

Schools put more focus on careers, work force training

All students can benefit from practical training, tied with academics

By Del Stover

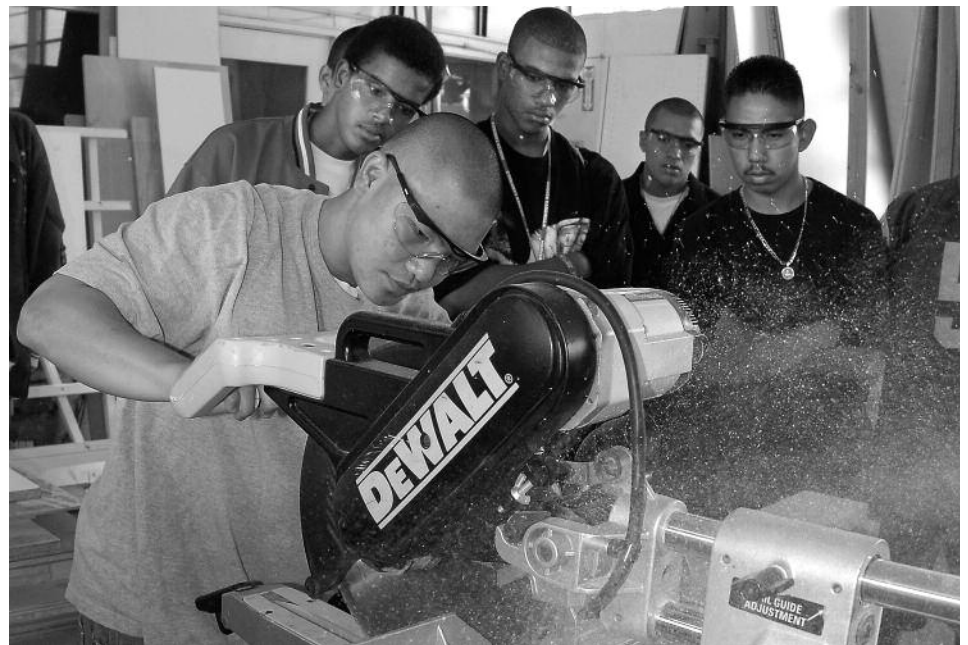
Scores of urban high schools offer classes that introduce students to careers in such fields as architecture, biotechnology, computer programming, engineering, and health care. But how many balance these academically rigorous curricula with courses in auto repair, carpentry, cosmetology, and heating/air-conditioning?

Saunders Trades and Technical High is just such a school.

For a century, this Yonkers, N.Y., campus has taught vocational education courses to students who moved after graduation into blue-collar jobs. But, in recent years, the school program has evolved to better prepare students for today's technology-based workplace.

Coursework is more advanced and academically rigorous than in decades gone by. Even classes in carpentry and auto repair, for example, weave academic lessons into classes in an attempt to strengthen literacy and math skills.

At the same time, Saunders attempts



A high school senior uses a sliding compound miter saw during a construction tech class at Hoover High School in San Diego in this 2006 photo. Career technical education (CTE) courses are expanding nationwide.

to open up as many career pathways as possible for students. While vocational classes prepare students to seek employment after graduation, academic classes give students the option to seek more advanced job training at community colleges and private technical schools.

Meanwhile, theme-based courses in architecture, environmental science, and constitutional law inspire students to explore career options that will lead them to a four-year college or university.

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NSBA's Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE), the urban initiative of NSBA's National Affiliate program, addresses the programmatic, fiscal, and governance challenges of urban public education on behalf of its 116 member school boards and the more than 8 million students they serve. Through legislative advocacy, conferences, workshops, seminars, and publications, CUBE has been in the forefront of cultivating excellence in urban public schools for four decades.

About NSBA

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of Hawaii, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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Urban Advocate is printed and assembled by the
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CUBE News

CUBE has successful meeting in Las Vegas

Sitting at desks arranged in the center of class, students at Basic High School in Clark County, Nev., this fall were asking one another questions—and offering perceptive answers—as part of a “Socratic Seminar” on Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*.

Standing along one wall, impressed with what they heard, were urban school leaders in town for the CUBE’s 41st Annual Conference.

Touring schools were just one of the highlights of this year’s conference, Sept. 25-28, in Las Vegas. Conference attendees also participated in workshops on school health, high school dropouts, 21st century learning, public relations, and the best practices of high-performance school boards.

One of the highlights of the conference was the annual awards banquet, where the Brownsville, Texas, school board was presented the 2008 CUBE Annual Award for Urban School Board Excellence.

Before presenting the award, Benjamin Canada, associate executive director of district services for the Texas Association for School Boards and an award judge, told the audience that the winner and finalists were worthy of recognition.



Enrique Escobedo Jr., president of the Brownsville, Texas, school district speaks at the awards banquet after his school board is presented with the 2008 CUBE Annual Award for Urban School Board Excellence.

“It’s not often you get to be among true teams ... people who work together, who cry together, who argue together, but who are able to come together united, not just for some children, not just for the special interest groups, but for the benefit of all children,” he said.

