

**A Position Paper by NYSUT's Career and Technical Education  
and Special Education Committees**  
**“Improving Access, Support, and Employability  
For Students with Disabilities in Career and Technical Education Programs”**  
**Recommendations Approved by the NYSUT Board of Directors**  
**August, 2008**

**Introduction**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) is a vital, progressive, and rigorous part of the total education system. CTE programs are designed for all students. New York's Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) learning standards specify that all students should be provided activities across all curricular areas to further career development knowledge, the acquisition of foundation skills and demonstrate the application of academic concepts to work and life experiences. CTE provides students with life skills and prepares them for the workforce through entry-level employment in skilled, higher wage jobs.

New York's career and technical education programs have been revamped to combine CTE and academic commencement level coursework aligned with State Learning Standards. Through the program approval process, the State Education Department (SED) ensures that local CTE programs meet the higher standards and requirements approved by the Board of Regents on February 6, 2001.

New York's educational vision is that “every student will graduate from high school ready for work, higher education and citizenship.” CTE programs are vital to ensuring that all students achieve this vision. NYS data indicate that CTE students in approved programs are outperforming non-CTE students on NYS Regents exams, in mathematics and English, statewide and in New York City. Graduation rates are also higher for students in CTE programs. However, for students with disabilities, the picture is mixed. According to SED data, generally, students with disabilities have low high school completion rates, and while more are now attending college, their efforts are undermined by the lack of supports necessary for them to succeed, which translates into far too many students with disabilities unprepared for the future. But life and work opportunities increase when students with disabilities complete CTE programs, allowing them to graduate from high school prepared for entry level jobs and post-secondary programs.

Students with disabilities can achieve great success in career and technical education programs. Research shows that students with disabilities in secondary CTE programs were less likely to drop out and more likely to be employed, to have competitive jobs, and to work full time after high school (Cobb et al. 1999; Colley and Jamison 1998). The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) of over 8,000 students with disabilities, ages 13 to 21, found that students who took concentrated coursework in career and technical education were more likely to graduate and had average annual earnings of approximately \$6,200 more than non-vocational students. This is an important finding because students with disabilities typically have the highest unemployment rate and the highest under-employment rate when compared to same age non-disabled peers.

**The Roles of the CTE and Special Education Teachers**

The CTE teacher is only one member of the team that plans and provides educational activities and accommodations for students with disabilities. Special educators typically play the primary role in identifying educational activities and accommodations that suit students' interests, aptitudes, abilities, and post-secondary school preferences. In IEP development and transition planning, the CTE teacher's role is to provide information, support, and assistance to others who lead the process. In particular, CTE teachers can provide: CTE-specific information, which would include occupationally

specific courses of study, cooperative education, apprenticeship, career guidance and counseling services; and, provide assessment tools to determine a student's readiness for specific occupational courses based on industry standards, information on the instructional demands (e.g., prerequisite basic, interpersonal, reasoning, learning-to-learn skills) and setting demands (e.g., independent work, self-monitoring, ability to stay on task).

Teachers and others who work with students with disabilities in CTE programs have voiced concerns for many years about overcrowding and safety in the classroom, the lack of support services, and the need for appropriate professional development for CTE teachers. Commissioner Mills, after reviewing graduation rates for students with disabilities, reported to the Regents in June 2006, that "many students with disabilities have difficulty completing the (CTE) programs." Commissioner Mills reinforced what CTE teachers and others have been concerned about - that far too often students with disabilities do not receive the support services they need and are entitled to in their CTE program. The lack of appropriate supports and services to students with disabilities in CTE programs is a contributing factor to lower graduation rates, inadequate preparation for employment, and future college success.

The NYSUT Career and Technical Education and Special Education committees, as well as the BOCES Statewide Planning Committee identified state and local issues affecting students, teachers and other school staff involved in the education of students with disabilities in career and technical education programs. The concerns expressed by those who work with students with disabilities - career and technical education and special education teachers, guidance counselors and work-experience coordinators, underscore their commitment to realizing better outcomes for students with disabilities in career and technical education. To ensure that all students with disabilities are afforded quality CTE programs which address their needs, abilities and post-school adult living objectives, these issues must be systemically addressed in a timely and efficient manner.

