

OCL “Skills Gap” Study Session, Feb. 25, 2014

Meeting held at ProLiteracy conference room, 104 Marcellus Street, Syracuse

Co-chairs: Barbara Carranti and Ben Lockwood

Attendees: Kimberly Armani, Carol Biesemeyer, James Branche, Ginny Carmody, Ryan Cummiskey, Jeff Craig, Karen DeJarnette, Corey Driscoll, Stan Goettel, Luis Gonzalez, Carol Hill, Heidi Holtz, Mike Irwin, Phil Jakes-Johnson, Ava Kerznowski, Robert Leslie, Melissa Menon, Sarah Merrick, Laura Miller, Georgette Nicolaides, Meg O’Connell, Tim Riehlman, Dominic Robinson, Lenore Sealy, Nora Spillane, Elizabeth Stewart, Mary Thompson, Joe Vargo, Jennifer Wells

OCL: Sandra Barrett, Colleen Karl-Howe and Renée K. Gadoua

Speaker: Jeff Craig, assistant superintendent for Instructional Support Services for OCM BOCES provided an overview of Onondaga County graduation rates and definitions of career readiness and common core standards as a starting point for 2014 study, “Understanding the Employment Skills Gap in CNY.” (Note: OCM BOCES serves 23 districts in Onondaga and Cortland counties and part of Madison County.)

Intro from Barbara Carranti: Process will continue to hone study focus. It’s clear there are several skills gaps, as noted in first session. In addition, we should consider the gap of experienced, high-level workers laid off and efforts to retain them in the community.

Note: See PPT and handouts at [2014 Study Presentations](#)

<http://onondagacitizensleague.org/blog/studies/study-archive/understanding-employment-skills-gap-cny/>

A. Background on graduation rates

- Graduation rates are difficult to discuss because definitions change often. Rates may be measured after four years, in August (after summer school) or after five or six years. Feds have different accountability definitions.
- Graduation data is not as dependable as we would hope; it’s difficult to compare apples to apples.
- In much of Onondaga County, graduation rates are higher than the New York state average, except in Syracuse, where the rate is well below the state average.
- Onondaga Central is a small district, making it susceptible to dramatic change based on a few students.
- Local diplomas no longer exist.
- A student who completes a GED is considered a dropout and is not counted among graduates.
- New York has at least six types of Regents diplomas. (More information on diploma requirements: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/diploma-credentials.html>)

Of the five Regents exams required for graduation (ELA, math, science, Global Studies, US studies), passing Global Studies is the biggest obstacle to graduation. That may be because it is more fact based than concept based. Students have choice in which math and science Regents test to take, but same ELA and social studies tests required for all.

Syracuse City rates in 4, 5 and 6-year cohorts. Students can remain in public school until age 21.

- At 4 years: SCSD has a 45 percent graduation rate
- At 5 years: SCSD has a 56 percent graduation rate
- At 6 years: SCSD has a 58 percent graduation rate

- Craig said “Zip code matters more than anything else in determining graduation rates”. Committee member pointed out that while zip code does matter, so does what happens in the home when the child is 0-5. Craig agreed, but noted that in the North, school districts are so segregated that zip code is the de facto descriptor for economic disadvantage. There is a clear relationship between districts and graduation rates.

- Craig stressed that graduation rates do not provide full information about skills gap.

Re remediation numbers: Many students take remediation courses in college. But school district requirements are not the same as college placement exams.

There is no standard tracking of routes graduates take, although some data available. Some districts survey and track alumni. New York requires tracking of persistence rate (staying in school) and the state follows SUNY and CUNY students. Persistence rate an indicator of K-12 success. National Student Clearinghouse (<http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/>) tracks students at 97 percent of higher education institutions. That does not include military.

B. Career readiness and common core overview

1. New York state definition for college and career readiness: 80 percent score on math Regents and 75 percent score on ELA Regents.

There is a regional vision for more elaborate requirements, including citizenship readiness.

2. 1983 Nation at Risk (<https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>): *“All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself.”*

This federal report led to 1991 New York Regents plan/Compact for Learning.
(NY Regents date to Civil War)

3. 1996: New York State Learning Standards developed 28 big ideas
(<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/standards.html>)
4. CDOS: NY state learning standards for career development and occupational studies at three levels (<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/cte/cdlearn/>). Includes career exploration, integrated studies, universal skills (communication, collaboration, creative thinking) and career majors.
5. Common Core learning standards for ELA literacy. Governors and states created the Common Core. 45 of 50 states adopted common core: reading, writing, speaking/presentation, listening.
(Current drama about Common Core is about the implementation and data collection.
- Who is against reading? - Common Core standards are just what we want to know for students to succeed).
6. 1990 SCANS: Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Standards (via U.S. secretary of labor). Included five competencies.
<http://www.academicinnovations.com/report.html>
7. American Management Association critical skills. The 4 Cs: Communication, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration.
<http://www.amanet.org/training/21st-Century-skills/>

C. Related issues

1. Politics and regulation
 - New York Education Commission
 - Board of Regents (beginning to recognize career and college readiness important to all students)
 - Legislature (Note ongoing Senate and Assembly hearings)
 - Governor (the wild card: Now focusing more on pre-k and early childhood ed)
2. There is nothing absolute about any of these standards. Every definition is a construct.

D. Discussion

- Most of these assessments did not include input from business.
- Educators and private sector have the same mission: Show up to work every day; don't be a downer; figure it out
- Skills valued by business are embedded in CDOS but there is no test or certification
- Special needs education does exist

- Do credentials or Regents diploma matter to employer? “If we see a spark, a curiosity, it helps ...” More recent experience matters more, especially with older worker; GED fine for entry level and diploma for higher levels.
- Most of high school game is credits and less an accumulation of skills.
- One source for skills info: Bill Coplin’s books <http://www.billcoplin.org/>
- What is valued and recorded and things for which schools are held accountable are not those skills that are needed to succeed.
- Some activities/hobbies may point to skills in collaboration, etc.
- Whitman School at SU is developing track to provide credentials for soft skills to provide evidence of skills beyond GPA.
- Monster.com offers some open courses on these skills.
- Are employers being creative thinkers? Many companies have institutional barriers to creativity.
- OnPoint for College helps candidates connect the dots between their skills and what makes them unique. Adolescents need help framing their skills.
- Lockheed recruiting moving toward emphasis on soft skills: how they work on a team, handle conflict, etc.
- OCM BOCES will soon announce plans to develop four schools addressing the 4 Cs. Watch for upcoming announcement for details.

Upcoming study sessions:

- Thursday, March 13, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., ProLiteracy
- Tuesday, March 25, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., ProLiteracy
- Thursday, April 10, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., OCM BOCES with optional 11 a.m. lunch, and tour after the meeting
- Tuesday, April 22, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., ProLiteracy
- Thursday, May 8, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., ProLiteracy
- Tuesday, May 20, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., ProLiteracy

Submitted by Renée K. Gadoua, study writer