

Create System Incentives and Supports for Connection of CTE and High School Redesign Efforts

SEVENTH IN A YEARLONG SERIES, THIS ARTICLE MORE CLOSELY EXAMINES RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN ACTE'S HIGH SCHOOL REFORM POSITION STATEMENT AND HIGHLIGHTS BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTATION.

THE EIGHTH RECOMMENDATION IN ACTE'S high school reform position statement is to create system incentives and supports for connection of CTE and high school redesign efforts. In many states and school districts, CTE leaders are providing the major impetus and resources for rethinking the instructional and organizational design of the traditional high school. However, in some locales, superintendents, school leaders, and school reform advocates are reportedly overlooking the role of CTE in providing meaning, relevance and experience in deeply contextualized learning of subject matter.

This oversight will limit the effectiveness and impact of the high school redesign agenda. Policymakers at the federal, state and local levels should see academic and interest-based courses as complementary of one another, and create initiatives that support rich, interest-based programs to be built around a core of rigorous academic expectations.

At all levels of discussion about high school design, teachers and leaders representing the resources and expertise of CTE should be involved. As states and school districts around the country grapple with high school reform—passing new legislation, developing curriculum, and implementing reform models—the strengths of CTE should not be ignored.

Taking the Lead in California

When California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger speaks, people listen. Lately, Schwarzenegger has been talking a lot about

high school reform and how career and technical education can play a major role in improving student achievement in California. Policymakers across the state are listening, and career and technical educators are taking advantage of the new opportunities to strengthen their programs and take a leadership role in high school improvement.

In Schwarzenegger's 2007 State of the State Address, he said, "We must also continue to reinvigorate career-tech education, I love career-tech, love it." He also proposed \$52 million in his 2007 budget, on top of increases in recent years, for career and technical education. This includes \$32 million in new funding for CTE instruction and programs and legislation to streamline CTE teacher credentialing, proposals that are already gaining the support of more state policymakers.

Schwarzenegger's support has created momentum in California. Local school districts are paying more attention to CTE programs, and local media are covering the changes with more frequency. The James Irvine Foundation, which sees CTE as a promising solution to the state's dropout problem, spent \$6 million to launch a new statewide center dedicated to the issue. Voters have passed a bond that includes \$500 million for new CTE facilities, and in January, the state Board of Education adopted new standards to enhance curriculum. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell has also proposed expanding the number of career and technical academies in the state from 290 to 500.

However, this momentum isn't likely to continue without the involvement of CTE



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leaders. In communities, schools and institutions, career and technical educators must continue to show that their programs are worthy of the strong support, and that CTE can lead the efforts to improve California's high schools.

Maximizing Connections

Leading high school reform is exactly what career and technical educators in Sacramento have done. Five years ago, Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) was ahead of its time. When the school district and city leaders were looking for a way to reform the cities struggling high schools, students were the ones that actually came up with the answer—focusing instruction around more relevant career themes.

At that time, the smaller learning communities and career academies movements were just getting under way, and the

community put a great deal of time and research into reform possibilities. Early grants from the Gates Foundation and Carnegie Corporation helped SCUSD with the costs of transforming its high schools, and now the school district is on the cutting edge of high school reform initiatives that link closely to career and technical education.

According to Mike Brunelle, director of career and technical preparation for SCUSD, each of SCUSD's approximately 15,000 high school students is now engaged in a career themed approach to learning. The district's five large high schools are all divided into smaller learning communities or career academies, and there are now nine smaller high schools organized around a single career theme. Sacramento City has gone beyond the concepts of a "wall-to-wall" academy school or a few new small schools to spread the ini-

tiative throughout the entire district.

To ensure the success of such a broad effort, CTE leaders have had to partner with, and gain the support of, business and industry and the community at large. Brunelle admits that this did not happen immediately. "People here have been opening their eyes over the past few years about the reality of career themes—it does not mean students will not be going to college. We want all students to have the skills to go out into the world of work or to pursue postsecondary education in any format—at a community college, a private institution, or one of the California state universities. All our programs provide students will the skills they need to be successful in multiple opportunities."

One of the most critical ways that SCUSD has built this support is by maximizing connections with the business community. The career pathways at each



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school fit into one of five pathways: arts, media and entertainment; business and information technology; engineering and industrial technology; human and public service; and health. Each of the pathways has a designated “entrepreneur” that is employed by the school district. The entrepreneur who leads each pathway is someone usually without an education background, but who is instead from the private sector, who worked within the business community and can bring their prior knowledge and resources to the program.

Brunelle emphasizes, “These entrepreneurs are our bridge between schools and the community.” That bridge works two ways. The entrepreneurs help the smaller learning communities in each school bring in speakers from the business community, provide specific industry information, and gather resources, and they also take students and teachers into the community for job shadowing and other special projects. Entrepreneurs participate in the common planning times of the smaller learning community teams, and facilitate requests from teachers for additional assistance. Their activities range from securing new equipment for classrooms to helping students find community internships.

The reform efforts at SCUSD have attracted more than 500 active business partners that are engaged with the schools and students. For example, the chief architect for the San Francisco Bay Bridge comes in to mentor students entering a bridge building competition. One of the keys to partnering with the business community has been to start small, and as Brunelle explains, “don’t ask for money right away.” The first step with a new business partner might be to invite them into a



▲▲ Maximized Connection

Education Entrepreneur Larry Loban (center) meets with two business partners, Deana Donohue (left) from the American Public Works Association and Society of Women Engineers and Liz Raley (right), Sacramento President of the Society of Women Engineers, to view plans for introducing Engineering and Industrial Technology career pathway to middle school students.

geometry class to share about how a concept students are struggling with is related to a career in the real world. This serves as a hook, and starts to form a relationship of mutual give and take that strengthens over time.

Stronger Systems Connections

The high school reform efforts of CTE leaders and SCUSD are starting to make a difference within the broader workforce development system as well. Education and business leaders in greater Sacramento have begun crafting a region-wide plan for the future of career and technical preparation. The goal for business leaders is to better meet the needs of the region’s economy.

The entire Sacramento region has been looking at the issue of economic growth for several years, but the process has gained a lot of steam as high school CTE programs have gotten increased attention. There is backing for strengthening career preparation from the Chamber of Commerce and local Workforce Investment Board, as well as other community leaders. Business leaders have shifted the focus from looking elsewhere for skilled workers, to preparing young people while they are in school

with the abilities, skills and background to contribute to the Sacramento economy. “Growing Human Capital” was the theme of the Sacramento Metro Chamber’s February regional economic forum.

“We found that most businesses are looking for a way to influence what is going on in education,” said Brunelle. “The medical, transportation and construction industries are in need of vast numbers of skilled professionals, and we can work with business and industry to prepare students to assume those roles.” Business leaders re-

ally see relevance to their involvement in CTE and high school reform efforts, and get excited about being involved and shaping the future.

The SCUSD efforts are a great example of how career and technical educators have been able to shape the high school reform dialogue, and create a true system of education that involves the entire community. Students receive a value-added education in this environment—one that engages them in academic and career preparation and prepares them for future success in whatever they may endeavor. ■

ACTE is very interested to learn about other CTE programs and initiatives that encourage students to complete high school. In addition, we are looking for information about CTE programs that work toward achieving the remainder of ACTE’s high school reform recommendations. If you teach or administer such a CTE program, please send information to Alisha Hyslop at ahyslop@acteonline.org.