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EDUCATION/ OPINION

Bringing the real world into the classroom

Vocational approach helps students and businesses



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IN HIS REMARKS on General Electric's relocation to Boston, Mayor Marty Walsh heralded a new era for public-private partnerships in education, saying that with GE's help "we're going to reinvent vocational education for the 21st century." We agree that expanding and invigorating career, vocational, and technical education pathway models in Boston high schools can be a game changer for the local economy and thousands of Boston's youth.

Career, vocational, and technical education connects personalized learning and academic rigor with real-world access to postsecondary and career pathways. Career and technical learning opportunities for high school students should not be electives, or housed only in VocTech schools, but integral components of traditional academic programs. All students benefit from hands-on experiences that help build problem-solving, communications, and relevant work skills that they need to be successful after high school.

National research shows us that high school students involved in career, vocational, and technical education are more engaged, perform better, and graduate at higher rates. These graduates not only meet the needs of our changing economy when they enter the workforce, but can also be valuable assets to local businesses and companies.

A recent study from [Northeastern University](#) shows many employers have difficulty filling skilled, well-paying jobs, and see the challenge worsening as greater numbers of baby boomers retire. While a four-year college degree is still a valued credential, a second study projects that between now and 2022 the majority of job openings in Massachusetts will require skills that don't necessarily require a four-year degree.

Many schools in Boston are already responding to these challenges. Madison Park Vocational Technical High School and English High School are engaging in activities that bring career, vocational, and technical education concepts to life in their school buildings.

English High, a comprehensive high school, recently launched five industry-credentialed career pathway programs. English is expanding the notion of post-secondary success to include strong vocational training programs that graduate students with rigorous industry-recognized credentials and prepare them for the workforce – or postsecondary education.

Madison Park is reimagining its programming under new leadership and additional resources that come with its “turnaround school” designation. The academic and vocational teachers working in concert to integrate academic and vocational learning in classes for students will undoubtedly be the cornerstone of that effort.

More can be done to sow the seeds for more career, vocational, and technical education pathways that concentrate on diverse industries.

In East Boston, JetBlue is exploring aviation pathways for students through the JetBlue Foundation, launched in 2013 to advance STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) education with a focus on traditionally underserved communities. The foundation has built relationships nationwide through mentoring, internships, and grants, and learned these successful partnerships have benefits far beyond our sector.

Boston’s successful initiative to [expand arts education](#) also provides opportunities to link students to pathways in creative industries such as media and visual communications and entertainment technology.

Working in partnership with industry leaders who are investing in our city is the way to develop pathways that benefit students, grow the local workforce, and attract new businesses to our region.

Laura Perille is CEO of EdVestors, a Boston nonprofit focused on accelerating improvement in urban schools, which is providing seed funds to promote career, vocational, and technical education partnerships in Boston. Joanna Geraghty is President of the JetBlue Foundation and executive vice president for customer experience at JetBlue.