

Strategies for Promoting Industry Certifications

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ABOUT THE ISSUE BRIEF

This issue brief is part of a body of work on the implementation and outcomes of Florida’s Career and Professional Education (CAPE) Act. *“The role of industry-recognized credentials in high school completion and postsecondary enrollment in Florida”* (Florida Industry Certification Study) is examining the ways districts and schools in Florida support high school students in earning industry certifications and the benefits and challenges of these programs. The experiences of Florida’s districts and schools can inform policymakers and educators in Florida and nationally who are considering similar policies.

The Florida Industry Certification Study is being conducted by RTI International with funding from the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences under Grant No. R305A170222. The views represented here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education.

Visit www.flcertificationstudy.org to learn more about the study and to explore findings on topics such as school strategies for promoting industry certifications, teacher supports in this program, perceived costs of the program, and challenges to the program.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth Glennie is a senior research education analyst at RTI International and is the principal investigator on the Florida Industry Certification Study. She designs and leads studies that examine the implementation and impact of U.S. educational policies on schools, teachers, and students. Many of her projects focus on factors influencing success in secondary school and access to postsecondary education for disadvantaged students. These studies have involved analyzing large national databases and data collected by states and specific intervention programs. She has developed surveys and interview protocol for students, teachers, and educational leaders.

Dr. Glennie has studied early college high schools, STEM schools, and other new models and strategies that have proliferated in North Carolina and across the country. Throughout her work, she communicates and collaborates with policymakers and service providers so that her studies can inform best practices.



Introduction

In Florida, students can earn industry certifications in high school. Through the Career and Professional Education (CAPE) Act, schools have resources to help students prepare for and take industry certification exams. Although earning industry certifications may help students in their future college and work, schools across Florida have different certification-earning rates. Could that be because schools use different strategies to promote certifications?

In 2018, school staff took a web-based survey with questions about the industry certifications in their school. One person from each school responded to the survey. Almost all of those who responded to the survey said that their school offers industry certifications to students.

Those that offer certifications responded to questions about their strategies for promoting them.

- What strategies do you use to promote certifications to students?
- Do you emphasize certain certifications career areas?
 - If so,
 - Which areas to you emphasize?
 - Why do you emphasize these areas?

We show results by different school characteristics: locale, poverty level, and past certification rate.

Do schools offer industry certifications?

Overall, 96 percent of schools offered industry certifications. In each type of school, at least 87 percent of school staff said their school offered industry certifications.

The percentage of schools offering certifications did not differ much by locale. However, by poverty-level, almost all high-poverty schools—98 percent—offered certifications, compared with 88 percent of the schools with the lowest poverty rates.

Perhaps staff in high-poverty schools see a more direct benefit to students of earning certifications. When looking at schools' past certification rates, all schools with middle or high rates of certification earning said they offered certifications, compared with 87 percent of those with low past certification rates. Note that even though these schools had a relatively low past certification rate, 87 percent still did offer certifications.

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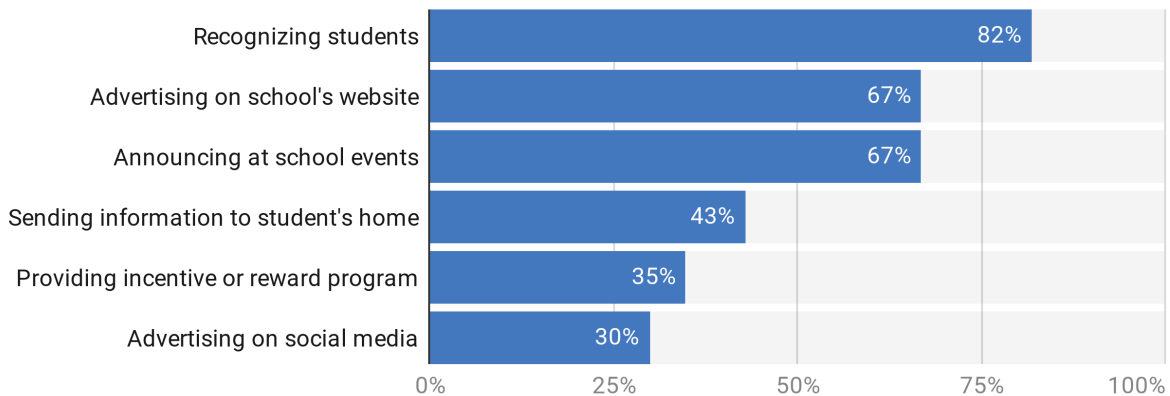
How do schools promote certifications?

