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Report provides detailed look at Career and Technical Education in Metro Milwaukee schools districts

MILWAUKEE – *Thursday, February 9, 2017* – A report released today by the Public Policy Forum shows that Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses are popular among Metro Milwaukee high school students, though the report also reveals that smaller numbers of students are using CTE as a primary means of preparing for their post-graduation pursuits.

“Across Metro Milwaukee, nearly 58% of 11th and 12th graders in public school districts have taken at least one CTE course, while a smaller percentage – less than one third – concentrate on CTE by taking two or more courses in the same field,” says Forum Senior Researcher Joe Yeado, the report’s author. “CTE is designed as a sequence of courses bridging high school to college and career, but in practice, few students are actually completing the curriculum.”

The report – *Building Bridges*– set out to quantify CTE in public school districts in the four-county Greater Milwaukee region (Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Waukesha, and Washington counties) by exploring enrollment, academic achievement, and outcomes for CTE students after high school. Using data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, it identifies a number of patterns and trends among CTE students. The latest school year for which data were available was 2014-15.

Enrollment data show that CTE students are mostly male and predominantly white. Female students comprise 46.1% of CTE enrollment in the region's school districts. Non-white students account for 36.3% of CTE students in Metro Milwaukee, which exceeds the level of diversity among CTE students statewide (21.8%). Special populations, including academic and economically disadvantaged students, comprise 47.3% of CTE students in the region.

With regard to academic achievement, the analysis finds that 96.8% of CTE concentrators graduate high school, compared to 90.2% of non-CTE students. However, results on state assessment exams are mixed. CTE concentrators had higher proficiency rates than the district average on the math portion of the state assessment, while posting lower proficiency rates on the reading portion. Based on the available data, it is not possible to conclusively say that CTE concentrators perform better or worse than non-CTE concentrators on state assessments.

The analysis also indicates that certain components of CTE deemed important to post-graduation success are not being widely implemented in Metro Milwaukee school districts.

“A high-quality CTE curriculum has a number of facets, such as work-based learning opportunities like internships and co-ops,” says Yeado. “When we looked at districts in the region, however, we found that nearly 85% of CTE concentrators had no work learning experience. It is clear that CTE concentrators in Metro Milwaukee are not benefitting from learning opportunities often cited as critical components of robust CTE programs.”

Other key report findings include the following:

- Nearly 75% of CTE concentrators continue their education after high school, with 68% attending a 4-year college.
- Less than 17% of CTE concentrators in the region enter the workforce directly from high school and most take jobs unrelated to their CTE training.
- The number of CTE teacher assignments in Metro Milwaukee has grown in nearly 14% in recent years, yet a shortage of CTE-licensed teachers remains a constraint to expanding CTE courses.

The report presents a number of policy recommendations for strengthening the CTE curriculum, including establishing a universal CTE definition and improving data collection; better defining CTE pathways by enhancing partnerships with higher education; and further developing relationships with businesses and community partners. Taken together, pursuit of these and other policy improvements could help create a more robust and universal CTE curriculum.

“This research comes amidst a growing conversation about Career and Technical Education and its role in preparing students for college and career. Many high school students in Metro Milwaukee take a CTE course, but a much smaller number get the full benefit of the curriculum,” says Yeado. “We hope the findings and conclusions help school leaders and policymakers improve the effectiveness of CTE programs and enhance their role in boosting post-graduation outcomes and preparing our future workforce.”

The full report – which was funded, in part, by grants from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and Northwestern Mutual Foundation – can be downloaded at the Forum’s web site, www.publicpolicyforum.org.

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, established in 1913 as a local government watchdog, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of public policy issues.

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