



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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New Report Urges New York State to Address Barriers to Career and Technical Education Programs for Students with Disabilities

December 8, 2016 (NEW YORK CITY) — Today, Advocates for Children of New York (AFC) is releasing a report, [*Obstacles and Opportunities: Creating Career and Technical Education Pathways for Students with Disabilities*](#), which analyzes access to high school-level career and technical education (CTE) programs for students with disabilities in New York State. In 2015, less than 50% of students with disabilities graduated from high school in four years, compared to about 83% of general education students. The new report, which analyzes public data on outcomes for students in CTE programs, finds that more than 75% of students with disabilities who completed at least two-thirds of a CTE program went on to graduate, compared to about 90% of general education students—effectively cutting the graduation gap in half for these students.

The paper finds that although students with disabilities made up about 15% of the class that was expected to graduate in 2015, they comprised only 11.6% of students reported to have completed most of a CTE program. “Considering the low graduation rates for students with disabilities statewide, administrators and policymakers should explore ways to maximize access to CTE programs for students with disabilities,” says Kim Sweet, AFC’s Executive Director. “That students with disabilities are under-represented in many programs represents a missed opportunity. Given the benefits of CTE for these students, the goal should be, at minimum, equal participation.”

Sam Streed, AFC’s Policy Analyst and one of the primary authors of the report, says, “CTE has proven an important—and effective—educational option for students with disabilities. As officials work to modernize and expand these programs, they have an exciting opportunity to create a truly new CTE, one where accessibility for students of all abilities and needs is a foundational principle, not an afterthought.”

Based on data findings and interviews with professionals, special education advocates, and parents of students with disabilities, AFC recommends changes to policy and practice to address barriers to CTE, including:

- Ensuring that all end-of-program CTE assessments offer accommodations for students with disabilities;
- Allowing for use of performance-based assessments for CTE programs in lieu of standardized written tests, which often disadvantage students with disabilities;
- Working with industry partners to create curricula adaptable to the diverse needs of students with disabilities;
- Encouraging programs that currently use tests scores as admissions criteria to allow students to instead use performance-based measures, such as grades or portfolios, when applying for a CTE program;
- Dedicating additional funding towards program expansion in geographic or content areas where students with disabilities are currently under-represented;
- Providing training aimed at helping CTE instructors more effectively work with students with disabilities and at educating special education and counseling personnel about CTE offerings;
- Gathering and publicly reporting program-level data on rates of enrollment, participation and retention, completion and graduation rates for students with disabilities;
- Increasing efforts to raise awareness among students, parents, and school personnel about the availability and benefits of CTE programming;
- Creating a statewide advisory group that includes parents, industry representatives, and educators to assess needs and help guide plans to best serve students with disabilities through CTE.

[Read full report.](#)

About Advocates for Children of New York (AFC)

Since its founding in 1971, Advocates for Children of New York has been protecting the education-related needs of children most at risk of academic failure or school-based discrimination due to such factors as poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, language barriers, immigration status, homelessness, or involvement in the child welfare or juvenile justice system. AFC's mission is to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. AFC uses integrated strategies to advance systemic reform, empower families and communities, and advocate for the educational rights of individual students.

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