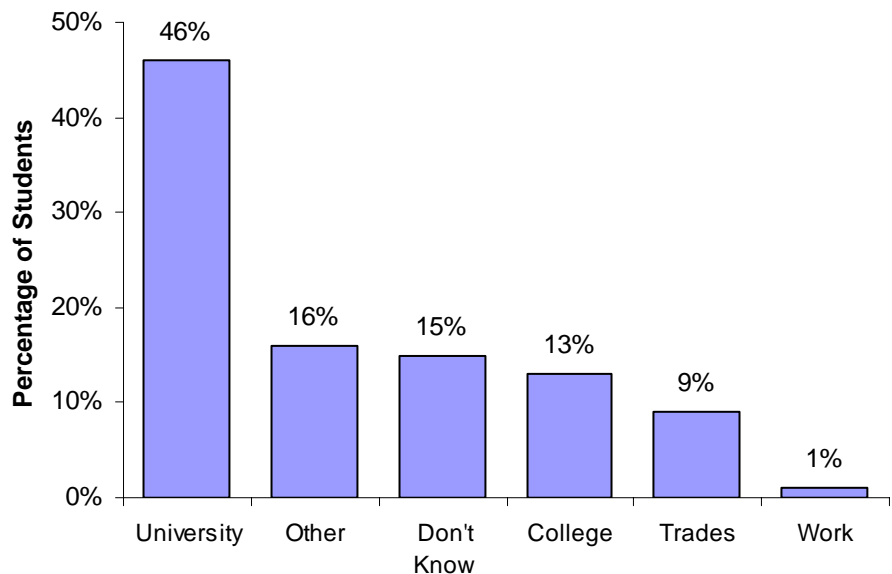
Future Research:

In addition to the program development underway at the school (described on page 1), the team has expressed an interest in future action research that may include conducting focus groups with students who are identified as suitable candidates for a workplace pathway program. As well, the team plans to solicit teachers' observations and input about students' engagement, effort and progress. For more information, please contact Cam Morrison or Anthony Buffone.

Actual Destinations of Grade 12 Graduating Students at St. Joan of Arc (Class of 2008) (n=344)



Stated Aspirations after Graduation of Grade 9 Students at St. Joan of Arc (Class of 2011) (n=333)



By comparing the survey responses from current Grade 9 students with actual (stated) destinations of Grade 12 students at the school, the team discovered that there were marked differences between Grade 9 students' perceptions of "what they wanted to do" following graduation, versus what Grade 12 graduates' typical destinations were. This finding confirmed the belief that the workplace pathway is not generally seen as a viable option by students at the school and is illustrated in the charts above. This finding is corroborated by previous research conducted by Dr. Alan King (2001, 2002, 2004).