**Enrollment in CTE by Students with Disabilities (SWD):**

Based on New York State Education Department data 207,348 students were enrolled in CTE programs in 2006-2007; 33,566 or 16.2% were students with disabilities. BOCES enrolled 35,806 in CTE programs, and 11,176 or 31.2% were students with disabilities. Total state enrollment has declined steadily for both general education and students with disabilities. Enrollment in CTE programs offered through BOCES has remained stable for the past five years for both general education students and students with disabilities. SED attributes the statewide enrollment decline to a decrease in CTE programs in the Big Four cities due to the program approval process which was implemented in 2001. BOCES have more approved programs than CTE programs offered in the Big Four cities.

**By Total State, By Total BOCES  
2002-2003 through 2006-2007 School Years**

School Year	Total State Enrollment	*SWD	Percent Disabled	Total BOCES	BOCES *SWD	Percent Disabled
<b>2006-2007</b>	207,348	33,566	16.2%	35,806	11,176	31.2%
<b>2005-2006</b>	201,161	36,049	17.9%	35,601	11,833	33.2%
<b>2004-2005</b>	212,251	36,204	17.1%	34,459	11,828	34.3%
<b>2003-2004</b>	236,796	36,518	15.4%	34,330	11,698	34.1%
<b>2002-2003</b>	254,660	41,939	16.5%	35,064	11,621	33.1%

Source: NYSED data

\*Students with Disabilities

## **Graduation Rates for Students with Disabilities**

The statewide percentage of the 2001 cohort of students with disabilities who graduated with a regular diploma in four years is only 37.3 percent. There were 45 school districts, including New York City, whose graduation rates for students with disabilities were 35 percent or lower. The statewide percentage of the 2001 cohort of students with disabilities who dropped out of school after four years was approximately 19 percent. There were 40 school districts, including New York City, whose drop-out rates for students with disabilities is 20 percent or higher.

## **Entry into College and Employability**

According to a May 2007 State Education Department report, the number of students with disabilities getting a Regents Diploma has increased four-fold, something that many people said was not possible a decade ago. As a result, more students with disabilities are continuing their post-secondary education, by attending two and four year colleges and vocational and career schools. Based on the chart below, students with disabilities seem to have similar aspirations as their general education counterparts, regarding attending either a two or four year college. A higher percentage (16%) of students with disabilities plan to seek employment after graduation from high school compared to only 6% of general education students. Completion of a career and technical education program will help ensure higher percentages of students with disabilities leave high school better prepared for work and jobs and/or entry into college.

### **Post-Secondary Plans of 2005-06 NYS Graduates**

	<b>All Students</b>		<b>General Education Students</b>		<b>Students with Disabilities</b>	
	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage of Students</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage of Students</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage of Students</b>
<b>To 4-year College</b>	64,381	40%	61,888	41%	2,493	21%
<b>To 2-year College</b>	40,772	25%	35,900	24%	4,872	41%
<b>To Other Post-secondary</b>	1,540	1%	1,248	1%	292	2%
<b>To the Military</b>	2,245	1%	1,976	1%	269	2%
<b>To Employment</b>	8,242	5%	6,600	4%	1,642	14%
<b>To Adult Services</b>	127	0%	84	0%	43	0%
<b>To Other Known Plans</b>	41,384	26%	39,519	26%	1,865	16%
<b>Plan Unknown</b>	3,040	2%	2,560	2%	480	4%

Source: NYSED data

## **Conclusion**

Individuals with disabilities face a variety of barriers to higher education, employment, and other life experiences. Although we have seen gradual changes due to civil rights legislation, the transition from college to employment is particularly difficult for students with disabilities because of attitudinal barriers and accommodation issues. Until the middle of the twentieth century, individuals with disabilities rarely participated in higher education opportunities. Career and technical education programs play an important part in facilitating successful transitions from school to employment or school to college for students with disabilities. NYSUT's Career and Technical Education and Special Education committees believe that students with disabilities can achieve great success in career and technical education program if CTE programs have the necessary resources as mandated by Federal and state requirements. (See Appendix)

Support for the following recommendations, NYSUT contends, will mean that students with disabilities will have a greater likelihood of higher program completion and graduation rates from their CTE programs; thereby, improving their employability and entry into post-secondary and vocational training programs, and increasing their chances for a productive and fulfilling life.

