

NYC as a Laboratory for Learning About Career and Technical Education: Lessons from CTE-Dedicated High Schools

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The NYC Department of Education oversees one of the largest and most diverse Career and Technical Education (CTE) systems in the country. This is the first in a series of reports from an ongoing study aimed at informing local and national CTE policy and practice. It focuses on 37 CTE-Dedicated high schools, which are structured to ensure that all enrolled students participate in a CTE Program of Study from 9th through 12th grade.

The analysis uses an especially rigorous research design that compares the experiences and outcomes of nearly 19,000 NYC students who were assigned to a CTE-Dedicated high school between 2013 and 2016 with those of similar students who also applied to CTE programs but were assigned to another high school during the same period. Among the key findings:

- **The CTE-Dedicated schools produced modest, but positive impacts on student engagement, including staying on track for a New York State Regents diploma.** One concern about CTE has been the idea that requiring students to complete career-specific courses and internships might distract them from other academic requirements and impede their progress through high school. We found no evidence of this. While students in CTE-Dedicated high schools earned somewhat fewer credits in academic subjects, they earned substantially more CTE course credits—and more credits overall—than their non-CTE counterparts. Students in CTE-Dedicated high schools had higher attendance and were consistently more likely to be on track for a Regents diploma.
- **CTE students graduated from high school and enrolled in college at rates that were similar, on average, to their non-CTE counterparts.** Although CTE students were more likely to be on track in 9th through 11th grades, our findings show that non-CTE students were equally likely to graduate. The non-CTE group had slightly higher immediate college enrollment rates, but this difference disappeared when we followed students into the second year after their scheduled high school graduation.
- **There was a great deal of variation in both programming conditions and impacts across the 37 CTE-Dedicated high schools.** In general, we found that smaller, nonselective schools with a single or coherent set of career themes produced meaningful improvements in high school graduation and college enrollment rates—particularly in programs focused on occupations requiring a four-year college degree for entry-level jobs. In contrast, larger, more selective schools with a range of programs focused on occupations that often require limited post-secondary education had null or negative effects on graduation and college enrollment. The study does not yet have data to determine whether students in these schools opted for employment immediately after high school or if they enrolled in post-secondary education later on.

The report provides further discussion of these and other findings, as well as their implications for policy and practice. It also outlines forthcoming work from the study, including efforts to obtain additional data on students' employment and earnings and longer-term college persistence and completion outcomes. This information will be crucial to fully understand the impact of NYC's diverse CTE options.

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