Those who said they offered certifications had different strategies for promoting them to students. They could select from these options:

- Sending information directly to student’s home
- Placing information on the school’s website
- Advertising on social media
- Announcing opportunities to earn certifications at school events such as assemblies
- Recognizing or celebrating students who receive certifications
- Providing an incentive or reward program (e.g., pizza parties or cash for exam success)

Overall, recognizing students who earned certifications was the most popular strategy. More than 80 percent of school staff said they did this. About two-thirds of respondents announced opportunities to earn certifications at school events, such as assemblies, or placed information on the school’s website. These activities are low-cost promotion strategies. Sending information to the students’ home would give parents direct information about the program, but less than half said they did that.

Strategies for promoting certifications to students

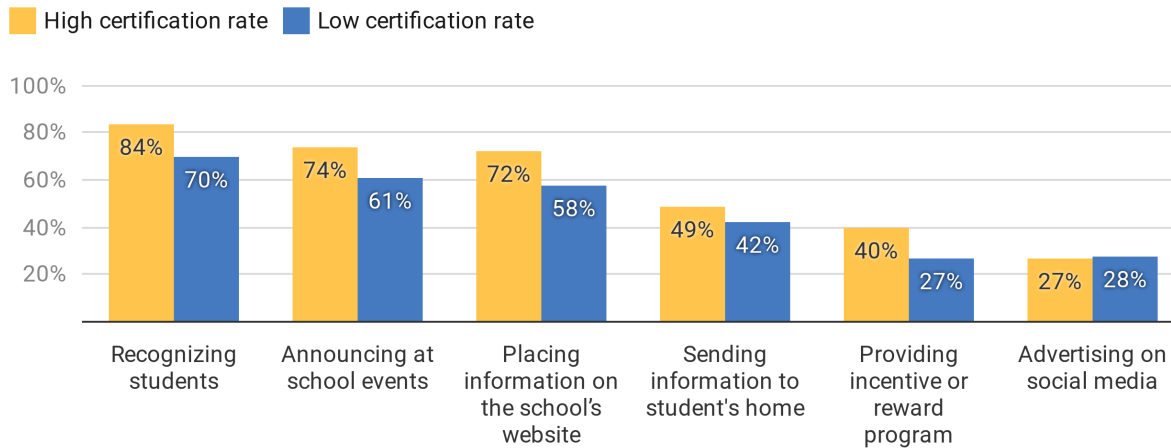


Note: Because respondents could choose more than one type of strategy, percentages do not total 100%.

Regardless of locale, poverty level, or past student certification rate, the pattern of promotion strategies was consistent across schools. In each type of school, celebrating students who earned certifications was the most popular way to promote certifications, and advertising on social media and providing rewards were the least popular.

The biggest difference in choice of strategy was between schools with high past certification rates and those with low past certification rates. Those with high past certification rates used almost every promotion strategy more frequently than those with low past certification rates did.

Strategies for promoting certifications to students, by past school certification rate



Note: Because respondents could choose more than one type of strategy, percentages do not total 100%.

Do schools emphasize certain career areas?

Students can earn certifications within these career areas:

