

# Summary

**“Conversation” of February 17, 2010  
on Career and Technical Education**



THE ALBERT SHANKER INSTITUTE

# Informal Summary – Albert Shanker Institute “Conversation” of February 17, 2010 on Career and Technical Education

Included in this brief summary are ideas on the future of career and technical education (CTE) that emerged during a meeting of experts, foundation executives, union leaders, government officials and elected leaders held February 17, 2010. This unique Conversation was hosted by the Albert Shanker Institute and convened and moderated by Randi Weingarten, President of the Institute and of the American Federation of Teachers. Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, was a special guest. Other participants are listed at the end of this summary.

## Discussion

The moderator offered the discussants two broad questions to frame the discussion:

- What do we want to do – what do we want to see happen?
- How will we do it?

This was an off-the-record meeting, so participants are not identified with comments, except for Randi Weingarten, in her role as moderator. At the same time, this document tries to use staff notes to remain true to the words and opinions that were expressed. The summary is written in an informal style consistent with its purpose.

The compendium is arranged in the following order: First, the moderator’s summary of the meeting’s main conclusions, from her point of view; second, comments that had to do with the big picture surrounding any

potential reform of CTE; third, more specific points organized into theme categories; and finally, suggestions that were put forward for immediate next steps.

Please note that the organization of this document does not place observations or proposals in the same chronological order in which they were made.

## Moderator’s Summary

- High school programs have to provide coursework that is relevant, engaging and interesting and that builds real skills and creates real employment opportunities. Students have to be able to see the education connection to employment down the road;
- We need rigor and a common core curriculum in high school to ensure that every student has mastered the basics. But, if there is a lack of rigor in CTE or CTE becomes de-facto tracking, we will not be successful. Career ready vs. college ready cannot be the direction we take. When students make choices between CTE and college-prep coursework — which they ought to be able to do — they ought to feel pride in either decision. And, CTE ought to be a matter of choice, not a default position;
- We need to figure out how to blend the academic core with CTE, and work-based or project-based experience needs to be part of the mix. There have

been lots of examples of this put forward around the room;

- We need to address the architecture of the program. This means we have to have an accountability system in which multiple pathways using multiple sources (ESEA, Perkins, WIA) answer to coherent standards.
- We need to address a lot of possible linkages and think about who will create them. These may include linkages between community colleges and high schools, but also between community colleges and school buildings as community centers for both kids and adults.

## Broad Perspectives and Reflections from Participants

- CTE is an important issue that has not received prime time – it needs to. And, we need to get it right – whether addressing the drop out problem, giving kids hope, or addressing our need to be economically competitive.
- We need to ramp these programs up so that they are more than just boutique schools or pilot efforts. In two or three years, we should have programs for students such that when they opt for the CTE pathway they will be prepared for a good life.
- This is a huge topic and there is a huge sense of



urgency about it. Kids need both to graduate and to find their place in the world of work. Dramatic change is needed, not tinkering. If we do this right we will help kids, families and the economy.

- We need to think about the barriers to CTE and do something about them. We have Carnegie units, required seat time, etc. We need to establish work-based credits and be able to attack the fundamental design of education in this country so that we can create multiple pathways.
- We don't all agree to everything. It's not as easy as it looks. We can't do everything for everyone. And, we have to identify the barriers – institutional resistance, systemic roadblocks, entrenched interests, for example. We have to reach some consensus about why something isn't changing. We need to know who we should fight with or go to for help. If it were all so obvious and easy we would have done it. The barriers are the commonality. There are barriers within tensions, and entrenched interests don't want change.
- We need to stop doing dumb things and learn how to scale up the good things. There are pockets of excellence out there and we need to figure out how to make them transportable. Other countries that have higher graduation rates than we do place a heavy emphasis on occupational, career and technical training and they are not asking all students to do the same thing. They respect skills as an accomplishment and use multiple measures to test for a variety of results. And their school cultures reward effort, not smartness.

