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Will Integrating Science in CTE Boost Test Scores?

SALT LAKE CITY – End-of-year testing is wrapping up now in the 15 Utah high schools from 13 districts participating in a semester-long research project to determine whether integrating science lessons into Career and Technology Education Health Science programs will boost student achievement.

The Utah State Office of Education was selected to collaborate with the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education (NRCCTE) and University of Louisville on this research project. Colorado and Michigan schools are also participating. Researchers chose Utah because of the quality and quantity of its existing Health Science programs, says Marv Johnson, CTE Specialist at USOE. He says the integrated curricula model has the potential to enhance these programs.

“With CTE in the health sciences, specifically, students have an opportunity to learn the skills that will lead to high-skill, high-wage careers and post-secondary programs. And this integrated curriculum model allows the technical skills to be taught and the science that’s already taught as part of the CTE curriculum to be enhanced,” Johnson says. “You can teach science without taking away from CTE technical instruction. And many students learn science or math better in a CTE program where they have some relevance to the specific career choice.”

Thirty-eight teachers in total are participating in the project, most are from Utah. The project divided the teachers into two groups, an experimental and a control. In the experimental group, CTE teachers paired up with science teachers in December. They reviewed the CTE lesson plans together to find areas where science concepts could be taught. The resulting integrated curriculum was then taught in the spring semester. The control group teachers taught their classes as they always do. Students in both groups were given a pre-test at the beginning of the spring semester and a post-test at the end of the semester with a national standardized science test.

The results of the project will be announced this fall. If they are favorable, the Utah State Office of Education’s CTE program will encourage this model to be adopted by districts across the state by providing professional development opportunities for teachers from interested districts.

This integrated curriculum model is not new to Utah. CTE classrooms across the state are wrapping up their first year of integrating math into CTE programs, a method supported by the findings of a previous research project. Literacy integration in CTE courses is another model the State Office may consider adopting in the future.

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