## Students with Disabilities

### Challenges and Recommendations

The NYSUT Board of Directors adopted these recommendations on August 13, 2008 which urge the Board of Regents and State Education Department (SED) to take the following actions:

1. **Issue: CTE Teacher Involvement in IEP Meetings** School districts do not consistently involve CTE teachers in Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings to develop a student's IEP, which includes participation in CTE programs.

**Recommendation: Amend section 200.4 of the Regulations, to require school districts to involve CTE teachers in IEP team meetings when discussing the initial and continuous placement in CTE programs. In addition, SED should provide guidance to extend this consideration to 504 Planning Team meetings.**

2. **Issue: Access to the IEP** CTE staff are not promptly and consistently provided a copy of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), including the behavioral intervention plan, or 504 Accommodation Plan, to ensure that students with disabilities are afforded the necessary accommodations, modifications and services needed for students to benefit from the CTE program.

**Recommendation: Enforce Section 200.4 of the Commissioner's Regulations, which specifically require school districts and BOCES to ensure that CTE teachers are provided a copy of the IEP, including the behavior intervention plan. CTE teachers should also be provided copies of 504 Accommodation Plans as appropriate.**

3. **Issue: Support Services** Many students with disabilities enrolled in CTE programs are not afforded the same level of special education programs and supports (e.g. classroom aids, consultant teachers) they receive in their academic program, thus affecting their ability to learn and fully benefit from CTE programs.

**Recommendation: Disseminate guidance to CSEs and to 504 Teams to ensure that the needs of students enrolled in CTE programs are fully addressed. This guidance should also include specific models for effectively delivering special education programs and services in CTE.**

4. **Issue: Class Size** Many career and technical education classes include a significant number of students with disabilities, often with very diverse needs, this potentially compromises the safety and successful learning of all students in the classroom.

**Recommendation: Establish class size guidelines for integrated career and technical education classes and to monitor special classes which provide career and technical education instruction to ensure that class sizes do not exceed the regulatory requirements in Section 200.6 (g) of the regulations. The number and needs of students with disabilities placed in integrated career and technical education classes should result in positive learning experiences for all students.**

5. **Issue: Improving Communications about Transition Planning** In addition to providing written input, it is important that CTE teachers participate in CSE meetings to provide relevant input about

the appropriateness of a CTE program for a student with a disability. In many instances, the CSE does accommodate the need for the CTE teacher to attend the CSE meetings. CTE teachers are trained to understand what is required for students to meet industry standards and assessments, work and employment skills needed for a CTE program. Unfortunately, many CTE teachers do not have regular and ongoing discussions with a student's special education teacher(s) and the CSE regarding such issues as educational progress, behavioral issues, reporting to parents, and transition planning.

**Recommendation: Urge the State Education Department to include a specific component in its CSE Training program on best practices and strategies to facilitate effective and ongoing communication among career and technical education teachers, special education teachers, the CSE, and parents.**

6. **Issue: Federal and State Compliance** School administrators are often not familiar with Federal and state requirements concerning the education of students with disabilities in CTE programs resulting in lack of a compliance with special education requirements. NYSUT local presidents and members may also not be as familiar with Federal and state compliance requirements as well.

**Recommendation: Encourage SED to provide training to school administrators to ensure that they are knowledgeable about federal and state special education requirements. NYSUT should also provide training to local presidents on steps they can take in collaboration with their Labor Relations Specialist (LRS) to address special education compliance issues.**

7. **Issue: Certification and Pre-service Programs** Career and technical education educators may not be adequately prepared to work with students with disabilities since pre-service programs generally focus on the education of general education to work with students. Generally, pre-service programs usually include one course on educating students with exceptionalities.

**Recommendation:** Work with colleges to ensure that beginning CTE teachers develop the competencies necessary to work effectively with students with disabilities. The use of hands-on and project based learning instructional strategies should also be emphasized in CTE teacher preparation programs, professional development, and in the CTE classroom.