Virginia Beach’s Ulysses Van Spiva wins 2008 Lifetime Achievement Award

Ulysses Van Spiva, a former school board member in Virginia Beach, Va., was awarded CUBE’s 2008 Benjamin Elijah Mays Lifetime Achievement Award at the CUBE Annual Conference.

Spiva, a retired professor and dean emeritus at Old Dominion University, started his career as a math teacher, was a policy fellow for the U.S. Office of Education in the 1970s, and served in various community and civic groups for many years.

Letters of support to the award’s nominating committee described Spiva as “one of the most outstanding leaders in education today” and “a tireless advocate for both students and teachers.”

At the awards banquet in Las Vegas, Spiva accepted the award by telling a story

about meeting Alex Haley, author of *Roots*, who said, “if you see a turtle on top of a fence post, you can be sure he had some help.” Added Spiva: “I’m that turtle tonight, for there’s no way did I get to this honor without the help of many people like yourselves.”

The Mays Lifetime Achievement Award is given to an individual who, for the span of his or her lifetime, has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to representing the educational needs of urban schoolchildren through his or her service as a local school board member. Mays, whom the award honors, was a teacher, minister, author, and civil rights activist who served as president of Morehouse College and of the Atlanta school board from 1970 to 1981.

Miami drama underscores challenges of urban superintendency

The departure of Rudy Crew from the Miami-Dade County Public Schools—and the controversy that surrounded his final days—is a vivid reminder of the challenges of sustaining stable leadership and a strong superintendent-board partnership in urban school systems.

Hired in 2004, Crew garnered national recognition for responding to school overcrowding, reaching out to parents, and launching initiatives aimed at boosting student achievement. Earlier this year, he was named Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA).

But state budget cuts and declining enrollment led to budget woes and layoffs, and critics blamed Crew for mishandling funds that worsened the budget situation. The superintendent also had problems navigating the diverse political environment of the district. For example, some in the Cuban-American community were outraged when Crew refused to remove a book from school libraries that offered a positive portrayal of life in communist-led Cuba.

A combative attitude toward critics didn't help Crew. In his final months, Crew wouldn't meet with one board member, and the tension and occasional insult or sharp retort gave a soap opera quality to televised board meetings—and boosted viewership to as high as 28,000.

Matters came to a head in August, when several board members attempted to oust Crew but failed by a single vote. Yet, with the subsequent defeat of one of his supporters in September board elections, the political writing was on the wall. The board finally agreed to buy out the remainder of Crew's contract for \$385,000.

The board later hired Associate Superintendent Alberto Carvalho to head the 385,000-student district.



Miami's new chief: Alberto Carvalho

Although some observers decried the change in leadership after only four years, others noted that Crew lasted longer than the average three-year tenure of urban superintendents. Some school systems have faced tougher, more unstable situations: St. Louis is looking to hire its eighth school superintendent since 2003. Kansas City has gone through 25 superintendents in the past 38 years.

Public frustration with the slow pace of reform, along with new board elections and conflicting expectations from various political entities, often are blamed for the turnover of urban superintendents. But Don McAdams, president of the Center for Reform of School Systems, says it's up to school boards to offset the damage of leadership turnover: "You've got to keep it [the school system] on course."

Clayton County outlines plan to regain accreditation

Times are tough for Georgia's Clayton County Public Schools. In recent months, Gov. Sonny Perdue removed four school board members from office for violating "their duties under state law," and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) stripped the district of its accreditation.

Yet the worst might be over. Between the governor's actions, resignations, and a recent board election, the county has wiped the slate clean—an entirely new school board is at the helm. And it's agreed on a plan with SACS to make sweeping changes to regain the district's accreditation.

That agreement calls for the county schools to comply with SACS standards, show continuous improvement, and meet nine conditions, including signing an ethics affidavit, undergoing additional board training, hiring a parliamentarian, and following state law regarding closed sessions.

SACS also insisted the board amend the superintendent's contract, which gave him



Newly elected to the Clayton County, Ga., school board, but still waiting to take office, Jessie Goree (right) shows the strain after attending an August board meeting where it was announced the school system would lose its accreditation.

extraordinary powers over policy.

This dramatic intervention follows incidents of illegal closed-door sessions, public bickering, questionable use of school dollars, and charges of nepotism aimed at the former school board. In February, the

SACS released a scathing report calling the board "fatally flawed" and "dysfunctional."

It threatened to strip the district of its accreditation unless changes were made by Sept. 1. It did so in late August.

Ultimately, Perdue intervened, removing four members in a step he said would send a clear message that unethical behavior and loss of accreditation would not be tolerated: "We can only hope this marks a new day for Clayton County, a time in which rebuilding can begin."

As the county attempts to regain accreditation, its troubles might well have an impact on school boards statewide. In the midst of this controversy, the state board of education created a Commission for School Board Excellence to offer recommendations to improve school governance. The commission's recently released report calls for new ethics policies, a clarification of the roles of board members and superintendents, a move to nonpartisan elections, and limits on the size of school boards.



In protest of school funding inequities, hundreds of Chicago public school students, with their parents, line up to fill out applications to attend school in a wealthy suburb north of the city. The highly publicized, symbolic effort was part of a boycott of Chicago schools organized to protest unequal education funding in Illinois.

