Do high-poverty and low-poverty high schools promote industry certifications the same way?

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Background
Industry recognized certifications are increasingly important credentials for graduates to bring to the job market. College students typically earn these credentials, but Florida introduced an innovative program to increase the number and variety of certifications earned by high-school students. Florida’s Career and Professional Education (CAPE) Act creates opportunities for high-school students to earn industry certifications. In 2016, Florida’s list of CAPS certifications included:

236 industry certifications, such as National Center for Construction Education & Research Electrical, Certified Nursing Assistant, and Microsoft Certified Professional
12 career areas, including Architecture and Construction, Health Sciences, and Information Technology

Approved CAPS certifications must be attainable by secondary school students, must be associated with key Florida industries, and require 120 course hours. Offering courses for each certification requires teachers who have the certifications themselves and appropriate technology or equipment.

Data
2016 survey of Florida traditional and vocational high schools
Florida Department of Education’s Education Data Warehouse
Student, teacher, and course data.
National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data

Method
Use Common Core of Data to identify high-poverty and low-poverty schools.
High-poverty schools are more than 75% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (58 schools)
Low-poverty schools are less than 25% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (341 schools)
Use Florida Education Data Warehouse to calculate the percentage of CTE teachers and courses at each school.

Results
Offering Certifications – survey data
First, we examine whether schools offer certifications and whether they emphasize particular career areas:
Does your school offer industry certifications to its students?
If so, does your school emphasize certain certification career areas?

Reasons for emphasizing certification career areas

Next, for schools that chose to emphasize certain career areas, we asked:
Why does the school emphasize these exam areas? (Check all that apply)

Results (cont.)

High-poverty schools promote industry certifications more actively than low-poverty high schools do, despite the resources that certifications require.

High-poverty schools promote industry certifications more actively than low-poverty high schools do, despite the resources that certifications require.

Resources for Certifications – administrative data
Teaching courses that prepare students to earn industry certifications requires having qualified teachers and facilities and equipment. We expect that schools with higher percentages of CTE teachers and courses will be better prepared to offer certifications.

Conclusion
Even though offering certifications requires having qualified staff, equipment, and other resources, high-poverty schools promote them more actively than low-poverty schools do.

High-poverty schools offer certifications more often.
High-poverty schools promote career areas in light of future-focused reasons—college and careers; and
Resources for Certifications – administrative data

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Non-responding schools were also surveyed. Pre-response rates are not 100%.

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Future work will examine:
the relationship of certification earning to the local job market; and
prospective outcomes for certification earners compared with non-earners.

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