8. **Issue: District and BOCES Professional Development Plans** Many districts' Professional Development Plans (PDP) do not address the needs of CTE teachers and other school personnel to acquire the appropriate knowledge and skills to meet the multifaceted learning needs of students with disabilities. PDP committee members from around the state have reported a lack of awareness about Section 200.2 of the Regulations which requires professional development plans to address the staff development needs of teachers, teaching assistants, and teacher aides who work with students with disabilities.

**Recommendation: SED offices should provide specific guidance on implementing Section 100.2 of the Regulations requiring the professional development plans to provide a "description of the professional development activities provided to all professional staff and supplementary school personnel who work with students with disabilities to assure that they have the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities." SED also needs to provide information on how the Special Education Training Resource Center (SETRC), the NYS CTE Resource Center, teacher centers, and the higher education community will assist districts in providing this professional development. (Topics may include collaborative teaching, effective communications, transition planning,**

and adapting Career Development Occupational Studies (CDOS) Learning Standards to the needs of students with disabilities).

9. **Issue: CTE Teacher Supply and Access to Pre-service Programs** Based on SED teacher supply and demand data, CTE teachers have been identified as one of the highest shortage areas. Currently, only four colleges in New York State - SUNY Buffalo, SUNY Oswego, NY Institute of Technology, and New York City College of Technology - offer approved career and technical education teacher training programs. Workers are often reluctant to interrupt their careers for full-time study in traditional college programs, which are not readily accessible to individuals who may be interested in transitioning into teaching. The decline in the number of CTE teacher preparation programs has underscored the difficulty in ensuring an adequate supply of teachers of career and technical subjects. Further, the next generation of CTE teachers must be prepared to meet the challenge of teaching content integrated with academics, which meets both industry and articulation standards, teaching an increasingly diverse population of students particularly students with disabilities, and preparing students for work and technical careers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Recommendation: Work with both two and four year colleges to create more programs to prepare career and technical teachers. SED must also examine how CTE teachers are being prepared, how pre-service classes are taught, increasing access to distance learning and alternative certification programs, including establishing an alternative certification program similar to the NYC Fellows program. Further, SED, in collaboration with NYSUT, must launch an aggressive campaign to promote CTE as a teaching option.**

10. **Issue: Mentoring and Professional Development** Mentoring programs should explicitly address the unique needs and challenges that CTE teachers face working with a growing population of students with disabilities. Beginning CTE teachers are challenged to improve student achievement, and teach content that is integrated with academics, while meeting both industry and articulation standards.

**Recommendation: Require the New York State CTE Resource Center to develop information and materials on effective mentoring and induction program models for beginning CTE teachers that involve CTE teachers being mentored by other CTE teachers.**

11. **Issue: Guidance Counselors** Guidance Counselors in component school districts often do not have an adequate understanding of the academic, support and industry requirements for many CTE programs, resulting in inappropriate or misplacement of students with disabilities in certain CTE programs.

**Recommendation: Provide professional development activities that improve guidance counselors' understanding of career and technical education and the appropriateness of CTE programs for students with disabilities.**

12. **Issue: Work Based Learning** Recent studies reinforce the need to strengthen the connection between education and employment. For example, a national longitudinal transition study of special education students found that enrollment in occupationally oriented career and technical education programs is significantly related to lower high school dropout rates and higher employment rates after graduation.

Cooperative work experiences, rather than simulated work experiences in classroom settings, help students with disabilities acquire the social skills necessary for interactions with colleagues and co-workers. Social skills are critical to long-term employment success. To increase the chances of productive employment for students with disabilities, we need to increase their participation in a work-based learning approach, which consists of career exploration, career assessment, work-related learning and cooperative work experiences.

