

ASPIRE JOHNSON COUNTY

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Questions from Cradle to Career: Multiple Pathways to Career Success, May 7, 2015

Questions Answered by Dr. David Dresslar, Executive Director of the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning at the University of Indianapolis and panelist for Cradle to Career Conversation

1. Would not our education outcomes and personal success stories be significantly enhanced if education institutions were to make career recommendations based upon one's innate aptitude set when those students are considering post-secondary education pursuits?

DD: Absolutely- well said!

2. How do the various levels of education translate into civic engagement?

DD: All citizens have both a right and an obligation to be engaged in the life of community, state and nation. In our egalitarian society, all citizens, regardless of educational attainment should participate.

3. What are other non-economic benefits of higher education?

DD: Higher education enhances of the quality of life for the individual and supports our democratic form of government through increased knowledge and understanding.

4. The lack of employability skills is frequently cited by employers as the key reason they cannot fill open positions. It seems these skills could be a key economic development driver for the state of Indiana. How can businesses "lobby" the state and federal government to rely less on standardized testing in favor of things businesses really need?

DD: In spite of the current anti-testing climate, standardized tests serve the important purpose of documenting learning and directing remediation. Employability skills are hard to assess in terms of mastery but they remain important to employers. Educators must provide both the knowledge and skills measured by tests as well as employability skills such as critical thinking, teamwork and problem solving.

5. Is the fact that we have a shorter school day/year than many other countries affecting the education of our children? What would it take to make a longer school day, more rigorous classes, and a longer school year acceptable for both parents and educators?

DD: It is widely agreed that more "time on task" for U. S. students would have a positive effect on academic performance. Some innovative schools have realized promising results have employed extending the day and/or year. The limiting factor to taking this to scale is simply the lack of funding that would be required to extend the work ours and days worked by the

educational labor force. Since that is quite unlikely to happen, schools must build rigor without expanding learning time.

6. At what age are we expecting students to start planning their career paths?

DD: Students should start considering career pathways as they transition from jr. high/middle school to high school for the simple reason that the high school coursework they pursue can be a controlling factor for a post-secondary education. Relatively young students have an advantage when they have some idea as to their career goals or career field in that the preparation for the career has specific educational requirements.

7. Is it realistic that a Jr/Sr. high school student is really able to make a major career decision?

DD: Students need not determine an actual career that early but they should know if they are pursuing a future goal that requires a college degree. All too often, students take a course of studies that do not prepare them for college and find out too late that they are unprepared to pursue the required education for the career to which they aspired. A challenging course of studies in high school is always the best preparation for the most career options.

8. We seem to expect many 18 year olds to know more about him or herself than they are able, so how viable is the strategy that postpones post-secondary education for a year or two until some students are able to make a better decision about their education? What are the pros and cons of postponing education?

DD: Many professionals recommend postponing a student's post-secondary education- especially for those students who lack a future goal or commitment. A year between high school and college can be a time to mature, earn tuition and develop a sense of purpose. There are no real disadvantages to this strategy.

9. How can we educate parents about the value of a dual credit pathway for education? They have a lot of influence over these decisions.

DD: Schools should be very transparent about dual credit opportunities for students. One good way to emphasize dual credit is the establishment of the Early College High School model that employs supports for students and a program of courses.

10. If you could create a curriculum that would directly relate to the improvement of Johnson County, what would you create?

DD: A curriculum that would provide opportunities for student success by giving them responsibility for their own learning and that is relevant to their lives. Educational success can directly result in economic well being for the community.

11. Dr. Dresslar, What sort of courses and experiences should schools provide to allow students to imagine, explore, and define what life will look like for them as well-adjusted, contributing members of the community?

DD: While at school, students should experience real life situations such as project-based learning so that they experience working in groups and reaching rigorous goals. The goal of schools should not be limited to what students know but also include what they are able to do. A well-rounded education includes imparting morality, justice and a sense of self-responsibility.

12. Dr. Dresslar, Given the employability skills gap, what is the prognosis for narrowing the gap? How long do you think it may take to narrow?

Unfortunately, for many students the gap between preparation and qualification will continue to be a factor for quite some time. The lack of communication and coordination between educators and employers will continue to be a source of that continued gap. Policy makers should encourage such a coordinated effort to the benefit of students, families, communities as well as the state and country.