

# Enhancing Collaboration Between County Community Colleges and County Vocational-Technical Schools

## The Imperative for Collaboration

New Jersey's 18 community colleges and 21 county vocational-technical school districts have long played a critical role in equipping New Jerseyans with the education, skills, and credentials that will prepare them for success in well-paying careers and have long worked closely together to meet the needs of their local communities. As economic, social, and technological change continue to accelerate — and the COVID-19 pandemic upends “business as usual” — the imperative is stronger than ever for them to work together, in expanded and innovative ways, to provide high-quality educational opportunities that respond to the needs of students, employers, communities, and New Jersey's economy.

The state's extensive network of community colleges and county vocational schools includes more than 100 school and college sites across all 21 counties, serving roughly 35,000 vocational high school students, over 10,000 full-time and part-time adult vocational students, and approximately 325,000 college students enrolled in credit, non-credit, and workforce development courses. These 39 schools and colleges have a special relationship as county-based institutions with a common focus on high-quality educational opportunities that prepare diverse student populations for employment and continued postsecondary education, especially in the high-demand technical fields that drive New Jersey's innovation economy and support quality of life in the Garden State.

The New Jersey Council of County Colleges recently released an ambitious plan for the future of community colleges in the state. **The Vision 2028 Framework for the Future of Community Colleges** released in October 2019 seeks to build broad, comprehensive partnerships with government, employers, high schools and colleges, and state and community organizations to expand access to postsecondary education, support student success, and drive economic mobility. Collaboration with county vocational-technical schools is fundamental to this commitment and a critical early step.

County vocational-technical schools and community colleges share a commitment to expanding educational and economic opportunities for all New Jerseyans. Quality career-focused education programs that develop fundamental competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication while leading to industry-valued credentials and degrees is a core strategy for addressing historic economic and social inequities that imperil the future of our state and too many of our residents.

To accomplish this, county vocational-technical schools and community colleges must continue to expand their many partnerships with businesses and employers, while collaborating to align their career and technical education programs with regional economic and employer needs. The development of new statewide *Pathway and Skills Collaboratives* in key industries will be an important strategy for expanding access to career training and aligning it with the needs of the labor market.

County vocational-technical schools and community colleges already have many outstanding partnerships that help New Jerseyans to launch their education pathways and prepare for career success. All counties have existing dual credit and articulation agreements in place that enable students to begin college credit-bearing coursework as part of their high school career and technical education program, making college more accessible and affordable. Collaborating to expand these opportunities and reduce the time and cost of degree completion— and get students into the workforce faster— will benefit students, families, employers and the state's economy.

And importantly, as the COVID-19 pandemic creates unprecedented economic challenges for our state, counties, local communities, county vocational-technical schools, and community colleges must do everything possible to share services, facilities, and equipment, while leveraging all available resources to do more for New Jersey with fewer tax and tuition dollars. The *Securing Our Children's Future Bond Act*, approved by voters in 2018, provides an immediate opportunity for counties to plan with their vocational-technical school and college leaders to create shared facilities that will expand access to career and technical education programs aligned with regional economic demand.

Expanded partnerships between our institutions will help build a stronger and fairer New Jersey by enhancing educational and economic opportunities and outcomes for our students, responding to emerging workforce needs, and sharing services and resources to reduce taxpayer and tuition costs. Recognizing this, the New Jersey Council of County Vocational-Technical Schools and the New Jersey Council of County Colleges have resolved to actively promote collaboration among county vocational-technical schools and community colleges as follows:

- Convene a meeting of community college presidents and county vocational-technical school superintendents August 18, 2020 to highlight best practices and establish the imperative for increased collaboration;
- Establish a subcommittee of community college presidents and county vocational-technical school superintendents to provide leadership to their respective organizations regarding collaboration among county-based institutions;
- Highlight best practices and exemplary programs for all counties to demonstrate the educational benefits and potential efficiencies of collaboration and shared services; and
- Convene ongoing regional meetings of community college and county vocational-technical school leaders to identify new opportunities for collaboration that will achieve the shared goals of clear career pathways to expand student opportunities and address workforce needs, greater affordability, and effective use of limited resources.