**Recommendation: Urge the CTE Resource Center to provide professional development on implementing effective work based learning programs that address the needs of students with disabilities and how such programs should be integrated into the IEP transition services planning requirements.**

## Appendix

### Summary of Federal and State Mandates and Requirements Related to Students with Disabilities

- ❖ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require that all students with disabilities have access to general education curriculum, including career and technical education and assessments.
- ❖ No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) require greater collaboration within and across services to ensure that all individuals have improved opportunities to participate in effective career education programs, and to achieve personal career goals.
- ❖ The board of education of each school district shall provide secondary school pupils and adults access to programs of occupational education, commensurate with the interests and capabilities of those desiring and having a need for preparatory training, retraining or upgrading for employment, and develop realistic programs in accord with manpower needs in existing and emerging occupations for present and projected employment opportunities (Education Law 4602).
- ❖ Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) learning standards specify that all students should have access to curriculum that will further their knowledge and skills in preparation for work and life settings.
- ❖ Under IDEA each school district's Committee on Special Education (CSE) is required to engage in planning and service delivery to assist youth with disabilities in making a smooth transition from school to adult living, learning, or earning roles in the community. This process includes instruction, community learning experiences, or support services to develop skills, knowledge and abilities and other strategies to address post-school living, learning or working needs. It may also include assistance in making applications prior to leaving school for services from community agencies, colleges, or employment. In New York State, transition components are built into the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) for special education, annual guidance plan for general education and/or Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for vocational rehabilitation. All youth with disabilities, aged 14-21, must have transition components in their IEPs.
- ❖ Transition planning should begin early enough to allow transition services to begin with the first IEP in effect when the student reaches age 15. It may be necessary to start earlier if additional time will be needed to develop skills or strategies to achieve a successful transition. The consideration of transition services must begin no later than age 15. Students, families and schools are key participants, as are community agencies or post-secondary education representatives whose specialized knowledge is needed to help with planning.
- ❖ The school district CSE has the legal responsibility to coordinate transition planning and provide transition services through the Individualized Education Program (IEP). However, schools also must have the active participation of students, families and community agencies in order to make the transition process effective and meaningful for individual students.
- ❖ The district is responsible for providing a free appropriate public education until the student obtains a Regents or local high school diploma, or until the student ages out at 21, whichever comes first. Beyond the age of 21, the student and/or his/her guardian, as the consumers of adult services, are responsible themselves to coordinate post-school programs and agencies.

## **The Perkins Act: Provisions for Students with Disabilities**

The primary legislative act that governs all career and technical programs is the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006. This legislation includes the provision of the "Tech Prep" programs. The primary difference between Tech Prep and other career technical classes is that Tech Prep programs must include the following elements:

- ❖ An articulation agreement between secondary and post-secondary consortium participants
- ❖ A two-plus-two-year program (secondary plus post-secondary) or a two-plus-four-year program
- ❖ A common core of academic study in math, science, communication and technology program
- ❖ Containment within a specifically Tech Prep curriculum
- ❖ Joint in-service training of secondary and post-secondary teachers to effectively implement the program across settings

Students who successfully complete a high school Tech Prep program can move directly from high school to a community college or four-year college to complete their career and technical education.

The provisions of the Perkins Act ensure that a student with a disability has equal access to any career or technical program he chooses. Listed below are a number of provisions in the Perkins Act that are important to students with disabilities and apply to high school and community college career and technical programs.

- ❖ "Special populations" must be included in the students admitted to career and technical programs; special populations are defined to include students with disabilities.
- ❖ Students and parents must be provided access to career guidance and academic counseling regarding career awareness, planning for occupational and academic future, and information about career options, financial aid, and post-secondary options, including baccalaureate degree programs.
- ❖ Students should have access to student organizations that engage in career and technical education activities as an integral part of the instructional program.
- ❖ Schools are required to provide a Tech Prep program that accepts students with disabilities. This provision is made because Tech Prep and career and technical programs are two distinct programs, and not all career and technical classes are part of a Tech Prep program. So this provision assures that students with disabilities will be admitted to all classes in both programs.
- ❖ Schools are required to hold career and technical programs accountable for student success and progress by establishing performance indicators for programs. All career and technical programs must report on whether students, including students with disabilities, reach yearly goals related to the academic and technical skills. Reporting of this information is required by both the No Child Left Behind Act and the Perkins Act. The assessment data flows from the local school, through state departments of education, to the U.S. Department of Education.

Implementation of this act is the responsibility of the local public school system with oversight by the state departments of education who report state efforts and results to the U.S. Department of Education.