

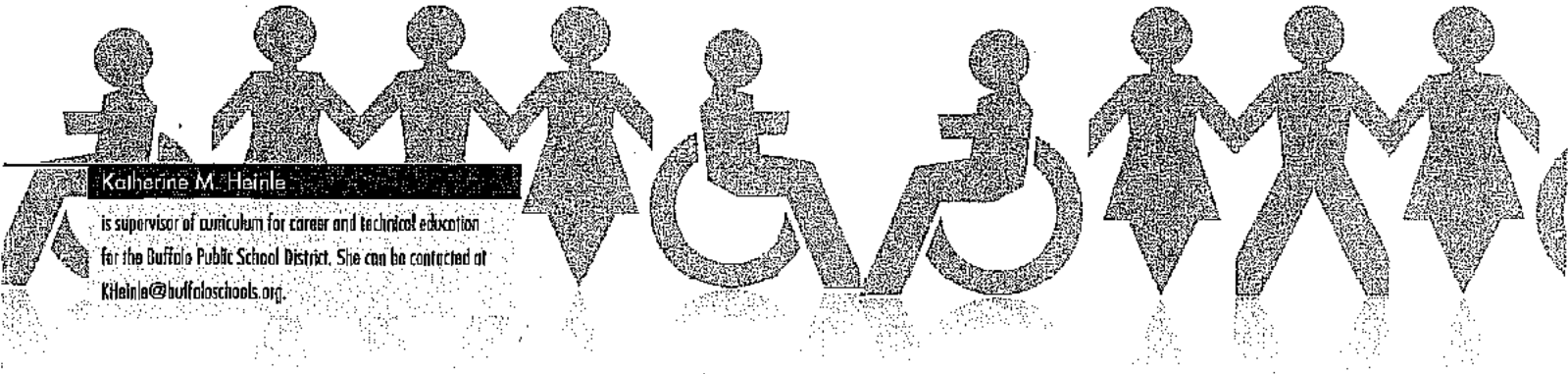
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BUFFALO'S APPROACH TO **CTE PROGRAMMING** *FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES*

By Katherine M. Heinle



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DIFFERENTIATED PROGRAMS MIRROR THE TRADITIONAL CERTIFIED CTE PROGRAMMING, BUT DO NOT REQUIRE INDUSTRY-LEVEL PROFICIENCY EXAMS

The New York State Department of Education recently instituted the requirement that career and technical education (CTE) programs throughout the state undergo a rigorous review for CTE certification. To effectively complete the certification process, industry experts were required to participate as part of the team and supervise curriculum development. While the results were rigorous, relevant and industry aligned, an unexpected consequence of the process was the diminished opportunity for special education students to find success in CTE programs. Industry partners were thrilled with the expectation of a highly trained workforce, but the reality was that more than 75 percent of the approximate 1,000 Buffalo Public School (BPS) students who graduated from CTE programs each year were deciding to continue their education at postsecondary institutions, instead of entering the workforce. The requirements for qualified and trained entry-level employees, with specific skills, remained a high priority of industry. The Buffalo school district's CTE and special education staff worked together with industry partners to come up with a solution, and the idea for differentiated programs evolved.

Differentiated CTE Programs

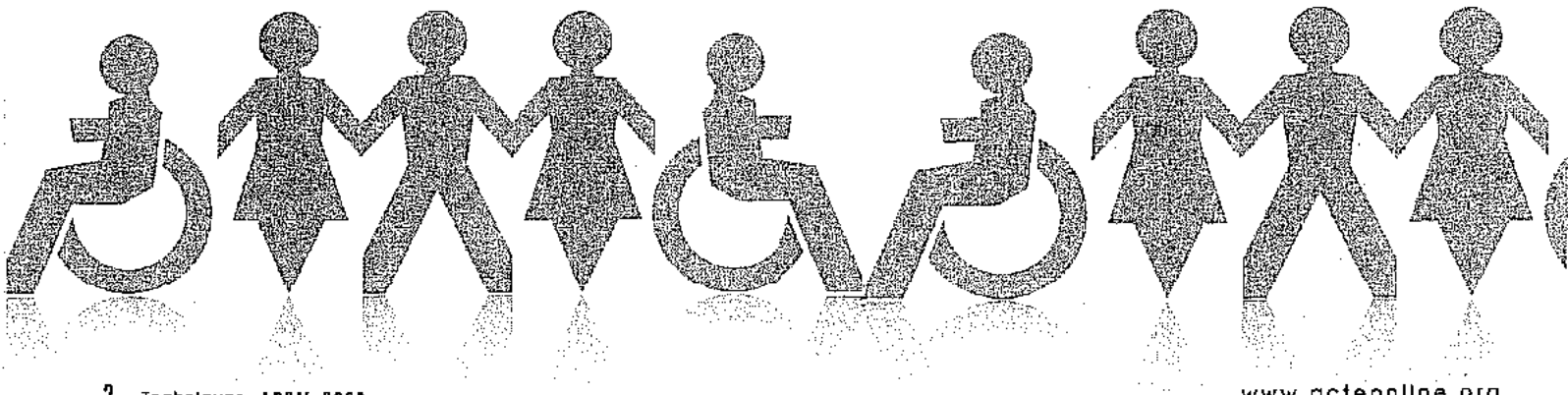
Differentiated programs allow students with disabilities to access and succeed in CTE. Participating students learn specific entry-level skills that industry requires. The programs mirror the traditional certified CTE programming, but do not require industry-level proficiency exams. Instead, students have an employability profile that outlines the skills learned and the level

of proficiency attained.