## Building a Strong, Well-Prepared Workforce

As the career-focused educational institutions in each county, community colleges and county vocational-technical schools share a commitment to meeting labor market and employer needs with degree and certificate programs that prepare young people and adults for well-paying careers. While these institutions prepare students for all types of careers—from the arts to zoology—they share a particular emphasis on New Jersey's innovation economy and technical fields with growing opportunities for residents with industry-valued credentials and associate degrees, in such industries as health care, technology, wind and clean energy, construction, advanced manufacturing, and hospitality.

As New Jersey's community colleges launch *Pathway and Skills Collaboratives* in the state's key industry sectors, they will engage county vocational-technical schools and employers in a statewide effort to map clear educational pathways from high school to college to employment. The goal is to create more seamless pathways that link credit and non-credit programs, work-based learning and apprenticeship, and prior learning assessments to strengthen and speed students' progress from high school to postsecondary education to family sustaining employment.

The *Pathway and Skills Collaboratives* will provide clear guidance to students in their choice and pursuit of an educational pathway that will lead to employment. This initiative will support regional models such as the Work and Learn Consortium in South Jersey, involving the county vocational-technical schools, community colleges, Rowan University, and key industry and workforce partners to align stackable industry-valued credentials with credit-bearing coursework to enable students to earn an industry-specific certification, an associate degree, and ultimately a bachelor's degree that is affordable and close to home.

## South Jersey's Work and Learn Consortium - Rowan College of South Jersey

Launched in 2018 under the leadership of Rowan College of South Jersey, the model responds to employer needs for individuals who are prepared to fill jobs in key industry sectors including advanced manufacturing, financial services, transportation, logistics and distribution, healthcare, biopharmaceutical life sciences, hospitality, retail and tourism, and construction management.

Employer involvement is the centerpiece of the initiative, with business leaders at the table with schools and colleges to ensure that academic and technical training is aligned with their needs and expectations for the future workforce. The employers also provide internships and other work-based learning opportunities that give students real work experience and enable them to get an up-close look at potential new hires.

Senate President Stephen Sweeney, an early supporter of the Work and Learn Consortium model, introduced legislation (enacted in January 2020) to implement this successful model statewide and encourage increased collaboration among vocational-technical schools, community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, employers and business organizations in all regions of New Jersey.

Consortium partners include: Rowan College of South Jersey, Rowan University, Gloucester County Institute of Technology, Cumberland County Technical Education Center, Cumberland County Center for Workforce and Economic Development, Inspira Health Network, Cumberland County Improvement Authority, Greater Vineland Chamber of Commerce, Millville Chamber of Commerce, Bridgeton Area of Chamber of Commerce, New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Gloucester County Chamber of Commerce, Gloucester County Department of Workforce Development and Economic Development, Paulsboro Refining Company (advanced manufacturing), South Jersey Federal Credit Union (financial services), Owens and Minor (transportation, logistics and distribution), Rowan Medicine (healthcare), Wedgewood Pharmacy (biopharmaceutical life sciences), Marriott Glassboro (hospitality, retail and tourism industry), and Greyhawk (construction management).

At the federal level, the 2018 Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (commonly known as "Perkins V") also supports this commitment to collaboration and alignment with regional labor market needs. County vocational-technical schools and community colleges commit to working closely together through the Perkins-driven Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment process of undertaking an in-depth biennial analysis of regional career and technical education programs and alignment to labor market data. This regional effort provides another opportunity for the county institutions to "do better together" to meet economic needs.

**Recommendation: Leveraging their statewide reach, community colleges— with the support of county vocational-technical schools, four-year institutions, and key employers— should launch *Pathway and Skills Collaboratives* in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, transportation and logistics, and technology to map and align education and training programs with the needs of the labor market. The statewide collaboratives will provide essential guidance for students and will support and inform regional Work and Learn Consortia designed to address the labor market needs in each county.**

## Increasing Affordability and Student Success

Achieving New Jersey’s ambitious goal of increasing the percentage of adults with a postsecondary degree or credential from the current 52% to at least 65% by 2025 requires strong partnerships to improve college and career readiness, support student success, and provide clear academic and technical pathways.

