

Chapter 2:

Communication and collaboration among educational and business partners

Strengthen communication, collaboration and support among local school districts, county vocational-technical schools, community colleges, state government and its various agencies, business and industry, and other prospective partners.

CONCERN: A Communications Gap and Lack of Collaboration and Support

A communications gap, along with a lack of collaboration, exists among local boards of education, county vocational-technical schools, county and municipal government, the New Jersey Department of Education and other departments of state government, the Legislature, and the business and employment community. As a result, several factors constrain programming for the career-focused learner. These include (a) a lack of information about employers' current and future needs, (b) limited knowledge of the essential skills and content that students must master to qualify for entry-level positions in various industries, and (c) support for CTE education in all segments of the public education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. The state should support and fund the expansion of CTE programs in all school districts, including those that operate comprehensive high schools. (There is no state funding category specifically aimed at CTE programs in comprehensive high schools. A state bond issue that will appear on the November 2018 ballot would set aside \$350 million for both school security enhancements and expansion of high school CTE programs. Funds for CTE program expansion, however, would apply only to county vocational-technical school districts. An additional \$50 million would be set aside for CTE programs in community colleges.⁹¹)
8. The state Department of Education should take a more active role in assisting local school districts in developing CTE programs. The assistance should facilitate the sharing of CTE programs among neighboring districts, thereby providing additional educational opportunities in a cost-efficient manner.
9. The New Jersey Department of Education and local school districts should study the Colorado CareerWise program⁹², a public-private partnership that provides three-year apprenticeships to high school students starting in junior year and leads to industry credentials and associate degrees.
10. The New Jersey School Boards Association should advocate for changes in federal law and U.S. Department of Labor regulations that limit the ability of Workforce Development Boards

⁹¹ "Legislative Update: Governor Signs Vo-Tech, School Security Bond Measure; Voters to Decide its Fate," *School Board Notes*, September 5, 2018, New Jersey School Boards Association, accessed September 13, 2018, <https://www.njsba.org/news-publications/school-board-notes/september-5-2018-vol-xlii-no-6/legislative-update-governor-signs-vo-tech-school-security-bond-measure-voters-to-decide-its-fate/>.

⁹² "Colorado's Swiss Apprenticeship Model," accessed June 25, 2018, https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/CO_Swiss_Apprenticeship_Model.pdf.

and Workforce Investment Boards to use federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds for the training of currently enrolled high school students. Upon such changes, the N.J. Department of Labor & Workforce Development should ensure that state procedures enable the use of such funds for the training of in-school youth.

11. The state Department of Labor & Workforce Development should provide preK-12 and regional school districts with a level of assistance comparable to its support of county CTE schools.
12. NJDOE should establish regional liaisons to help K-12 school districts respond to area employment needs. It should consider the use of the county roundtable structure for assistant superintendents and curriculum directors to encourage dialogue among schools and businesses about regional employment needs and the status of education programs.
13. County vocational-technical schools should actively share information with local boards of education about the needs of employers and the skills that the business community requires of its employees.
14. Local school districts should actively forge relationships and networking opportunities with business organizations and community groups to obtain information and share resources related to the labor market.
15. Parents and guidance counselors should be involved in discussions of CTE options and benefits with students as early as the 7th or 8th grade.
16. Local school districts should provide programming for all students beginning in elementary school and continuing through the middle grades and high school to raise awareness of all careers and the broad variety of career pathways. Districts should consider initiatives, such as open houses and “Career Awareness Days” with follow-up discussions, as effective introductions. Districts should provide students with additional age-appropriate opportunities, such as site visits, technology-based field trips and internships, to foster greater understanding of careers and to refine students’ potential career interests and pathways.
17. Local boards of education should forge relationships with county, municipal and state government. For example, representation by a school district on the community Industrial Development Board (or similar structures) would provide a forum for local industry to explain its skill needs for entry level employees.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

The education community does not always fully understand the needs of local businesses and employers. Through their established relationships with the county government, community colleges and local employers, county vocational-technical schools are prepared to understand the demands of local employers and the skills required of their employees.

Unfortunately, local school districts may not always have the same relationships and lines of communication with these entities. And many employers may not have the time and resources to develop individual relationships with all local school districts across New Jersey. Yet the information gleaned from relationships with the business community is critical in providing students with the training and skills that will enable them to succeed in the job market.

