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MEANING AND CONNECTION IN THIS THING CALLED LIFE

Educating Success-Ready Students

“The brain is looking for two things, meaning and connection. If we can provide that to all our students throughout their academic careers, we have done them a great service in helping them negotiate this thing called life.”

Martha Stark, Executive Director of *NServe*

NServe: A career and technical education consortium of nine high schools in Chicago's northern suburbs, representing some 24,000 students

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INTRODUCTION

THE EVANSTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION is pleased to share this report of research conducted in Evanston from October 2009 to February 2010, a focused inquiry into the status of access to jobs and training for youth who do not attend college and/or do not complete high school. Our interest in this topic was formed and fueled by findings that emerged from the community scan we conducted in Evanston in 2004-05 as part of our *Communityworks Initiative*, a state-wide effort to understand the intersections between workforce training, early childhood education, and land use and protection in Evanston and seventeen other Illinois communities.

In 2004 and 2005, we learned that 30% of Evanston youth do not attend college following graduation from Evanston Township High School, and still more do not complete high school. What are the options for productive work for this part of our population? We learned that the so-called “middle skills jobs,” which are projected to have major growth over the coming decade, are a big part of the answer. To support young people as they grow into adulthood, we posed a second question: what obstacles must youth overcome in pursuing these jobs?

Thus this research focuses on the options for and access to training for middle skills jobs. The research is Evanston-specific but is also applicable to other parts of our region.

We are very grateful to the Osa Foundation for the grant that supported the research and to its president, Robin Lavin, for her commitment to understanding the world of middle skills jobs and for agreeing to explore the topic with us. And we are most grateful to Debi Chess Mabie who put her community organizing skills and experiences to work in getting to the heart of the matter.

Our key conclusions are:

- A significant number of jobs is projected to be available in the coming years in the middle-skill sector.
- There are very real barriers to success in obtaining training for these jobs in terms of quality and accessibility of community college programs, proprietary school training programs, and apprenticeship programs.
- The most significant gaps in connecting young people to middle skills training and jobs are in perceptions of these career paths and in inadequate communication about the possibilities.

The research leads us to propose some actions as a starting point for discussion among educators, workforce development professionals, community and social service organizations, and citizens:

- **Change our terminology:** We can influence perceptions by changing our terminology in how we speak about education outcomes. We can make a difference by choosing to refer to the goal of education as preparing students to be “success-ready” versus “college-ready” or “job-ready” and by realizing that the skills students need to succeed in college are the same skills they will need to succeed in today’s workplace.
- **Develop soft skills:** In our interviews with employers and educators, both pointed to possession of critical thinking and communication skills as the leading indicator of success in both the workplace and in postsecondary education. They are also essential skills that an individual needs

to be an informed and active citizen. Begin this “soft skills” development in the earliest years in conjunction with literacy development.

- **Start earlier:** Begin the career path/lifestyle discussion earlier on in a student’s school years. “Career Cruising” needs to be implemented not just in middle school but also in elementary school. ETHS can begin to break down barriers to success by pledging accountability to the full vision statement that says students will be prepared to pursue both a career direction and continued education. It is important to start educating students about career options earlier in their academic career.
- **Track students’ post-secondary paths:** Commit to comprehensive data collection to better understand students’ post-secondary paths. This information is key to identifying and understanding gaps in school and community-based services. We need to focus more attention on those students NOT pursuing a four-year post-secondary path.
- **Create collaborative community efforts to support students in their pursuit of middle skills jobs:** We must increase and support community collaborations, and make collective efforts to obtain and administer American Recovery and Reinvestment Act dollars for workforce development, with specific focus on bringing YouthBuild and/or green economy job training programs to Evanston.

Martha Stark, Executive Director of NServe, an organization focused on connecting in-school youth to vocational, trade, and technology-based career options stated, “The brain is looking for two things, meaning and connection. If we can provide that to all our students throughout their academic careers, we have done them a great service in helping them negotiate this thing called life.”

The results of this research will create more questions: How do we take data and develop usable information? What populations should be the focus of community efforts, so that we make best use of available funds? What do we mean by the impact of programs? How do we measure impact?

Do we as a community have the collective will to begin to tackle these tough issues?

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MIDDLE SKILLS JOBS AND TRAINING: EVANSTON OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Data collected by the National Student Clearinghouse suggest that since 2006, on average, 70 percent of an Evanston Township High School graduating class will enroll in college the fall immediately following high school graduation. Although the most complete set of data for ETHS college enrollment rates (graduating class of 2004) reflects that 52 percent of those attending college immediately following high school have graduated by now, the data do not tell us *why* 30 percent do not attend college immediately follow high school, or *what* they are doing instead. While no empirical data exist about the activities of students who do not go to four-year college after graduation, this report will focus on the above questions as they relate to access to and training for middle-skill occupations in Northern Cook County. Middle-skill jobs are defined as those which require more than a high school education but less than a four-year degree. These jobs are expected to experience the greatest growth into the year 2014.

Quantitative information in this report is gathered from data published by four entities: the Workforce Board of Northern Cook County, Skills2Compete Illinois Campaign, Evanston Township High School (ETHS) Research and Evaluation Department, and Evanston Chamber of Commerce. Qualitative data were gathered through focus groups, interviews with several individuals, families, educators, program administrators, private business owners and industry leaders, and community leaders in Evanston and the surrounding Chicago metropolitan area.