Dual credit agreements with county vocational-technical schools that enable students to begin credit-bearing coursework as part of their high school career and technical education (CTE) program are a key strategy to achieve this goal. Earning postsecondary CTE credit in high school can lead to higher rates of college enrollment, persistence and completion by ensuring career-focused students are not just prepared for college-level work, but given a jump start on college credits that will reduce the cost and time to earn a degree.

These partnerships vary by county, with unique features that leverage institutional programs and strengths to meet regional needs. Common strategies for dual credit and industry credentials include high school students enrolled in regular college classes, qualified high school instructors recognized as adjunct faculty teaching college-level courses, county vocational-technical schools or programs housed on the county college campus, and work and learn partnerships with employers that provide stackable credentials. (See Exemplary Programs Appendix for descriptions of programs in Bergen, Cumberland, Gloucester, Hudson, Morris, Salem and Somerset counties).

For example, “12th grade option” programs in several counties give high school seniors the chance to take some or all of their classes at the community college, at little or no cost to their families. Instead of experiencing the typical “senior slump” in their last year of high school, these students get a head start on college, experiencing the challenges of navigating collegiate expectations and high-level academic and technical content.

All 21 county vocational-technical schools have some dual-credit and/or articulation agreements with their community college, and many of them also have agreements with other community colleges, as well as four-year institutions.

Some programs even enable students to achieve an associate degree at the same time they complete high school. Last year, 161 county vocational-technical school graduates earned an associate degrees concurrent with their high school diplomas.

### Bergen County – Applied Technology High School

Applied Technology High School (ATHS) is a full-time high school located on the Bergen Community College (BCC) campus. The school was launched in 2015 with 31 students and a focus on advanced manufacturing and engineering technology. Today it has over 200 students and a second full-time program focused on preparing students for careers in health professions that was launched in collaboration with the BCC faculty in response to the burgeoning workforce demand. A third career program in cybersecurity is planned for 2021.

Applied Tech High School students take a combination of high school and dual enrollment courses beginning in 9th grade, with the percentage of their dual enrollment coursework increasing as they rise in grade level. Most of the college courses are taught by college faculty, while some are taught by approved high school teachers.

Prior to Grade 12, college course sections are exclusive for ATHS students. However, their senior year is spent in college courses mixed in with college students. ATHS health professions students have the added benefit of access to the college’s Integrated Teaching Center for Health Professions, which includes state-of-the-art simulators. Just by taking their core requirements, ATHS students can earn 40-51 credits towards an associate degree at Bergen Community College (30 credits paid by Bergen Tech) and 39 credits towards a BS at New Jersey Institute of Technology. However, many students take additional college courses at night and online, and some earn their associate degree as they graduate from high school.

**Recommendation: While institutional flexibility is essential, increased consistency in dual credit options will provide greater equity and opportunity across the state. New Jersey Council of County Colleges and New Jersey Council of County Vocational-Technical Schools commit to identifying fair and viable dual credit models that will offer more cost-effective and time-efficient pathways to credentials and degrees. This will not only open the doors of opportunity to more students, but will also ensure a stream of well-prepared students enrolling in community colleges, especially in programs aligned to the needs of New Jersey’s key industry sectors such as health care, STEM, hospitality, manufacturing, and energy.**

## Enhancing Economic Opportunity and Equity

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and highlighted historic inequities that often derail the success of minority and low-socioeconomic status students, and deepen the economic divide between communities. Without significant investments in career-focused education and training, the economic fallout from the pandemic could hold back a generation of young New Jerseyans from achieving their full earning potential.

Broad partnerships to design high quality career pathways can be part of the solution by enabling students to identify their career interests early, develop essential academic and technical skills, and ultimately launch career pathways in high-demand fields that will provide a family-sustaining salary.

