Some Strategies to Help Students Make the Right Career Decisions

For Counselors, Teachers, Parents, and Community Members

Students need information about current and future labor market trends in order to make sound career decisions. They also need to be exposed to many areas in order to develop a variety of interests and skills. And, they most definitely need to know that occupations are not gender specific and that both females and males can pursue careers that may be considered nontraditional by today's standards if they have the interest and ability.

Following are some strategies that be incorporated by school counselors and teachers with the support of parents and community members.

1. Develop a career resource center to provide students with career and employment information such as current labor market information, including expected incomes, area employers, and job projections. The center's materials should
   - Be reviewed for bias and stereotyping
   - Promote nontraditional jobs for females and males
   - Be up to date
   - Reflect current and emerging occupations and employment trends, and
   - Be publicized to make students, parents, and staff aware of its existence.

2. Identify students' personal strengths, interests, and skills with sex-fair career-interest assessments. Once those qualities have been identified, encourage the student to pursue both traditional and nontraditional applications of them. These assessments can also be used to help students focus on their planning for high school courses to ensure that they take the needed math, science, and technology courses that may be needed in their career of choice.

3. Recruitment brochures describing career and technical courses/programs can promote sex fairness through inclusive language, illustrations, and examples. In addition, nontraditional options can be offered in brochures and in oral presentations given by students, parents, and/or others.

4. Minicourses can introduce students to areas with which they are unfamiliar. They can overcome the fear of the unknown through a "try it, you might like it" approach.
   - They can provide students information on program content,
   - They can introduce students to unfamiliar tools and equipment, and
   - They can give students an opportunity to explore classrooms that are new to them and they can try new things and gain new skills.
   - Some colleges, universities, and technical colleges offer courses to help students explore nontraditional options.

5. Career fairs help students learn about career choices from people employed in various fields. For example,
   - "Expanding Horizons" workshops can be developed to inform girls of careers in engineering, math, and science.
   - "Choices," another workshop that can be developed for girls would feature female speakers (role models) who hold nontraditional and/or high wage jobs.

6. Keep teachers, counselors, parents, community members, and employers informed of labor market trends and expanding options.

7. Invite people employed in nontraditional jobs to speak before classes, student organizations, and advisory committees. Ask speakers to talk equitably about careers, and provide speakers with guidelines for equitable language to help them prepare their presentation. These people may also be ideal student mentors.

8. Provide support to students pursuing nontraditional programs.
   - Organize support groups that help students currently enrolled in nontraditional programs as well as those considering entering such a program.
   - Train peer counselors and mentors to give nontraditional students the individual attention and support they need to help them develop self-confidence, clarify their career goals, and deal with the pressures of being in a nontraditional field.

9. Monitor nontraditional students' progress to identify how they are being encouraged and where there are problems, and those students who are at risk of dropping out.

10. Encourage teachers to create an accepting environment for all students.

11. Avoid using negative sex-typed expectations regarding field of study, co-curricular activities, careers, life options, and lifestyles.

12. Encourage students to pursue areas that reflect their individual interests and abilities. Provide students with options rather than influence their choices based upon any personal biases you may have.

Tips and Concerns

- Be aware of your own stereotypes or biases.
- Review and update local guidance philosophy, program, and activities.
- Be prepared for resistance to promoting expanded roles and nontraditional options. Explore this resistance with students and parents.
- Be aware that guidance counselors have specific responsibilities under Title IX.
- Be aware of biases that recruiters from the military, technical colleges, or universities may present, and review materials for bias before allowing them to be distributed.
- Infuse equity into the local guidance program, including career/technical, personal/social, and learning.
- View everyone as having a counseling function, including teaching and support staff, students, parents, and community members. They can serve on committees when planning a career day, career fair, mentoring activity, job shadowing activity, etc.
- When choosing career speakers, select female and male representatives from both traditional and nontraditional careers to avoid giving the impression that everyone works in a nontraditional career.

Source: Bitters, Barbara and Susan Foxwell. *Wisconsin Model for Sex Equity in Career and Vocational Education.* Madison, WI: Department of Public Instruction, 1993.