

Today's Education Pipeline

Cathleen C. McColgin, Ph.D.

November 17, 2017

Technological change and global competition continue to demand a higher level of competencies and skills, making education more critical than ever to support and grow a healthy economy and ensure quality of life. The industries that drive our economy—technology, science and health-- require innovation, entrepreneurship and a well-educated workforce.

As a part of The Genesis Group Community Forum Series, it is a pleasure to offer my views on today's education in our community. I am also excited to be a part of the upcoming "Celebration of Education" which honors outstanding educators and programs in the Mohawk Valley.

Here in the Mohawk Valley, education has been a foundation of life since the area was settled more than 200 years ago. As early as 1795, public schools were authorized and funded by the state. The Legislature of 1812 enacted a law which provided the present plan of school districts and required teachers possess certain scholastic qualifications. Excellence in education has continued in our region, with ample opportunities for students of all ages and backgrounds.

Today, more than 50,000 school-aged children and 20,000 college students are enrolled in public, private and parochial schools, including 11 colleges and universities. Approximately 13,000 individuals are employed by area educational institutions, making education one of the largest economic engines in the region.

The large number and variety of educational opportunities available locally has been instrumental in our ability to create and maintain an effective education pipeline - that aligns systems and programs - to help students successfully advance from birth to career. Instead of viewing PreK-12 and postsecondary education as separate entities, we look at the pipeline as a continuum leading from PreK through elementary, middle and high school, into college and through to degree completion.

Within the pipeline are multiple pathways that aim to provide a clear roadmap of the courses, programs, and credentials that students need in order to identify and achieve career goals. Dual credit or concurrent enrollment programs, such as Herkimer College's College Now program allows high school students to take college-level courses earning both high school and college credits for the same courses, giving them a head start on college.

Articulation agreements ensure smooth transition of credits from BOCES programs into college programs, and also from two-year colleges into baccalaureate programs. Additionally, many community colleges partner with four-year institutions to provide joint admission programs. In some cases, community college graduates are able to pursue a bachelor's degree through a partner institution without leaving the community college campus.

Perhaps one of the best examples of an effective pathway locally is the Valley Pathways in Technology Early College High School (VP-Tech) program, a partnership between Herkimer

BOCES, Herkimer College and local businesses. Students begin the program in ninth grade, and leave in four to six years with a Regents diploma, an associate degree and connections with potential employers. This is one of many such agreements between BOCES programs and local colleges.

These types of partnerships require collaboration among educators, administrators and institutions in order to improve transitions between the various levels of school and to identify clear routes to specific careers, serving a diverse set of students. Put simply, we are working together to break down barriers that prevent student success.

Each year, during the week prior to Thanksgiving, American Education Week is observed. Originally established as a national effort to raise public awareness of the importance of public education, American Education Week gives us the opportunity to celebrate outstanding education programs and educators for their achievements and contributions. So, today it is my privilege to publicly thank all our local educators who truly make a difference -- for sharing your talents, skills, knowledge, passion, and love of your subjects and students.

Cathleen C. McColgin, Ph.D. is president of Herkimer County Community College and a major supporter of The Genesis Group.