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## Virtual IS Conference for HS Students

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# Midwest Association for Information Systems MWAIS 2022 Omaha, Nebraska Big Idea Proposal: Virtual IS Conference for HS Students

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**ABSTRACT:** IS job growth will continue to outpace supply through 2030. According to BLS (2019), IT occupations are expected to grow by 810,800 jobs over the next 10 years with interest among K-12 students unable to keep up. The problem becomes exacerbated by the language used to promote IS careers in K-12 schools: Computer Science and an overemphasis on coding. In Northeast Wisconsin, the NEW Connect IT! event reaches students to showcase the broad range of careers and educational pathways in IT, while attempting to break the “coding only” stereotype surrounding computer science.

## INTRODUCTION

Many organizations have worked to grow IS interest among K-12 students. However, almost all are focused on a narrow slice of the problem. The BLS indicates less than 50% of the 810,800 open roles each year will require a traditional “coding focus.” Yet, the organizations and solutions include AP Computer Science A, AP Computer Science Principles, AP Computer Science B, Microsoft TEALS program (“building equitable inclusive computer science programs in high schools”), Code.org, and Girls who Code. Moreover, the term “computer science” carries with it many stereotypes and socio-economic challenges that discourage women and students of color (Gallop & Amazon, 2021).

## APPROACH

In Northeast Wisconsin (NEW), the NEW Digital Alliance sponsors a NEW Connect IT! event targeting high school students. Originally offered for several years in person, during COVID-19 the event switched to a virtual format. The focus of the event is to allow local high school students to (1) learn about the diversity of IT careers and benefits, (2) meet local employers with IT talent needs, (3) hear about the variety of career paths in IT, (4) speak with IT professionals from local companies, and (5) view demonstrations of innovative technology used by local companies.

## METHODOLOGY

With the conversion to a virtual offering, we were able to better capture data around participants' feelings towards the event and subsequent interest in pursuing an IS-related major and IS-related career. After each session, High School students were sent a link to complete a survey. Specifically, we asked (1) please rate your interest in pursuing an Information Technology career before/after attending the event, (2) questions related to self-efficacy for choosing an information systems-related major and career, and (3) questions related to behavioral intention to choose an information systems-related major and career.

## RESULTS

Ninety-eight high school students completed the survey. There was a significant increase in interest in pursuing an IT career after attending the NEW Connect IT! ( $M=3.26$ ,  $SD=1.096$ ) than before attending the NEW Connect IT! ( $M=2.31$ ,  $SD=1.267$ );  $t(151) = -13.048$ ,  $p=0.001$ . **A surprising result was that high school students did not differentiate between educational and career pathways for either self-efficacy or behavior intention.**

## BIG IDEA / QUESTIONS

The following questions can be used to guide discussion of this Big Idea: (1) Is there agreement around the overemphasis of “computer science” in high school? (2) How can we showcase the non-coding IT skills, tools, and career options? (3) How can we further test this lack of educational and career pathway differentiation? (4) How can K-12 schools be encouraged to view their computer science curriculum more broadly?

## REFERENCES

1. Gallop & Amazon. (2021). Developing careers of the future: A study of student access to, and interest in, computer science [Brochure]. [https://www.gallup.com/file/analytics/355139/Amazon\\_Future\\_Engineers\\_Report\\_2021.pdf](https://www.gallup.com/file/analytics/355139/Amazon_Future_Engineers_Report_2021.pdf)
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