The scope of the region defined in this report is the mandated geographical service area of the Workforce Board of Northern Cook County, whose middle-skill job projection data serve as the foundation of this research. Communities include Chicago (north of downtown), Evanston, Arlington Heights, Rolling Meadows, Des Plaines, Glenview, Golf, Palatine, Morton Grove, Mount Prospect, Northbrook, Park Ridge, Lincolnwood, Niles, Schaumburg, Hoffman Estates, Hanover Park, Elgin, Streamwood, Wheeling, Palatine, and Prospect Heights.

The underlying primary purpose of this report is to provide information that will inform and direct educational, business and community efforts to serve and support non four-year college bound youth in Evanston in their pursuit of finding long-term meaningful career and lifestyle paths.

MIDDLE SKILL JOB GROWTH PROJECTIONS

According to the Skills 2Compete report, *Illinois' Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs*, middle-skill jobs currently make up the largest segment of jobs in our economy and are the highest-growth occupations in the region for Evanston job seekers. On average, these jobs have entry-level earnings of \$45,000 in yearly income¹.

¹ *Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs: Meeting the Demands of a 21st Century Economy*, The Workforce Alliance, Kermit Kaleba and Andrea Mayo. September 2008.

Projected Northern Cook County Demand for 30 Middle-Skill Occupations, 2004-2014²

<u>Projected Employment</u>	<u>Job Openings</u>	<u>Median Earnings</u>
Computers		
Support Specialist	6,000	43,200
Specialist, Other	3,180	69,400
Construction		
Carpenters	13,940	52,400
Electricians	9,440	61,500
Painters	4,280	39,600
Operating Engineers	3,440	60,300
Plumbers	8,230	66,700
Healthcare		
Dental Hygienists	2,060	63,100
Licensed Practical Nurses	7,490	37,200
Lab Technicians	2,800	35,600
Physical Therapy Assistants	1,110	40,600
Radiology Techs	2,220	48,400
Registered Nurses	40,240	55,200
Respiratory Therapists	2,080	45,300
Surgical Techs	1,100	38,700
Installation, Maintenance and Repair		
Aircraft Mechanics	670	52,600
Auto Mechanics	3,360	34,600
Bus/Truck Mechanics	3,590	41,300
Heating and Air Condition Installer	2,680	42,500
Heavy Equipment Mechanics	620	47,700
Public Safety		
Emergency Medical Technicians	3,780	26,700
Fire Fighters	7,140	41,700
Police Officers	9,200	59,900
Transportation		
Air Traffic Controllers	420	134,700
Heavy Truck Drivers	22,640	38,500
Other		
Claims Adjusters	2,330	51,300
Legal Secretaries	4,180	39,400
Machinist	5,670	34,100
Mechanical Drafters	1,040	42,500
Paralegals	1,980	43,900

This report focuses on obtaining access to six of these thirty occupations:

- Licensed Practical Nurse/Registered Nurse
- Auto Mechanic
- Police Officer
- Heavy Truck Driver
- Carpentry

² *State of the Workforce*, Workforce Board of Northern Cook County, April 2009.

The guiding questions are:

Can a student get information and access entry into one of these six middle-skill occupations while at ETHS?

and

What are the training and education opportunities for students who have completed high school without engaging in in-school programs, or for those who have dropped out of high school?

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Education and training programs that prepare individuals for middle-skill entry-level positions are at secondary and post-secondary two-year institutions, six-month proprietary school certificate programs, as well as community-based programs. Some provide remediation and GED preparation, while others prepare students for four-year college degree pursuit. Most have credit transfer systems and provide internship opportunities and job placement services. The two primary middle-skill education and training facilities for Evanston residents are Evanston Township High School and Oakton Community College.

Evanston Township High School

The Applied Sciences and Technology Department at Evanston Township High School creates and facilitates vocational education curricula mostly to that part of the student body interested in entering the work force directly after high school. The mission of the Department is to provide students with real-world career and job-related skills so they can successfully pursue post-secondary options upon graduation.

The Applied Sciences and Technology Department is built around the Career Pathways Program, a program of study that prepares students for career opportunities in five broad career strands: Arts and Communication, Business/Management and Information Systems, Health Science/Human Services, Industry/Engineering, and Environmental/Natural Resources.

Within each career strand students are able to pursue an area of interest that could lead to a four-year college or university, community college or technical school, an apprenticeship program, or directly into a career choice upon graduation from ETHS. Career Pathways introduces students to career areas through course work and on-site work experiences. Introductory courses called "Smart Labs" equip students with all the materials, tools, and equipment they need to investigate a career area. Computer-based activities simulate career skills while integrating the academic core areas of math, science, language arts, social science, and visual arts. The Career Pathways curriculum is developed around the Illinois state mandated Career Cluster Framework. The Illinois Career Cluster Model has five levels:

- a) Essential Knowledge and Skills
- b) Career and Technical Education Areas
- c) Career Cluster
- d) Career Pathways
- e) Programs of Study

This model offers the knowledge and skills required to complete a program of study that leads to a community college and/or university, and provides students with opportunities for certification and degree attainment.³ Areas of study and curriculum development in the Career Cluster Framework are informed by Department of Labor jobs and occupations forecast.