- We need to reframe the question – what is the role of public education and of CTE in it? Public education is supposed to prepare adults for work and life, yet we know that 50% of our students will reach their mid-20's with only a high school degree. And, high school is the last place where the entire bill for schooling is paid. Beyond high school someone else has to pay, yet high school is the new middle school because students really need to go farther.
- We need to shift funding so it is aimed at results. There is something unconvincing about graduation rates at 2 year post-secondary schools as related to GDP growth. Every 1% increase in graduation rates translates into a \$300 billion increase in GDP. Those with high school diplomas are at a 15% unemployment rate and those with college diplomas at a 5% unemployment rate. We need to make the links between academics and jobs clearer to kids.
- For every dollar put into this at the state level we have to cut something. States are already in deficit and those that aren't don't want to be.

### **More Specific Points of Analysis, Fact and Opinion**

#### *Content and Skills*

- We need to focus on the front end and on a core curriculum that will prepare kids for multiple opportunities. If we are only talking about high school then we are too late. In Singapore, they spot the kids who need help early and give them the supports they need. We have to have standards,

and up to a point they have to be the same standards. After that there can be pathways, as long as there is fluidity and there are chances to go back and forth between them and to give more time to the kids who need it, whichever pathway they choose.

- Kids need to be caught before they start to fail. One way is to make them pass a test in third and eighth grades as a requirement for moving on.
- Students need to obtain three things – academic content, generic occupational skills, and the technical skills valued by employers. Some of the technical skills can be learned early and occupational skills are essential – those who don't have them can be fired. So, CTE can easily cover two of the three needs by integrating school-based learning with knowledge about an industry and its jobs and by helping students understand what is required to transition from high school to post high school. The third can be worked on by integrating school subjects with knowledge of an industry or through specific projects.

#### *CTE and Education Reform*

- Because we do not want CTE as a second track, and there are not very many good jobs that do not require a postsecondary education, we need a postsecondary pathway that is not college and is not tracking.
- We need to create a new vision for high school that includes intellectually demanding CTE work. And, kids need more access to CTE. CTE is not



a player in Annual Yearly Progress measures. Too often, it is used to warehouse struggling students separately, who are given a steady diet of test prep and remedial courses. There is also a core conflict of interest in Title I. Most people have the old Title I mindset – reading, math, college-ready. We must create a tested core and also give respect to those who develop skills. At age 16, kids ought to be able to specialize and have the opportunity to spend their last two years on CTE. Right now we have no capacity to do this. We need to find a way for kids to shine in high school in both core academic and occupational areas.

- We need to figure out how to blend high quality academics with careers and technical education. This must mean that CTE is linked to quality academics, and is not a deficit model. We must avoid tracking which demeans kids. So, we have to create a broader concept of what rigor means and a more balanced accountability system in which testing is not the only measure. NCLB makes this harder but we have to create incentives to measure and recognize other skills. And, academics need to be joined with knowledge of careers, occupations and skills into a broader sense of what learning is. Then, preparation for certification exams could be treated the same way as AP courses, for example. Florida, Texas and Virginia are using such certification exams.
- It is possible to have multiple pathways, but with opportunities kept open to change from one to another. We need to provide work-based learning, academics, technical education and the time needed to master all with rigor. But, we cannot

squeeze everything into a shortened day. In the cities kids may be able to master academics through real work – a great anti-tracking strategy.

- There is a danger of creating de facto racial/ethnic/inner city tracks. We have to focus on historic inequalities. For CTE to work and be accepted there must be equal opportunity to learn and it must start much earlier than high school. Kids should not be locked into a track. Then, we need to evaluate kids in 8th and 9th grades so they get what they need and don't have to go through remediation in college. We need to make investments in scaling, but Race to the Top, in which good states get money and others don't, does not make sense.

