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Statewide Graduation Requirements & Common Course Sequencing

CTE Centers have the unique experience of seeing students from all around the county (and sometimes beyond). After working at Stafford Tech for five years, I have become increasingly concerned about the impact of differing graduation requirements between School Districts. All of our partner schools have different requirements for graduation. This leads to inequitable experiences between students who attend the Technical Center. Students coming from schools that have less requirements typically have more time to access their program or co-op, which, as you can imagine, creates a much more robust experience for those students. Students from schools that have unique graduation requirements often have to take an Independent Study or a course that may interfere with their co-op opportunities to be able to stay on track for graduation.

Access to coursework looks very different at the partner schools within our county. For example, some students might have access to two Science courses/ credits in Freshman or Sophomore year. Others, only have access to one Science course per year. This variance can create a very different experience for a student during their Junior and Senior years. Students in larger school districts have access to a wider variety of courses including things like AP and honors level courses. This inequity continues to impact students as they apply to colleges.

Common sequencing of courses is equally important. For example, If we can be sure that all Juniors take Chemistry at all of our different partner schools, then we, at the CTE Center, can plan on accommodating one single class. At this point, we are trying to accommodate different needs and sequencing. It costs the Center (and our partner schools who support us) time and money to meet all of the different course needs of students. We often use Independent Study courses to meet these varied needs. Independent Studies are not always a great choice for our students for various reasons and I worry that they particularly hurt students who are applying to 4 year colleges.

We also have students and families that move around the state, from one high school to another. Differing graduation requirements and inconsistent sequencing can make it difficult for students to achieve the necessary credits to graduate within four years and at times, presents barriers for students to access CTE and other flexible pathway experiences.

To me, starting with common graduation requirements and course sequencing is a 'no-brainer' in education transformation. Not only will we create a more streamlined educational system for students and families to navigate, but we will also make it easier for students and schools to provide flexible pathway experiences, which has been an on-going priority for the state. Common graduation requirements and course sequencing is the solid foundation on which our education system should rest.