

CAREER ACADEMY CONVERSATION
National Career Academy Coalition Conference
Hyatt Regency, Orange County
Friday, November 4, 2011

Forty people attended this Conversation, representing 21 organizations. The agenda was organized around the four topics for which task forces have been established, reported on below.

◆ ACADEMY RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT

Peter Magnuson (ACTE) provided a briefing on expected Carl Perkins funding levels and the ESEA reauthorization language as currently drafted. A 1.5% cut is anticipated in Perkins funding, pending decisions of the budget super-committee. If automatic cuts are arrived at, the reduction would be 6.7% for education, to take effect during the 2013 fiscal year.

The Senate ESEA reauthorization language (Harkin-Enzi) gives more prominence to high schools than in the past, and offers strategies for those with less than a 75% graduation rate, all of which focus on “college and career” preparation and incorporate the principles of Career Academies and Linked Learning, such as personalization, work-based learning, and links to post-secondary institutions. These include: Graduation Promise Academies (SLCs in grade 9, Career Academies in grades 10-12); Career Academies in grades 9-12; and Early College High Schools. The House is working on education bills in pieces and has passed a Charter School Bill, a Consolidation Bill (eliminating 40 categorical programs, among them Small Learning Communities), and a bill to allow more flexibility in use of Title I funds, such as for the integration of academic and CTE learning.

Brad Stam (ConnectEd CA) reported on the “Pathways Supporting College and Career Act”, introduced by Representative Glen Thompson (R) and Senator Bob Casey (D) from Pennsylvania, which acknowledges Linked Learning as a viable reform strategy. This identifies the central principles of Linked Learning and would allow use of Title I funds to support this approach.

Mary Visher (MDRC) mentioned that the U.S. Department of Labor plans to launch an Investments in Workforce Development initiative modeled on the i3 grants that may allow use of funds for academy-like programs. Svetlana Darche (WestEd) mentioned that the Workforce Innovation Fund is expected to focus on pathways that integrate academic and CTE learning. And Senator Dianne Feinstein is considering introducing a bill based on the California Partnership Academy model.

Jerry Winthrop (CA Department of Education) reported that it has been an exciting time for the CPAs with the release by Superintendent Torlakson of CASN’s CPA report last week. However, even in the face of convincing data that CPAs are having positive effects on senior graduation rates (95% vs. 85% statewide) and meeting a-g college entrance requirements (57% vs. 36% statewide), funding for approximately 200 of the 500 CPAs may sunset next June due to California’s dire financial straits.

◆ ACADEMY CURRICULA

Erin Fender (CASN) and Penni Hudis (Connect Ed), co-chairs of this task force, shared a handout that summarized progress here. The goal is to compile curriculum abstracts and links on a searchable database for eight CTE industries by July 2012, focusing on curriculum that is rigorous, project/ problem based, and interdisciplinary. Currently three industries are up and available: Energy & Utilities/STEM; Health & Medical Technology/Health Science; and Engineering and Design/STEM. Finance & Business/ Finance/ Business Management & Administration; and Arts, Media & Entertainment/ Arts, Audio/Video Technology & Communication will be complete by January 2012. The database for these includes descriptions and links to the source, some of which are free, while others have fiscal or professional development requirements. Some include full courses, some projects and some lessons.

There was discussion about how to link to other open source databases of curriculum such as High Tech High, the Buck Institute for Education, Education Development Corporation, Ford/ PAS, and

ConnectEd CA Studios. The last of these includes a toolkit and program to assist with integrated curriculum development, tied to standards. Another suggestion was to link this to the teacher preparation and certification programs that Nancy Farnan has established at SDSU, and its replications in other UCs/CSUs. Concern was expressed about how to complete this work for the eight industries/ career cluster fields not included in CASN's current funding.

◆ **ACADEMY STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT**

Mary Visher (MDRC), chair of this task force, led this discussion, and announced that Katherine Blasik (NAF) has agreed to co-chair it. Mary reviewed goals in this arena: 1) to collect and share information regarding current standards and related databases; b) to assess the degree of alignment among these systems; c) to explore ways to develop a better aligned and more cohesive system that could reduce the burden on academies, and perhaps adopt a set of core indicators at the academy and student levels. Two tools have been developed in this endeavor, a matrix of organizations collecting data on academy implementation and another for related student performance data. This task force was scheduled to meet the next day, November 5th (and did so).

Discussion revolved around the question of how to assess college and career readiness, especially the latter. David Stern (CASN) reported on a Forum for Youth Investment piece entitled *From Soft Skills to Hard Data*, which focuses on four elements from those listed among the 21st Century skills: communication, relationships and collaboration, critical thinking, and initiative and self-development. These range across K-12 grade levels and tend to rely on written tests. Svetlana Darche (WestEd) shared a paper entitled *College and Career Readiness: What do we Mean?* This examines the intersection of college prep and career prep skills, including knowledge, technical skills, and behaviors, including cognitive and non-cognitive skills.

Both NAF and WestEd have new and better instruments under development that need to be tested to establish their validity and reliability. Joe Demarco (CSSR) commented that public exhibitions are the key, that to be authentic such assessment must involve an observation of a student doing something. He commented that New Hampshire is now the first state to rule out use of seat time to measure progress, that course credit there is dependent on demonstrated mastery of competencies.

Michael Strait (NAF) mentioned NAF's ongoing efforts to measure employability skills, including internships, and their online student certification assessment instrument, which has been piloted and revised, and will be re-piloted. Brad Stam and David Stern exchanged thoughts on GPAs as a measure of performance and predictor of college performance, with mixed reactions.

◆ **WORKPLACE LEARNING**

Rob Atterbury (ConnectEd CA) is chair of this task force and led this discussion. He shared the latest version of the Linked Learning Alliance's *Career Practicum: A Work-Based Learning Strategy* (June 2011), which was developed by a consortium of organizations and defines outcomes and criteria for such efforts. It is a field document and can be shared with anyone interested in its use; Rob invited feedback from those who do so.

Rob commented that we need to shift from viewing workplace learning as something that is episodic and for a few students, and often focused just on internships, to something that is more regular and for all students across a range of strategies. April Treece (Contra Costa Economic Partnership--CCEP) commented that in April 35 teachers and 60 industry partners tried out the Career Practicum and worked to relate it to student learning outcomes. Nancy Farnan (SDSU) commented that perhaps we need a database of assessment instruments parallel to the one we're developing for curriculum.

NEXT CONVERSATIONS

- Educating for Careers/ CPA Conference, Sacramento, CA, February 13-15
- NAF Leadership Summit & Institute, Washington, D.C., July 16-20