Relationship Building

Various stakeholders should be engaged in the process of preparing non-college-bound students for meaningful employment. These parties should include K-12 and regional high school district boards of education, county CTE districts, the business community, county and municipal government, various state departments and agencies, and the Legislature.

These parties must communicate if they are to gain an appreciation of the employment needs within the state and within a particular community. Such collaboration will provide educators with information about the particular skills that must be taught to enable students to qualify for, and thrive in, the workforce. It will also provide the business community with information about current CTE programming in both vocational-technical and comprehensive high schools.

School officials should actively forge new relationships and engage in networking opportunities to obtain information and share resources. For example, school administrators could participate in local, regional and statewide business organizations, such as the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, the National Federation of Independent Business and the Ne

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Association, as well as groups such as the Rotary Club, Kiwanis International and Lions Clubs.

Networking through these organizations can facilitate relationship-building, and it can provide information and data that schools can use to better understand employers' needs. Districts can host meetings at school facilities with selected organizations for information sharing. These networking activities can provide information about labor needs in a particular region, salaries and the potential for career growth, and employment mobility including the ease of finding employment after losing a job.

Career Education

The Task Force believes that career education, involving teachers, guidance counselors and parents, should begin in elementary school, continue through the middle grades and high school, and include discussion of educational options and their respective benefits. Initiatives like open houses and "Career Awareness Days" with follow-up discussions are effective introductions. Districts should also afford age-appropriate opportunities to deepen the students' understanding of what the various careers involve. These might include site visits, technology-based field trips and internships, that will enable students to refine their potential career interests and pathways.

New Jersey's Student Learning Standards (9.2, Career Awareness, Exploration and Preparation) sets benchmarks for career awareness, exploration and preparation by the conclusion of the fourth, eighth and 12th grades, respectively. Career exploration activities include the following:

- Research careers...and determine attributes of career success.
- Develop a Personalized Student Learning Plan with the assistance of an adult mentor that includes information about career areas of interest, goals and an educational plan.
- Evaluate communication, collaboration, and leadership skills that can be developed through school, home, work, and extracurricular activities for use in a career.

- Evaluate how traditional and nontraditional careers have evolved regionally, nationally, and globally.
- Analyze labor market trends using state and federal labor market information and other resources available online.
- Demonstrate understanding of the necessary preparation and legal requirements to enter the workforce.
- Evaluate the impact of online activities and social media on employer decisions.⁹³

Apprenticeships

Colorado’s “CareerWise”, the nation’s first statewide youth apprenticeship program, provides an exciting model for collaboration between school and business.⁹⁴ The program (discussed earlier in this report) was inspired by one that operates successfully in Switzerland, and is coordinated by a nonprofit organization.

CareerWise enables students, starting in their junior year, to obtain high school and college credit, as well as a paycheck. Its curriculum was developed jointly by businesses, colleges, and K-12 schools. The program is currently funded through federal and state business and philanthropy.

The Task Force believes strongly that similar initiatives should be replicated in New Jersey and is encouraged by Governor Phil Murphy’s proposed New Jersey Apprenticeship Network, which would be developed by the state Departments of Labor & Workforce Development and Education and the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education.⁹⁵

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Appendix II, “Apprenticeships: A Key to a ‘Future Ready’ New Jersey,” provides information about NJSBA’s support for the apprenticeship concept.

County Development/Investment Boards

The County Workforce Development/Investment Boards present another venue that could potentially assist in career awareness and training for high school students. The current role of the county Workforce Development/Investment Boards includes providing training programs that qualify participants for skilled entry-level jobs.

Members of Workforce Development/Investment Boards (WDBs or WIBs) have indicated anecdotally that they have more resources than clients. However, they are limited in using the funds to provide job training to high-school-aged students unless those students drop out of school or graduate.

⁹³ "9.2 Career Awareness, Exploration, and Preparation," New Jersey Student Learning Standards, New Jersey Department of Education, accessed August 2, 2018, <https://www.nj.gov/education/cccs/2014/career/92.pdf>.

⁹⁴ Hickenlooper, “Colorado’s Swiss Apprenticeship Model,” https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/CO_Swiss_Apprenticeship_Model.pdf.