#### *Models to Consider*

- One response to the drop out rate is to separate technical skills institutes from 4-year schools. There is experience with stand-alone technical schools that has dramatically increased graduation rates – to 97%, for example, and these are for kids that would drop out otherwise. We also need to catch the kids in middle school – early, before failure sets in.
- Studies of Milwaukee youth apprenticeships show high rates of enrollment in technical college or university (75%), completion of degrees (60%) and in the case of job attainment after high school (85%) exceed national averages. In Philadelphia internships for high school kids have proven to be successful. Longitudinal studies of these kids have shown them to have jobs and salaries 6 years out of high school.

- CTE in the high schools can lead to three post-high school routes: certificates, 2-year degrees and apprenticeships. They all require some combination of academics and career training. Apprenticeship openings can be negotiated with unions, state funds can be found, grant programs may be available. Union pension and trust funds can provide leverage for CTE.
- Unions are a post-secondary education resource – especially for those whose jobs are technologically vulnerable or who need technological skills. Online academies are one approach. Job shadowing also has union support. Sometimes these programs have to screen candidates out based on their secondary skills – math, for example – because not having these skills can lead to failure.
- Global competition has brought the attention of some businesses to the dropout problem. Cash grants for programs that are already working are one approach, particularly for those programs that can be brought up to scale. Job shadowing has been particularly successful.
- One way to make CTE more helpful to at-risk kids is to create a highly managed, activity-based, rigorous academic curriculum with real life examples that can also be integrated into a 21st century skills curriculum. Curriculum must have rigor and include entrepreneurship skills, some courses must be a length that can maintain the attention spans of at risk kids, and certifications must be tied to industry standards. Successful examples exist in New York City, Chicago and Miami.



- Possibly we need to think out of the box – maybe give students more evening classes; create an AP equivalent for CTE.
- All kids need exposure to careers and college readiness. Given that we shouldn't have a CTE track, and that CTE shouldn't be siloed, if reform is to succeed CTE can't be an option for just a few; it should be for all.
- States may not want to spend on training at the adult level if they have already invested in K-12 education. But business wants training. So, one way to deal with this is to offer tax breaks or partial tax breaks to business in return for skills training. Doing this may perpetuate the disconnect with K-12 education though, because employers want skills training that is specific to their needs.

#### *Resources and Incentives*

- In inflated dollars the Perkins Act provides 70% less than it did in 1984. Yet it has been used to create shared time technology centers in rural areas where graduation rates are at 95 to 97%. A number of states (West Virginia, Delaware, Maryland) have such schools. They have a unique culture and are outperforming other high schools on state measures.
- States and the federal government must step up to the plate. Governments should support registered apprenticeship programs. They can commingle dollars across budgets. The Workforce Investment Act, for example, could put funds into pre-apprenticeship programs that then lead to apprenticeship programs.
- One way to prod postsecondary institutions to increase their graduation rates is to give them money (50%, for example) based on full time equivalents on the front end, but also later for those who graduate (the other 50%). The graduates also have to meet standards in order for the institutions to get the support.

#### **Suggestions for Immediate next Steps**

- In concluding, Randi Weingarten said that if there was basic agreement on the summary then we should also put together a "compendium" of the ideas that had been presented. She suggested that we come up with an agenda based on models that work and that are aligned with the jobs the economy is most likely to create. She urged that such models be scalable and transferable.
- A number of participants suggested that leaders would be needed to move this agenda and that the education sector would be key to defining a CTE approach that is not second class. For this, the program needs a new narrative.
- Others suggested that more employers be involved.
- A high level Education Department official proposed that her office would "do whatever possible to help facilitate a continuation of this discussion."

#### **Postscript to the Discussion**

In preparing this document, and in discussions with a number of leaders, organizers and participants in the Conversation, we decided to add a section suggesting additional ideas on how to move CTE forward. What follows are ideas we hope you will consider. We are also asking you to react by adding your own proposals to this list.

At this point we have no plan regarding a process for acting on these ideas, or on others that may be offered, so we ask for your suggestions on this as well.