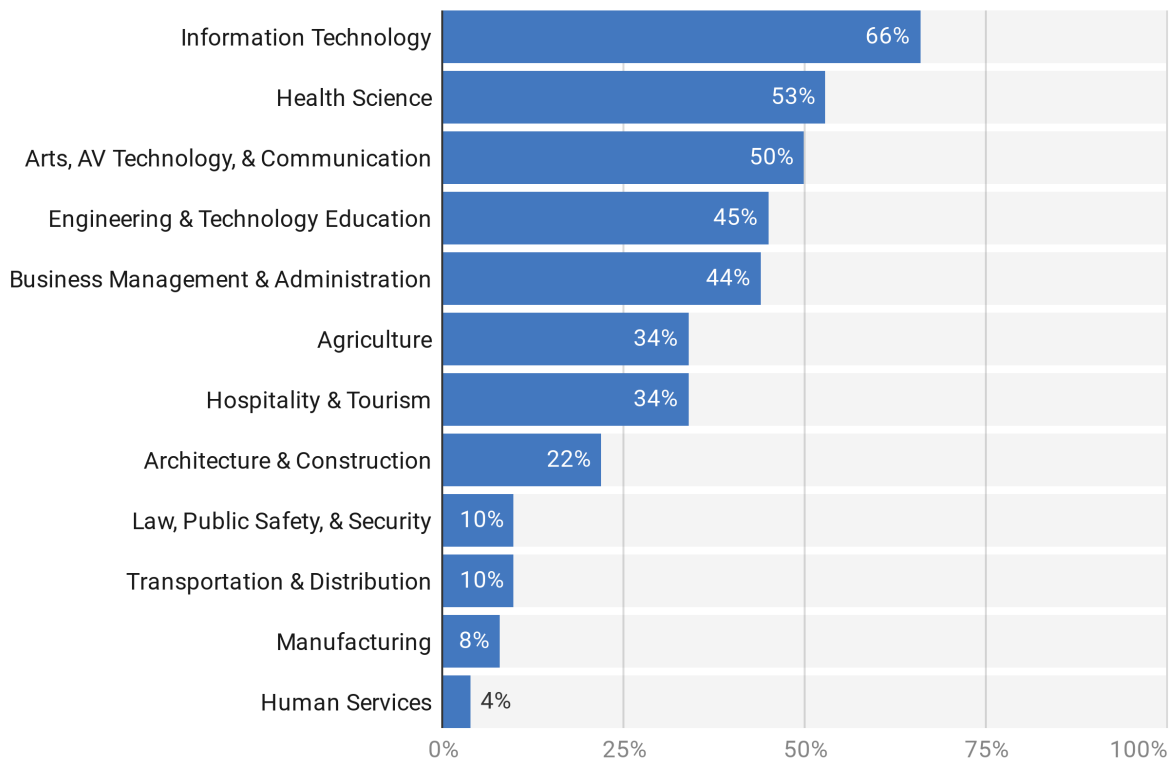
- Agriculture
- Architecture & Construction
- Arts, AV Technology, & Communication
- Business Management & Administration
- Engineering & Technology Education
- Health Science
- Hospitality & Tourism
- Human Services
- Information Technology
- Law, Public Safety & Security
- Manufacturing
- Transportation & Distribution

Overall, 64 percent said they emphasized a particular career area, and this response did not differ much across types of schools. The biggest difference is by locale where 71 percent of city schools said they did compared with 60 percent of suburban schools.

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Of those emphasizing a particular career area, at least half emphasized Information Technology; Health Science; and Arts, AV Technology & Communication. Fewer than 10 percent emphasized Law, Public Safety & Security; Manufacturing; Transportation & Distribution; and Human Services.

Of those emphasizing any career area, the percentage of schools emphasizing each one