⁹⁵ "Governor Phil Murphy Announces the Creation of the New Jersey Apprenticeship Network," State of New Jersey, March 29, 2018, accessed August 06, 2018, https://nj.gov/governor/news/news/562018/approved/20180329a_apprenticeship.shtml.

The federal [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#) (*P.L.* 113-128) and related U.S. Department of Labor regulations (20 CFR 681.410) require states and local Workforce Development Boards to spend at least 75 percent of funding on out-of-school students. The [Federal Register, Vol. 81, No. 161, Part VI](#), August 19, 2016, contains the following statement:

“...the focus in WIOA is on expending additional resources on OSY (out-of-school youth). Local WDBs do not have the authority under WIOA to determine ISY (in-school youth) and OSY expenditure rates based on the needs of their own area. Local areas must spend a minimum of 75 percent of youth funds on OSY...”

The Task Force believes that the New Jersey School Boards Association should advocate for changes in federal law and regulation to remove existing restrictions on the use of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Funds for in-school youth. Upon such changes, the N.J. Department of Labor & Workforce Development should ensure that state procedures enable the use of such funds for the training of currently enrolled students.

Government Support

The Task Force believes that state and local government must also be partners with school districts in maintaining and expanding opportunities for the career-focused learner. It noted several activities and practices that would enable school districts to make progress toward this goal.

- School district representation on the community's Industrial Development Board (or similar local governing body structure) would provide a forum for local industry to address the skills that entry-level employees should possess.
- The state Department of Education should take a more active role in assisting local school districts that operate comprehensive high schools in developing CTE programs. The assistance should include facilitating the sharing of CTE programs among neighboring districts, which would provide additional educational opportunities for students in a budget-friendly and efficient manner.
- NJDOE should appoint liaisons to assist local school boards in understanding and responding to regional employment needs. The department should also consider the use of the county roundtable structure for assistant superintendents and curriculum directors to encourage dialogue among schools and businesses about regional employment needs and the status of education programs.
- The state Department of Labor & Workforce Development should provide information and support to local K-12 districts much as they do with the county vocational-technical schools.
- The Legislature should understand the critical need for CTE expansion in all districts, not only in the county vocational districts. For example, recent legislation authorizes a statewide bond referendum to support facility expansion in the county vocational school districts. Missing from the equation are the many school districts that operate comprehensive high schools and

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which are struggling to provide career and technical education. Any new money from the state should be used to expand viable options for career-focused students in all school districts.

CONCERN: Tension between County Vocational and K-12 Districts

Communication, collaboration and sense of “partnership” are frequently lacking between county vocational-technical schools and K-12 districts concerning the best methods to serve all students. Often, tension stems from a feeling that county and local school districts are competing against one another to retain or attract high-achieving students. There is also concern about selective admissions processes depriving students of CTE opportunities. Adversarial relationships between county vocational schools and local school districts run contrary to the overarching goal of maximizing student potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

18. Representatives of local school districts and county vocational-technical school districts should create opportunities to engage in respectful dialogue about the issues they face, and work constructively toward the advancement of student achievement.
19. Local school districts and county vocational-technical school districts should consider possible areas of collaboration, such as offering career pathways to students in other districts where such programs do not exist.
20. If a local district offers a unique career pathway, that district is encouraged to offer other districts the option to enroll tuition students in the program when seats are available.
21. Vocational-technical schools are encouraged to establish “satellite” programs in local school districts through inter-local agreements. Such CTE programs would be open to students from the host district as well as from neighboring high schools.

Competition to attract high-achieving students can lead to an adversarial relationship between county CTE and local school districts.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

The Task Force’s subcommittee on Communication and Collaboration found that a sense of “partnership” concerning how to best serve all student is lacking between county vocational-technical schools, on the one hand, and K-12 and regional high school districts, on the other, concerning how best to serve all students. Often, tension stems from a feeling that they are competing against one another to retain or attract the state’s highest-achieving students. This competition can lead to an adversarial and sometimes contentious and confrontational relationship.

Sources of Tension

The Task Force found the following concerns expressed by local school districts:

- The proliferation of the “Academy” model in the countywide systems, as opposed to the traditional skill-building or technical training model of the vocational-technical schools, has created a new dynamic and can sometimes exacerbate the tension between local and

countywide school districts. Some local districts believe that entrance criteria or selective admissions processes adopted by the county schools results in “skimming” of the sending districts’ highest academic achievers. Lower-performing students remaining in the comprehensive high school may be less likely to enroll in post-secondary education and are precisely the population that would most benefit from skills training. However, the local district may not be able to provide that training.