County vocational-technical schools and community colleges provide a wide range of academic and technical programs—secondary and postsecondary— that are high-quality, affordable, and close to home. Students who complete these pathways will be prepared to move into well-paying jobs and/or continue their education at four-year institutions. For example, partnerships that enable students who may have perceived college as unattainable to earn postsecondary credentials, experience campus life and see a clear pathway from school to employment will extend opportunities to underserved students and communities.

*Pathway and Skills Collaboratives*, involving county vocational-technical schools, community colleges, four year colleges and universities, and employers will help students to navigate the journey from high school to postsecondary credentials and/or degrees with clear roadmaps to employment and further education in high-demand, well-paying careers. County vocational-technical schools and community colleges are committed to partnerships that will eliminate the guesswork and potential missteps that slow students’ progress by smoothing the transition points between high school, community college, four-year college or university, and the workforce, with the goal of enabling more students— especially those historically underserved— to achieve a postsecondary credential and employment.

### Passaic County Community College and Passaic County Technical Institute

While the construction industry offers family-supporting jobs and careers, women and minorities have long been underrepresented in the building trades workforce. To address this inequity and to expand opportunities in this industry, Passaic County Community College (PCCC) and Passaic County Technical Institute (PCTI) collaborated to develop and implement a Women and Minorities in Construction Program. With funding from the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the program provides welding training to an initial group of 50 participants, identified by the Passaic County One Stop Career Center. Passaic County Technical Institute delivers the technical skills training component and Passaic Community County College is delivering the basic skills and soft skills instruction. This program, which includes strong partnerships with local unions, builds on a long history of collaboration between PCCC and PCTI.

**Recommendation: The subcommittee of community college presidents and vocational-school superintendents formed to provide leadership to their respective organizations regarding collaboration among county-based institutions should consider specific actions that can be taken to close equity gaps and address systemic racism in our state. The subcommittee should identify promising strategies for making high-quality educational opportunities and career pathways leading to employment in well-paying careers available to all New Jerseyans, with particular emphasis on sectors in which minority residents are underrepresented.**

## Maximizing Available Resources

New Jersey's counties face unprecedented fiscal challenges as they continue to respond to the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. Counties and their institutions must cover unforeseen health and safety costs and respond to changing educational challenges at a time when their revenues are limited or at best uncertain. The need to maximize all available resources is more urgent than ever before.

Specialized career and technical education shops and laboratories are expensive to build, equip, and maintain. Even with growing demand for education programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels, duplication of facilities at the county vocational-technical schools and community colleges may be unnecessary.

Where feasible, county vocational-technical schools and community colleges can share facilities and equipment to meet the needs of secondary education, postsecondary education, and continuing education students at different times of the day. With careful, coordinated planning, a single shop or laboratory could be used by high school CTE students in the morning and early afternoon, college students in the afternoon, and adults seeking workforce certifications in the early evening hours, supporting a range of career pathways aligned with industry needs.

### Morris County School of Technology – Grant Funded Programs at County College of Morris

When the New Jersey Legislature recognized the growing demand for career and technical education programs, state leaders knew it would take time to fund and build expanded facilities, so they established a County Vocational School Partnership Grant Program to support the immediate creation of new career programs in existing facilities.

Two of these grants spurred the creation of new programs developed by the Morris County Vocational School District and housed in available space on the County College of Morris campus. The Engineering Technology: Design & Prototyping program is taught by shared faculty in the college's advanced manufacturing lab and the Cybersecurity and Information Protection program is taught by shared faculty in CCM's Cybersecurity Center. A third collaboration in Culinary Arts and Hospitality was added in 2019-20.

Each of the shared-time programs for high school juniors and seniors expands countywide access to career and technical education in high demand fields and enables high school students to earn a full year of college credits, while maximizing the use of state-of-the-art college facilities. The program has enabled the college to attract a new cadre of high-achieving students, many of whom complete their associate degrees at CCM before enrolling in a four-year institution. Partnerships with employers provide work-based learning experiences that enable students to gain hands-on training in workplace practices and an inside track to employment.

The Securing Our Children's Future Bond Act will provide \$275 million for the expansion of county vocational-technical schools and \$50 million for community college facilities to meet industry needs for technically-skilled employees and the growing demand for career options that can be launched without a four-year college degree. As the state solicits applications for grant funding, there is an immediate opportunity for county leaders to plan with their vocational-technical school and community college for shared facilities that will expand access to career and technical education programs aligned with regional economic demand.

