



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Education

Re: Access to Career and Technical Education Programs for Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners and Int. 1099-2016

September 21, 2016

Good afternoon. My name is Sam Streed, and I am a policy analyst at Advocates for Children of New York. For over four decades, Advocates for Children has worked to promote educational access in New York for students who have traditionally been marginalized by the education system, including students who are economically disadvantaged, English Language Learners (or ELLs), students with disabilities, and students of color.

Over the past few years, Advocates for Children has become increasingly involved in advocacy relating to Career and Technical Education programs, or CTE, with a focus on efforts to reduce barriers to access for students with disabilities and ELLs. In New York City in 2015, only 38% of students with disabilities and 37% of ELLs graduated by the end of four years of high school – far behind the citywide average of 67%. Furthermore, students with disabilities drop out at almost twice the rate of general education students; ELLs drop out at nearly three times the rate of their peers.

While CTE for high school students is not a panacea, it can help address these dismal outcomes. Featuring hands-on skills-building with real world applications, CTE is shown to help keep at-risk students – such as ELLs and students with disabilities – engaged and on-track for graduation. Students in CTE programs are less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to be engaged and successful in academic courses than their peers. They are also more likely to secure employment after high school.

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Some of the benefits for these student groups can be seen here in New York City. According to NYC Department of Education (DOE) data submitted to the State for the 2014-15 school year, students with disabilities who completed at least two CTE courses graduated from high school at a rate of about 64%—that’s 26% higher than students with disabilities who were *not* CTE students. Similarly, about 60% of ELLs who completed at least two CTE courses graduated from high school, as compared to only 34% of ELLs who did not pursue a CTE program.

But while students with disabilities and ELLs generally do well in the city’s CTE programs, both groups are underrepresented among CTE students. In 2015, students with disabilities comprised about 12% of students who took two or more CTE courses, versus almost 17% of the overall cohort. And only 3% of CTE students were ELLs, versus 10% of the total cohort. This disproportionality points to a disparity in access for both groups.

For those students with disabilities and ELLs who *are* in CTE programs, we currently cannot tell from public data whether they have equitable access to the full range of programs available. We are excited about the renewed interest in CTE and the numerous new programs focused on emerging Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. However, we are concerned that students with disabilities and ELLs will face barriers to these programs – and instead be tracked into more traditional vocational education programs, such as cooking or carpentry – essentially creating a two-tiered system of CTE.

Advocates for Children supports the idea behind **Intro. 1099**, the CTE reporting bill before the Committee today. Public data is essential to ensuring that under-served



groups such as students with disabilities and ELLs have access to the diverse array of CTE programs. This is especially important considering the significant and persistent need for successful interventions for these two groups. With close monitoring and appropriate follow-up, increased transparency could help the DOE identify barriers to access, such as a lack of available supports and accommodations, or issues with physical access or safety. We would, however, like to suggest some changes that we believe would strengthen the bill – such as tracking ELL participation in CTE – and would be pleased to discuss them further with the bill’s sponsors.

More broadly, as the city continues to grow its CTE offerings for high school students, we recommend closely monitoring to what extent CTE programs are designed and equipped to serve students with disabilities and ELLs. AFC thanks Mayor Bill de Blasio and the Council for including budget increases for CTE programs over the next four years. In developing new programs, the DOE should prioritize schools that commit to providing increased access for these groups. With its sheer size and demonstrated commitment to CTE programming, NYC can truly be a laboratory for innovation in CTE. But at each step, the city should *also* ensure that students with disabilities and ELLs have equal access to this valuable educational option.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am available to answer any questions now or afterward.