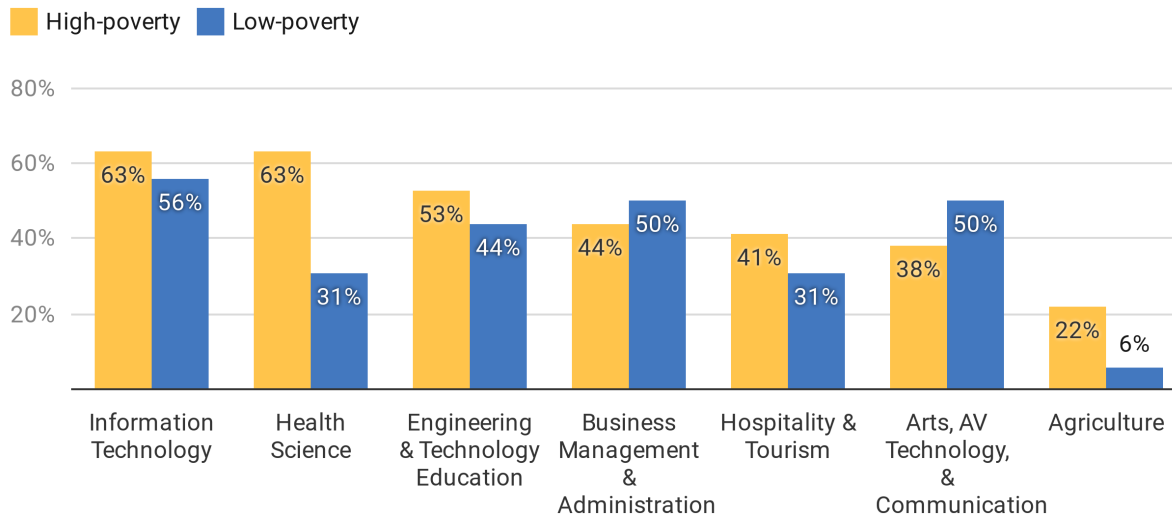


Note: Because respondents could choose more than one area, percentages do not total 100%.

Schools had different priority areas based on poverty level, locale, and past certification rate.

High-poverty schools more frequently said they emphasized the areas of Agriculture; Engineering & Technology Education; Health Science; Hospitality & Tourism; and Law, Public Safety & Security than low-poverty schools did. In the area of Health Sciences, the difference between high and low-poverty schools was more than 30 percentage points. Yet, low-poverty schools emphasized Arts, AV Tech & Communication at a higher rate than high-poverty schools did.

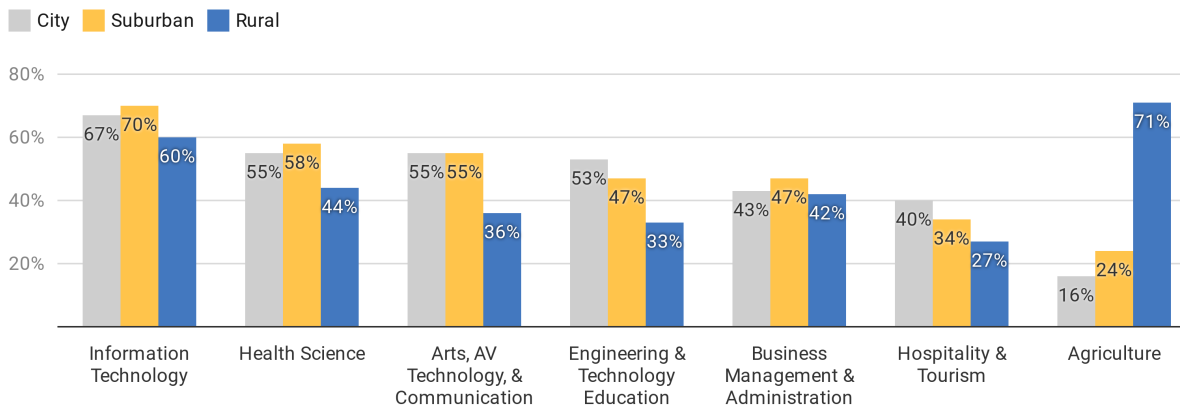
Career areas emphasized, by school poverty level



Note: Because respondents could choose more than one area, percentages do not total 100%. This comparison only includes areas that were emphasized by at least 25% of schools.

Next, we examined the rates of emphasizing career areas by locale. Cities and suburbs have similar preferences for areas. For most of the areas, the difference was within 5 percentage points. However, rural schools seem to have different priorities than either city or suburban schools. Their rate of emphasizing Agriculture was more than 50 percentage points higher than city schools, and more than 40 percentage points higher than suburban schools. However, their rates of emphasizing Arts, AV Technology, & Communication; Engineering & Technology Education; and Health Science were at least 10 percentage points lower than either city or suburban schools.

