

(Innovative Idea)

Certifying the Future: Adoption of iCEV for Student Industry Certifications

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Introduction/Need for innovation

The South Coast Region Agricultural Education Consortium [SCRAEC], funded by the California Career Pathways Trust grant program, was established in 2014 to enhance the Agricultural Mechanics and Agriscience pathways at 29 high schools in the South Coast of California by creating a pool of graduates prepared for high-skill, high-wage [HSHW] jobs. A California Department of Education [CDE] issued metric used to evaluate the success of such funded programs includes the number of students certified by industry. The Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS] (2015) reports the median income for persons holding an industry certification is 34% higher than those who do not. Additionally, those with certification are more likely to be employed (BLS, 2015). Industry certification provides a nationally recognized credential that can be taken anywhere by the worker/student (Castellano, Stone, & Stringfield, 2005) and “industry-based skills standards are seen by many as the way to empower individuals entering or returning to the workforce” (Aragon, Woo & Marvel, 2005, p. 35).

While “employers are increasingly hiring employees with certifications” (Aragon et al., 2005, p. 35), there is a lack of certification programs for some common high school Career Technical Education [CTE] areas (Castellano et al., 2005), such as Agricultural & Natural Resources [AGNR]. The program director of the SCRAEC reached out to iCEV; a reputable company with a vast library of AGNR multimedia curriculum. In 2012 iCEV introduced an online delivery method for their materials. iCEV works with individual states to ensure content is aligned to state standards and has also partnered with several national industry leaders in the AGNR industry sector and, with workforce development interests, in order to provide opportunities for high school student certification.

How it works

During July, the program director of the SCRAEC requested teacher and student numbers from each program based on school needs. Teacher email addresses were collected and given to iCEV for account set up. Each teacher was then able to set their students up with their own iCEV accounts. Instructions were distributed, via iCEV, on how to add students into the system. The program director has worked with iCEV to provide teacher training opportunities to facilitate the use of the curriculum and certifications (June 2015, October 2015, December 2015, June 2016, and December 2016). These trainings were offered during South Coast Region schedule in-service meetings and at the state agriculture teacher conference.

Teachers have the option of using pre-built courses, aligned to California curriculum standards, or building their own courses with the provided modules. Course sequences for industry certifications can be built into teachers’ course playlists, or they can stand alone. Teachers have the opportunity to decide how they wish to implement the certification modules into their individual classes and lessons. Some programs, such as King City High School, offer “iCEV Fridays” where students are encouraged to complete their certification modules during regular class time (Lauren Peterson, personal communication, December 2, 2016). Commonly, the certification exams are given in lieu of a semester final.

Results to date

Since June 2015, iCEV has been working with the SCRAEC; when the grant was funded. In the 2015-2016 year, 475 students received industry backed certifications via iCEV in California. The SCRAEC had 402 (84.6%) certifications, awarded between January and June of 2016, in the following areas: Food safety (26), meat evaluation (3), plant science (15), principles of floral design (133), fundamentals of animal science (70), veterinary medical applications (31), principles of livestock selection and evaluation (27), and professional communications (97). As of December 31, 2016, the number of certificates completed within the California is 121 with 83 (68.6%) within the SCRAEC.

The amount of time teachers access the iCEV website has been increasing rapidly. Between the dates of August 1 and November 23 during 2015, teachers in the SCRAEC had accessed their iCEV accounts, 6,399 times. During that same date range during 2016, there were 17,646 teacher logins; a 275% increase after the first year of adoption (Dusty Moore, personal communication, November 23, 2016).

The partnership between the SCRAEC and iCEV has allowed teachers the opportunity to expand their curriculum and is creating students who meet skill standards which improve the United States workforce, increase accountability in CTE, and meet the workforce development needs of businesses within the AGNR industry sector (Bunn & Stewart, 1998). Although student employability impact is not yet able to be measured, it is evident iCEV is allowing the students in the SCRAEC to move in the right direction in regards to accountability measures being set forth by the CDE.

Future plans

During the full academic year of implementation, 5% of the students in the SCRAEC received an industry backed certification through iCEV. It is the goal of the program director during the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years to have 10% and 20%, of students receive a certification, respectively. The program director will use creative marketing strategies, such as promotional giveaways, encouraging programs to use the iCEV platform to certify students. Additionally, the program director will work with the California Agricultural Teachers Association to promote certification on a larger scale by continuing to offer teacher training workshops. iCEV will continue to create additional certifications in partnership with various AGNR industry sector leaders which will increase the pool of certifications available to students in the SCRAEC.

Costs

Teacher accounts are \$700 annually, reduced from \$850 as in-kind support from iCEV. Individual student accounts are \$10 annually and include an in-kind voucher (valued at \$30) for one certification examination. During the 2015-2016 year of implementation the total cost for implementation was \$129,190 for 71 teacher and 7,949 student accounts (with an additional \$249,120 of in-kind support). Costs in the 2016-2017 year, were \$134,400 for 74 teachers and 8,260 students (with \$258,900 of in-kind support).

References

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