**Recommendation: Each county and region should actively seek opportunities to create partnerships for shared facilities and services that might include shared shops and laboratories, collaborative equipment purchases leveraging federal Perkins funds, shared faculty and staff, and joint use of classrooms and support facilities such as fitness centers. County officials should strongly consider taking advantage of the historic opportunity presented by the Securing Our Children's Future Bond Act. Investing in classroom, laboratory, and technical facilities that can be shared by county vocational-technical schools and community colleges — leveraging a state match of 75% — will position counties for economic growth as our state rebounds from the COVID-19 pandemic.**

## Action Steps

The August 18 convening of county vocational-technical school and community college leaders highlighted best practices and established the imperative for increased collaboration. This is a critical first step. To continue the momentum, the New Jersey Council of County Vocational-Technical Schools and the New Jersey Council of County Colleges will:

- Establish a subcommittee of community college presidents and county vocational-technical school superintendents to provide leadership to their respective organizations regarding collaboration among county-based institutions. This subcommittee will develop recommendations for addressing systemic racism and close equity gaps and to expand opportunity to all New Jerseyans;
- Highlight best practices and exemplary programs for all counties to demonstrate the educational benefits and potential efficiencies of collaboration and shared services; and
- Convene ongoing regional meetings of community college and county vocational-technical school leaders to identify new opportunities for collaboration to achieve the shared goals of strong clear career pathways to expand student opportunities and address workforce needs, affordability, and effective use of limited resources.

## Appendix

### County Vocational-Technical School and Community College Partnerships: Exemplary Program Models

County vocational-technical schools and community colleges partner in various ways to provide education pathways that prepare New Jersey students for high-demand careers. Dual credit opportunities that enable students to begin credit-bearing coursework as part of their high school career and technical education program are a core strategy that reduces the time and cost of degree completion.

Each partnership is unique, leveraging institutional and program strengths. Common strategies for dual credit and industry credentials include:

- Enrolling high school students in credit-bearing classes on the college campus (dual enrollment)
- Locating a stand-alone county vocational-technical school or program on the college campus, facilitating student access to college classes
- Senior option programs that enable grade 12 students to take all or some of their classes at a community college
- Agreements that recognize the college-level content included in secondary CTE programs and award transcribed credit for courses taught in the vocational school by appropriate high school faculty (dual credit)
- “Work and learn” partnerships with employers that provide stackable credentials as well as dual credit opportunities

#### **Bergen County – Applied Technology High School at Bergen Community College**

Applied Technology High School is a full-time high school located on the Bergen Community College campus. Students take a combination of high school and dual enrollment courses beginning in 9th grade, with the percentage of their dual enrollment course work increasing as they rise in grade level. Most of the college courses are taught by college faculty; some are taught by approved high school teachers. Prior to Grade 12, college course sections are exclusive for ATHS students. However, their senior year is spent in college courses mixed in with college students. Just by taking their core requirements, ATHS students can earn 40-51 credits towards an associate degree at Bergen Community College (30 credits paid by Bergen Tech) and 39 credits towards a BS at NJIT. However, many students take additional college courses at night and online, and some earn their associate degree before they graduate from high school.

#### **Cumberland Tech – Early College High School at Rowan College of South Jersey**

The early College High School (ECHS) program established between Cumberland Technical Education Center and Rowan College of South Jersey (RCSJ) allows students to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and up to 60 college credits - tuition free. The institutions are located on adjacent campuses in Vineland, which supports shared service agreements for dual credit/dual enrollment, facilities and security. The vocational school provides a dedicated administrator and counselor to ensure smooth coordination with the college and support students as they transition into the college experience. Students have the potential to earn an associate degree by the time they graduate from high school, jump-starting college completion and entry into the workforce, while reducing the time and cost of postsecondary education.