- **Licensed Practical Nurse/Registered Nurse:** *Health Sciences* is a Career Pathways program, open to juniors and seniors, that prepares students for two-year nursing programs and offers the option of participating in the Presbyterian Homes Certified Nursing Assistant training program (free tuition). Students are then prepared to transfer to a two-year LPN program or four-year RN program with the credits they earned while still in high school. ETHS has a partnership with NorthShore University Health Systems where students “shadow” health professionals in various departments twice a week.
- **Auto Mechanic:** *Transportation* is offered as a series of courses in the Career Pathways curriculum. Classes offered are Auto Maintenance, Automotive Technology I, Automotive Technology II, and Industry/Engineering Practicum. This set of courses prepares a student for further training, not directly for the job market.
- **Police Officer:** *Introduction to Public Safety* is designed specifically for junior and senior students interested in exploring three public safety career areas: fire, police, and emergency medical services. This course is offered in partnership with the Evanston Police and Fire Departments and Oakton Community College. Students earn two Applied Science and Technology credits and six Oakton credits. Oakton credits can be applied toward either a Fire Science or Law Enforcement A.S. degree or a certificate program.
- **Heavy Truck Driver:** ETHS does not have a program.
- **Carpentry:** ETHS does not have a program.

Added to the Applied Sciences and Technology curriculum at ETHS in 2006, *Project Lead the Way* is four-year sequence of project-based pre-engineering courses which, when combined with college preparatory mathematics and science courses in high school, introduces students to the scope, rigor and discipline of engineering and engineering technology prior to entering college. “While not all students enrolled in *Project Lead the Way* classes will go on to pursue careers and educational tracks in engineering, the hands-on project and problem-based approach motivates some young people to continue with mechanical drafting courses at the high school. These skills will help them be prepared for two-year programs in manufacturing and design fields,” says Shelley Gates, Chair of the Applied Sciences and Technology Department at ETHS.

Oakton Community College

Oakton Community College is a state-supported two-year institution serving residents of northern Cook County. Oakton has offices in ETHS and helps student transfer from high school to their programs. Oakton offers over 35 career programs, but are they the programs prospective students are interested in? If not, can they connect students to those programs in another community college?

³ www.workforceinfo.state.il.us

- **Licensed Practical Nurse/Registered Nurse:** Associate Degree Nursing curriculum prepares the student for a position as a registered nurse in a variety of health care settings. The program is approved by the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, Board of Nursing, and is accredited by the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission. Students who successfully complete the first year of the Associate Degree Nursing curriculum may select the option of enrolling in NUR 151. Upon completion of this course, students receive the Practical Nurse certificate and are eligible to apply for the National Council Licensure Examination for Practical Nurses (LPN). Tuition for this program is approximately \$3,000 a year.
- **Auto Mechanic:** Oakton does not offer a degree program for this occupation. They do offer an Automotive Technology (Apprenticeship), designed for people already working in the field, which fulfills the requirements of the U.S. Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training for related instruction in this highly skilled trade. Students who complete the related automotive apprenticeship instruction and on-the-job training receive a certificate. Tuition for this program is approximately \$1,500 part-time for four years. Students who are interested in an entry-level auto mechanic program must attend another community college, such as Truman Community College in Chicago*.
- **Police Officer:** Oakton offers an Associate in Applied Science Law Enforcement Degree. This requires 60 semester credit hours to complete. Tuition for this program is approximately \$3,000 per year full-time. A certificate (30 semester hours) is also available, and required for most entry-level positions as a security officer.
- **Heavy Truck Driver:** Oakton does not have this program.*
- **Carpentry:** Oakton does not have this program.*

Proprietary Schools/Apprenticeship Programs

In addition to Oakton Community College, well over 30 certificate programs exist in proprietary schools, for-profit educational institutions offering training for specific occupations within the defined region. These programs train and prepare individuals for employment in the middle-skill job sector. Most of the programs for heavy truck driving and auto mechanic jobs exist within these schools. More information on the efficacy of these programs is provided later in this report.

Access to carpentry programs and other middle-skill trades are mainly found through union apprentice and community-based programs.

* If a program not offered at a student's district community college is offered at another out of district state supported two-year institution, students can enroll in that program at their home-district tuition rate. This can present barriers of transportation. Students need to have knowledge of such an option.

Heavy Truck Driving

Drivers of trucks designed to carry 26,000 pounds or more--including most tractor-trailers, as well as bigger straight trucks--must obtain a commercial driver's license (CDL). All truck drivers who operate trucks transporting hazardous materials must obtain a CDL, regardless of truck size. In order to receive the hazardous materials endorsement, a driver must be fingerprinted and submit to a criminal background check by the Transportation Security Administration.

In reviewing the requirements listed to be admitted to truck driving school, it is apparent that there are some significant potential barriers to high school dropouts or graduates. For example, trainees must be 21 for many of the potential positions; they cannot have had their driver's license suspended; and they must have three forms of ID.

Blue Horizon Truck Driving School

5926 S. Pulaski
Chicago, IL

Currently, **Bulldog Driving School** offers Class A-CDL only, which is the highest CDL possible. Students can obtain endorsements like double and triple, tankers, hazmat, passenger, etc. Most of these endorsements are written tests only. Tuition costs and job placement services were not specified on their website. Calls to the school were not returned.

Progressive Truck Driving School, Inc.

5538 W. Belmont
Chicago, IL 60641

According to their website, the school is dedicated to help graduates find a secure position in one of their affiliate truck companies. Students participate in job counseling sessions given by the school's instructors and recruiters from many different companies. The school asserts that it has a strong working relationship with several top trucking companies in the industry. Calls to this school were also not returned.

Union Apprenticeship/Community-Based Programs

Carpentry

Carpentry is among the trades-related middle-skill occupations for which apprenticeship is still the main portal of entry into the profession. An apprentice is someone who is learning a trade by working under the guidance of skilled journeymen. Apprentices earn while they learn and are paid a wage from the first day of being hired by contractor. Apprentices usually start at about 40 percent of the skilled journeyman's rate of pay. Apprentices' wages are increased at periodic intervals until their wages are up to 80 percent of the journeyman's rate--usually the last year of 2-4 years training.