Whatever happens, we hope that the Conversation on CTE was stimulating and that it will result in increased attention to the very important policy questions surrounding the expansion and improvement of career and technical education. Here are the additional post-Conversation suggestions:

- Develop a coherent protocol for CTE that emphasizes achievement and readiness in the academic core for all students, targets early competence in core subjects and presents CTE as an indispensable part of American K-12 education. The protocol should facilitate student choice for CTE and not present it as a default position for non-achievers. It should be of such high quality that students who choose it could opt for either CTE or college prep in advancing their post-secondary education.
- Consider the shape of CTE programs in terms of the needs of the American economy and job availability both now and in the future.



- Investigate the barriers to change – the tracking charge conventionally aimed at CTE; entrenched interests; inadequate funding, the one-size-fits-all approach to high school credentials; the perception that CTE is for prospective dropouts.
- Find the best models available representing high quality CTE pathways. These should include a solid academic core, together with career orientation, employment skills, occupational and technical skills, apprenticeships, and, preferably, some work experience. They should result in real credentials.
- Aim major proposals at the reauthorization of the Perkins Act. Rethinking has already begun, and the actual process will begin in 2011.
- Consider options that may be made possible in the President's budget proposal for a "Workforce Innovation Fund" and in the \$2 billion for community colleges included in the recently passed health care and student loan reform legislation that can be used for secondary/postsecondary connections.
- Bring CTE into school reform designs; include it in accountability systems; tie it to new assessment, standards and curriculum, and have it lead to concrete achievements that are respected by school systems and their graduates.

## Participants

**Randi Weingarten**, Chair of the meeting and President, AFT, Shanker Institute

**Arne Duncan**, Secretary of Education

**John Bishop**, Associate Professor of Human Resource Studies, Cornell University, ILR School, Department of Human Resource Studies; Executive Director, Educational Excellence Alliance

**Ron Bloom**, Senior Counsel for Manufacturing Policy

**Gene Bottoms**, Senior Vice President, Southern Regional Education Board

**Janet Bray**, Executive Director, Association for Career and Technical Education

**Tony Carnevale**, Director, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Economy

**Michael Cohen**, President, Achieve

**Antonia Cortese**, Secretary-Treasurer, AFT, Shanker Institute

**Brenda Dann-Messier**, Assistant Secretary of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education

**Kimberly Green**, Executive Director, National Association of State Directors of CTE Consortium

**Yvette Herrera**, Senior Director, Politics, Communication and Education, Communication Workers of America

**J.D. Hoyer**, President, National Academy Foundation

**Dwight Hutchins**, Managing Director for Strategy in Public Service, Accenture

**John Jackson**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Schott Foundation for Public Education

**Richard Kazis**, Senior Vice President, Jobs for the Future

**Eugenia Kemble**, Executive Director, Shanker Institute

**Michael Langford**, President, Utility Workers Union of America

**Charlene Lake**, Senior Vice President, Public Affairs & Chief Sustainability Officer, AT&T

**Dan Leeds**, Chair, National Public Education Support Fund and Fulcrum Investments

**Robert Lerman**, Professor of Economics, American University; Senior Fellow, Urban Institute

**Dane Linn**, Center for Best Practices Education Division, National Governors Association

**Governor Joe Manchin III**, West Virginia

**Gayle Manchin**, member, WV State Board of Education; Commissioner, West Virginia Commission for National and Community Service; Co-Chair, Governor's 21st Century Jobs Cabinet.

**Jeannie Oakes**, Director of Education and Scholarship, Ford Foundation

**Jane Oates**, Assistant Secretary of Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor

**Charlie P. Rose**, General Counsel, U.S. Department of Education

**Amy Rosen**, President and Chief of Executive Officer, Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship

**James R. Stone**, Director, National Research Center for Career and Technical Education, University of Louisville

**Gene Wilhoit**, Executive Director, Council of Chief State School Officers

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