

The Chicago Landscape of Career and Technical Education

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In this brief we provide an introductory overview of career and technical education (CTE) programs in both Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC). In future issues, we will highlight specific CTE programs and initiatives in the Chicago area and the innovative partnerships between high schools, community colleges, and industry that make them possible.

The State of Illinois, and the City of Chicago in particular, have some of the highest unemployment rates in the country for youth ages 16 to 19 years old and 20 to 24 years old, and both lead the nation in Black youth unemployment (Cordova, Wilson, & Morsey, 2016; Ross & Svajlenka, 2016). Based on 2014 data, in Chicago 16% of 16- to 19-year-olds are employed, which is significantly lower than the national average of 29% (Cordova et al., 2016). Conversely, employment rates for 20- to 24-year-old Chicagoans is on par with the national average of 65% (Ross & Svajlenka, 2016). Furthermore, only 12% of Chicago Black youth ages 16 to 19 years old and 41% of youth ages 20 to 24 years old were employed (Cordova et al., 2016). Even still, nationally the Black youth employment rate is still disconcertingly low as only 21% of Black 16- to 19-year-olds (Cordova et al., 2016) and 57% of Black 20- to 24-year-olds are employed (Ross & Svajlenka, 2016).

CTE is one programmatic solution to address this equity concern by providing youth the academic and technical skills needed to become more employable. For high school youth especially, employment connected to their career goals and aspirations can offer additional learning opportunities outside of formal schooling that broaden their networks and help them develop positive relationships with adults (Ross & Svajlenka, 2016). Moreover, for many low-income, high school youth, obtaining employment is not optional; it is vital to supplementing family income and also financially planning for college (College Board, 2016). Students who participate in high-quality CTE programs graduate from high school at higher rates, are more likely to attend college, and in the long term earn higher wages than students who do not participate (ACTE, 2016). Additionally, retention and achievement within CTE programs has increased significantly, illustrating students have the commitment and dedication needed to promote a skilled workforce (Illinois Community College Board, 2014).

Students are not the only beneficiaries of CTE programs. Employers report that participating in initiatives that help youth acquire specialized skills positively impacts their companies and industries as a whole. Furthermore, participating business organizations gain a more robust talent pool, a diverse and innovative workforce, positive press and branding opportunities, as well as economic development that boosts business prospects (Cahill & Jackson, 2015).

Finally, the way in which young people navigate postsecondary education and the workforce is changing. The traditional pathway involves enrolling in some form of postsecondary education immediately after high school and subsequently entering the workforce upon receiving a degree. However, the non-traditional pathway will soon be the norm as more young people, approximately 8% of the workforce and 70 to 80% of college students, are simultaneously enrolled in some form of postsecondary education while earning a living (Carnevale, Smith, Melton, & Price, 2015). Ultimately, youth who earn a college degree are more likely to advance to managerial positions with higher wages than those who immediately

go into full-time work post high school (Carnevale et al., 2015). Unfortunately, low-income youth who work extensively while in school have lower rates of degree completion (Carnevale et al., 2015). Yet, perhaps paid CTE internships and apprenticeships could alleviate this inequity, as low-income students would be engaged in employment that applies to both their studies and career interests (see Carnevale et al., 2015). In the following sections we review both high school and community college CTE programs in the City of Chicago.

Chicago Public Schools

CPS houses 12 of the 16 nationally recognized career clusters. Career clusters are groups of occupations and industries that have in common a set of foundational knowledge and skills. Among these career clusters students can choose to specialize in one of forty different programs of study (Jankowski, Kirby, Bragg, Taylor, & Oertle, 2009). Career pathways are multi-year programs of academic and technical study that prepare high school students for a full range of postsecondary options within each of the 16 clusters. Programs of study are sequences of courses that incorporate a non-duplicative progression of secondary and postsecondary elements, which include both academic and career and technical content (Jankowski et al., 2009).

In 2010, CPS reorganized 250 non-standardized CTE programs into 80 College and Career Academies at 35 high schools. These College and Career Academies (CCA) provide approximately 20,000 students with college prep courses like math, science, and English, as well as hands-on experience in their specific industry. CCA students also have the opportunity to receive scholarships, attain industry-recognized certifications, earn college credit, participate in job shadows and internships, attend college fairs and tours, and compete in city, state, and national competitions (Chicago Public Schools, 2016a).

Work-Based Learning Experiences. CPS also partners with industry professionals and organizations that give students opportunities to put skills they learn in their CTE courses to practice via real-world

work-based learning experiences (WBL). Some WBL opportunities are similar to an apprenticeship and include job shadows, internships, cooperative education, guest speakers, and site visits. WBL experiences typically occur during the junior and senior years of high school (Chicago Public Schools, 2016b).

