

Another Way to a Sustainable Job

The Bloomberg administration has 460 days left in office. Michael Bloomberg has been mayor for almost 11 years. But his administration has been in shutdown mode for a while now. Already, high ranking members are leaving for other opportunities, usually in the private sector where their contacts make them prime movers. But while this administration winds down, the needs of New Yorkers go on.

The next administration – and the new mayor – will take office on January 1, 2014. They will face many issues, but the most important thing that the new administration will do is to decide on its policy priorities.

Number One Priority

Obviously, jobs are a number one priority. New York City's unemployment rate is nearly 10 percent, and that's just the official rate, not reflective of those who have simply given up looking for employment. Some people think that a mayor can do little to combat what has been a worldwide recession and – in this country – a jobless recovery. But good planning and careful follow through can make a great deal of difference in the lives of many New Yorkers.

In this new economy, jobs are more than ever linked to the right type of education. Let's focus on the city's young people.

Too many youths are either dropping out of high school or graduating without any marketable skills that would ensure them a decent paying job in today's economy. The Schott Foundation for Public Education recently published a report showing that little more than half of the nation's black and Latino young men graduate from high school. The New York State section of the report shows only 37 percent of black and Latino males graduating from high school in the state in 2009-10, the school year studied by the report.

Since Mayor Bloomberg took office, high school graduation rates in the city have improved somewhat. Ironically, those who graduate are finding it more difficult to enroll in four-year CUNY colleges now that entrance requirements have increased.

But most graduates of the city's public high schools do not or cannot go on to college. I'm talking about hundreds of thousands of young New Yorkers. All too often, these youths lack the skills necessary for employment in the city's tough, demanding labor market. What do they have to look forward to? And what will this mean for the everyday life of all New Yorkers – higher taxes for public expenditures, higher crime rates, less likelihood of businesses moving here or staying here, altogether a lower lifestyle.

The city has made a commitment to help youths who won't go on to higher education by providing courses in what used to be called vocational education, now known as career and technical education (CTE).

Basic Skills Required

To be ready for a career in our 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.

About 140,000 students in the city's public high schools are enrolled in CTE classes. Most take courses in general education high schools. The city has 39 CTE schools, with about 30,000 students enrolled in them. Although funding is increasing, CTE schools, on average, were funded at per student rates that were lower than other public high schools.

There are new ideas about how CTE can better prepare students for careers. Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce just came out with a report that examines pathways to careers for people not going on to college. It identifies nearly 30 million jobs nationwide that pay middle class wages with the proper CTE education.

Just so you don't think that this is only a New York City problem, it's a national problem and one that directly involves our national security. Large numbers of citizens of other countries are being better educated than many of their American counterparts and the scores show it. Our rather tepid attempts at educational reform aren't going to cut it in a global economy. Many of our students of all colors aren't well enough prepared to qualify for jobs in our labor market.

In next year's election campaign, candidates – especially candidates for mayor – should be questioned about their commitment to making CTE an effective reality. This means an integrated curriculum with certified teachers and sufficient funding. We cannot afford to continue the way we are going with the vast majority of black and Latino young people dropping out or graduating with no useful skills to participate in this new economy.

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