



The U.S. Department of Education's

GENDER EQUITY EXPERT PANEL



**Exemplary & Promising
Gender Equity Programs**

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GENDER EQUITY IN VOCATIONAL/TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL-TO-WORK

SUMMARY REVIEWS OF PROMISING PROGRAMS



PROMISING

CAREER CHOICES CURRICULUM

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The *Career Choices Curriculum* is a comprehensive guidance program designed to address career and life planning topics of concern to young people in grades 9 and 10, and to young women in particular. The program is thematically integrated into academic subjects—English/language arts, math, and social studies. Its goals are:

- to demonstrate the relevance of education (thus motivating teens to apply themselves to their studies);
- to help adolescents establish and consolidate identity (a particular problem for females);
- to foster ambitious, yet realistic career plans (many young women aim too low);
- to expose young people to the myriad career choices available in both traditional and nontraditional fields; and
- to teach the skills and attitudes necessary for success at home and on the job in the 21st century.

TARGET POPULATIONS

Career Choices Curriculum was designed for students in 9th or 10th grade—a critical time in the developmental cycle for young people, and one when females in particular often begin to scale back their goals and dreams. It is also a critical time to address teen pregnancy prevention. The curriculum has been used in mainstream language arts classrooms, in juvenile correctional institutions, with Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) youth programs, and in teen-parent programs across the country.

COST

The curriculum materials include:

- *Career Choices Curriculum* (\$24.95), the main textbook;
- a consumable *Workbook & Portfolio* (\$6.95) for use alongside the text;
- a comprehensive *Instructor's/Counselor's Guide* (\$22.95) that offers a variety of strategies and resources for special populations;
- *Possibilities* (\$11.95), an anthology of literary pieces from a diverse group of authors that makes the course particularly useful in English/language arts departments; and
- *Lifestyle Math* (\$8.95), a mathematics workbook that helps students understand the relevancy of mathematics in the context of their futures.

Total cost per classroom depends upon whether the instructor uses the optional English/language arts and mathematics books. Materials can be treated as interdisciplinary units in academic classrooms, as modules with specific classes, or with special populations.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Academic Innovations schedules 50 to 60 day-long workshops every year to train instructors in the use of the materials. The cost of \$85 includes a complete set of textbooks (value \$72.75), lunch, and resource materials. Those who can't attend a workshop may borrow a training videotape at no cost. In addition, certified trainers are available for on-site training for districts and individual schools, and master teachers who have used the curriculum successfully provide a further resource.

The Academic Innovations Technical Support Department provides assistance by phone (toll free), e-mail, and a comprehensive Web site. An online discussion group makes it easy for *Career Choices Curriculum* instructors to share ideas, resources, and challenges, and helps to alleviate the isolation many educators feel.

Print resources include a free newsletter and resource and funding guides. The newsletter and updated *Instructor's Guide* contain a list of resources (videos, films, books) that could be helpful to teachers and students.

Academic Innovations has recently developed *CareerChoices.com*, a Web site containing over 80 individualized lessons which link *Career Choices Curriculum* students and teachers to exciting and informative Internet resources. Using *CareerChoices.com*, students can easily find help in the following areas:

- researching nontraditional career opportunities,
- exploring colleges and vocational schools,
- comparing salary levels for various careers,
- writing resumes, and
- creating a "real-world" budget.

REVIEW SUMMARY

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS: GOOD

The Gender Equity Expert Panel felt that there was sufficient, consistent preliminary teacher and student self-report evidence, and anecdotal evidence to rate the effectiveness of this program as "good." Available data included teacher surveys and student essays, evaluations from users at multiple sites, and independent research and evaluation. All claimed that the *Career Choices Curriculum* is highly successful in achieving its goals. The Panel was impressed by the evidence related to the widespread use of *Career Choices Curriculum*, and this is reflected in their "excellent" rating for Criterion 3, usefulness to others/replicability. The impact claims that the program helped students make deliberate career choices, decreased dropouts, and increased achievement in reading and mathematics are supported by some evidence. The *Career Choices Curriculum* teachers also rated *Career Choices Curriculum* as "Better" or "Significantly Better" than other programs with similar purposes.

In addition to evaluation data collected at each site, follow-up phone interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators to gather more in-depth information. Because the curriculum has been so widely used with JTPA populations, the course has been part of independent evaluations conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor. Although the developers have collected evaluation data in a variety of ways to support a variety of claims, no systematic evidence has been presented to demonstrate the curriculum's effectiveness in promoting gender equity. However, some of the teacher and student evaluative comments indicated positive results for female students.

In order to rate the program excellent on evidence of positive impact, the Panel would want to see more systematic collection and analysis of evidence disaggregated by sex, race, disability, English proficiency, and socioeconomic status. The few small studies were more formative than summative, and in some cases, focused on special uses of the program (in Denver, for example, students were paid to attend and could also receive course credit upon completion). The Panel would also look for convincing comparative information to show that the positive results for students (and perhaps their teachers) could be explicitly attributed to the program.