The Chicago Regional Council of Carpenters / Carpenter Local Union 1539

2510 E Dempster #204
Des Plaines, IL 60016

The Carpenters Apprentice and Training Program at the Carpenter Training Center provides training for 40,000 Pre-Apprentice, Apprentice, and Journeyman Union Carpenters in the central region of the Chicago Regional Council of Carpenters (CRCC). The Chicago Regional counties are Cook, DuPage, Grundy,

Iroquois, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will.

Eligible applicants must be at least 17 years old, reside within the jurisdiction of the Apprenticeship program, have an original Social Security card or a receipt showing an application for a duplicate card, be physically fit to work at the trade, and have successfully completed appropriate requirements at an accredited high school or have a GED.

Doug Lid, Director of Programs for the Carpenter Training Center, said that they do not have an effective means of reaching high school age and just out of high school young people. Most apprentices come through Worknet centers or come from a family of tradespeople that provides the connection to the training.

Chicago Women In Trades

4425 South Western Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60609

Chicago Women in Trades provides training and access to apprenticeship programs for women ages 18 and older interested in entering “non-traditional” vocational trade careers.

Community Builders

Church Street Village
1623 Church Street
Evanston, IL 60201

Community Builders of Evanston, LLC, is a local not-for-profit that hires youth from the West Evanston neighborhood and trains them in the construction trades. These young men learn numerous skills on the job and receive group and individual on-the-job training, including GED test preparation and GED attainment. However, this program is relatively informal and does not provide union training.

EMPLOYMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

To get a sense of job availability and the specific skill sets employers are looking for, interviews were conducted with employers in the Evanston-North Chicago area that provide job opportunities in three of the five projected high growth middle-skill industries; Health Care (LPN and RN), Public Safety (Police Officer), and Construction (Carpenters).

Evanston Hospital: NorthShore University Health System

2650 Ridge Ave.
Evanston, IL 60201

Evanston Hospital employs over 2,500 nursing professionals in the hospital and various NorthShore University Health Systems affiliated clinics and programs. Enzi Guanine, Director of Nurse Recruitment for Evanston Hospital says, “We do most of our recruiting from nursing programs and through professional organizations, but our strongest applicants, those that have stayed the longest and have just been great, are those referred by other nurses. The most difficult positions to fill are specialty areas like IV

therapy...or night shift, or off-shift positions. We have learned to be creative in our shift scheduling in order for people to get their needs met.”

She estimates about 35-40% of the nursing staff come from the Evanston, Skokie, northern suburbs and the north side of Chicago area. “We have great nursing programs in our geographic reach that turn out really qualified nurses. Colleges like UIC, Oakton and the City Colleges (Chicago Community Colleges) all have been good resources.” She adds, “We do also have a great deal of foreign born staff that have had to attend programs for US accreditation.”

Cari Natolicky, Director of Human Resources, says they rely on technology to recruit and screen applicants by posting positions on the NorthShore.org website: “We really don’t have physically posted job descriptions any more. We do send announcements out to trade publications like Nursing Spectrum (an online resource magazine). All applicants are encouraged to visit the website, log in, find openings and apply on-line.” She adds, “Nursing positions are not hard to fill. Evanston Hospital has wonderful benefits and pleasant working conditions. We support continuing education and provide incentives for LPN to RN attainment. I believe to date about 60% of our LPN’s take advantage of that program...and we are constantly hiring. We are always looking for qualified people for our nursing team and positions get filled very quickly. Nursing is a very competitive profession.”

Both Ms. Guanine and Ms. Netolicky agree that in addition to basic nursing skills learned in their educational programs with and/or acquired through on-the-job training, such general skills such as the ability to clearly and effectively communicate, ability to follow directions and solve problems, ability to work under extreme pressure, and a great deal of empathy are the most important qualities a nurse working at Evanston Hospital can possess.

City of Evanston Police Department

1454 Elmwood Ave.
Evanston, IL 60201

The Evanston Police Department employs over 150 entry-level law enforcement officials. Applicants must be between 21 and 35 years old (unless currently certified as a full-time Illinois Police Officer), a citizen of the United States, a high school graduate with an Associates Degree or 60 semester hours of college credit, and a licensed driver. In addition to meeting the basic requirements, to become an Evanston Police Officer, an individual must successfully complete a written exam, oral interview, polygraph test, and an extensive physical exam.

Neighboring Chicago and Skokie police departments have similar requirements. Skokie employs somewhat more than 200 entry-level law enforcement officials, while the City of Chicago employs over 13,000, although none of the three departments are accepting applications or hiring new recruits at this time.

The City of Evanston has no residency requirement. Skokie requires residency in Cook, Lake, or DuPage County within 24 months from hire. For the Chicago Police Department, proof of residency will be required at the time of employment but is not required during the application and testing process. Evanston’s lack of residency requirement represents a disadvantage for Evanston residents, because the potential pool of applicants for Evanston positions is much larger.

Get Dwell

523 Green Bay Road
Wilmette, Illinois 60091

Get Dwell is a Wilmette-based home handyman, maintenance and repair service serving Chicago and the North Shore. The company specializes in a range of services, from fine carpentry to drywall work, and from plumbing leaks to preventative home maintenance.

