



Doc H's Blog

**Kentucky Education Commissioner
Terry Holliday**



January 17, 2014

Elevating and integrating career and tech ed

In a few weeks, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) will release findings from a study of our career and technical education programs. KDE requested the Southern Region Education Board (SREB) study pursuant to recent legislation that merged the former Office of Career and Technical Education within the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet with our local Carl Perkins programs in the Department of Education. It was important for the department to have an independent outside voice make key findings and recommendations on how to elevate and integrate career and technical education in the Commonwealth. Once we report the findings, we will ask the House and Senate Education chairs to provide time either during session or during the interim period to review the findings and recommendation from the report.

Why do we want to elevate and integrate career and technical education in Kentucky? The simple answer is that we need to do a better job preparing and advising students for the career options that are available in Kentucky and the United States. While some of these jobs will require 4-year degrees, the vast majority of jobs that pay a living wage require 1-year technical or 2-year associate degrees.

A few years ago, I read a book titled "The Coming Jobs War" by Jim Clifton. Mr. Clifton provides projections that globally, more than 3 billion people are looking for jobs that pay a living wage; there are currently only 1.2 billion such jobs. That leaves a gap of 1.8 billion jobs.

U.S. companies are more and more internationally based. They will place their companies where they can find a qualified work force at the lowest cost. Nations who are surpassing the U.S. on international tests like PISA and TIMSS are most certainly focused on increasing the talent pool so they can attract more economic development and more jobs. International test scores do impact the economy.

We have already seen many jobs losses in our country. The loss of U.S. jobs has affected our adult population; however, the biggest impact is in our 18-24 year-old population. Too many of these young people lack the skills required for 21st century jobs. The unemployment rate for the 18-24 year-old group is double that of the general population (15 percent vs. 7.3 percent). When you breakout the data by subgroups, we find that black males, 18-24 years old, have an unemployment rate that exceeds 30 percent. The vast majority of these young people graduated from high school. When you look at high school dropouts, the numbers of unemployed greatly increase.

Why are so many young people unemployed and underemployed? The reasons are clear.

1. More than 50 percent of employers state that these young people do not have the skills for the jobs that are available. There are more than 3.2 million jobs unfilled in the U.S. -- many in manufacturing and health care. These jobs are unfilled because employers cannot find candidates with the skills needed. Many of these jobs require only 1-year technical or 2-year associate degrees.

2. Our students do not receive adequate career counseling and they make poor career decisions. Too often our students enter career studies where very few jobs exist and pass over career studies that have job openings. Too often we hear stories of students who graduate from a 4-year college and are unable to find a job in their chosen area so they take a low-paying and low-skills job. We also hear the opposite – an employer has numerous openings for jobs that pay a living wage and cannot find applicants who are qualified.

Career and technical education must be elevated and integrated into P-12 education in Kentucky.

- We must raise it to a level equal to college or academic preparation.
- We must do a better job of advising students on what jobs are available and then matching them to their career interest through a career pathway.
- We must integrate career and technical education through new delivery models that integrate CTE and academic requirements in full day programs that do not require lost time in transportation between programs.
- We must eliminate career and technical programs that are out-of-date and do not have positive job prospects.
- We must start new career and technical programs based on local and regional industry needs.
- We must communicate and collaborate with industry to create model programs like our Advance Manufacturing program in Scott County with Toyota.
- We must update facilities and equipment in our career and technical programs to help prepare students for the high-tech and high-skills jobs.

As we roll out the findings and recommendations from the Southern Region Education Board, I hope readers will help communicate the importance of career and technical education throughout the Commonwealth.

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.
Education Commissioner