Claim	Evidence
<p>1. Extensive use of the curriculum in schools nationwide.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Over a period of 7 years, the program was used in more than 1,800 schools nationwide. ● Increased use of curriculum each year; as demonstrated by evaluation data and sales records. (In 1990, 6,342 <i>Career Choices Curriculum</i> books were sold; in 1997, 39,484 copies were sold.) ● Increased enrollment patterns in <i>Career Choices Curriculum</i> in multiple school districts.
<p>2. Helps students understand the importance of making deliberate career choices and may contribute to decreased dropouts and higher achievement in reading and math.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Eighty-three percent of Denver students who participated in the JTPA Academic Enrichment Program indicated they believed the course would help them in the future. ● Denver JTPA's Academic Enrichment Program used <i>Career Choices Curriculum</i>. Pre- and post-WRAT tests showed significant gains in reading scores among seven of eight groups and in math scores for five of the eight groups. All other groups showed positive gains. ● Cochella Valley High School (90 percent Hispanic) requires <i>Career Choices Curriculum</i> for all freshmen. Since 1993, when the program was first used, the dropout rate has fallen from the highest in the county to the lowest. ● Teacher reports indicate that the materials have worked with students from minority/ethnic backgrounds. Data from North Dakota suggest that teachers perceived the students to be engaged and generally positive about the program.
<p>3. Effective in serving female students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student quotes in teacher surveys reflect changes in female students' career plans, including the choice of nontraditional careers, based on better understanding of careers and the cost of living. ● Teacher comments from multiple sites where pregnant and parenting teens were present demonstrate positive impact of the curriculum.
<p>4. Teachers rated the curriculum as "Better" or "Significantly Better" than other curricula.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Data from annual questionnaires completed by <i>Career Choices Curriculum</i> teachers over the last 4 years.

QUALITY: EXCELLENT

The curriculum is unique in that it is interdisciplinary and designed to truly integrate career guidance into the core high school curriculum (language arts and mathematics). In addition, the program's adaptability allows it to be used with and complement other similar materials. The *Instructor's/Counselor's Guide* provides excellent assistance. The career guidance is appropriate, helpful, and comprehensive in scope.

The materials meet the special needs of girls for career development (a need often identified in research) in a thorough manner. They include information regarding nontraditional occupations, workplace rights and responsibilities, and blending work and family. In addition, the materials reflect sensitivity and inclusiveness regarding race, gender, and disability. Academic Innovations, the developer of the curriculum, updates the materials every 2 years. Data and information related to gender equity were accurate and research-based.

USEFULNESS/REPLICABILITY: EXCELLENT

Whether used by itself or in combination with other materials, the *Career Choices Curriculum* is an excellent resource for teachers and counselors. In addition to the fact that the cost of the materials is competitive with comparable materials, the developers provide training, technical assistance, and a Web site to support the curriculum users.

Academic Innovations has given copyright permission for Braille editions of the curriculum. In addition, audiotapes have been made that include descriptions of the pictures in the book. The curriculum has been effectively used with students on Indian reservations, Hispanic populations, African-American populations, and in correctional institutions.

Each year for the last 5 years, between 5,000 and 10,000 economically disadvantaged students have used this curriculum in their JTPA summer youth programs. A high percentage of these individuals come from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Because of the flexibility of the curriculum and its value in conjunction with other materials, *Career Choices Curriculum* provides opportunity for widespread replication. The owners of Academic Innovations have a long track record of taking programs to national scale and providing the support for successful implementation. Data on book sales and curriculum use show increases in both areas.

EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE: EXCELLENT

The developers of the curriculum should be applauded for their approach to integrating gender equity issues and career decisionmaking into the core academic curriculum. **Career Choices Curriculum** approaches gender equity by building it into the curriculum in a manner that engages all students, regardless of gender. The authors have a long history of writing and publishing gender equity books, including *Choices, A Teen Woman's Journal for Self-Awareness and Personal Planning*, Advocacy Press, 1983; *Things Will Be Different for My Daughter: A Practical Guide for Building Her Self-Esteem and Self-Reliance*, Penguin, 1995; and several other nationally renowned equity titles. They designed these guidance materials to be used in core academic courses, because of the resistance of many educators and students to separate or single-sex equity initiatives. In order to have all girls exposed to these concepts, they designed the course for all students. Because the course fits into the academic classroom (English/Language arts for example), the authors have been able to provide a basis for gender equity and move toward their goal of reaching a far greater audience.

The **Career Choices Curriculum** is founded on an understanding of the research and statistics that are the basis for efforts to achieve gender equity, particularly with respect to self-knowledge and career development. Because it focuses on universally necessary skills, such as economic self-sufficiency and risk taking (two areas that schools need to better address for girls), the curriculum has an appeal for all students. This strength is one of the reasons the curriculum has become so widely used and respected in the field of gender equity and career development.

With regard to federal mandates, the curriculum addresses the School-to-Work goal of serving "all students" in an exemplary manner. It also makes a significant contribution to improved strategies for teaching and learning, especially in regard to its interdisciplinary approach.