Get Dwell employs eight skilled tradespeople on a “project need basis.” “Although I am a union tradesperson, my guys are not. A lot of my guys come to me from other careers as teachers or graphic designers,” says Daryl Rose, owner of Get Dwell. “They realized they had a talent to work with their hands and have perfected it over the years. Some of my guys learned skills from their dads or an uncle. We work in a lot of upscale homes in Chicago and the North Shore so I need my guys to be very professional and respectful. Ninety percent of my work comes from referrals.”

Although job projections for the industry point to a lot of growth, his business has taken a hit in the downturn of the economy over the last year. “People just don’t have money to put into their houses these days,” he says. “And they are hesitant to over improve with the housing market so bad. Two years ago I was constantly working. I had all my guys on projects and was scrambling to hire more. Now I’ve cut the guys back. I think it will turn around soon.”

Daryl has had to return to school for training in “green build” technologies: “Almost all new construction will be built around green technologies, reducing the impact of housing structures on the environment. It has been incredibly fascinating.” He is sending his employees to programs that teach weatherization techniques as well.

Energy Recovery Technologies

2022 Dempster
Evanston, IL 60202

Ron Fleckman, President and CEO of Energy Recovery Technologies (ERT), a start-up “green technology” industry in Evanston, says the model of his company is to create an environment that reflects the importance of cultivating and supporting behaviors that enhance an employee’s technical performance. ERT recruits and trains individuals to assemble and install energy system hardware that captures the exhaust of traditional heating and air conditioning units and re-filters energy back into the original structure. ERT hopes to put 250 individuals into the “green economy” in the next 2-5 years.

Currently ERT is training 37 young men and women living in Evanston. Fleckman says, “The biggest challenge now is not the actual technical training, it’s the other stuff...showing up on time, conflict resolution, social skills. We can teach almost any body how to put together a filter system, but how to cope with work when you’re pissed off at home is another matter.”

ERT works closely with Community Builders, an Evanston community-based construction and technical skills training program aimed specifically at young men and women who have not found success at Evanston Township High School. Those young people have either dropped out or graduated, but have found themselves lacking in employable skills. “They (Community Builders) have a pretty extensive job-readiness component that we support,” says Mr. Fleckman. “We are also starting to reach out to Youth

Job Center, Oakton Community College, and ETHS to see if there are ways we can work more closely in employing folks from Evanston to work in Evanston. It would be great if folks could walk or ride their bikes to work, decreasing our impact on the environment.”

SOFT SKILLS

The “soft-skills” described by Mr. Fleckman and other employers in this research-- those skills that lie outside of specialized technical skill required for specific middle-skill jobs, but seem to be just as important when evaluating employability--have been identified as “The Seven Survival Skills for the Twenty-First Century Workforce” by The Partnership for 21st Centuries Skills⁴:

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Collaboration and leading by influence
- Adaptability
- Initiative and entrepreneurship
- Effective oral and written communication
- Ability to analyze information
- Creativity

These “core competencies” are described as attributes that transcend the actual work involved in being competitive for jobs and point to general behavioral attributes that make one successful in the world of work, and in life. The Partnership has advocated for integrating the Survival Skills into core math and science, literature, and social studies curriculum as a national educational standard.

Sacella Smith, Executive Director of Youth Job Center in Evanston also sees the importance of soft-skills training in workforce development. Smith says, “We serve about 1,400 individuals annually. A large number of our clients certainly take advantage of the Job Readiness training as well as the Employer Expectations workshops. We work with over 50 employers in and around Evanston and the employers we work with trust that the clients we refer have a basic set of social and behavioral skills that will promote their employment: that they will show up on time, be willing to learn new things, have communication skills and show enthusiasm.”

“But more than anything,” says Jennifer Stasch, Executive Director of the Workforce Board of Northern Cook County, “employers are looking for employees with passion for the job. It seems the best way to make an individual marketable is to prepare them for what *they* want to do, not what *we* want them to do. Young people who have discovered their passion are far more likely to have the will and discipline to learn and do the difficult things school and work often require.”

BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT AND SUCCESS

Business, education and community leaders continue to grapple with labor shortages, under enrollment in programs and issues of unemployment. What are some of the factors contributing to these dilemmas?

⁴ Partnership for 21st Century Skills, *The Seven Survival Skills for the Twenty-First Century Workforce: A Framework*, <http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/documents.pdf>

Inadequate Communication of Information

Shelley Gates, Chair of the ETHS Applied Sciences and Technology Department, feels more students would take advantage of her department's programs if they were fully aware of what was offered: "Although programs exist, students and their families are just not aware of them; teachers and counselors don't have these programs on their radar to introduce to students as an option."

"Applied Sciences and Technology course offerings are not given the same attention during Freshman Orientation," stated the mother of a first-year student at ETHS. "During orientation you are bombarded with information about college entrance exams, test-prep dates, required courses for college, college application assistance...if they did talk about anything non-college it must have been for about two seconds and got lost in college speak."

Another parent of a high school freshman stated that her son was very interested in some type of carpentry and/or mechanical engineering program. Up until this year he was convinced he was not going to college after high school. He expressed this desire to his parents, who fully supported him, but found it difficult to find out about programs at the high school. He was placed in the AVID program at the high school, which provides support to mid-range students toward college preparation. While the student saw the value of this program for students who truly did want to go to college, he felt this program was not meeting his needs. He did eventually find out about an Applied Sciences and Technology Open House given in December of the academic year. He reported that up until then, he had not heard about Project LeadTheWay or any other options that might be more appealing to him. His mother was completely unaware of the program as well. She stated, "We got so much information at orientation. It mostly had to do with testing dates and curriculum requirements for colleges. I barely remember anything else."

