

Working to Improve Nontraditional Student Participation in Career & Technical Education

While schools are aware that students may not enroll in nontraditional classes for a variety of reasons, it is often due to the lack career information about opportunities in nontraditional occupations provided pre-high school grades. Starting in the early middle school grades with career exploration and later identification of secondary classes that correspond to selected careers can improve student involvement. However, the number one reason young men and women do not usually sign up for many career and technical education programs is the lack of other young men and women in them.

Tips to increase student interest and success in nontraditional technical careers?

- Have all middle school students identify both traditional and nontraditional careers and secondary courses.
- Encourage “friends” to explore a several different careers, allow for those with common interests to pair up, and provide opportunities for groups to explore specific careers.
- Arrange for class observations in both technical and application level CTE classes in high school to offer greater knowledge of content, projects and opportunities.
- Work with business and industry to create short job shadows and site visits with small groups of both traditional and nontraditional students.
- Allow for groups of young women and men to specifically explore opportunities in nontraditional careers by bringing in professionals in the field to speak, demonstrate common activities and projects, or arrange for on-site projects that relate to the career.

Improve Classroom Climate

- Identify what conditions or situations at school would make students feel uncomfortable in a nontraditional classroom. (*Identify gender specific terms and actions*)
- Take steps to identify activities that positively affect the performance and completion rate of all your students.
- Allow for team work that does not segregate one gender from the other, but also allow for same gender pairing.
- Make career and continuing education information available to all students in the classroom.
- Invite professionals who represent their career positively to the classroom to discuss their field and daily work routine in a mixed gender environment.

Why do students leave nontraditional programs?

- Poor classroom climate
- Student isolation based on gender
- Lack of role models or successful mentors
- Gender-biased instructional and support strategies
- External conditions such as lack of support from parents/guardians and peers

What are some ways to help students succeed in nontraditional programs?

- Invite employers to speak to students about the potential for getting jobs after they finish your program.
- Bring in multiple role models and mentors to encourage students, help them understand the realities of the working world, and provide valuable contacts for job placement.
- Look for PLE learning opportunities for students to help provide them with a sense of direction and to assist them in developing a career plan.
- Let students know it is okay to try or sample a career, as they can change their mind.
- All teachers should take equity seriously and demonstrate a positive attitude about equity and fairness in your classroom. Promote courtesy, fairness, and acceptance among all students.
- Intervene when students use inappropriate language or gestures in the classroom.
- Hold all students to uniform standards of discipline and achievement.
- Deal with sexual harassment immediately and let your students know that it won't be tolerated.
- Assign male and female students to work together to help reduce the natural tendency to self-segregate by gender.
- Promote peer study groups. Encourage all students to participate to help minimize the stigma for students who need help.
- Revisit career interest assessments and career information multiple times through the school year.
- Train all students in proper use and care of hand tools and equipment to reduce physical demands.
- Ask physical education and/or athletic staff to help provide physical training specific to your students' needs.
- Research ways to best communicate with parents of minority students to increase involvement in their student's education. Consider that cultural factors may be the reason why parents/guardians are reluctant and even opposed to enrolling in a nontraditional program and pursuing a nontraditional career.
- Identify local partners to help find scholarships, tools, and jobs for students. Enlist help from your advisory committee, governmental agencies, and community-based organizations who will work with you and who can provide services your students need to stay in school and succeed.