Classroom guest speakers and one-day site visits are usually a student's introduction to exploring how their CTE coursework applies on the ground. During one-day job shadows students are partnered with an industry professional who serves as both teacher and mentor. Students complete their job shadow in the spring of their junior year. Internships occur the following summer, once the student has completed two years of CTE curriculum. Internships give students the opportunity to apply the academic, technical, and employability skills emphasized in the CTE courses. Internships differ from youth employment in that they are a highly structured and supervised learning environment. Finally, cooperative education,

i.e. co-op or work study, is paid employment for only the strongest CTE students and provides on-the-job advanced skills training aligned with a particular CTE pathway (Chicago Public Schools, 2016b).

Selective-Enrollment High Schools.

CPS has 11 selective enrollment high schools. These schools were originally targeted efforts to keep white families and their children in the school district, and as a result were located in gentrifying and affluent neighborhoods. Over time a significant percentage of white students have left CPS, resulting in white student enrollment of fewer than 10%.

Hancock College Prep and Jones College Prep are the only selective-enrollment high schools in CPS with CCAs that have eligibility requirements. There are also a few CCAs that are selective in enrollment, such as Health Sciences, Law and Public Safety, IT - Cisco Networking and Information Technology, Database Programming Academy, and Pre-Engineering and these are considered academically rigorous. Student acceptance into both selective-enrollment high schools and CCAs is based on middle school GPA and local and state assessment scores (Chicago Public Schools, 2016c).

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City Colleges of Chicago

Illinois has 16 of the nationally recognized career clusters with the option of earning a basic certificate, advanced certificate, or an Associate of Applied Science degree (Illinois Community College Board, 2016). There are over 170,000 community college students enrolled in CTE programs in the state of Illinois (Association for Career & Technical Education, 2016). During 2013–14, the majority of students were enrolled in the Health Science concentration. There were also 8,432 more male than female students enrolled in the CTE program (Perkins Collaborative Resource Network, 2014). However, in 2015 female student enrollment increased to 54%, outnumbering male students (Illinois Community College Board, 2016). In addition to general education standards there are also program-specific standards for postsecondary CTE programs, and CTE program length varies from one semester to two years (Illinois Community College Board, 2016).

The City Colleges of Chicago (CCC), specifically, offer CTE programs at each campus in the following areas: business; information technology; education and training; human services; manufacturing; transportation, distribution and logistics; and health sciences. CCC currently serve over 100,000 students (City Colleges of Chicago, 2016a). As of 2014 students of color make up 81% of the enrollment at the CCC, granting them the Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) designation (City Colleges of Chicago, 2016b).

In 2011, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, in partnership with CCC, launched College to Careers (C2C), which is a program aimed to promote partnerships between the CCC and industry leaders (City Colleges of Chicago, 2016c; City of Chicago, 2014). The expectation is that through these industry partnerships the CCC can align their curricula to better meet the ever-changing demands of certain growing fields (City of Chicago, 2014). At its inception C2C targeted healthcare and transportation and logistics as these were considered two growth industries. It is anticipated that by 2020 Chicago will need 75,000 more healthcare practitioners and 4,000 new truck drivers to fill potential job openings (City of Chicago, 2014). CCC and corporations collaborate around three specific purposes: 1) curriculum design and creation of certificate programs, 2) curriculum delivery, and 3) access to internships, interviews, and facilities (City of Chicago, 2014). Currently, via the C2C initiative the

CCC partners with over 50 corporations (City Colleges of Chicago, 2016b). In 2015, nearly 57,000 students were enrolled in C2C programs, representing over half of the CCC's total enrollment (City Colleges of Chicago, 2016a).

Future Research

The CTE programs in Chicago have a strong foundation to continue to be appealing and viable options for students. Still, additional research is needed to understand how CTE programs in Chicago can help overcome a persistent inequity—that a significant percentage of Chicagoans are not participating in and/or are left out of the workforce. Regrettably, Chicago is mired in ongoing discrimination in housing and school reform policies that presently have made the city one of the most racially segregated in the nation (see Lipman, 2011). These discriminatory policies and practices deplete low-income communities and communities of color of vital resources needed to not only gain access to employment but also gain the education and training necessary to become employable. More research is necessary to understand how high schools, community colleges, and industry leaders are working in concert to use CTE programming as one possible solution to addressing inequities for many Chicagoans navigating the workforce. Thus, within the sociopolitical landscape of Chicago we need more data that tracks how both high school and community college CTE programs link young people to employers and employment opportunities.

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