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Introduction

The state of Georgia has invested significantly in YouScience in order to make it available to all 180 school districts at no cost. YouScience is a career-path assessment that measures both interest and aptitude. To better understand the successes and challenges that schools are facing as they implement the new program, the Georgia Department of Education (GA DOE) partnered with the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government to conduct four listening sessions with Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) directors and counselors. Two of the sessions were held with school counselors and CTAE directors in districts that have fully implemented YouScience. The other two listening sessions were held with school counselors and CTAE directors in districts that are exploring implementation of YouScience. This report presents the findings from those listening sessions. The report is broken into three main sections: successes, challenges, and opportunities for improvement, which include additional resources and questions or changes. Participant names were not collected during the listening sessions to allow participants to share their feedback openly.

Successes

When asked what is working well and their opinions about YouScience, nearly all listening session participants responded favorably. One of the factors that educators like the most is that YouScience is a tool designed to help all students. It is useful in helping postsecondary-bound students decide on majors or look at longer term goals as well as providing resources to use in college applications. Participants also indicated that YouScience is very powerful for students who plan to go straight into the workforce. For these students, the tool is particularly helpful when speaking with parents about students' next steps following high school graduation. YouScience lists jobs that a student has both an aptitude for and interest in as well as the education needed to pursue that career and the outlook such as number of jobs openings and average annual salary.

"It's not just our kids who are going to work straight from school, it's also our college-bound students who may not have any idea what they want to do with the education that they're going to get." – CTAE Director

"It levels the playing field on our students. You see those with the high aptitude and low interest, and it's not because I'm really not interested, I just don't know anything about that career."
– Counselor

Across the board, educators felt it is important to encourage administrators, teachers, and others to take the test themselves and explore their results. Those who took it not only found the results interesting but were also more likely to support implementation and long-term use of the program. This buy-in tended to decrease the number of hurdles that the staff faced when administering the test to students as well as using the results in ongoing counseling.

“Once I convinced our superintendent to take it herself, then she jumped in with both feet and both arms.” – CTAE Director

Another widespread success that many educators echoed is strong customer service and support from YouScience, from planning through implementation and administration. YouScience provides calls and webinars to help prepare schools, day-of chat support for test administration, and ongoing technical assistance with things such as reporting and using the data. Participants generally found the YouScience staff to be approachable, helpful, and timely.

“The YouScience chat function is great. They give fast responses and great customer service.” – CTAE Director

“The Professional Development Day on YouScience and how to get started was helpful, as was the New School Counselors Conference. These helped clue counselors into the usefulness.” – Counselor

A major theme throughout all of the listening sessions was that schools can adopt different approaches to administering and using YouScience depending on their needs. This variety of implementation strategies can be seen as a success for YouScience. Schools shared a wide variety of approaches that differed based on school schedule, available technology, and the existing flexibility in state law and education policy. This discussion also sparked the desire for some additional resources to share lessons learned and best practices with similar districts. See the opportunities section below for more

details on these desired resources.

Challenges

One of the most common challenges that the listening sessions revealed is the time required for implementation. The test runs 90 minutes, not including set-up, sharing instructions, logging on, and any other administrative matters. This substantial amount of time is challenging for several reasons. First, scheduling can be difficult, especially finding time to administer the test and determining who will be responsible. Many classes have “seat time” requirements or end-of-pathway assessments and milestone tests that make teachers reluctant to give up time for YouScience administration.

“The first year was a disaster because we did not anticipate how long and frustrating it would be for the kids.” – Counselor

In many of the districts represented in the listening sessions, a counselor or the counseling department was fully responsible for the test, which also caused scheduling challenges. Additionally, technology resources at individual schools can affect implementation. Administering the assessment without interfering with other classes can be problematic at schools that use computer labs or laptop carts. Lastly, focusing on the assessment for 90 minutes proved difficult for some students, influencing the results. This difficulty varied greatly depending on the type of students. Some districts chose to start with honors students or exclude students with disabilities, which limits the accessibility of YouScience to all students.

“I can’t be in every classroom, so I cut little strips of paper from each roster that had their GTID on it and gave those to the teachers to help get everyone logged on. It was tedious, especially with almost 2,000 kids at the school.” – Counselor

In addition to the challenges in administering the test, some schools had difficulty setting up the program, particularly with student data and access. Currently, a lot of setup and uploads must occur before the test can be administered. Educators would like to find a more streamlined way to get students logged in to YouScience without having to write down each student’s ID, email, and other information. One participant suggested a better connection between YouScience and the Statewide Longitudinal Data System.

