



Evaluation Series

Columbus, Ohio Public School Career Centers

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Executive Summary

The Columbus, Ohio Public Schools operate four vocational career centers: Fort Hayes Metropolitan Education Center, Northwest, Northeast, and Southeast Career Centers. These Centers offer vocational curricula, while maintaining academic standards similar to the learners' "home" school. However, Ft. Hayes MEC also has the distinction of being an accredited high school as well as a career center. The students who attend both the career center and the high school spend the entire day at Ft. Hayes. The other 3 centers have learners on a half day basis, with the learners spending the rest of their time at their home schools. Consistent with state policy, all centers use three of the *ACT Work Keys* tests as entry and exit exams for all learners.

The results obtained over two academic years and four programs in Columbus exceeded state-wide results consistently and by a wide margin. While the percentage of learners gaining at least one level statewide actually declined from 1995 to 1997, the Career Centers program saw between 23% and 46% of its learners advance by at least one level.

More detailed analysis of the Ft. Hayes MEC are even more impressive. At Ft. Hayes MEC:

- Learners in the Child Care career track, who used PLATO[®] courseware related to their program but not aligned to the Work Keys curriculum, showed a pattern of declines.
- Learners in the Academic Enhancement Program (AEP) lab, using PLATO courseware and other instructional software, showed gains comparable to the average of all four AEP labs in all of the Career Centers.
- The learners in the Data Processing career track, who used only PLATO, showed the broadest pattern of gains.

Thus, results were greater in a PLATO[®]-only lab with the most intensive pattern of use than in labs using a combination of instructional software including PLATO.

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Introduction

The Columbus, Ohio Public Schools operate four vocational career centers: Fort Hayes Metropolitan Education Center, Northwest, Northeast, and Southeast Career Centers. These Centers offer vocational curricula, while maintaining academic standards similar to the learners' "home" school. However, Ft. Hayes MEC also has the distinction of being an accredited high school as well as career center. The students who attend both the career center and high school spend the entire day at Ft. Hayes MEC. All centers have learners on a half day basis. The learners then spend the rest of their time at their home schools.

Consistent with state policy, the Centers administer ACT's *Work Keys* test to measure the progress of learners and their readiness for their chosen careers. The *Work Keys* system was chosen by the State of Ohio because it provides a profile of skill levels on eight scales which have been shown to predict success on the job. Each target occupation is analyzed to determine the needed profile of skill levels on the eight *Work Keys* scales. This makes it possible to match particular learner profiles to particular jobs. The tests require application of core skills to problems which closely resemble those found in work settings. They are carefully graded by level of difficulty. The *Work Keys* tests are reported on scales with up to 5 levels.

The Centers administer only the tests for three of the *Work Keys* scales:

- *Locating Information* (interpreting text and non-text information)
- *Reading for Information*, and
- *Applied Mathematics*.

The *Work Keys* tests are given as a pretest in the fall at the beginning of the program, and as a posttest in the spring of the end of the program. Most programs are 2 year programs, which the learners start when beginning their junior year of high school. Results of these tests are placed in the learner's Career Passport and are presented to employers during the interview process as proof of academic competencies.

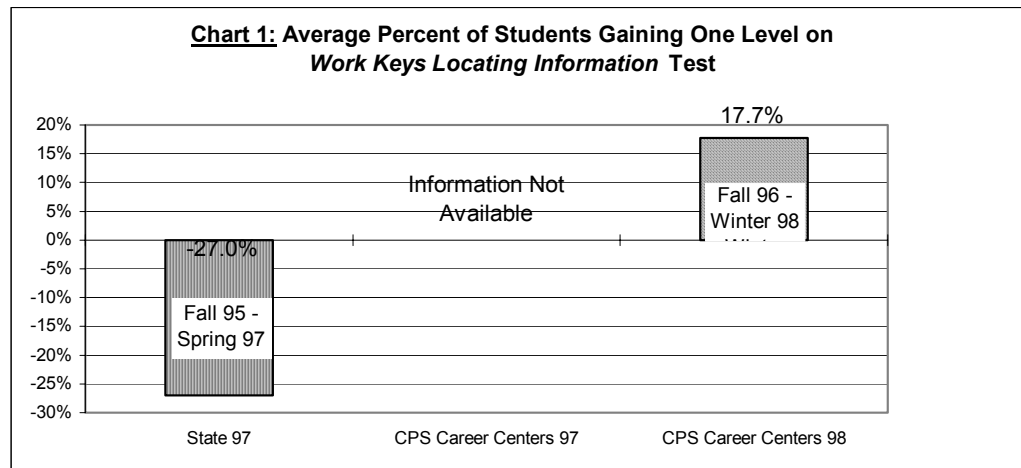
To develop work-related reading and math competencies for its learners, the Columbus Career Centers have created the Academic Enhancement Program (AEP). To support the program, each Center was equipped in 1993 with computer labs and educational software, with the PLATO[®] Learning System being added in 1996. At least 25 workstations are located in each AEP lab, while Ft. Hayes MEC has six additional workstations located in its library, and 25 workstations located in the Data Processing lab. The PLATO[®] alignment used is designed specifically for *Work Keys*, and includes a number of courses from the PLATO *Work Skills* curriculum as well as the PLATO[®] core skills curricula.

Learners are scheduled regularly into the lab, and also can continue work during free periods in the lab or library. Lab instructors and the program instructor for each career program work with the learners in the lab. Both are accredited teachers. The vocational instructor works closely with the lab instructor to align the learners' classroom activities with their lab activities. Each AEP lab also has a full-time instructional assistant. Most of the career centers have created custom activities to correspond with the needs of the learners, and do not necessarily use the Work Keys alignment as provided.

Work Keys Results: All Centers

Summaries of Work Keys gains for all four Career Centers are available for 1997 and 1998. They may be compared to statewide figures.

Chart 1 summarizes the average percentage of learners across all four centers who progressed by one level on the *Work Keys Locating Information* test.



The chart shows that in 1998 an average of 17.7% of Career Center learners gained one Work Keys level. This compares to a decline of one level by 27% of learners state-wide between Fall, 1995 and Spring, 1997. All remaining learners showed a change of less than one level.

Chart 2 shows the average percentage of learners in all four Career Centers who gained one level on the *Work Keys Reading for Information* test.

