



Joseph C. Cornwall Center
for Metropolitan Studies

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Our Vision

The Joseph C. Cornwall Center strives to be:

- A key resource in the production of “usable” knowledge for the public, private, and nonprofit sector
- development in Newark, the northern region of New Jersey and beyond.
- A central force convening key civil society individuals and institutions as they engage in and pursue the economic, political, and cultural revitalization of Newark.
- A forceful agent for the economic and administrative coordination and cooperation of Newark and its surrounding communities.
- A national model for what a university-based center can accomplish working with regional, local, and community partners.

From the Director’s Desk

Monday, April 21, 2014

Greetings.

Please see attached article.

All the best.

RVA

OPINION: SEARCHING FOR NEW WAYS OF PROMOTING OPPORTUNITY

ROLAND ANGLIN | APRIL 21, 2014

Before discussing theories of 21st century education, we must find ways to educate the most vulnerable children -- in urban and rural settings



Those who have read my contributions to these pages know that youth unemployment is a major concern of mine. There are so many kids from urban and rural places in New Jersey who are over age and under accredited and on their way to leaving school without a credential.

It is precisely those young people that we need to worry about, since they are on the path to join the ranks of the chronically unemployed.

It is not just a matter of improving schools. Many of these young people have experienced trauma and are challenged by limited cognitive skills that restrict their ability to enter the workforce as it stands. They also challenge school reform efforts greatly.

Even with the myriad difficulties in improving schools in poor urban and rural districts, we must continue to experiment and innovate. One way may be to rethink the current structure of high schools and make them more focused on providing a usable set of skills earlier in a young person's school career while leading to a credential that carries significance.

It is easy to ask: vocational-technical schools are supposed to do that are they not? Yes, but there not enough, nor are they functionally set up to help the group of young people I am most worried about.

First, the good news: New Jersey has rather robust examples of how to expand and improve vocational-technical schools and postsecondary training programs. One way that New Jersey is emphasizing the connection between education and workforce demands is through Talent Network program of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD). Begun in 2011, the Talent Network initiative partners educators, employers, and workforce practitioners, all in an effort to upgrade the skills of current workers and young people about to enter the workforce.

Each Talent Network provides a bridge between jobs and job seekers in key industry sectors by supporting the "[efforts of the workforce development system](#) and educational institutions that prepare workers for opportunities"

Six industries identified by New Jersey as key economic drivers: (1) transportation, logistics, and distribution; (2) life sciences; (3) advanced manufacturing; (4) financial services; (5) healthcare; and (6) technology and entrepreneurship. These six sectors account for half of all jobs in the state and about 60 percent of all wages paid to workers in New Jersey.

Specifically, Talent Networks work in conjunction with technical high schools, community colleges, and other institutions of higher education to [help develop curriculum](#) that reflects the skills industry needs.

Secondly, the New Jersey Employer Coalition for Technical Education, launched in February 2014, also aims to connect education and workforce. The coalition is organized by the New Jersey Business and Industry Association, a statewide advocacy group for private sector businesses and employers, and is cosponsored by the New Jersey Council of County Vocational-Technical Schools.

One major focus of the coalition is expanding vocational-technical programs that already exist. The New Jersey Council of County Vocational-Technical Schools estimates that the existing 21 county vo-tech schools do not have the capacity to meet the demand. Currently, vo-tech schools serve approximately 32,000 students, but in 2013 they had to [turn away about 17,000 additional applicants](#) who could not be accommodated.

The coalition also focuses on promoting a higher-quality technical education with opportunities for networking and job placement through partnerships between businesses and county vo-tech schools. Among the coalition's founding members are BMW of North America, General Mills, the HealthCare Institute of New Jersey, and PSE&G. In addition, there is a lengthy list of more than 100 other companies and individual members, each representing a business in New Jersey.

Lastly, The New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development was founded in 2004 to "provide [coordinated one-stop statewide education](#) and training services to businesses and industries." The consortium established New Jersey's 19 community colleges as the "preferred provider of training and for workforce development and business attraction programs."

Companies use New Jersey's community colleges to train and develop the capacity of existing employees, as well as emerging ones. The consortium also assists businesses with customized training grant applications at no cost, using funds made available through the New Jersey Workforce Development Partnership to train frontline workers involved in the production of goods and services.

The people and institutions that run these and other programs do a tremendous job trying to serve the changing needs of our state's industry. It is important to acknowledge that there are people and policies trying to close the skills gap for the most economically vulnerable among us.

There is, however, more demand than supply of quality efforts to train young people. I think we need to give more chances and opportunity to train young people who are in danger of leaving school without a substantive education or at the least a high school diploma.

I don't have an answer. But some experiments bear watching, especially those that build on what we already have in the state, perhaps requiring elaboration, connection, and layering. Early-college high schools are one such example, more specifically early college programs that bring specialized curriculum and partnerships to help youth most in danger of leaving school or not getting the type of education that helps get a job with a living wage with opportunities to grow.

One example that has captured attention and emulation is the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) started in Brooklyn, NY. This early-college high school uses a public/private partnership to help prepare students for careers in high-skilled jobs in technology, manufacturing, healthcare, and finance. The core of the partnership is active engagement of a business, in this case IBM, with an interest in an industry-specific pipeline of future workers, a community college or university (City University of New York), and a school district (New York Department of Education).

Beginning in ninth grade, students participate in a specialized, intensive curriculum and programs that prepare them for entrance in the industry after graduation. The students receive individualized mentoring (from the industry partner) and counseling to keep them on track. If successful, students graduate with a high school diploma and an associate's degree.

As the Aspen Institute describes the innovation: "[Student learning is focused from grade nine on](#), through a six-year scope and sequence of high school and college coursework to ensure students earn an Associate in Applied Science degree awarded by the school's college partner. Each student moves through a personalized academic pathway, aligned to college and career requirements, which is closely monitored by his or her teachers and advisors, based on their individual needs and performance. The focus is on mastery, not seat time. In Brooklyn, students are taking college courses as early as grade 10, as they work toward an AAS degree in either Computer Information Systems or Electromechanical Engineering Technology."

The experiment is relatively new, as are efforts to replicate it in Chicago, so success cannot be asserted with any meaning or longevity. But P-TECH is [achieving better-than-average rates](#) of getting the initial cohort of students to meet or score better than average on the NYS Regents exams in math and science. More than 80 percent of the students receive free and reduced lunch. The model intrigues educators I have talked to. If there is a criticism, it is that the intensive curriculum and other supports should begin in earlier grades.

Some will be disturbed by the significant presence of industry as a partner. I can imagine the question: are we not then producing drones and limiting the chance for kids to get a liberal education? It is a point to consider, but let's hold off on final judgment. Let's watch these types of schools to see if they can make a difference over time in educating poor kids. Then we can talk about the philosophy of education in the 21st century.

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