



Partnership

Wyoming Transition Programs Case Study Albany County School District #1 Laramie, Wyoming New Option Wyoming (NOW)

Program Goals and Inception

The New Option Wyoming (NOW) program began when the former Principal of Whiting High School (WHS), and the district's Dropout Prevention Manager examined data showing credit deficiencies among students at both high schools. Attributing these deficiencies in part to the impact of the pandemic, they design a program that would help students get back on track and maintain a path to graduation, while also providing some credit for work experience. The NOW program focuses on credit completion and using enhanced work experience to support selected students. It was approved by the ACSD1 school board and began in August of 2021. NOW program goals are for all student participants to attain national career readiness through a certification of Level 3 or higher on the ACT WorkKeys assessment, and to receive a high school diploma.

Program Description

Students completing the program pursue a traditional high school diploma. They complete Wyoming-required core credits in English, math, and science and earn 2-3 elective credits for workplace experience, which is documented through employers. Students must work 90 hours to receive a half credit. Students also complete an internship component, earning 1 hour. The remaining credits are preparation for the ACT WorkKeys assessment.

Students are typically admitted to the NOW program in 11th grade, based on a referral from their building administrator, or because of a deficiency in graduation credits. Partnership with Wyoming Workforce Services (WWS) provides workshops and lessons on job searching, resume building, and the like and a course called WYServe, which provided instruction in customer service skills. In the 2022-2023 school year, the local community college provided a workplace readiness training course, initially on campus, but later held on the alternative school campus. The course focuses particularly on career development and exploration.

Stakeholder Perspectives

According to the district's Dropout Prevention Coordinator, NOW opens the door to the community for educational and vocational opportunities and provides a variety of opportunities for students who are interested in programming outside of traditional high school offerings. In

addition, internship/work experience requirements allow students to explore what they want to do after graduation with actual experience in those work settings. The NOW Program Coordinator described the importance of providing flexibility within the school day, so that the students' work experience is honored. In addition, she described the opportunity for students to engage with a college setting with less intimidation than they might otherwise experience.

A community college administrator also suggested that a promising aspect of the program is the flexibility to include a dual-credit option through the local community college, for students who wouldn't necessarily be typically included in the audience for this type of course. The WWS staff member commended the NOW program for allowing high school students to get early work experience that provided them with high school credit.

A current student, who is working full-time while completing her high school graduation requirements through the NOW program, described how the program allows her to complete requirements at her own pace and honors the full-time job that she has. A recent graduate, now in the beginning stages of entering college for a career in health sciences, described the positive aspects of being able to tailor his work experience to his interests in health care. He received help from the program coordinator with finding a job that aligned with his experiences and was pleased to be able to complete his academic requirements at his own pace. In addition, this recent graduate described how the program helped him develop communication skills, particularly learning to advocate for himself and his own educational needs. In addition, he used his work experience to save money for college.

A community member who has hosted NOW students in his place of business for two years explained that the students who worked in his business received an opportunity to see what the day-to-day life of his business was and reported that both experiences with NOW students were positive, though he also mentioned a desire for enhanced communication during the time when students were working at his business. He saw the NOW program as providing students with an opportunity to explore potential careers, to see if those careers were interesting to them.

Program Data

Data for the NOW program are available for the 2021-2022 school year, which represents the first year of the program.

Number of students enrolled: 37 (15 juniors, 15 seniors, 7 5th-year seniors)

Number of students who completed requirements for graduation: 15

Average ACT-WorkKeys score: 4.5

Number of students who earned National Career Readiness Certificate: 16

Promising Practices

1. Flexibility in providing options to complete high school graduation credit requirements through work experience;

2. Engaging the local community college to offer a dual-credit course on campus, tailored to the needs of the students in the NOW program;
3. Providing individualized opportunities to seek work experience aligned with career goals;
4. Providing self-paced academic options for students;
5. Providing the opportunity for students to learn skills to help them navigate and succeed in the workplace.