CTE programs help keep state's talent pipeline filled

By Vicki J. Martin  
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Career and technical education is celebrated across Wisconsin in February. Milwaukee Area Technical College and the Wisconsin Technical College System are proud to partner with the state Department of Public Instruction and Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development to promote hands-on, skills-based learning programs to high school students.

Such programs encourage students to align their academic coursework and plans with their college and career goals. The types of career and technical education programs are as varied as the areas of studies that are represented. Transcripted credit programs allow students to take college credits at no cost while still in high school. Students enrolled in youth options programs take college courses at MATC to enhance their educational opportunities. Through youth apprenticeships, students can earn high school credits and industry and state certification in work-based learning programs.

About 87,000 Wisconsin high school students, more than two-thirds of our state’s high school population, participate in such programs. And the success rate for students is impressive. Students in CTE programs graduate at a 96% rate, which exceeds the rate for students who are not in such programs. National data show students who complete rigorous academic coursework combined with a career focus are more likely to pursue postsecondary education, have a higher grade-point average in college and are more likely to continue a college education.

An example of a local success story is a student who was enrolled in South Milwaukee High School’s CTE program. By taking advantage of a hands-on academic camp during the summer and then completing college coursework while still in high school, the student was able to enroll at MATC with one semester worth of credit.

Students who participate in CTE programs have a smoother transition from classroom to the workforce. In addition to learning essential workplace abilities, such programs allow students to hone skills such as communication, critical thinking, problem solving, entrepreneurship and leadership, all of which will help them be successful throughout their careers, no matter their field of study.

Wisconsin businesses benefit as well. Business and industry leaders play a vital role in creating strong school-to-work connections. Career and technical education programs help keep the talent pipelines filled for the state’s essential industries.

Wisconsin’s technical colleges are uniquely poised to respond to evolving industry needs to help ensure that the pool of professionals for these rapidly growing sectors stays stocked with skilled, knowledgeable and productive individuals.

The National Skills Coalition projects that 51% of job openings in Wisconsin between 2010 and 2020 will be middle-skill jobs — those that require education beyond high school but not a four-year degree. Middle-skill jobs make up the largest percentage of labor markets in both the state and nationally. Career and technical education programs help put students on the pathway to careers more quickly and in a more cost-effective manner.

Vicki J. Martin is the president of Milwaukee Area Technical College.

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