The ETHS College and Career Center serves as a resource for students to explore *all* post-secondary education and training options. Michelle Vazquez, Post Secondary Counselor at the Center stated, "The ETHS website is an excellent resource for finding school and career information. I can look and see who has gone on to the site and who has looked at what information. 80% of the users are parents and they are mainly going on to the college resource site. You can also access *Career Cruising* on the website. This program is a career aptitude assessment introduced to Sophomores during AVID class. It used to be during Home Base⁵, but they cut that program."

When asked why freshman were not introduced to *Career Cruising* she said, "They really just are not ready. Freshman year seems to be spent just getting used to high school. They aren't thinking beyond that." She added, "My experience has been that students don't think of or take advantage of the Applied Sciences programs so much because they just don't know what is available or they are getting family pressure to stay on a more academic course."

When asked what would be the best way to get information to students she said, "I think the best way is through their teachers or counselors; they are the ones who know the students best and can tell who might benefit from what." I also asked her if she talks to students about proprietary schools. She shook her head saying, "Those are pretty tricky. I tell students in general, if it's advertised on TV then it's probably a rip off."

⁵ Home Base was a class period where students stayed with the same group of kids through out the year. They were provided information on relevant school and life issues during this period.

A guidance counselor at ETHS reported that she sometimes feels overwhelmed by what information she is required to give her students: "...There is a lot of pressure to support kids in pursuing four-year college opportunities. And unless a kid is seriously failing or in big trouble, a lot of things might just slip by, I'm embarrassed to say."

The mother of a student recently graduated from ETHS remembers her and her sons' experience with the College and Career Center as "...basically a waste of time. We had forty-five minutes in his junior year to meet with his counselor. I knew more about options through my own research than she did."

This researcher's own experience at the College and Career center was that the conversation almost always veered to four-year college opportunities, even if the initial question was directed at accessing information for students not going to a four-year college or university.

The access to information for students already out of school might be even narrower. However, there are a number of online sites for educational support and for job seekers. Television commercials advertise certificate and two-year degree programs available through proprietary schools and on line universities. The Youth Job Center and Department of Employment Security/WorkNet offices provide access to training and education program databases, as does the public library.

Perceptions: Students, Parents, Educators, and Employers

The major "road block" to connecting students to middle-skill job opportunities is the *perception* of both middle skill-jobs and the education and training required to access these jobs. For many people, blue-collar jobs-- jobs that are perceived to require less mental fortitude because of the lack of formal education required to access them-- are of lesser value. Quite simply, middle-skill jobs and vocational education lack prestige in our society.

Evanston Township High School is a "college-prep" high school, which means the expressed academic goal is for...

"All students (to) complete an educational program that meets the requirements for admission to an Illinois public college or university."

Martha Stark, Executive Director of NServe, an organization focused on connecting in-school youth to vocational, trade, and technology-based career options stated, "Any high school principal who doesn't claim one hundred percent college attendance is going to be accused of having low expectations. He will be run out of town by indignant parents quicker than you can imagine. Too much emphasis in general is put on where a child goes to school, versus why a child goes to school. The pervasive and unspoken belief that any pursuit of education or training not leading to a four year college degree and a white collar profession is a second rate educational option, the subtext being that those who choose to be skilled tradespeople or pursue non traditional careers are not capable of other types of educational training."

Shelley Gates contends there are a fair number of students and families that are aware of Applied Science and Technology programs but do not take advantage because of the stigma attached to these programs.

A 23-year-old young man participating in our focus group thought the vocational education track at the high school might have been a more appropriate choice for him but viewed that choice as "a loser's"

option. He has been out of high school for five years now, and is struggling to find meaningful long-term employment that will provide enough income to support his family. He states, "I did know some about the Applied Sciences classes but I didn't really take them. I kind of thought those kids were losers. Everyone talks about college all the time. What colleges they will go to...those things have a lot of prestige at ETHS. If you say you're not going or you really just don't know what you're going to do you are treated like a freak. So you just don't say anything."

Another perspective on this issue has its roots in a very difficult issue—perceptions in some minds that academic tracking is based on race at ETHS. At a recent community meeting to address employment opportunities for youth in Evanston, the topic of vocational education was raised. Opponents to vocational education as an option mainly for students clearly not on a four-year college track voiced strong opposition. "As we know those students in most need are overwhelmingly black," stated one community member. "We are so quick to give up on those students and push them into vocational programs, instead of supporting them on a more academic track. If it were up to a lot of white folks here in Evanston, all our black kids would be in vocational programs."

Jennifer Stasch, Executive Director of the Workforce Board of Northern Cook County, believes young people do not realize the economics of life: "They see these reality shows where people their age are living in really nice apartments in big cities and wearing really nice clothes. They have no concept of what the rent on that apartment might be, let alone the costs of transportation, utilities, groceries. They have a media-influenced life style charted for themselves but no understanding of what type of income they will need to support that life style. And mind you, no one on those shows is a carpenter or plumber. If young people were prepared with information about the *real* cost of living, they just might make different educational and professional choices."

One employer reported that the perception others have about the work his people do still affects them. "When I was doing construction management I was on a job with a guy that had a new girlfriend. He had a date that night and was worried about getting home to get cleaned up in time. He said 'I don't want her to see I've been working with my hands all day', and this guy is making almost thirty dollars an hour."

