

Chapter 1:

Needs, attitudes, expectations—workforce, societal, parental

Ascertain the skills required to meet the needs of business and industry, and change the attitude toward jobs that do not require a college education.

CONCERN: Misperceptions and Lack of Awareness

The education community, including parents and students, is not always aware of the post-secondary training and career opportunities available for non-college-bound students. There is also a persistent misperception that career without college is inferior to the four-year college route. Existing student assessment tools do not necessarily reflect the skills required to succeed in available jobs that do not require a college education. There is a lack of information on how best to assess whether non-college-bound students are ready for the workplace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The New Jersey Department of Education should explore the use of new assessment tools to measure the skills necessary to succeed in available jobs. The effort should address the use of NJCAN⁸⁷ as an assessment support.
2. NJDOE should develop additional measures of school and student success that focus on career readiness.
3. The New Jersey Departments of Education and Labor & Workforce Development should establish a formal, standing structure to facilitate collaboration with representatives of industry, trade unions, and other entities to ensure that students recognize the array of careers available to them and the multiple pathways to those careers. These pathways include earning job-specific professional certification and two-year degrees, as well as experience in apprenticeships and internships and CTE programs at the secondary and post-secondary levels.
4. NJDOE should ensure the availability of a staff liaison to engage in dialogue with schools about meaningful career preparation.
5. Inter-agency collaboration is critical to address the issues raised by the Task Force. Therefore, the state Departments of Education and Labor & Workforce Development, along with other state agencies, should establish a formal structure to identify current programs and propose additional efforts that would support the goals of this Task Force.
6. Working with its partners in business and industry, government and higher education, the New Jersey School Boards Association should conduct programming for its members to promote consideration of, and dialogue about, the full range of career pathways available to students.

⁸⁷ The New Jersey Career Assistance Navigator is an internet-based system sponsored by the NJDOE and the state Department of Labor & Workforce Development that provides information on careers, post-secondary education and financial aid. See: <https://njcis.intocareers.org/materials/portal/home.html>.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

High school students should have a broad range of post-secondary education, training and career opportunities in addition to enrolling in a four-year college. Nonetheless, society continues to define post-secondary success as college admission. Changing this attitude will require a message from the top.

The Task Force believes that the New Jersey Department of Education has an important role to play in communicating—and emphasizing—the fact that there are many pathways to a successful career other than enrolling in a four-year college. These pathways include earning job-specific professional certification, associate degrees, apprenticeships/internships and vocational-technical programs. Efforts to promote this message should be fully funded by the state.

For example, the Department of Education and the State Board of Education should ensure that New Jersey’s Student Learning Standards, which include a section on 21st Century Life and Careers⁸⁸, are placing appropriate emphasis on current and anticipated career pathways, as well as the soft skills, such as punctuality, teamwork and communication with management and co-workers, which are essential to workplace success. The NJDOE School Performance Reports⁸⁹, which include data on high school students’ participation in CTE programs and structured learning experiences, as well as industry-valued credentials earned, should be organized so that statistics on post-secondary involvement in such career-focused activities is recognized as a measure of student achievement on par with college admission rates.

The NJDOE should ensure the future availability of a resource person to assist school districts in resolving questions about career-readiness and to provide ongoing dialogue about how best to prepare students for meaningful career paths.

The Task Force also believes that the Department of Education should explore new assessment tools to measure skills that are necessary to succeed in available jobs. For example, NJDOE should consider how NJCAN could be used as an assessment support. (NJCAN is the acronym for the New Jersey Career Assistance Navigator, a free on-line interactive career exploration resource, operated by the state Departments of Education and Labor & Workforce Development.)

An essential part of the New Jersey School Boards Association’s mission is to provide training and support to advance student achievement through effective school district governance. The Task Force, therefore, believes that the Association should work with business to sponsor workshops and events that promote the consideration of alternative career pathways.

The NJDOE Office of Career Readiness “is responsible for the statewide implementation of secondary and postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) programs. This includes

⁸⁸ "New Jersey Student Learning Standards: 21st Century Life and Careers," New Jersey Department of Education, accessed August 2, 2018, <https://www.nj.gov/education/aps/cccs/career/>.

⁸⁹ "New Jersey School Performance Reports," New Jersey Department of Education, accessed August 2, 2018, <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/PerformanceReports.aspx>.

collaboration with the state workforce development system, institutions of higher education, business and industry and other state agencies to create rigorous programs of study that are aligned to workforce needs and career pathways.”⁹⁰

To encourage greater understanding of the needs of employers, available jobs and required skills, the Department of Education should ensure that discussions with the manufacturing, labor, and business communities occur regularly. The formal collaboration should include representatives from the following sectors: Retail Hospitality and Tourism; Advanced Manufacturing; Financial Services; HealthCare; Life Sciences; Technology and Entrepreneurship; Transportation; and Logistics and Distribution.

Information gathered from the various industries, with assistance and input from the state Department of Labor & Workforce Development, would inform NJDOE decisions about standards, curricula and testing. As part of these discussions, the participants should identify how additional efforts might be made across the various departments of state government to support the goals reflected in this Task Force report.

The [New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce & Economic Development](#) may serve as a model for such collaboration. It consortium provides businesses with skills training for current or prospective employees. Partners include the New Jersey Council of County Colleges, the New Jersey Business and Industry Association, and the New Jersey Department of Labor & Workforce Development. According to its website, the consortium also helps veterans, the unemployed and the underemployed receive the training they need to find jobs and careers with companies that need their skills.

Liaisons involving the state, local school districts, business and industry and the New Jersey School Boards Association will be a win-win for both students and employers. Industry will have a forum to advocate for policy and programming that will ensure a skilled workforce, and students will be prepared for meaningful and appropriate career paths during and after high school.

⁹⁰ "Learning That Works for New Jersey: CTE," New Jersey Department of Education, accessed August 2, 2018, <https://www.nj.gov/education/cte/>.