CTE programs in Buffalo's schools are provided throughout a student's high school career. During an application process in the eighth grade, students rank the CTE programs and schools they would like to attend, and complete additional requirements that may include a submission of a portfolio or an entrance test. The application process has been redesigned to include differentiated CTE programs for students with disabilities; students and parents work together with special education liaisons to determine which programs are best suited for their students.

Team Teaching

The differentiated programs are team-taught by two teachers: the CTE instructor and a special education teacher. Both teachers bring their special aptitudes to develop students' abilities and talents. Professional development opportunities are offered to both teachers so that the special education teacher can develop a working knowledge of the trade area, and the CTE teacher can be cognizant of special education requirements. Professional learning opportunities include alternate assessments, learning characteristics of students with disabilities, and information on community agencies that provide support services to students transitioning to supported or unsupported employment. Industry partners and employers who work with students with disabilities are also offered multiple awareness sessions that include mentoring and adaptive equipment. Together the teachers review students' Individualized Education Program (IEP) and transition plans to continually monitor and measure progress towards the goals listed in each student's IEP. They communicate the student's progress to their parent(s) and ensure that support is in place for successful and





appropriate internship placement and/or successful postsecondary outcomes.

Honing Skills

Since programs are offered throughout the four years of high school, students' skills are developed and honed through continuous repetition. Business and industry partners are involved with the development of these programs so that upon graduation, the students have learned skills that will make them employable. Once they have developed a certain competency, the group then completes community service projects related to their CTE area. The next step is work experience opportunities for students, during which the teachers are available to coach students while advising employers to ensure success.

South Park High School's Horticulture Program

The first differentiated program that the district undertook was in horticulture at South Park High school. Buffalo, known as the City of Trees, is home to the world famous Frederick Law Olmsted Park System. A city with a rich history of greenscapes requires well-trained entry-level employees for a wealth of career opportunities. After four years, the program is a model of a successful practice. The students run their own business, Sparky's, named after the South Park mascot. Sparky's is a full-service horticulture business that offers students the opportunity to develop specific horticulture skills in floral design, landscaping and plant management, while they also develop sales and business skills. The principal at South Park requested that an additional differentiated CTE program be added since the horticulture program has grown in such popularity. This year, South Park will be offering a differentiated program in printing. Students in that program will run a printing company learning skills that will include refilling ink jets, copying, collating and laminating.

Other successful differentiated Programs include:

- Automotive: training students in inspections, oil changes, car detailing and other basic car repair.
- Building maintenance: students develop skills in basic home repair, including drywall, electrical and plumbing.
- Theatre maintenance program: located within Buffalo's Performance Arts High School, the program teaches students everything from set design to ticket sales.
- Culinary arts: students are involved in food preparation and customer service in BPS' state-of-the-art student-run restaurant located in Buffalo's vibrant theatre district. The restaurant is open to the public for breakfast, lunch and evening banquets.



Note: a program with an engineering theme is on the drawing table.

The certification process for career and technical education (CTE) in the state of New York included:

- Thorough review, analysis and update of curriculum to meet industry standards.
- CTE curriculum cross-walks with all academic standards
- Mandatory assessments requiring CTE students to take both a written and a performance test that assesses a high level of skill attainment matched to industry standards.
- CTE curriculum be in concert with postsecondary curriculum enabling students to obtain college credit (referred to as articulations).
- Work experience in the specific CTE area.
- Employability profiles outlining all specific career skills attained as well as transferable skills such as critical thinking, time and resource management, and teamwork.

Differentiated Programs Showing Success

The programs have been highly successful with students becoming part of the greater school community. Qualitative data suggests that students in the differentiated programs have shown improved achievement and attendance. The CTE and special education departments' short-term goal is to see at least one differentiated program in each of Buffalo's 15 high schools, and ultimately it is our hope to have a differentiated program for each of the 28 CTE programs offered in the district. If other districts are interested in starting a similar pro-

gram, it is important that programs are developed in conjunction with local business and industry partners. To ensure success, programs must be aligned with employment opportunities in your area. Additionally, everyone involved will need some type of training; business owners and CTE teachers will need some background in working with student with disabilities, while special education teachers will need training to develop specific trade skills. Lastly, do not forget that students and parents need to have a realistic expectation of what the programs will offer for future employment and potential success.



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