



REL Appalachia Ask-A-REL Response

College and Career Readiness

June 2017

Question:

What research is available about the role of student empowerment in strengthening students' preparation for and success in college and careers?

Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about student empowerment. Ask-A-REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask-A-REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for research reports and descriptive study articles on student empowerment. We focused on identifying resources that specifically addressed the effects of students' empowerment on college and career readiness. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist.

Research References

Kirk, C. M., Lewis, R. K, Brown, K., Karibo, B., & Park, E. (2016). The power of student empowerment: Measuring classroom predictors and individual indicators. *Journal of Educational Research, 109*(6), 589–595. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1110651>

From the abstract: “Despite spending more money per student than almost all developed nations, the United States lags behind in educational indicators with persistent disparities between privileged and marginalized students. Most approaches have ignored the role of power dynamics in predicting student performance. Building on the existing literature in school climate and empowering settings, this study explored the construct of student

empowerment to identify both environmental factors that predict increased empowerment and outcomes associated with empowerment. A survey was administered to 381 students from five urban high schools. Results suggest that intrapersonal student empowerment is predicted by equitable power use by teachers, positive teacher-student relationships and a sense of community in the classroom. Highly empowered students reported better grades, fewer behavioral incidents, increased extracurricular participation and higher educational aspirations than students who were less empowered. Limitations are discussed alongside implications for educational practice and future research.”

Martin, K., Galentino, R., & Townsend, L. (2014). Community college student success: The role of motivation and self-empowerment. *Community College Review*, 42(3), 221–241. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1029076>

From the abstract: “Nationwide, low percentages of community college students graduate. Although community colleges’ higher percentages of low income, academically underprepared, non-traditional, and minority students are often cited as the reason for low graduation rates, this study sought to examine common characteristics of community college students who do graduate. The qualitative study included interviews of community college graduates from a large, public community college in the Southeastern United States, as well as interviews of faculty and staff members at the institution. The students in this study were found to have the following characteristics in common: clear goals, strong motivation and a drive to succeed, ability to manage external demands, and self-empowerment.”

McQuillan, P. J. (2005). Possibilities and pitfalls: A comparative analysis of student empowerment. *American Educational Research Journal*, 42(4), 639–670. Abstract retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ737134>

From the abstract: “Although U.S. schools typically express commitment to preparing students for the responsibilities of democratic citizenship, most American youth are socialized for adult civic life by an institution that defines them as passive and subordinate and treats them in ways that are anything but democratic. In contrast to such counterproductive practices, the author offers a comparative analysis of two schools’ efforts at student empowerment. He first outlines why schools should help empower students and then proposes a conception of student empowerment founded on three dimensions: the academic, political, and social. To explore the “possibilities and pitfalls” of empowerment in practice, the author presents case studies of two schools’ student empowerment efforts. Each examines how the schools sought to help empower students, what power students gained, and how students and faculty responded to these efforts. Drawing on insights derived from these studies, he discusses some practical implications for schools hoping to promote student empowerment.”

National Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools. (2014). *Developing student ownership and responsibility in high schools. Practitioner brief*. Nashville, TN: Author. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED561245>

From the abstract: “The National Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools (NCSU) spent the 2011–12 school year conducting intensive case studies of four Fort Worth, Texas high schools to understand what differentiates higher and lower performing schools. It was found that high schools can address gaps in student achievement by developing policies and practices that help students learn how to take ownership and responsibility for their own learning. This brief highlights what was learned from the work with Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) and provides examples of policies and practices to develop student ownership and responsibility.”

Perez-Gualdrón, L., Yeh, C., & Russell, L. (2016). Boys II Men: A culturally-responsive school counseling group for urban high school boys of color. *Journal of School Counseling, 14*(13). Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1126013>

From the abstract: “Using a participatory and collaborative approach, we developed, implemented, and evaluated a culturally responsive school counseling group, “Boys II Men,” for 11 low-income diverse male students of color at an urban public school. The content of the group focused on five areas: social connections and support, exploring gender roles, navigating identities, school engagement, and future planning. We worked closely with teachers, school staff, and counselors to foster a supportive and positive school climate (Beesley, 2004). Each student was interviewed about his experience in the group to assess the impact of the strategies and techniques used. We also analyzed the specific content of each module for main themes. Strengths and weaknesses of the group were also assessed at post-test. Innovative methods and practical applications for school counselors are discussed.”

Additional Organizations to Consult

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID): <http://www.avid.org>

From the website: “AVID brings research-based strategies and curriculum to educational institutions in elementary, secondary, and higher education. The AVID System annually provides 60,000+ educators with training and methodologies that develop students’ critical thinking, literacy, and math skills across all content areas throughout the entire campus, in what we call Schoolwide AVID. AVID:

- Teaches skills and behaviors for academic success
- Provides intensive support with tutorials and strong student/teacher relationships
- Creates a positive peer group for students
- Develops a sense of hope for personal achievement gained through hard work and determination

As a result, policymakers and educators now consider AVID's mission to be an essential strategy for closing the achievement gap, making college access and success available to all students.”

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): <http://www.casel.org/>

From the website: “Our mission is ambitious: to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of education from preschool through high school. As a thought leader, field builder, and advocate, CASEL uniquely spans three worlds:

- Research develops, synthesizes, and disseminates evidence documenting the impact of social and emotional learning.
- Practice demonstrates what is possible in classrooms, schools, and communities that prioritize SEL—including our work with partner districts.
- Policy helps pave the way for SEL practices that are scalable and sustainable, setting a new standard for high-quality education in the United States.”

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- “student empowerment” AND (evaluation OR impact OR effect or relat*)
- “student empowerment” AND “college and career readiness”
- empower* AND (“college readiness” OR “college preparation”)
- empower* AND (“career readiness” OR “career preparation”)

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- **Date of the publication:** Searches cover the most current information (i.e., within the last five years), except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Search priorities of reference sources:** Search priorities include IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- **Methodology:** The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.

- Existing knowledge base: Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on May 16, 2017. URLs, descriptions, and content included in this document were current at that time.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Appalachia Region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia (REL AP) at SRI International. This Ask-A-REL response was developed by REL AP under Contract ED-IES-17-C-0004 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, administered by SRI International. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.