Effectiveness of Community College, Proprietary School, and Training/Apprenticeship Programs

According to the Department of Education, only 29% of Oakton students received financial aid. In addition, after the first year of attendance, there is a 44% transfer out rate, and only 9% completed their degree or certification in 'normal time' or within two or four years given the program of study.

Proprietary schools present a problem in that some are not accredited. Individuals interested in attending a driving school should check with local trucking companies to make sure the school's training is acceptable. The Professional Truck Driver Institute (PTDI), a nonprofit organization established by the trucking industry, certifies driver-training courses at truck driver training schools that meet industry standards and Federal Highway Administration guidelines for training tractor-trailer drivers.

The accreditation status for proprietary schools is very difficult to determine for a few reasons according to information from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC): 1) the accreditation process is voluntary, 2) accreditation entities are non-governmental, and 3) the accreditation depends on peer

evaluation⁶. Although most schools do offer financial aid, they are not required to track or report aid rates or classifications (such as race, gender, income status) of recipients.

Unfortunately, some institutions claim accreditation from agencies like the Association of Online Academic Excellence, the World Association of Universities and Colleges, and the Association of Private Colleges and Universities. These organizations are not recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or the U.S. Department of Education, the only two governmentally sanctioned higher education accrediting agencies in the United States. ERIC cautions students to not be misled by organizations not recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as accrediting agencies. Because the schools are not required by federal regulation to report, it is difficult to obtain information on graduation and job placement rates for most proprietary schools as well.

Entry into apprenticeship programs for all trades, including, electrical, plumbing and construction, requires certain skills sets such as an aptitude for math, physical ability, and the ability to work with your hands. However, the most commonly acknowledged barrier to entry into the trades is not knowing someone already in the trade union to sponsor an individual as an apprenticeship. While some young people have made the decision to “informally” apprentice with a tradesperson who may be a close friend or relative in order to learn a skilled trade and seek employment, there is limited opportunity for career growth and salary increase with this entry path. Individuals and companies are reluctant to hire non-union tradespeople due to liability and questionable skill level issues.

Organizations such as Chicago Women In Trades are making concerted efforts to make sure young women and minorities have access to pre-apprenticeship programs and union training programs through increased community outreach and policy advocacy. With new monies made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, incentives for increased inclusion of minority youth in green-build technology training provide an opportunity for schools and community based programs to work more closely with unions in creating access to training and jobs.

CONCLUSION

Over 55,000 middle-skill sector jobs are projected to be available in the northern Cook County region within the next few years. There are very real barriers to young people accessing these jobs due to issues of accessibility and quality of programs, perceptions about these jobs and training, and an inadequate transfer of information.

It is our hope that this research and report is the first step in a community-wide discussion and development of strategies to change perceptions about middle-skills jobs and training, improve communication about the opportunities available, and improve success for our young people. We propose some initial ideas for discussion:

- Change our terminology
- Develop soft skills
- Start earlier with career discussions
- Better track students’ post-secondary paths

⁶ <http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/>

- Create collaborative community efforts to support students in their pursuit of middle skills training and jobs

Support for, access to, and availability of quality educational, training, and apprenticeship opportunities must be made more readily available for young people in order to prepare them for these jobs and to be competitive in the 21st Century job market. Evanston can be a model community for helping all of our young people become successful adults, no matter what their chosen path.

RESOURCES

LOCAL/REGIONAL

City of Evanston

2100 Ridge Ave,
Evanston, IL 60201

Cam Herth, Summer Youth Employment Program
866-2920

Sol Anderson, Youth Coordinator, Youth Job Program/ City-School Liaison Employment Team
847-448-8049

Evanston Township High School

Applied Sciences and Technology Department
Shelley Gates, Chair
gatess@eths.k12.il.us

College and Career Center
Michelle Vazquez, Post Secondary Counselor
847-424-7163
vazquezm@eths.k12.il.us

Illinois Student Assistance Commission

1755 Lake Cook Road
Deerfield, IL 60015
1-800-899-47222
collegezone.com
WhatsNextIllinois.org

ISAC assist students and families in accessing financial aid and scholarship opportunities

NSERVE: Connecting Academics to the World of Work

Martha Eldredge Stark, Executive Director
1131 S. Dee Road, Park Ridge, IL 6006
847-692-8023
www.nserve.info

NSERVE is a Career and Technical Education consortium of nine high schools in the northern suburbs of Chicago, representing approximately 24,000 secondary students.

Skills2Compete Illinois Campaign

www.Skills2Compete.org/Illinois

Workforce Board of Northern Cook County

Jennifer Stasch, Executive Director
2604 E. Dempster, Suite 305
Park Ridge, IL 60068
847-699-9195 x140

Workforce Board of Northern Cook County maximizes the investment of American Recovery and Investment Act funds in upgrading the education and skills of the workforce and creates linkages to high quality job opportunities. The Workforce Board also has a Youth Council whose mandate is to align individuals from programs, policy, and private industry to work toward “...*a comprehensive, unified youth development system that equips each and every youth with the work values, career skills, and the commitment to lifelong learning that is necessary to enter satisfying and productive adult roles at home, in the community, and in the workplace.*”

Youthfutures

A program of Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago, an on-line directory of more than 1,000 providers of services and programs in 20 categories, including educational opportunities, healthcare services, literacy programs, and food assistance. Designed to complement, not duplicate, the services of One-Stop Centers, as it offers a list of closest resources for individual services.

www.youthfuturesmetro.com

Youth Job Center

Sacella Smith, Executive Director
1114 Church Street
Evanston, IL 60201
847-864-5627

www.youthjobcenter.org

Youth Job Center helps youth ages 14 to 25 obtain and maintain employment, increase income potential, gain meaningful work experiences, develop professional skills and behavior, and enhance feelings of independence, confidence, and self-worth.

