



## **The Need for Enhanced Technical Education**

By David R. Jones  
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To be prepared for a career in New York City's labor market, students who are not going on to college need to be able to integrate technical knowledge and skills with core academic knowledge. In our changing economy, even the most technical job today requires basic literate and numeric skills.

A few years ago the Community Service Society inserted specific educational questions in its citywide survey, "[The Unheard Third](#)," which is the largest annual survey of low-income respondents conducted in the country. We asked what would be the improvement in the schools they would most like to see. People responded with "better teacher salaries," "smaller class size," and "a focus on vocational education."

Vocational education, now known as career and technical education (CTE), was once a separate "track" in our high schools. The city's Department of Education has vowed to make sure that CTE students get basic academic instructions.

Educational outcomes from career and technical programs are changing. The road to college for many young people, particularly those from low-income families with little college in their family history, often goes through work after high school. Young people often need employment to learn the relevance of college to their advancement.

About 140,000 students in the city's public high schools are enrolled in vocational education classes. Most take courses in general education high schools.

The city has 39 CTE schools, with about 30,000 students enrolled in them. CTE schools, on average, were funded at per student rates that were a bit lower than other public high schools. Despite having poorer students who enter high school with lower skill levels on average, CTE schools in New York City often graduate their students at higher rates than other high schools. Historically, though, these schools have been generally left to their own devices with little centralized support.

Presently, the city offers programs in its CTE schools in automotive repair, aviation maintenance, electronic technology, welding, construction, and plumbing, among many

others. Students graduating from these courses should be entering a pipeline to well-paying jobs through apprenticeship programs in various industries.

In many cases, this means bringing in trade unions as a partner to the educational process. Unfortunately, the history of some of these unions has been to exclude people of color. Given the fact that nearly 80 percent of the city's high school students are black or Latino and, thus, are likely to form the overwhelming number of CTE students, this potential roadblock to work after school must be closely monitored by the city.

CTE has long been misunderstood, and suffered from a lack of support from politicians who are afraid of efforts that might imply that some students are not college material. With funding from the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation, the Community Service Society (CSS) is starting a research project that seeks to examine how certain types of CTE programs can actually increase college-going. CSS is working with the city's Department of Education to better understand and identify these types of programs.

We must ensure that career and technical high schools and post high school training lead students to jobs that provide economic and social advancement. We cannot continue the way we are going now with the vast majority of black and Latino young people either dropping out of high school or graduating with no useful skills to participate in this new economy.

There will be an election for a new mayor of New York City in 2013. The next mayor must ensure that CTE is a continuing educational priority. This should begin by determining the education plans of those New Yorkers who are running for mayor.

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