Chicago applauds message, but not tactics in protest of school funding disparities

It was the right issue. But it was the wrong tactic. That was the message officials gave to community activists, who this summer encouraged parents to keep their kids at home and “boycott” the first days of school as a protest to the disparity in spending between Chicago schools and those in surrounding, more-affluent suburban districts.

As many as 1,200 students skipped school at the urging of boycott organizers that included a state senator. To garner publicity, organizers set up “teach-ins” with students at City Hall, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, and corporate offices around the city. Other students traveled by bus to a suburban school to fill out registra-

tion forms in front of newspaper reporters and television cameras.

The protest ended after two days, fueling debate about school funding issues and the \$900-plus disparity in spending between poor and wealthier districts in Illinois. Organizers also won a meeting with Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

Not surprisingly, school officials did not appreciate the lobbying effort, even if it was on their behalf.

“We are in total agreement with the fact that we need more money for our students in Chicago,” Rufus Williams, president of the Chicago school board, told the community. But “we are absolutely and resolutely against this boycott of our schools.”

Brownsville, Texas, wins Broad Prize

The Brownsville Independent School District has won the 2008 Broad Prize for Urban Education. The award was announced only weeks after the Texas school system was honored with CUBE’s top prize for urban school board leadership.

Two CUBE member districts—Broward County, Fla., and Miami-Dade County—were finalists for the Broad Prize.

The prize was founded in 2002 by the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation to spotlight the success of urban school systems in

raising student achievement. Over the years, a number of CUBE member districts have won this prestigious award, including Boston, Houston, and Norfolk, Va.

In addition to the national recognition that accompanies the prize, Brownsville will receive \$1 million in college scholarships for its students. As finalists, both Broward County and Miami-Dade County will receive \$250,000 each for scholarships.

“Brownsville is the best kept secret in America,” said Eli Broad, founder of the Broad Foundation.

D.C. wants big bucks to upgrade schools

In their latest effort to improve the District of Columbia school system, D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty and schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee recently announced a fast-paced, \$1.3 billion plan to upgrade the city’s aging and worn school buildings.

Most notable about the 250-page, “master facilities” plan is not the price tag—but a schedule that calls for visible improvements to all 120 city schools quickly.

“Whereas previous plans established a prolonged approach that left too many schools waiting while a select few were rebuilt, the 2008 plan will dramatically change the face of every school in the District within five years,” Fenty said in a statement announcing the initiative.

According to the *Washington Post*, the D.C. schools already have spent \$1.4 billion on school modernization in recent years. This past summer saw \$200 million in renovations.

Philadelphia targets struggling schools

Every urban school district has a program to help its underperforming schools, and Philadelphia is no different. Eighty-five city schools have just been named Empowerment Schools, which will be supported with a “combination of targeted interventions,” Superintendent Arlene Ackerman has announced.

These schools will receive more professional development, additional oversight, quarterly assessments in reading and path, a parent ombudsman, extra volunteers, and technical assistance from “school response” teams.

Twenty-three struggling schools will receive even more support.

Although encouraged by improved test scores in recent years, School Reform Commission Chair Sandra Dungee Glenn has said that everyone in the district’s leadership agrees “more aggressive efforts are necessary to turn around our poorest-performing schools.”



Students walk out of newly opened Roybal Learning Center, which is a new name for one of the most troubled and costly school construction projects in the nation.

L.A. high school opens despite old controversies, years of delay

Years ago, construction of the Belmont Learning Complex garnered national—and highly critical—headlines. Critics complained the site, a former oil field, was unsafe because of pollutants in the ground.

Then geologists discovered an earthquake fault across the site.

Controversy over the school's safety and escalating costs severely damaged the school district's credibility, and the half-finished project was cancelled in 2000, even before the earthquake fault was discovered. But officials eventually turned their attention back to the 33-acre site, redesigned the campus, and this summer finally opened school under a new name: the Edward R. Roybal Learning Center

The campus is impressive, with seven small learning communities, a dance studio, science labs, teacher planning rooms, 480 underground parking spaces, and 315 trees on a sizable park.

The school also carries a hefty price tag, the result of delays in construction, changes in the plan, and repairs to facilities that deteriorated while buildings were abandoned. The school system's Facilities Services Division puts the cost at \$202 million for the 2,500-student campus.

The *Los Angeles Times* cites a final cost to the district of \$350 million to \$400 million.



This fifth-grade teacher was one of 7,000 to receive merit pay bonuses last year in Houston.

Denver schools revamp teacher merit pay

After months of negotiation that raised doubts about the future viability of its performance-pay system, ProComp, the Denver Public Schools and its teachers union have reached agreement on a three-year contract that many believe better focuses merit pay to the deserving.

Overall, teachers will receive a 3 percent raise this year and at least 0.25 percent above the local Consumer Price Index in the next two years. But, officials say, teachers participating in ProComp are likely to see an average 15 percent gain in that time.

Agreement wasn't certain earlier this year, as union officials resisted the district's insistence that ProComp be modified to focus more money on early career teachers and those who chose difficult-to-teach subjects or hard-to-staff schools. But bol-

stering the district's position was a citizen's advisory group that criticized the status quo, saying the distribution of merit pay actually helped hike all salaries.

The new contract adopts many of the district's proposals for change, including an incentive for teachers in schools ranking in the top 50 percent in growth in student achievement.