#### **Gloucester County Institute of Technology – Collegiate High School at Rowan College of South Jersey**

The GCIT Collegiate High School program enables all seniors to take college-level courses on the adjacent campus of Rowan College of South Jersey. Students in GCIT’s academy programs for health sciences, engineering, business and information technology have the ability to complete an associate degree by taking a combination of college courses offered at GCIT (free) and reduced tuition courses at RCSJ. Students in other GCIT career programs may also take college courses through Rowan’s High School Option Program at a reduced tuition rate. RCSH offers a “bank” of more than 50 courses available to GCIT students at a reduced tuition rate, enabling them to get a jump-start on a college degree.

### **Hudson County Dual Enrollment Options**

The dual enrollment agreement between Hudson County Schools of Technology and Hudson County Community College provides a pathway for high school students in specific programs of study to earn an associate degree upon high school graduation. Currently, the two programs that qualify are the design and fabrication (“DFAB”) program, which may lead to an A.S. in Science and Math, and environmental science, which may lead to an A.S. in Environmental Studies. The two degree pathways comprise a combination of specialized high school classes, aligned and mapped to meet the learning outcomes of related college courses, and additional college courses taken after-school taught either in the high school or at any of the college’s locations amounting to a total 60 college credits. Participating students register for the equivalent college course while taking the accompanying high school class taught by a High Tech High School teacher who has been approved by the college as qualified to teach college-level material, and pay 25% of the in-county tuition rate for that course. The additional after-school courses are taught by college instructors and the participating students pay 50% of the in-county tuition rate, resulting in a significant savings for students and families.

### **Morris County Vocational School District – Senior Option at County College of Morris**

All full-time seniors can attend County College of Morris (CCM) for their 12th grade year. The county vocational-technical school district pays for 24 credits and requires students to take English Comp I and II, physical education, a health course (online or at the college) and CTE-related courses. Students can opt to take more credits, but families must cover the cost of additional credits over 24. Students can opt to attend the college for only CTE-related courses if they want to remain at the high school for their general education courses. In addition to the Senior Option program, several shared-time programs for 11th and 12th graders housed at CCM provide students with even more college credits since all of their CTE courses are dual credit. The Engineering Technology: Design & Prototyping program is taught by shared faculty in the college’s advanced manufacturing lab and the Cybersecurity and Information Protection program is taught by shared faculty in CCM’s Cybersecurity Center. A third collaboration in Culinary Arts and Hospitality was added in 2019-20. Students can earn 30-37 college credits for these programs, fully covered by the county vocational-technical school district.

### **Salem County College Accelerated Program**

The partnership between the Salem County Vocational Technical Schools (SCVTS) and Salem Community College (SCC) allows students to obtain as many as 54 college credits at no cost to students and their parents through the SCC’s College Accelerated Program (dual credit). SCC offers college courses on the SCVTS campus after school at a reduced financial rate of \$180 for a three credit course, which addresses logistical challenges of transportation and scheduling students to attend classes at the college. Both the dual credit and after school courses align to six different associate degrees, including Biology/Chemistry, Agricultural Science, Liberal Arts, and Nuclear Technology.

More than 20 high school students have earned their associate degrees before graduating, and the number of participating students continues to grow each year with over 100 students taking college classes in high school.

### **Somerset County – Health Sciences Academy and Manufacturing Program at Raritan Valley College**

The students enrolled in the Academy for Health and Medical Science are eligible to earn up to 64 college credits and an associate of applied science degree in General Science from Raritan Valley Community College (RVCC), as well as their high school diploma from Somerset County Vocational-Technical School. Students enter the ninth grade as a cohort and progress through an intensive four-year sequence of honors courses, with most of the science, upper level-math and upper level humanities courses being offered at the collegiate level for dual credit. Students enrolled in this program have access to RVCC’s resources including the Academic Support Center.

The Mechatronics Engineering and Advance Manufacturing (MEAM) program launched in 2018 enables students to attend classes on the RVCC campus and make use of their sophisticated manufacturing equipment. The students enrolled in this program are eligible for up to 12 articulated credits, as well as industry certifications (OSHA-10 and NIMS Level 1 Certificate for Materials, Measurement and Safety).