NATIONAL

Partnership for 21st Century Skills

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills is a national organization that advocates for the integration of skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and communication into the teaching of core academic subjects such as mathematics, reading, science and history. The Partnership brings together education leaders, the business community and policy-makers to ensure every child graduates prepared for life and work.

www.21stcenturyskills.org

The Workforce Alliance

The Workforce Alliance (TWA) is a national coalition of community-based organizations, community colleges, unions, business leaders and local officials advocating for public policies that invest in the skills of America's workers, so they can better support their families and help American businesses better compete in today's economy.

www.workforcealliance.org

YouthBuild USA

YouthBuild programs target low-income young people ages 16–24, assist in working toward their GED or high school diploma while learning job skills by building affordable housing for homeless and low-income people. Strong emphasis is placed on leadership development and community service.
www.youthbuild.org

READING

Shop Class As Soulcraft: An Inquiry Into the Value of Work. By Matthew B. Crawford

The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach The New Survival Skills Our Children Need- And What We Can Do About It. By Tony Wagner

"New Data on D202 College Attendance Puts Focus on Post-Secondary Planning"

By Jennie Berkson

Evanston RoundTable 2/16/2010

"D202 Increases Opportunities In Applied Sciences"

By Jennie Berkson

Evanston RoundTable 12/23/2009

FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Literacy and Early-Childhood Education

When considering “soft skills” as core competencies in assessing job preparedness, we must look at how the attainment of literacy skills (the process of attaining reading, writing, speaking, listening, and analytical skills), through formal (school and professional) and informal (social/peer and familial) settings, articulate themselves in the workplace.

An individual’s success or failure in the academic world relies heavily on the ability to acquire literacy skills in the classroom setting. In the United States, how an individual is able to adjust to school literacy practices identifies them as academic successes or failures. However, an individual’s first experience with literacy comes even before the first classroom experience; they begin in the home. Individuals with home literacy experiences that do not mirror classroom literacy practices begin their academic career at a grave disadvantage.

Impact of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

The Recovery Act includes \$1,200,000,000 WIA Youth Employment & training, including summer jobs. Illinois' share will be \$62,831,717. Particular emphasis is placed on creating summer employment opportunities for youth, but year-round youth activities are also envisioned. The Recovery Act has raised the age eligibility for youth service from 21 to 24. Youth participants must be low income and have substantial barriers to employment such as: basic literacy skills deficiency; school dropout; homeless; runaway or foster child; pregnant or parenting; an offender; or require additional assistance to complete an educational program or secure and hold employment. Services include tutoring, mentoring, study skills training, and instruction leading to completion of secondary school.

A programs such as YouthBuild, which targets low-income young people ages 16–24 and assists them in working toward their GED or high school diploma while learning job skills in the construction trades can serve as a model for middle skill job preparedness and job creation.

Further exploration as to the efficacy of the program and the feasibility of program duplication (or duplication of elements of the program) in the Evanston/Northern Cook County region should be of consideration as we develop strategies to not just prepare individuals for the workforce, but partner with businesses and companies to create jobs in our community.

ONE FINAL NOTE

Can't afford to cut career, tech funding

Letter to the editor

Published: 1/3/2010

Chicago Daily Herald

In the next decade, a large percentage of jobs in Illinois - 41 percent - will be at the "middle skill" level, requiring more education than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor's degree. What are these middle skills jobs? They come in a wide range of industries and occupations including engineering technicians, health care professionals (nurses, dental hygienists, radiological technicians, etc.),

paralegals, automotive technicians, first-line construction managers, heating and air conditioning repairers and many more, offering annual salaries that can reach as much as \$70,000.

Community colleges are a major pathway to these occupations. But despite the real opportunities that will emerge in the economy for these middle skill jobs, significant obstacles must be overcome to ensure students can access them. Academic programs must be kept current to meet evolving industry needs. High school and college dropout rates must be lowered. Students must be better prepared for the academic requirements of knowledge-based mid-level skill jobs.

State and federal programs like Career and Technical Education Information (CTEI), the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act and Partnership for College and Career Success (formerly Tech Prep) are important to overcoming these obstacles. These programs fund initiatives to develop and revise curriculum, provide professional development for faculty and purchase equipment and software vital to ensuring that career programs remain current and match real-world business and industry needs. Additionally, these programs also provide an important source of funding for services to students aimed at increasing graduation rates, reducing dropout rates and enabling a seamless transition from high school to college.

This year, Illinois high schools and community colleges will receive \$105.7 million in state and federal funding for career and technical education programs. This funding is critical to maintaining quality academic programs to prepare students for careers that can support a middle-class lifestyle. But despite the importance of these programs, funding for them has been on the chopping block. During budget deliberations for the current fiscal year, state funding for the CTEI program was threatened with total elimination. The funding was only restored to last year's levels because the cut would have resulted in Illinois losing an additional \$48.9 million in federal funds for career and technical education. The threat for drastic cuts still looms large for next year, as the state faces an even more dire revenue picture.

As the governor and legislators begin next year's difficult budget deliberations, the Illinois Community College Trustees Association will strongly urge them to keep career and technical education as strong priorities. Given the importance of mid-skills jobs to our state's students and economy, we cannot afford cuts in these vital programs.

Barbara D. Oilschlager
President
Illinois Community College Trustees Association
Vice Chairman
College of Lake County Board of Trustees