The fate of ProComp was being closely watched by urban school leaders interested in exploring merit pay plans, a once-unthinkable initiative that's rapidly gaining acceptance nationwide. Chattanooga, Cincinnati, Dallas, Houston, New York City, and Prince George's County, Md., are just a few of the urban districts already using some form of merit pay. Others, such as Washington, D.C., are debating such innovations.

New York City gets tougher on bullying

New rules against bullying—including harassment by cell phone, Internet, and other technologies—will protect students in New York City schools, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and schools Chancellor Joel Klein announced.

Urban school leaders nationwide have put more attention into anti-bullying initiatives as research reveals the emotional harm and educational distractions suffered by victims. Studies also have revealed that students involved in school shootings often are bullied before they act.

New York City officials say Regulation A-832 will make their anti-bullying efforts

“among the most rigorous in the country.”

Schools now will be required to more forcefully communicate an anti-bullying message to students, and training will help teachers and administrators to identify potential problems, officials say. A new tracking system will allow school officials to identify trends or troubles spots across the district and respond more quickly to complaints.

“Bullying and harassment impede our ability to learn,” Bloomberg says. “By holding students and administrators accountable ... we can create safer schools with healthier learning environments.”

Galveston, Houston open doors after shutdown by Hurricane Ike

The Galveston school system managed to open eight of its 11 storm-damaged schools Oct. 7, three weeks after Hurricane Ike slammed into the city.

The 7,700-student school system had been closed since Ike, a category 2 hurricane packing 110-mile-per-hour winds, struck the Texas Gulf Coast Sept. 13. Schools all along the Texas coast were shut down for days or weeks, and some storm-damaged buildings might be closed for months.

Schools in Houston began to reopen in phases starting Sept. 23, but some did not open for another week.

In the rush to reopen city schools, Galveston officials reported spending about \$1 million a day to clean and repair buildings. Structural damage wasn't too severe, they say, but carpets, library books, and school buses were damaged by flooding seawater pushed inland by the storm.

Estimates of the damage range between \$25 million and \$40 million, although flood insurance is expected to cover only a portion of the amount.

Of more concern right now to



School personnel tour Central Middle School in Galveston two weeks after Hurricane Ike closed down the school system. Some areas of the school had more than five feet of water in it, and officials say the school could be closed for six months.

Galveston officials is the long-term impact to the district. With thousands of city homes damaged, it's unclear how many residents will return and whether the district's enrollment will recover. Some fear faculty will need to be trimmed next year.

"We'll see what our enrollment is, and then we'll start the process if we have to downsize," Superintendent Lynne Cleveland told the *Houston Chronicle*.

New Orleans considers more charter schools

A number of schools in New Orleans' Recovery School District could become charter schools—or see lower grades taken over by charters in low-achieving elementary schools.

At least four low-achieving elementary schools could switch to charter status next fall, Superintendent Paul Vallas told *The Times-Picayune*. He also suggested top-performing schools will be given the option to apply for charters over the next two years. A schools spokesperson said one option was to have charter school operators take over some grades in low-achieving elementary schools.

If the idea is approved by the state

education board, this effort would expand what already is one of the largest charter school networks in the nation. Fifty-seven percent of the city's public school students now attend charter schools, according to a survey by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

The next highest concentrations of charter school students are in Dayton, Ohio, and Washington, D.C.

Local and state officials jumped on the charter school bandwagon after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city's troubled school system in 2005, and city schools were placed under the control of the state-created recovery district.

Japanese immersion gets boost in Portland

The Portland, Ore., Public Schools was among the first in the nation in 1989 to offer a Japanese immersion program. But there's been a problem: Only about a quarter of students who enroll in the program in elementary school stay with the language through high school.

Now school officials hope to use a \$1.4 million federal grant to change that.

The money, say Portland officials, will be used to add new courses to the program, provide more Japanese-speaking tutors and mentors, allow students to earn college credit for their studies, and offer high school students a six-week summer research residency in Japan.

Officials say they hope their efforts will boost interest in the program and improve student retention. "We want to bolster offerings at the middle and high school level ... to make the program more relevant," says district spokesperson Matt Shelby.

Rochester, N.Y., seeks discipline consistency

Got caught with drugs? Threw a punch? Talked back to your teacher? If you're a student in Rochester, N.Y., the disciplinary measures you'd face for your misbehavior once depended on what school you attended.

At one school, the principal might call the police. At another, you might be suspended and sent to counseling.

That disparity of consequences is ending under a plan proposed by Superintendent Jean-Claude Brizard to standardize discipline practices across the school system.

In addition to equity and compliance with education law, Brizard also is seeking to ensure some common sense in disciplinary measures. He's already taken action to stop long-term suspensions among young students, after learning that, in years past, dozens of children—in kindergarten through second grade—had been suspended for five days or more.

Outside audit helps Yonkers to upgrade special-ed services

District seeks fresh look for ways to lower costs, reduce minority referrals

When special education services cost your school system \$104 million annually—one-quarter of your budget—it's worth taking a hard look at how well that money is spent. At least, that was the recent thinking of the school leadership in Yonkers, N.Y.

School officials initially conducted an internal review of their special-education program but ultimately decided that an outside audit would provide a fresh look.