- Selective admissions processes can also result in a county school system’s student body not necessarily reflecting the demographics of the local districts from which it receives pupils. Whether intentional or not, this enrollment trend can result in an inequitable access for some segments of the population.
- There are financial implications for sending districts as more of their students attend county vocational-technical schools. They must pay tuition to the county districts. In addition, “[s]ending districts must also pay for students’ transportation (because county vocational districts do not receive state transportation aid)—meaning the local district loses a student and the associated state aid *and* must cover the costs of busing the student to the county school.”⁹⁶

Conversely, the countywide districts have their own sources of contention with local districts.

- They occasionally experience resistance from sending districts when they recruit students into their schools. This resistance can lead to a lack of awareness of the county vocational-technical option among students and parents. In fact, a recent report noted that some county district officials believe that local districts “have been known to discourage their students from applying to the county schools” and that some consider local district efforts to create CTE programs as a “strategy to undermine their schools.”⁹⁷
- Because of the growing attractiveness of their academies to state’s highest achievers, vocational-technical school districts can sometimes be demonized or made to feel like they are “poachers,” rather than being portrayed as a viable alternative educational path that is in the best interests of many students.

Alleviating the tension that exists between some local school districts and the state’s 21 county vocational-technical school districts requires collective recognition that neither the local nor county model is going away any time soon.

Task Force members believe that alleviating the tension that exists between some local school districts and the state’s 21 county vocational-technical school districts requires collective recognition that neither the local nor county model is going away any time soon. With the acceptance of that reality, leaders should set a course in which both types of districts work independently and collaboratively to ensure they are providing all students with opportunities to maximize their academic potential.

⁹⁶ Smarick, “The Evolving High School CTE, 20.

⁹⁷ Smarick, 21.

Common Goal and Understanding

Therefore, representatives of both entities should create opportunities to “sit down and talk to one another” in a respectful manner, with the goal of reaching a common understanding of the issues that concern each respective entity, and leading to continued conversations on the best way to work collaboratively toward advancing student achievement.

In a recent opinion article, Michael C. Dicken, superintendent of the Gloucester County Institute of Technology and Special Services School District, commented that the ultimate goal should be meeting the needs of all students. The president-elect of the New Jersey Council of County Vocational-Technical Schools, Dicken addressed the cost-effectiveness of county-wide CTE programs, but also stressed the need for a better relationship between local school districts and county vocational schools.

It is also time to change the conversation about CTE from a focus on cost and conflict between school districts to an emphasis on expanding opportunities for students. All schools and colleges have a role to play in preparing students for career success.

The bottom line is that employers need graduates with technical and scientific skills, strong academic preparation and work-readiness skills. And young people need to be shown clear pathways to success. They need help identifying career goals and accessing education and training.

With improved communication and a collaborative mindset, county and local school districts can work together to address the needs of all students in a cost-effective way.⁹⁸

The Task Force believes that local districts and county vocational districts, with support from the New Jersey Department of Education and NJSBA, should identify areas where they can share and collaborate. Through these conversations, K-12 school districts should learn how best to leverage the expertise of the county schools when developing their own programs. County vocational programs should consider lotteries for admission, locating programs where underrepresented populations live, and intensive outreach to parents. They should also give serious thought to sharing resources, expertise and space. Local districts and county vocational districts should discuss how the vocational district might assist in filling the needs of students remaining in the comprehensive high school.

Effective communication can lead to productive partnerships that benefit students from both county and local school districts.

Given the ill-will that may exist in some counties between local and county vocational districts, there may be reluctance in starting the conversation. But effective communication can lead to productive partnerships that benefit students from both county and local school districts. By coming together and sharing concerns, ideas and resources, they may discover ways to help and work with one another. In and of itself, simply initiating the conversation may ease any tension that interferes with collaboration.

⁹⁸ Michael C. Dicken, "County Career-tech Programs More Cost-effective than Local Ones," The Press of Atlantic City, February 9, 2018, accessed June 22, 2018, http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/opinion/commentary/county-career-tech-programs-more-cost-effective-than-local-ones/article_53fa4ab9-0dd3-5fc1-8eaa-e53f25097ce3.html.

