

4-H at Work: Career Lessons Provide New Dimension to School Classrooms

Abstract

Georgia 4-H has been partnering with public schools for over 100 years to provide youth development programming for elementary, middle, and high schools. In 2013, a new state accountability system required the addition of career exploration lessons in elementary schools. Georgia 4-H staff and faculty developed a career curriculum taught by county Extension agents in public school classrooms. This curriculum allowed Georgia 4-H to continue its historic partnership with Georgia public schools and assisted elementary schools in meeting new educational requirements. Evaluation data show that youth participants increased knowledge in respective career areas. State-standards-based 4-H career education delivered in classrooms and elsewhere can meet varied needs and yield valuable outcomes.

Keywords: [4-H](#), [career exploration](#), [elementary school](#), [partnership](#), [evaluation](#)

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Introduction

In September 2011, President Barack Obama announced that states would be eligible for waivers from portions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, commonly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). States seeking waivers were required to have plans for reforming education in the state (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Georgia was one of 10 states granted a waiver in March 2012 (The State of Georgia, Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.). Georgia's reform plan involved having a "comprehensive platform for school improvement, accountability, teacher effectiveness and communication" in order to "significantly improve student achievement" (U.S. Department of Education, 2014, para. 6). The waiver exempted Georgia from meeting the NCLB's requirement of 100% proficiency in reading and math by 2014. In exchange for this exemption, Georgia added social studies and science to student performance assessment and new college and career preparedness standards and requirements.

In 2013, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal unveiled the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) as a tool for exempting the State of Georgia from NCLB requirements. Schools were uncertain about how to implement the new accountability measures of CCRPI in addition to existing mandates for classroom time. As a result, many schools faced the possibility of cutting long-standing 4-H programming from their classrooms. In an

effort to avoid the loss of 4-H in-school programming and to continue developing better educated youths, Georgia 4-H responded to the needs created by the CCRPI post-elementary-school measures—which require that students in grades 1–5 complete grade-specific career awareness lessons aligned to Georgia's career clusters (Georgia Department of Education, 2016)—by developing and implementing a curriculum that would not only satisfy the CCRPI accountability requirements but also add to the already effective programming of Georgia 4-H.

Background

Georgia 4-H has benefited from a historic relationship with Georgia public schools. Georgia 4-H originated from the Boys' Corn Club organized in 1904 by then Newton County School Superintendent G. C. Adams (University of Georgia Extension, 2014). Formation of the Boy's Corn Club was followed by establishment of a Girl's Canning Club a few years later. These initial clubs cemented the relationship between Georgia 4-H and Georgia's school systems.

This relationship continues today. Georgia county 4-H Extension agents enter thousands of classrooms each year to provide Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) standards-based educational lessons. These lessons add enrichment to elementary and middle school classrooms, provide valuable experiential learning, deliver new and different subjects that schools do not have time to offer, and expose students to additional youth development programs offered by Georgia 4-H outside the classroom. Georgia 4-H programs and activities teach vital soft skills, content-based knowledge, and life skills that prepare youths for future careers. The relationship with Georgia public schools links family, school, and community and provides youths the opportunity to learn about and explore potential careers (Ferry, 2006). Public speaking skills, science-based education, and career education are the focal points of Georgia 4-H educational programming.

Challenge

Prior to the NCLB waiver, career exploration had not been directly assessed by GADOE. The new Georgia CCRPI accountability system established 17 career clusters and requirements for students in grades 1–12 to explore and prepare for careers in those clusters. The waiver was approved in March 2012 with an implementation date of August of the 2012–2013 school year. Due to the quick turnaround, many schools were not prepared or equipped to provide the required career exploration lessons and activities. Elementary-aged youths were to explore each of the 17 career clusters through lessons required for each grade (see Table 1 for a list of career clusters by grade). During spring 2012, several Georgia elementary schools contacted their local county 4-H agents to request career exploration lessons. In many instances, provision of these lessons was necessary to maintain 4-H's relationship with and access to the school for 4-H programming.

Table 1.

Georgia Elementary School Career Clusters

Grade	Career clusters
1	Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources Law, Public Safety, Corrections, and Security Transportation, Distributions, and Logistics
2	Arts, Audio-Visual Technology, and Communications Education and Training Health Science
3	Energy Hospitality and Tourism Human Services
4	Architecture and Construction Business Management and Administration Manufacturing Science, Technology, Engineering, and

Mathematics

5 Finance Government and Public Administration Information Technology Marketing

Solution

In response to the new requirement for school systems, Georgia 4-H created a writing team of Extension 4-H agents and others to develop lessons for the fifth-grade career awareness component. The writing team developed hands-on, engaging lesson plans using creative teaching tools for the following career clusters: Finance, Government and Public Administration, Information Technology, and Marketing. Examples of activity topics from the various lessons include budgeting, government agencies, diversity of careers in information technology, and marketing techniques. Each lesson was carefully reviewed by veteran Extension agents and a county school curriculum director prior to the final review by the writing team to ensure that each met Georgia educational standards. Before statewide dissemination, the writing team demonstrated the lessons for 4-H agents at a curriculum training. Lessons and resources were provided to agents for replication. In 2014, surveys to accompany each lesson were developed. Counties elected whether to administer the surveys to students; Table 2 is a summary of surveys administered in 2016.

Table 2.

Summary of College and Career Readiness Curriculum Survey
Administration, 2016

Career cluster lesson	# of counties	# of surveys administered
Finance	9	2,455
Government and Public Administration	7	1,715
Information Technology	8	2,382
Marketing	7	1,967
Total		8,519

Outcomes

The CCRPI career lessons were delivered in schools in several counties during the 2012–2013 school year. After that successful pilot year, the program was expanded for delivery by Georgia 4-H county agents to fifth grade classes in public schools statewide. Between 2013 and 2016, 123,063 youths received instruction in the curriculum. Selected counties implemented the retrospective "post-then-pre" questionnaire evaluation of the career lessons in order to measure youths' demonstrated knowledge of the curriculum content. In 2016, surveys were administered to a total of 8,519 youths in all four content areas. Table 3 provides a summary of survey outcomes.

Table 3.

Results of College and Career Readiness Curriculum Survey, 2016

Career cluster lesson	Outcome	% of youths
Finance	Students correctly identified some of the best things they should do with their money (share	95%

	it, invest it, save it, spend it wisely).	
	Students correctly identified ways to spend less money while on a budget.	84%
Government and Public Administration	Students correctly identified the U.S. government as the largest employer in the world.	75%
	Students correctly identified at least 2 of the 4 main functions of government.	83%
	Students correctly matched at least 3 of the 5 government departments with the type of assistance provided.	83%
Information Technology	Students correctly identified terms related to information technology.	79%
	Students identified one or more careers in the information technology field in which they were interested.	76%
Marketing	Students correctly identified terms related to marketing.	88%
	Students identified one or more careers in the marketing field in which they were interested.	79%
	Students learned about new jobs in the marketing field.	68%

Conclusions

The CCRPI career lessons for fifth grade have resulted in positive outcomes for Georgia youths, schools, and local county 4-H programs. Youths have received instruction on and exposure to future career opportunities, schools have received assistance for meeting state-mandated standards, and local county 4-H programs have strengthened their relationships with local school systems by providing important classroom instruction and enrichment. These outcomes demonstrate that a 4-H career curriculum provides a valuable experiential learning experience for youths in the classroom. Such lessons also can be used in afterschool, day camp, and library programs by any 4-H professional regardless of the setting.

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