"It is a bold move to publicly and aggressively seek an outside view," says Superintendent Bernard Pierorazio. But "we wanted a different set of eyes collegially looking over our collective shoulders."

The school board engaged the services of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative, a national network of urban education leaders. The collaborative sent a three-member auditing team to Yonkers to interview dozens of teachers, administrators, parents, and others, and study district policies and procedures.

The team's 116-page report cited a number of strengths in the district's special-education program. But of more interest were the recommendations for improvement. Among them:

- Address the disproportionate number of minorities enrolled in special education.
- Expand existing classroom immersion efforts and provide teachers with more training and support.
- Improve the quality of individual education plans (IEPs) and the review of initial student placements.
- Address the dropout rate of students with disabilities.
- Decentralize some services and move more decision-making from the central office to school sites.
- Reduce the school system's reliance on out-of-district placements.
- Regularly analyze data to facilitate planning, identify teacher training needs, and "ascertain progress from year to year."

These findings confirmed some of the

opinions of district administrators, Pierorazio says. On the issue of out-of-district placements, for example, school officials already had built a new state-of-the-art facility to serve severely autistic students who had been served elsewhere. That move has saved the district \$1 million annually in tuition and transportation costs.

Yet the district still has about 400 of its 3,500 students in out-of-district placements, at a cost of up to \$100,000 per student, he says. Following up on the audit's recommendations to serve them in-district potentially could cut those costs in half, freeing up money to improve services generally.

The Rev. Gerald Sudick, president of the school board, says reducing outside placements also has the advantage of cutting down the time—in some cases 90 minutes or more a day—that students spend on buses getting to distant classrooms.

"I'm concerned about the wear and tear on these students," he says. "I think that's more important than the money."

The audit's findings are being used to implement a multiyear plan to improve district procedures, Pierorazio says. In August, for example, officials announced they'd reduced outside placements by 15 percent and referrals to the special education department by 30 percent.

One issue that's received attention is the disproportionate number of students—particularly African-American students—identified as emotionally disabled, Pierorazio adds. Now under review is the question of whether some of these referrals actually involve students who simply behave poorly.

"We need to review that," he says. One response to the audit's concerns could be "training across the district to ensure that our administrators and teachers recognize



A teacher works with autistic children at Westchester Hills School 29 in Yonkers, N.Y. Ending out-of-district placements and putting children in local schools have reduced students' travel time, boosted parental participation, and cut costs.

and understand and have strategies to deal with student issues in the classroom that are behavioral, not educational."

Tougher screening already is in place, Pierorazio says. "We have too many labels for students. We have to get away from that. We just have to deal with the child and try to make them more mainstreamed."

Bringing these issues to the forefront was important, but Pierorazio acknowledges there was some trepidation about the outside audit—and the potential public reaction to any negative findings.

But, he adds, officials recognized that a fresh look outweighed such concerns. In the end, the independence of the review was welcomed by the community. "There was a lot of credibility when we rolled this out," he says.

The effort has proved its worth—and serves as a model for other school systems with concerns about a program. As Pierorazio explained when the report was released, it provides "a roadmap that helps us to achieve our goals of educating all students for academic excellence, and increasing student support services, as well as our commitment to fiscal accountability."

For more information, read about North Carolina's Wake County School System's audit experiences in "The Academic Audit" by board president Rosa Gill. Her article appears in the Urban Special Report in November's *American School Board Journal* (www.asbj.com).

CTE

Continued from page 1

It's an academic program designed to meet the needs and aspirations of students at all levels of academic ability—exactly what a good vocational school should do, says Principal Steve Mazzola.

“Our tech students are predominately going to go to a four-year college,” he says. But others “are looking at going right into the field after graduation. Everyone is different. We can't assume that every student is going to be a doctor or lawyer ... we can't just pigeonhole a student.”

That sentiment is shared by a growing number of educators who want to see vocational education play a larger role in urban high schools. College-prep courses are important, they say, but courses with more practical applications—ones that prepare students for the workplace—can engage young people who otherwise might drop out of school.

What's more, these classes might prove to be the only path to economic success for many other urban students who will never enroll in college or complete a four-year program.