Multiple Campuses

Some county vocational-technical school districts operate CTE programs at multiple locations. These “satellite” programs provide selected career pathways and are located closer to a student’s home district. The Task Force believes that vocational-technical schools should consider situating additional programs in K-12 local districts under inter-local agreements and opening the programs to students from neighboring high schools.

Model Practices

While there are pockets of friction between local and county school districts in some areas, there are also examples of practices that could serve as models for collaborative and complementary relationships.

The Morris County Vocational School District has made a conscious effort to forge a positive working relationship with the local districts. A “Key Communicator Group” has been created to facilitate communication between various stakeholders, including members of the local boards of education, superintendents, administrators, faculty and parents.

This forum builds a sense of shared responsibility for the educational well-being all of all students in the county.

There are examples of practices that could serve as models for collaborative and complementary relationships.

Morris County does not appear to experience tension between the vocational-technical and local school districts. Attendance at open houses where prospective students and their families learn about CTE programs are at or near capacity. Entrance criteria result in attendance by the highest performing students from the local high schools. However, the Vo-Tech’s Academy students take courses with traditional students; the schedules are coordinated and all the trade programs are on campus. Most high schools in the county do not offer vocational training, avoiding any sense of competition with the county vocational school. Also, the schools have put in place a Memorandum of Agreement whereby the vocational school will pay back the local district for vocational students taking courses in local district schools.

Partnership models like this have been funded through the County Vocational School District Partnership Grant.⁹⁹ That program, while limited, provides a model of collaboration among county vocational school districts and other school districts, business and industry groups, community colleges and other entities to expand access and opportunities in CTE.

Appendix III, an article posted by the NJCCVTS, “County Vocational-Technical School Partnership Grants: Expanding CTE Programs and Partnerships to Meet Student and Employer Demands,” provides examples of collaborative programs funded through the partnerships grants. A list of the partner schools and CTE programs is in Appendix IV.

⁹⁹ Notice of Grant Opportunity, County Vocational School District Partnership Grant, Cohort 4, November 2017, New Jersey Department of Education, accessed August 6, 2018, <http://www.state.nj.us/education/grants/docs/18-ve04-g06.doc>.

CONCERN: Impact on School Performance Reports and Access to Opportunity

The Department of Education’s [School Performance Reports](#) take into account college admission rates, college preparation activities and test scores. The reports provide an inaccurate image of overall school district performance when large numbers of the highest achieving students opt to attend academies operated by the county vocational-technical school districts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

22. County vocational-technical schools should structure their admissions processes to create more options for students across the achievement spectrum.
23. The New Jersey Department of Education should develop additional measures of school and student success that place more emphasis on “career readiness” as opposed to “college readiness.”
24. NJDOE should revise or weight its performance measurement system in a way that does not penalize a comprehensive high school for the loss of its highest achievers to county vocational-technical schools. The departure of high-achieving students creates a perception about the quality of the district, which may be misleading or completely inaccurate.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION:

As noted earlier, a source of contention between school districts that operate comprehensive high schools and the county vocational districts, particularly with the proliferation of the “academy” model, is a sense that the county districts attract the highest-performing students to their schools. This can build resentment among the sending districts toward the county vocational school. In addition, selective admissions processes can create a school demographic that does not reflect countywide enrollment and can result in an inequitable access for some segments of the population.

A May 2017 *Education Week* article focused on the challenge. "As CTE programs get tougher, and demand builds, schools must decide who gets in and who doesn't. When those decisions are based on academic skill— [and] students must have good grades and pass a test to get in—[those] who've had less opportunity can find themselves at a distinct disadvantage."¹⁰⁰

It is in the interests of all students for vocational-technical schools to create more options for students across the achievement spectrum.

The Task Force believes that selective admissions processes adopted by many of the county vocational-technical school districts has the unfortunate effect of depriving students of the rich opportunities offered by the county CTE programs. Selective processes tend to exclude students who do not aspire to post-secondary education and can create inequities in access. It is in the interests of all students for vocational-technical schools to structure their admissions processes to be less selective in order to create more options for students across the achievement spectrum.

¹⁰⁰ Catherine Gewertz, "Can a Career Tech Ed. School Be Too Popular?" *Education Week*, June 20, 2018, Editorial Projects in Education, accessed August 06, 2018, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/05/17/can-a-career-tech-ed-school-be.html>.