“How many people does it really take to really understand it, to be able to implement it, give the test, and then do the true counseling piece of explaining it to the kids? Interpreting the results. That’s a huge piece of it. If it’s not done correctly, then what was the point of it?” – CTAE Director

Following test administration, there are two other challenges that educators mentioned: how to use the results and extra costs for certain analytics. One of the benefits of YouScience is the in-depth results provided to the student and school, but figuring out how to use those results in a meaningful way can be hard. Several of the districts that have wholeheartedly embraced YouScience would like to have supplemental analytics and reports, but these have either been limited or have required additional fees. This was unexpected and hard to navigate.

A final challenge that was mentioned during one of the listening sessions is data governance and student privacy. Some concerns were expressed about the potential use and ownership of the data after students complete the test.

Opportunities

Listening session participants shared suggestions and ideas for making YouScience easier to implement or to increase its impact on students. One set of suggestions centered on desired changes to the YouScience software, including adding a section about military careers due to a

large number of students that may consider this route. Another improvement for YouScience would be a Spanish version for students who may struggle to take this test in a language other than their native tongue. Finally, participants would like to see more robust reporting tools and school/district dashboards. Specifically, counselors and directors would like to see classroom personality reports and reports focused on schoolwide workforce/ economic development factors that could help inform the local community. One of the benefits of YouScience over other options is that it includes information like aptitudes, strengths, and learning styles. Teachers would like to be able to run reports for the students in their classes that could be used to modify the lessons to better fit the students and their personalities or learning styles.

A second broad area of potential improvement discussed by participants is the development of additional resources by either the state or YouScience. An implementation toolkit might include the following resources:

- *Print-and-go lesson plans for advisement:* YouScience provides some suggestions on how to incorporate students' results into advising sessions, but counselors felt that they do not have the time to do this. If YouScience or other districts that have figured it out could share more print-and-go plans, the assessment results would be easier to use.
- *Examples of letters to inform all stakeholders:* Several CTAE directors mentioned sending out a letter to parents, students, and guardians explaining YouScience. Other districts would like to see these for reference.
- *Flowchart or timeline:* Both counselors and CTAE directors would like to see how this assessment fits into the larger school calendar. They suggested a timeline for YouScience or including it on the testing calendar because it uses similar resources. Flow charts could help with decision making.
- *Best practices / lessons learned from districts that have already implemented the assessment:* Districts that are trying to decide whether to implement YouScience and those in the early stages of implementation would like a way to learn from pilot districts. During the listening sessions, the districts that had already implemented YouScience had a lot of knowledge to share about what worked and what did not. Finding a way to connect these two groups could be particularly beneficial.
- *Frequently asked questions:* While YouScience does have some questions and answers on its website, some participants requested some Georgia-specific FAQs.

A final opportunity for improvement discussed by listening session participants was the need for additional direction and support from GA DOE on YouScience. Most importantly, participants would like the why behind YouScience to be better articulated. There are other options to fulfill the Bridge Bill with less effort on the schools end such as Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), so districts want to understand why they should switch to YouScience.

“The YouScience readiness call was helpful, but it is so overwhelming since the level of counselor responsibilities and workload are not fully understood.” - Counselor

Participants were unclear about how YouScience helps to fulfill all or portions of the Bridge Bill (HB 400). Many of the participants knew that there was some overlap between Bridge Bill and YouScience but did not understand the nuts and bolts behind it. Specifically, the participants wanted more information about how YouScience fits into the school’s existing assessment calendar and whether the assessment could be used as an accountability measure for the College and Career Ready Performance Index. Many decisions at the school level are based on administrator’s perceived importance, which can be judged on their weight for funding or inclusion on the school’s report card.

The final question that several of the educators wanted guidance on is what to do if a student’s assessment recommends a pathway that is not offered at the school. YouScience presents information about a variety of careers and career pathways, but school districts are unable to offer all the pathways. Additionally, they may not be available via dual enrollment either. This is especially salient for smaller or more rural districts that do not have the capacity to offer all of the pathways.

“We don’t have that many pathways since we are a small rural district. What happens if they get a pathway that’s not offered?” - Counselor

Conclusion

YouScience listening sessions showed a generally positive reaction to the implementation of the career and interest aptitude tool throughout Georgia. CTAE directors and counselors provided insight into what is working, challenges they are facing, and how the GA DOE and YouScience could help expand the program in more schools. Participants reported that they found the tool helpful for all students regardless of postsecondary plans, YouScience provided sufficient support during planning and implementation of the instrument, and that implementation is flexible enough to be feasible in their district. The most common challenges reported by listening session participants centered on the time and resources required to implement the assessment and use the results (e.g., working with individual students to integrate it into their individual graduation plans). The findings from the listening studies should be helpful as the state and YouScience plan next steps for this tool across Georgia.