

1.05.08

Straight Talk – the Challenges of Engaging Educators on CTE / Jump Start

Let's be candid. Launching Jump Start and trying to get CTE to flourish in our schools and districts has met a series of challenges, some of which we don't speak about too often. Among these challenges:

- 1) academic-subject teachers who display an unspoken (or perhaps even a vocal) disdain about CTE. For many of these teachers, their concern is that CTE students are "tracked" into what they believe are low-trajectory Jump Start pathways that reduce student life opportunities;
- 2) counselors who refuse to learn how to schedule students in Jump Start pathways;
- 3) district administrators who underfund CTE programs, preventing schools from offering a rich portfolio of pathways that correspond with student interests and their most-promising local career opportunities.

In Louisiana we've done what we can in policy to create a momentum for CTE and Jump Start graduation pathways:

- Accountability Parity – Louisiana schools and districts earn the same accountability points for top-level student performance, whether in Jump Start (i.e., an advanced state-level IBC) or TOPS University (i.e., a 5 on an AP test). There is no CTE stigma in our state's accountability system;
- Dedicated, Incremental Funding Streams – Louisiana provides districts and charter schools with unlimited career development funds (CDF) based on student enrollment in courses that lead to high-demand, high-wage IBCs. CDF is a national best practice, enabling schools to generate significant incremental CTE funding to reinvest in high-demand pathways, teacher training and workplace-based learning opportunities;
- Summer Programs – Louisiana is pioneering the opportunity for our students to engage in summer programs with four required features: 1) students participate in workplace-based learning (WBL) while earning; 2) academic credits; 3) high-value IBCs; and 4) a summer wage. Our vision is to make these summer programs a standard part of public education in Louisiana, engaging *all* students (including university-bound students, students with disabilities, etc.). For additional details see module 1.08.16 *Summer WBL Programs*.

But these policies aren't enough. We need to take a positive approach to overcoming the stigma associated with CTE.

Successfully Engaging Educators about CTE

There are five positive steps CTE leaders can take to successfully engage fellow educators and overcome the CTE stigma.

- 1) Properly framing CTE / Jump Start – the old "vo-tech" was properly viewed as a dumping ground for low-performing students, with placement often based on unfortunate factors such as race and gender. In Louisiana the old Career Diploma (derided by some as "the dummy diploma") was earned by fewer than 2% of our students, a cohort that was overwhelmingly male and African-American. Tellingly, the curriculum provided no focus on skills that actually helped students attain entry-level employment in high-demand, high-wage industry sectors.

Updated CTE programs like Jump Start are different in concept and practice than the old vo-tech. Today's CTE aligns pathways, courses and WBL opportunities with the industry sectors that will drive the state's future prosperity. Our goal is to help students master critical workplace behaviors and communication skills – which include literacy and numeracy, as well as problem-solving and teamwork – that prepare them to be successful adults.

Jump Start not only prepares students for adult success . . . CTE also helps students understand that lifelong learning and collaboration are essential skills regardless of how / when they pursue post-high school education and training.

- 2) Overcoming the "four-year college is best" mindset – every academic-subject teacher went to college, so it's natural for them to believe that college is the best pathway. Statistics prove that students with college degrees earn more in the future. But there are other factors that also should be considered as we help prepare students for their best adult future.

In Louisiana fewer than 20% of our students persist to a four-year degree – far too many of our students who matriculate to college ultimately drop out, without a degree but with student debt. *Meanwhile, our community and technical college system (which is "college") is an under-utilized gem, a way for students to earn critical IBCs and continue their education.*

Successfully Engaging Educators about CTE

- 1) Properly framing CTE / Jump Start
- 2) Overcoming the "four-year college is best" mindset
- 3) Integrating basic academic skills in CTE pathways
- 4) Leveraging testimonials from industry allies
- 5) Leveraging testimonials from academic-subject teachers, counselors and administrators

- 3) Integrating basic academic skills in CTE pathways – every employer wants entry-level job applicants who are literate, numerate and capable of working effectively as team members and team leaders. This is our vision for *all* students, both university-bound students and those who may work full-time after high school (or those who will work and attend college at the same time). CTE is not an “either / or” proposition with academic excellence.