Local school districts are also concerned that this trend has an adverse impact on their performance as measured by the New Jersey Department of Education.

The state’s School Performance Reports include indicators of “College and Career Readiness.” This section illustrates measures of student behavior that correlate with greater success in college, including:

- Performance on standardized test (i.e., PARCC);
- Percentage of graduates who enrolled in college in the fall of 2017 and the percentages of graduates who were enrolled in 2-year and 4-year colleges;
- Percentage of students taking rigorous coursework in high schools, such as AP or IB classes;
- Participation and performance on college entrance exams (PSAT, SAT, ACT), including a measure of those who score at or above College Readiness Benchmarks for each test.¹⁰¹

There is also a “Graduation and Postsecondary” section in the School Performance Report, which shows graduation rates, dropout rates, and postsecondary enrollment rates. This information indicates how many students finish high school and move on to a college or university.

However, the reports have begun including indicators aimed at measuring students’ “career” readiness. For example, the reports include the percentage of students enrolled in approved career and technical (CTE) programs. They include a measurement of student participation in structured learning experiences (SLEs), and report data on students who earn “industry-valued credentials.”

Nonetheless, with its emphasis on academic test scores, participation in college preparatory activities and college enrollment, the current performance reporting system may not be in the best interests of students. It incentivizes school districts to focus on indicators, data points and scores, rather than concentrating on the appropriate pathway for each individual student. It encourages “teaching to the test.” It is not responsive to the need to prepare students for careers that have yet to be identified; to the increasing replacement of humans by robots and artificial intelligence; or to the fact that many careers do not and will not require a four-year degree. There is a growing recognition among employers that earning professional certificates is a career pathway across industries.

With its emphasis on academic test scores, participation in college preparatory activities and college enrollment, the state’s current school performance reporting system, may not be in the best interests of students.

When college-bound and high-achieving students attend the county vocational academies, it changes the proportion of academically oriented students remaining in the comprehensive high school. This may create a misleading and inaccurate perception about the quality of a district. In such a case, the School Performance Report may fail to adequately reflect the success of a district in preparing students to enter the workforce and in assisting them in finding the best career paths and direction.

¹⁰¹ "Performance Reports - Reference Guide," New Jersey Department of Education, accessed August 6, 2018, <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/Documents/ReferenceGuide.html>.

To reflect the success of schools with varying populations, the School Performance Reports should be revised so that they do not penalize school districts in which a large number of high-achieving students opt to attend academies operated by county vocational school districts. The state Department of Education should develop additional measures of school and student success. It should build upon some of the changes that have been made to the School Performance Reports in recent years, which place more emphasis on “career readiness” as opposed to college readiness.

CONCERN: Lack of Information about Military Opportunities

Many students are not aware of the post-secondary education and career opportunities offered by the military, and are sometimes dissuaded from considering this option.

RECOMMENDATIONS

25. School districts should educate students and parents about the opportunities that the military can offer with respect to post-secondary education and career training and about requirements for enlistment.
26. School districts should actively confront the stigma associated with the military that may dissuade parents and students from considering this option.
27. School districts should establish a “Military Opportunities Day” as part of their efforts to prepare students for their post-secondary pathways.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

Entering the military is an additional career pathway that some non-college-bound students may want to consider. Many probably do not know about the post-secondary opportunities that the military can offer in terms of training for various careers. For example, they may not be aware that most of the U.S. Army’s career paths are non-combat. In addition, they may not know about the financial support that the military provides to qualified students. Others are deterred from considering this option because of misconceptions about military service.

While not easy to get into the military, it is a viable post-high school option for the student who is not ready for college.

Leadership for Educational Excellence (LEE)¹⁰², a coalition of the state’s major educational organizations, has joined with the New Jersey Department of Education, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, the U.S. Army, America’s Navy, the United States Marine Corps, the U.S. Air Force and the Army National Guard in encouraging public schools to institute a “Military Opportunities Day” between September and November. During Military Opportunities Day, high school juniors and seniors could receive information about the educational and career opportunities available through the various branches of the military.

¹⁰² Leadership for Educational Excellence includes the New Jersey School Boards Association, the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, the New Jersey Education Association, the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association, the New Jersey Association of School Business Officials, and the New Jersey PTA.