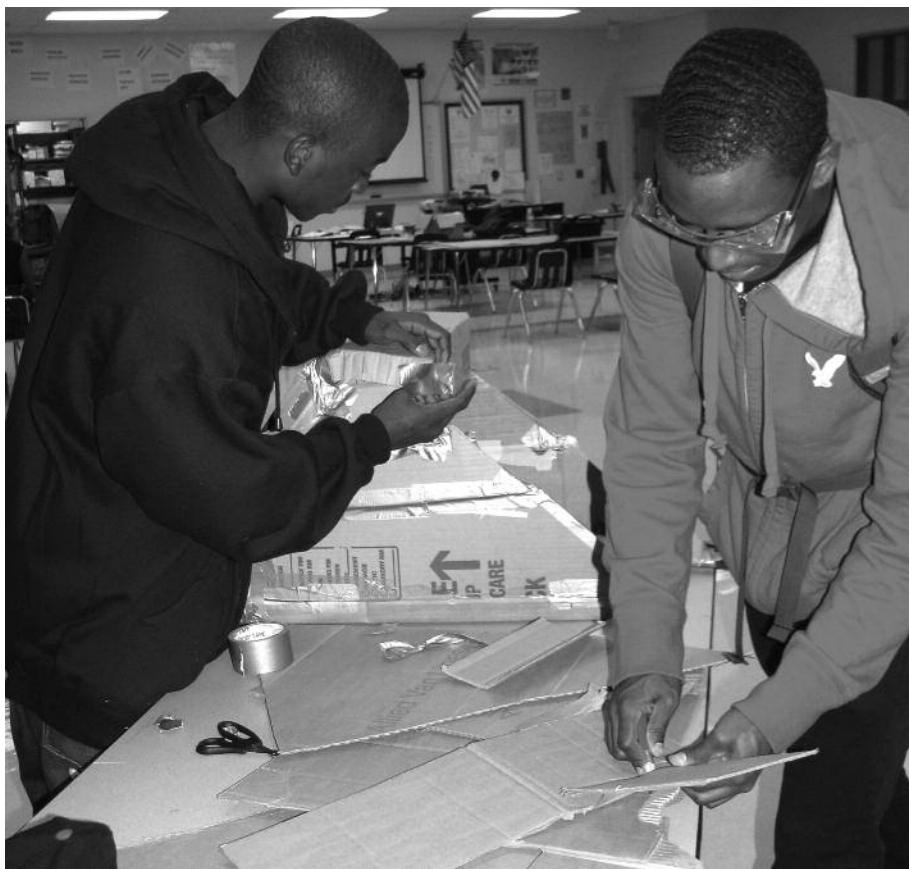
The bottom line is that high schools can no longer leave less-academically successful students to fend for themselves after graduation, says Patrick Ainsworth, assistant superintendent for secondary, post-secondary, and adult education for the California Department of Education.

“Our high schools are not designed for the future,” he says “They're designed for an industrial era long gone, and while they serve about a third of students very well, they're set up to be custodial institutions [for the rest]. We can't afford to send half or two-thirds of our students into the world without any preparation.”

Stronger focus on careers

That's particularly true for urban students, whose career opportunities are dramatically limited in comparison to those of their suburban, affluent peers, says Paul Harrington, associate director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University. In many urban centers, there has been a steady decline in manufacturing and other blue-collar jobs that pay a decent wage.

The most severe impact of this economic reality falls on high school dropouts, he says. In Philadelphia, for example, limited employment opportuni-



Students, working only with cardboard and tape, attempt to build a chair that can hold at least 300 pounds. The project was part of an engineering design and development class at the Academy of Engineering, one of many CTE programs offered by North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools.

ties restrict the lifetime earnings of a dropout to \$457,000, nearly \$200,000 less than the average for dropouts elsewhere in the state.

To counter this urban reality, schools need to do more to prepare students for what the Center for Economic Policy Research calls a “good job”—one that pays at least \$34,000 a year and provides health care and a pension plan. While these jobs are disappearing for low-skilled workers, demand is growing significantly for medical technicians, computer repairmen, and other high-skilled workers who have pursued technical or other post-secondary training.

That reality has prompted more educators to push for changes to traditional vocational education. A new model, known as career technical training (CTE), calls for a greater emphasis on academic rigor so that, for example, students will be prepared to read high-tech manuals and to work with computerized diagnostic equipment used by today's auto mechanics.

It's a direction that the business community is encouraging, Harrington says.

“The work force really is pushing literacy and math skills,” as well, because rapidly changing technology and economic competition means tomorrow's work force will need retraining several times in the decades ahead.

For educators, there's a more immediate advantage to the CTE model. The mix of practical vocational skills and academics is proving an effective strategy to cut the dropout rate. “The dropout issue is about engagement, and CTE provides that engagement,” says Jimmy Chancey, director of CTE programs for North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools. “Kids see the relevance of what they're studying and how it can help them.”

Yet, engagement isn't a goal only aimed at low-achieving students, educators say. More CTE classes are a hybrid of job training and college prep, which makes academics more interesting and again offers students experiences that can help with career planning. One San Diego-area school, for example, offers a class in medical terminology that the *San Diego Union-Tribune* described as “voca-

tional but heavy on the advanced vocabulary [used] in pre-med in college.”

Expanding horizons

This mix of practical and academic is education at its best, CTE proponents say. Many students would agree. Jordan Fakhoury, a 16-year-old senior in Yonkers, has spent his time at Saunders High studying environmental technology. Instruction has included outdoor classroom projects to study a non-native species of vine that’s strangling neighborhood trees and to analyze pollution in community streams.

“It’s definitely opened my eyes to what’s going on around us,” he says. Lately, though, his interest has turned to health care, and because of the school’s rigorous academic program in math and science, he feels confident that a university pre-med program is a viable option after graduation.

The opportunity to explore career options also is particularly valuable for urban students, who view their career options through the prism of personal experiences, Harrington says. In neighborhoods where jobs are scarce but crime is commonplace, for example, male students are likely to aspire only to careers as police officers or probation officers.

But “take a kid and put him in a bank or hospital ... and all of a sudden a whole world of opportunity opens up that he

never considered,” Harrington adds.