Modern CTE programs like Jump Start reinforce a more relevant context that helps students understand why mastering key academic skills is essential to their adult success. Let’s help academic-subject teachers, counselors and administrators embrace the reality that modern CTE programs reinforce enhanced academic performance among all students;

- 4) Leveraging testimonials from industry allies – let’s enlist industry allies to reinforce this message to our educator-colleagues. *Industry leaders should be invited to every middle school and high school (in-person and virtually) to reinforce to our colleagues the need for our schools to graduate young adults who possess basic academic and workplace communication skills, along with the ability to set and achieve challenging goals (such as attaining demanding IBCs).* Inviting virtual speakers from other parts of the state and country to speak to our colleagues is particularly effective, since it helps all of us see the bigger picture. There is a universe of opportunities out there for our students;
- 5) Leveraging testimonials from academic-subject teachers, counselors and administrators – finally, we should ask those academic-subject teachers, counselors and administrators who have first-hand experience with modern CTE to describe to their peers how these programs and opportunities benefit all students.

Our mission: to create positive campaigns of engagement with our educator colleagues to overcome the CTE stigma.

Practical Steps to Successful Educator Engagement

Here are three easy, practical steps that every school can take to overcome the CTE stigma among our fellow educators.

Step #1: Engage top academic students in CTE projects through joint academic subject - CTE class assignments – demonstrating that CTE isn’t for “those” (i.e., lesser) students is particularly possible through “joint class assignments.” Example: *all* geometry students of all levels of academic achievement can work on assignments that combine theoretical problem sets with hands-on projects that demonstrate how concepts work. *When top academic students engage in CTE activities and like it, this demonstrates that CTE opportunities are for all students.*

Practical Steps to Successful Educator Engagement

- 1) Engage top academic students in CTE projects through joint academic subject - CTE class assignments
- 2) Create annual school awards for CTE Excellence (sponsored by industry, awarded by workplace experts, including stipends)
- 3) Implement virtual teacher externships in high-demand industry sectors as PD

Step #2: Create annual school awards for CTE Excellence (sponsored by industry, awarded by workplace experts, including stipends) – celebrating CTE excellence is one way to create greater regard for Jump Start among educators, students and parents. Schools can create year-end awards celebrating top-level performance in CTE courses and Jump Start pathways. In the best case scenario, these awards will: a) carry the names of industry sponsor; b) be awarded by industry leaders in graduation ceremonies; and c) include a stipend (cash and/or post-secondary tuition credits) to celebrate CTE excellence.

Step #3: Implement virtual teacher externships in high-demand industry sectors as PD – Louisiana’s virtual externship pilot (implemented by The Orchard Foundation) proved that both academic-subject teachers and CTE teachers found engagement with workplace experts was energizing. The feedback from these educators was clear: *PD sessions with industry experts provide all teachers with insights on how they can enhance their instructional resources to better motivate their students.*

Schools can create interactive PD exercises with workplace experts (so much more interesting than the typical “sit and get” PD sessions) that demonstrate how *all* teachers can create assignments and class projects of greater relevance. ***Our goal for late 2018 is to upload “best practices” resources on holding industry-based teacher PD sessions contributed by Academy participants, so that schools don’t have to reinvent the wheel in terms of virtual externship PD opportunities for all teachers.***

What some of Louisiana’s Most-Respected CTE Leaders Are Saying About Overcoming the Stigma Associated with CTE

Jayda Spiller, Bossier Parish	<i>“We all know that engaged CTE students perform better academically. By collaborating with academic-subject teachers on joint assignments we can achieve our common vision: helping students succeed based on their interests and abilities.”</i>
Chris Broussard Iberia Parish	<i>“We need to create materials that show academic-subject teachers how CTE classes can lead students to achieve academic excellence. Imagine students learning key math concepts in their CTE class – a win / win for everyone.”</i>
Staci Polozola Livingston Parish	<i>“Engaging counselors is key. Let’s invite counselors to observe students working as nurse assistants and skilled trades workers. When they see our students absorbed in work, they’ll see how CTE leads to adult learning and success.”</i>