



Career and Technical Education -- A Crucial Step Forward

ELECTION 2008: 64 DAYS LEFT TO REGISTER TO VOTE

New York City's public education system has utterly failed many of its students. In a school system of overwhelmingly students of color, barely half of incoming high school students graduate and less than 10 percent of Black and Latino graduates earn a Regents diploma, the mark of real academic achievement.

In this disillusioning situation, the success of career and technical education (CTE) is crucial. The idea behind CTE is to combine academic and vocational studies to prepare students for sustainable careers, which can be started right after high school if the student so chooses.

Pipeline to Jobs

A successful CTE program would provide a pipeline to employment by giving students skills in high-demand occupations to which they can connect directly after graduation. Most of the current 21 vocational high schools provide a broad curriculum of CTE courses, but several focus on specific occupations.

Last year, approximately 110,000 New York City students were enrolled in career and technical education, about 30,000 in CTE schools. Yet CTE programs are uneven. Many of the best programs are screened for only the highest-skilled students, denying opportunities to young people who would benefit the most from them.

Recent studies have shown that Black, Latino, and male students are more likely to drop out of high school than White, Asian, or female students. This is reflected in the chronically high jobless rates among Black and Latino men in New York City as well as the nearly 200,000 mostly Black and Latino youths ages 16 to 24 who are neither in school nor in the workforce. CTE schools have a higher rate than traditional high schools of keeping young people from dropping out.

CTE can also open up college opportunities for many young people who may not have otherwise sought post-secondary education. The path to college does not always follow just one route. Students who enter work after CTE programs in high schools often later attend college part-time once they see its relevance to their field. In this sense, CTE programs can open doors not just to job placement after high school, but to career advancement.

There is plenty of public support for CTE. In the Community Service Society's (CSS) recent survey of low- and moderate-income New Yorkers, more than nine out of 10 respondents supported technical and vocational education programs in high schools. CSS has been advocating for an overhaul of the city's vocational education curriculum for several years.

CTE Task Force

In his January 2008 State of the City speech, Mayor Bloomberg announced plans to create a task force – the Mayoral Task Force on Career and Technical Education Innovation - which would focus on better preparing New York City high school students for technical careers.

I was a member of the task force, a cross-section of private, public, and nonprofit professionals. We hosted public hearings and collected public comment on a draft of recommendations. The task force was co-chaired by former New York City Mayor David N. Dinkins and New York Life Chairman Sy Sternberg.

The final report of the task force was released last week by Mayor Bloomberg. The report recommended five goals for future career and technical education in New York City.

- *Meet 21st-century standards:* Prepare students to meet rigorous academic and industry-based skills defined by the State Board of Regents incorporating recommendations from industry partners.
- *Expand pathways to graduation:* Create rigorous courses of study that integrate academics, internships, and hands-on experience.
- *Engage and empower industry leadership:* Develop a well-defined partnership structure for industry that ensures CTE programs remain relevant as industry evolves.
- *Prepare graduates for post-secondary success:* Prepare more students for post-secondary education and training by ensuring secondary-level CTE coursework is well-aligned with expectations for post-secondary degrees and certificates.
- *Increase opportunity and access:* Provide students and families with the necessary information to make informed choices about their educational options, including CTE, and ensure that all students have access to high schools that give them both post-secondary work and educational options upon graduation.

I am happy with the effort put into the report and its strong recommendations for a vastly improved role for CTE in New York City. I hope that the recommendations of the report will be implemented in full. Specifically, I hope that the city develops all five pilot schools for 2009 that are suggested in the report. I also applaud the task force's acknowledgement that a successful CTE program begins years earlier, in the middle grades, where a foundation in literacy and numeracy is essential.

I am pleased to see that CTE programming will also be used as a "recuperative" strategy for overage/under-credited and out-of-school youth through the development of a hybrid diploma/GED school and connection to existing programs of the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation. This will help to address the problem of the city's "disconnected youth," those

between ages 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor in the labor force. CSS is spearheading an effort to focus on the more than 4 million disconnected youth nationally.

And I hope that CTE schools will be reflective of the entire student population of New York City high schools -- they should neither “cream” off the best students nor become a less rigorous option for students falling behind.

Equitable Funding

Considering that funding for CTE high schools had declined over the past several years, it is most crucial that the task force’s recommendations for an “equitable distribution of resources” be adopted. This means reevaluating CTE funding formulas and capital investments.

A well thought out and supported CTE program could result in large numbers of students graduating from high school prepared for success in work or college. This would ensure New York City a skilled workforce to keep our city and its communities strong and productive.

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