Federal and state policymakers are thinking along the same lines. For example, the 2006 reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act strengthened provisions calling for greater academic rigor, more coordinated planning with local industry and post-secondary education institutions, and a greater focus on “high-skill, high-wage, or high-demand occupations” and “emerging professions.”

Many state education departments are putting their support behind CTE programs. In California, where Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is a big proponent of vocational education, state spending on CTE programs has risen 18 percent in the past two years. The state’s plan specifically calls for high schools to do more to prepare students for post-secondary training and work force preparation.

“What’s happening in California is a complete rethinking of high school,” Ainsworth says. “We’re



Students care for a “patient” during a certified nursing assistant class at the Academy of Medical Science, one of many CTE programs offered by North Carolina’s Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools. Such practical training is designed to introduce students to careers experiencing growth in the local job market.

HOW CTE CAN HELP

Supporting CTE programs is likely to improve the academic success of students and lay the groundwork for a more financially rewarding future, according to research cited by the Association of Career and Technical Education (ACTE).

That success is even more likely if school programs convince students of the value of post-secondary training—and support them in seeking such training.

Some research findings:

- Students in CTE programs scored higher test scores in reading and math than other students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.
- Students in CTE programs took more and higher level math classes than students enrolled in a general academic track.
- High school students who took four CTE courses reported an average increase in earnings of \$1,200 immediately after graduation.
- Graduates of CTE programs are 10 percent to 15 percent more likely to be employed and earn 8 percent to 9 percent more than graduates of more academic-oriented programs.
- Men who attended community college and took one year of technically oriented coursework increased their earnings by 14 percent. Women increased their income by 29 percent.
- Students with a vocational focus were more likely to obtain a degree or certificate within two years.

The ACTE data sheet of research findings is available at www.acteonline.org/resource_center/upload/CTEeffects.doc.

seeing a big sea change in CTE, with more higher-end courses, such as pre-engineering, medical options. Even the traditional kinds of programs like woodshop are now architecture and construction courses. It’s much more career-focused.”

Ties to local economy

That career focus increasingly includes the local job market, as well. In Washington, D.C., officials recently opened a high school dedicated to architecture, construction, and engineering. In addition to its academic coursework, however, the state-of-the-art facility is equipped to teach students electrical wiring, carpentry, and the operation of large construction equipment.

Officials say the school is a response to expectations for a 10-percent increase in construction jobs in the next decade—and the lack of job opportunities for young urban graduates.

“This futuristic school marks the launch of a new era of high-tech construction instruction in the district,”

D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty told the *Washington Post* in August. “Graduates can look forward to well-paying jobs that can’t be outsourced and trades that can never be taken away.”

Responding to similar industry needs in Charlotte, N. C., school officials have put CTE programs in all district high schools, Chancey says. To make training relevant, officials rely on advisory boards of business leaders and studies of local industrial growth to help guide curriculum planning.

Today, schools offer career options in engineering, information technology, health care, construction, fabric merchandizing, graphics arts, and even auto racing—all industries seeing significant growth in the region.

“We offer a full spectrum of programs, and students can study everything, depending on their interests, from business education to automotive repair,” Chancey says. Close ties with community colleges and technical schools also ensure that high school courses provide a foundation for post-secondary training without duplicating later studies.

Similar partnerships have been developed by officials in Yonkers, so that the Saunders’ counseling office can help students “articulate to a two-year community college or union apprenticeship without a problem,” Mazzola says.

The best CTE programs also include real-world job experiences, Harrington says. In urban areas, particularly, there is a shortage of job opportunities for teens, who need such experiences to understand what employers expect of them.

“Employers want some literacy and occupational skills, but first they want certain behavioral traits,” he says. “They want the work ethic, a good attitude. But you develop that work ethic by getting a job and seeing the behavior modeled.”

A successful formula

It won’t come as a surprise that developing a good CTE program has its challenges. Curricula often must be rewritten. Facilities must be modernized to include the equipment that students will find in the modern workplace.

“In marketing classes ... we just used to be in a regular classroom,” Chancey says. “If you taught social studies one period, you could teach marketing in the next period. But now you need access to the whole range of technology advances

used in the tourism/hotel industry.”

Also required is a new mindset for teachers, he says. Learning to incorporate academics into vocational training—and tie academic lessons to specific careers—is a change from the past. The business community’s demand for more innovation and problem-solving skills in workers also “has caused our entire curriculum to change, and our teachers have had to put some of their thought processes to work.”

Yet, when done well, CTE programs provide urban students with the best of

all words—readying them for college, if possible, but also for a successful entry into the work force. And some see that as a wave of the future.

“I see high schools changing dramatically,” Ainsworth predicts. “We really need to play our traditional role, but there’s a new role that we need to have ... one that brings education and economic development together.”

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One year later

School leaders still seek answers to ruling on race-based admissions

One year after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against race-based student assignment plans in Seattle and Louisville, Ky., urban school leaders are still searching for ways to promote classroom diversity that will pass legal muster.

Yet public apathy for school integration is proving to be as big an obstacle to progress as are the restrictions placed on school boards by the high court.

The Seattle school board is looking to do what it can, but segregated housing patterns and a strong public desire for neighborhood schools and school choice are totally at odds with available strategies to promote school integration, says board member Harium Martin-Morris.