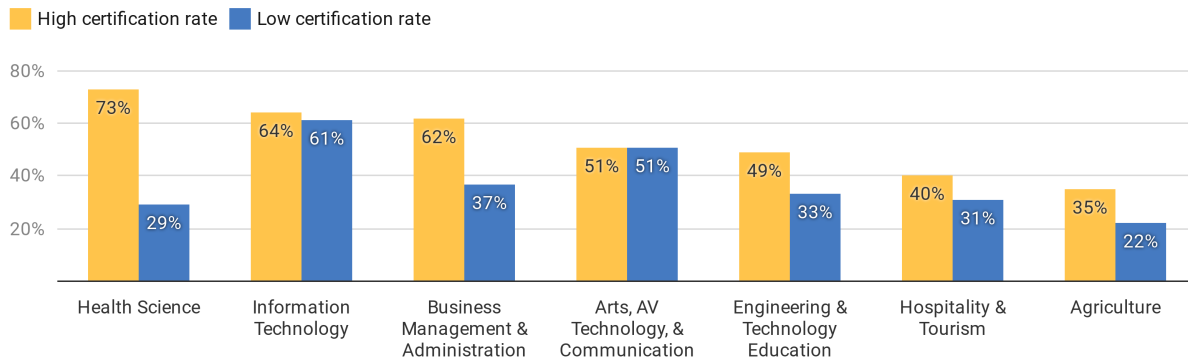
Career areas emphasized, by locale



Note: Because respondents could choose more than one area, percentages do not total 100%. This comparison only includes areas that were emphasized by at least 25% of schools.

High-certification-rate schools had higher rates of emphasizing almost every area. The biggest difference was in the area of Health Science, followed by Business Management & Administration. However, there was no difference between high and low-certification-rate schools in Arts, AV Technology, & Communication.

Career areas emphasized, by past school certification rate



Note: Because respondents could choose more than one area, percentages do not total 100%. This comparison only includes areas that were emphasized by at least 25% of schools.

Why do schools emphasize certain career areas?

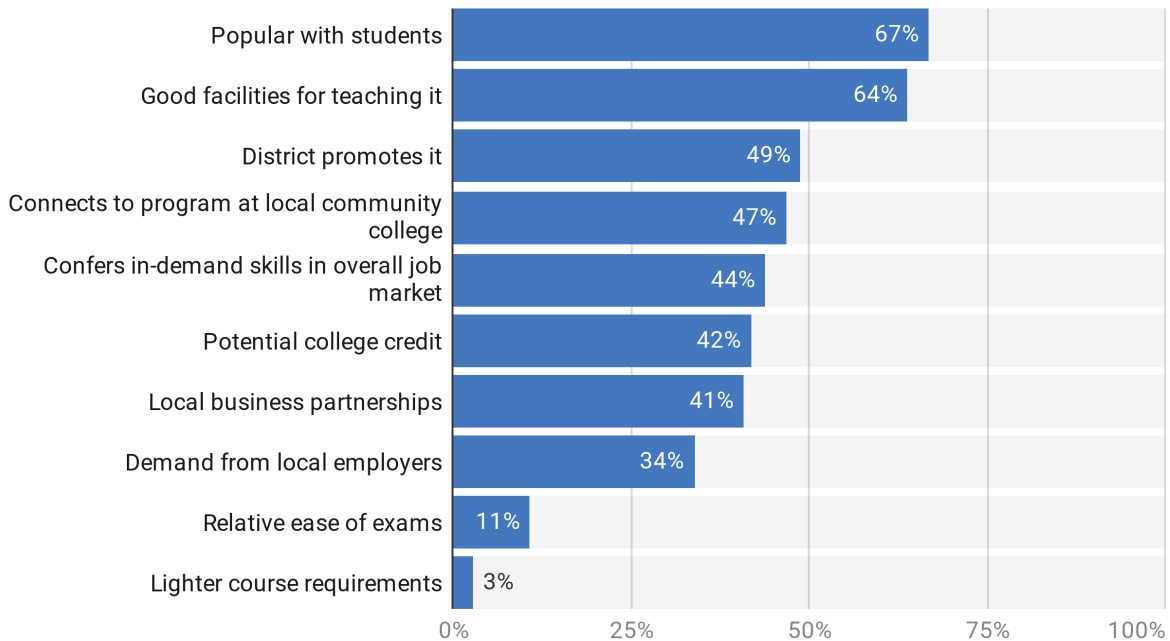
School officials who said they emphasized areas had the opportunity to share their reasons for doing so. They could select as many options as they believed applied to their school from the following list. These options focus on different themes: **high school experience**, **jobs**, **college access**, and **ease of process**.