In a letter urging school districts to schedule a Military Opportunities Day, the LEE Group noted that the U.S. Military is the largest provider of post-secondary scholarships in the world; it offers educational and career opportunities in the growing STEM fields, and it has a strategic interest in improving student academic achievement.

Military Opportunities Day can be an integral part of a school's annual effort to help juniors and seniors prepare for a post-secondary pathway: work, college, or the military. Activities can include presentations to students by each branch of service, evening seminars geared toward parents on the education and career opportunities available to their children through military service, the scheduling of career exploration workshops, and information on "March2Success," a preparation course for the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Test, the SAT, the ACT and other standardized tests.¹⁰³

CONCERN: Overlooking the Faith-Based Community

School districts may overlook the role that the faith-based community can play in program development.

RECOMMENDATION

- 28.** School districts should consider consulting faith-based communities when developing CTE programming. These communities can provide a point of access for employers to engage with students who are preparing to enter the workforce.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

An underutilized resource in school districts is the faith-based community. Whether the matter concerns the social-emotional needs of students or developing school-community partnerships to assist students as they plan for their futures, engaging spiritual leaders can be critical. Many towns have interfaith councils, which can provide natural forums for collaboration on a variety of topics. Since faith-based institutions understand the needs and characteristics of a community, they can provide insight for educators in developing specific programs.

CONCERN: Is Higher Education the Best Preparation for Every Student?

School districts may not be questioning whether and how higher education prepares an individual student to succeed in the workforce.

RECOMMENDATION

- 29.** Local school districts should provide appropriate career awareness guidance to students who are contemplating post-secondary education with honest conversations about college-readiness and the availability of other pathways.

¹⁰³ Lawrence S. Feinsod, Ed.D., *et al.*, Military Opportunities Day – 2017, Letter of Support, August 2017, Leadership for Educational Excellence, accessed August 6, 2018, <https://www.njsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Military-Opportunities-Day-Letter-of-Support-2017.pdf>.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

While higher education plays an important role in preparing students for the workforce, a four-year institution is not for everyone. Colleges are accepting many students who may not be ready for college-level coursework. Some of these students eventually drop out, and some require remedial courses.

Additionally, as referenced elsewhere in this report, many students who attend college accumulate debt.

For some students, a four-year institution may eventually be a "good fit," but not right after high school. A student who is uncertain about his or her direction may benefit from a "gap year" before college. Some may wish to attend community colleges, which in recent years have increased their focus on vocational training, rather than simply being providers of remedial courses or stepping stones to four-year colleges.

For other students, there are pathways to the workforce other than higher education. Students need guidance about the variety of pathways to careers that include entering the workforce directly upon high school graduation or completing a post-secondary path that results in a professional certificate or a two- or four-year degree. Ultimately, what is critical is that each student be provided information about the available options and be apprised of the realistic predictions for employment and success along any career path.

The education community does a disservice to students if it does not expose them to multiple pathways. School districts must review the career-awareness guidance programs they offer in both middle and high schools.

The guidance provided by schools should be informed by the predictions of experts and researchers who have studied employment and job market trends. The guidance that schools provide to students should include discussion about the future workforce, including predictions about which employment positions are likely to evaporate, and which are emerging.

The impact of globalization and artificial intelligence is having a significant impact on the career choices of current and future PreK-20 students. Artificial intelligence, technology and robotics are increasingly replacing humans for jobs that can be accomplished through a defined step-by-step process. Concurrently, there are employment needs in many of the traditional trades like welding, electrical and plumbing.

Among the greatest concerns is the large number of students who plan to enter the workforce directly after graduation. Without a skill or a plan to acquire one, these students will earn the minimum wage.

Considering the above factors, schools must engage with students at an early stage, so that the student can follow a program that will allow him or her to achieve skills to qualify in a career that is financially viable and personally rewarding.

In sum, higher education may play a role in preparing students, but we should dispense with the presumption that students must earn the traditional four-year degree. Schools should provide students who are contemplating post-secondary education with appropriate guidance on multiple pathways and the various programs and classes available. They should engage students in honest conversations about college-readiness, the likely costs of various levels and types of higher education, the well-paying jobs that are available now and predictably in the future, the types of skills that are required for those jobs, and prospects for employment.