“We can’t satisfy all of that in one assignment plan,” he says.

Today, the public is more concerned with the quality of schools than in the composition of its student population, Martin-Morris adds. And he feels the same way.

“Diversity is not as important to me as knowing that we’ve got quality buildings,” he says. “Diversity for diversity’s sake just doesn’t come first.”

In North Carolina, magnet schools and theme-based programs are the most effective strategy available to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public

Schools, says board Chair Joe “Coach” White. And diversity is a part of the discussion as the board conducts a comprehensive review of its magnet program.

But legal obstacles, segregated housing, and public demand for students to attend school close to home stymie more aggressive efforts to promote diversity. “What tools are there other than magnets?” he asks. Even volunteer diversity programs are “not feasible with the [heavy] traffic on our streets.”

School boards across the nation are exploring the use of socioeconomic factors as a means to promote diversity without an undue focus on race. After the high court overturned its old assignment plan, the Jefferson County (Ky.) Public Schools adopted a new plan using neighborhoods—and their unique socioeconomic profiles—to organize elementary school zones that maximize diverse student enrollments. It survived a legal challenge earlier this year.

Across the nation, school officials say the public still supports the ideals of diversity—but they’re not interested in heavy-handed strategies to meet this goal. Meanwhile, NSBA and CUBE are working with a network of school attorneys exploring strategies that might pass legal muster—and prove a practical and effective option.

Research and Reality

Schools work to squeeze more instructional time into day

Schools try varied schedules, confront several challenges, in adding time for teaching

By keeping students in class for eight hours a day—and adding 10 days to the school calendar—Grove Patterson Academy in Toledo, Ohio, provides students with the equivalent of 49 additional days of instruction every year.

The goal: Use that extra time to boost student achievement.

It sounds like a good idea. But does this approach get results? Are many schools nationwide adding instructional time to their schedules? Where do they find the time, and how do they use it?

Those are some of the questions explored in *Expanded Learning Time in Action: Initiatives in High-Poverty and High-Minority Schools and Districts*, a report that looks at the efforts of 300 schools, from 1991 to 2007, to “rethink” the school calendar. The report was published by the Washington, D. C.-based Center for American Progress.

Schools are experimenting with a variety of models to expand “learning time,” the report says. Some extend the school day to seven or eight hours; some operate only a few days a week on an extended

schedule (one charter school has a few nine-hour days). Many schools also add extra days to the calendar, with one keeping students 205 days a year.

Other models include block scheduling to cut down on time wasted changing classes, mandatory Saturday classes, or a summer program for low-achieving students.

Charter schools are the most aggressive in adding instructional time, but the report notes a number of public schools have added 10 percent to 15 percent more time to their calendars. Most urban school districts have only a few schools experimenting with an extended schedule, perhaps due to limited resources that restrict widespread adoption of such models.

Most extended schedules are found in the elementary and middle schools, which the report suggests might reflect the challenges of accommodating the more extensive extracurricular activities of high schools and the greater number of older



Students at KIPP Summit Academy in San Lorenzo, Calif., attend school from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. four days a week and until 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Students also attend school approximately 12 Saturdays a year and three weeks in the summer.

students with after-school jobs.

Schools use their extra time in a variety of ways, the report says. Some focus more attention on core subjects, such as reading and math. Others try to interject more “enrichment” activities into their programs, with an expanded focus on character development and community service or more instruction in foreign languages, the arts, or work force skills.

A big stumbling block for expanding such efforts is the price tag—one principal cited a cost of \$125,000 to \$150,000 to extend just fourth- and fifth-grade schedules. The long-term viability of such efforts often is uncertain, as many schools depend on grants or district interventions without a long-term commitment.

The report suggests that expanded learning opportunities are beneficial to students, noting, for example, that students at Perspectives Charter School in Chicago score higher on the Achievement College Test (ACT) than other city students. But such evidence is mostly anecdotal or limited in detail, and educators will need to look elsewhere for more conclusive findings.

That’s if truly definitive findings exist. As the report notes, there remains a “lack of proven, long-term models” to guide educators on how—or if—the time has come to extend the school calendar.

This report is available at www.americanprogress.org.

TOLEDO SCHOOL PUTS EXTRA TIME TO GOOD USE

Ten years ago, when Toledo’s Grove Patterson Academy started its eight-hour school day, one concern was whether students would wilt before the end of the day, says Principal Gretchen Bueter.

The surprise was there aren’t that many that are exhausted, she says. “Students run out of here at the end of the day. They’re chipper on the buses.”

Having a long school day and year isn’t worth very much, however, if the time isn’t used wisely. So the school is “practically locked down” at the beginning of the day for a 90-minute block of time focusing on reading and literacy, Bueter says. “We don’t interrupt the reading.”

Students also spend 30 minutes daily studying Spanish or German, a great instructional initiative for a K-8 school.

That said, the day is long, Bueter admits, and teachers make sure students take breaks, stretch, sing songs, or are provided classroom activities that get them from behind their desks. The school also uses art, physical education, and assemblies to break up the day.

It’s also important to engage teachers in the planning process of any schedule change, and that future teachers know what is being demanded of them, she says. “We get people who want to do this.”