- High school experience
 - The area is popular with students.
 - Our district promotes the area.
 - School has good facilities for teaching the area.
- Jobs
 - School has business partnerships in the area.
 - General demand from local employers.
 - The area confers in-demand skills in overall job market.
- College access
 - The area connects to a program at a local community college or technical school.
 - The area provides potential college credit.
- Ease of process
 - The course requirements are lighter than other areas.
 - Ease of exam relative to other areas.

Overall, the most popular reasons for promoting specific career areas were high school focused; more than 60 percent selected popularity with students and having good school facilities to teach these areas. Several schools promoted specific areas due to career-focused reasons. They believed these areas would help students get jobs. Over 40 percent promoted specific areas because they had partnerships with local businesses, or they believed the area would confer job-related skills. Additionally, over 40 percent selected college-focused reasons—a connection to a community college/technical school or the potential for college credit. The least frequently cited reasons were the perceived ease of exam or the lighter course requirements.

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Reasons for emphasizing career areas

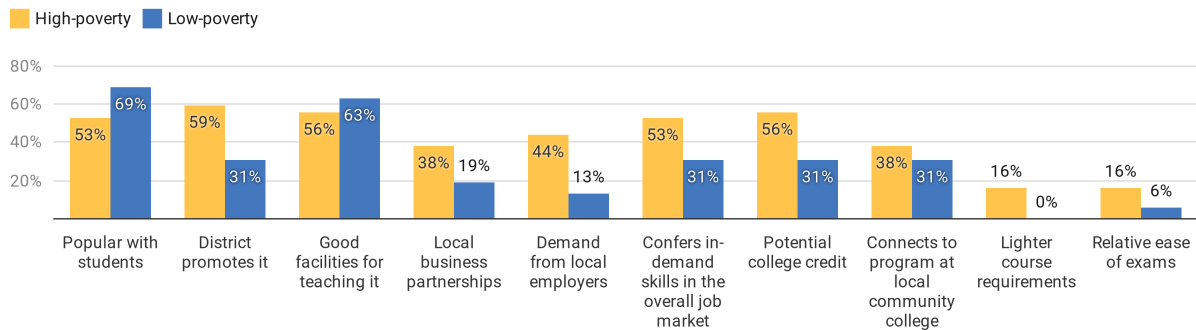


Note: Because respondents could choose more than one reason, percentages do not total 100%.

The basic pattern of responses was the same for school types based on poverty level, locale, or past certification rate. Yet, we did find some differences in their stated reasons for emphasizing career areas.

In high-poverty schools, the reasons for emphasizing career areas tended to focus on students' prospects after high school. These included job-related factors where the difference between high-poverty and low-poverty schools was at least 19 percentage points for each option. Additionally, high-poverty schools more often emphasized career areas for college access reasons. In contrast, low-poverty schools focused more on the high school experience. Staff in low-poverty schools most frequently said they emphasized particular career areas that were their popular with students.

Reasons for emphasizing career areas, by school poverty level

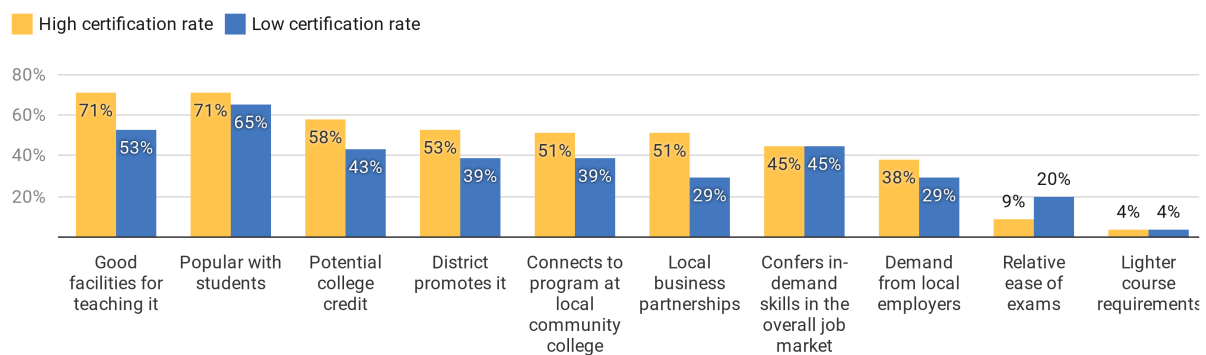


Note: Because respondents could choose more than one reason, percentages do not total 100%.

Reasons for emphasizing career areas did not differ much by locale. Most results were within 5 percentage points of one another. The biggest difference was for conferring in-demand skills in the overall job market. Here, the suburban schools had the lowest rate (32 percent) and city schools had the highest rate (62 percent) with rural schools in the middle (47 percent). (Results not shown.)

High-certification-rate schools selected almost every reason more frequently than low-certification-rate schools. The only reason more often stated by low-certification-rate schools was the relative ease of the exam. However, they did not differ in selecting areas because of lighter course requirements. The biggest differences between high and low-certification-rate schools were having facilities to teach the area and having a business partner. Perhaps if schools with low certification rates could improve their facilities and cultivate business partnerships, their certification rates would increase.

Reasons for emphasizing career areas, by past school certification rate



Note: Because respondents could choose more than one reason, percentages do not total 100%.

CONCLUSION

Staff in more than three quarters of Florida’s traditional or vocational public high schools responded to a survey about practices associated with industry certifications in their schools. Almost all of those who responded to this survey said that their school offered industry certifications. The most popular strategies for promoting them were relatively low-cost activities, such as recognizing students who earned certifications, announcing opportunities to earn certifications at school events, and placing information on the school’s website.

Locale

Practices for promoting certifications did not differ much by locale. The biggest difference was in the area promoted, where rural schools had a much higher rate of promoting Agriculture than suburban or city schools, and lower rates of promoting Arts, AV Technology & Communication. These differences may reflect local job demand.

Past certification rates

Comparing schools by their past certification rates shows that *high-certification-rate schools reported using almost every promotion strategy more frequently than low-certification-rate schools did.* Low-certification-rate schools could increase their certification rates by taking advantage of low-cost policies to promote them. Fewer low-certification-rate schools reported having facilities to teach a given area or having a business partner. Perhaps improving their facilities and cultivating business partnerships should be a first step for these schools.

School poverty level

The most striking difference in certification promotion strategies was between high-poverty and low-poverty schools. *High-poverty school staff that responded to this survey had higher rates of offering certifications than low-poverty rate schools did (98 percent versus 88 percent).* High-poverty schools more frequently promoted certain career areas such as Agriculture and Health Sciences. Yet, low-poverty schools promoted Arts, AV Technology & Communication at a higher rate than high-poverty schools did.

Low-poverty schools promoted career areas for high-school-focused reasons: the school has good facilities to teach them, and they were popular with students. High-poverty schools more frequently promoted career areas for reasons associated with college and jobs. It seems that staff in high-poverty schools see a more direct link to jobs for their students with certain certifications.

END NOTES

Overall Notes

Results reported in this issue brief include school survey data collected through the [Florida Industry Certification Study](#) and are based on the schools that offer certifications.

Definitions

Poverty level: percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

- High-poverty - More than 75% (83 schools)
- Middle-poverty - 26-75% (383 schools)
- Low-poverty - Less than or equal to 25% (58 schools)

Locale:

- City (136 schools)
- Suburb (258 schools)
- Rural (130 schools)

Past certification rate: percentage of 9th graders in academic year 2013-14 who earned certifications by academic year 2016-17. This is the year before the survey when they should have been in 12th grade.

- Low certification rate - Less than 10% (151 schools)
- Middle certification rate - 10-25% (237 schools)
- High certification rate - More than 25% (136 schools)

Sources

[Florida Industry Certification Study](#)

[Florida Department of Education, Education Data Warehouse](#)