

CAREER SCHOOLS PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IMPROVING WORKER SKILLS

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By Peter T. Koch

For-profit career schools and colleges have again been in for some criticism recently in a number of mainline press articles. What is alleged is not as bad as what is left out of these articles. A few facts may help to paint a more complete picture of what 114 career schools are accomplishing for the New Hampshire workforce.

The recent articles have focused on the fact that the vast majority of these career schools are, dare I say it, “for-profit”, as though this really makes a critical difference. These articles have appeared in the New York Times, BusinessWeek, and several others here in New Hampshire. The articles are never complimentary and they completely miss the reasons that for-profit, career education has been so successful. Simply stated, they are successful because there is a demand for their services and they meet the needs of employers. Some specific reasons for the success of these schools include:

Career schools train students for the skills employers want and they keep current with employer needs on an ongoing basis. These schools have to be on the cutting edge of industry technology to stay in business

Career schools can adjust their training curricula more responsively because they do not have to deal with the educational bureaucracy faced by traditional colleges

Career schools are student focused rather than faculty focused. This enables career schools to help build self esteem and self confidence in adult students who have usually not had a good education experience in high school. Student focus results in student completers.

Career schools have much higher retention rates – most are in the 70%-90% range. What traditional college can make that claim? Most of them have trouble reaching 50%

Career Schools have higher graduation rates – most are greater than 70% and some are at 90%. Over 50% of students entering traditional colleges drop out before completing their second year

Career schools have higher job placement rates – many schools have rates of 70% or higher. Traditional colleges do not report these statistics

Career schools cost less and take less time to complete because they are focused on skill building that can be applied right away and lead to jobs

Career schools are taxpayers. Traditional schools are not.

The career schools are training the skills employers want. Why else would students enroll in these programs? In 2009 these career schools educated and trained 36,500 students and generated over \$55 million in taxable business revenue for New Hampshire.

The articles critical of for-profit career schools allege that these schools do not provide a good education, they cost a lot and students end up with a lot of debt that they have a hard time repaying. This does not appear to be any different than the students who attend 2 and 4 year colleges, who drop out or who graduate, have a hard time finding a job and are strapped with debt as high as \$50,000 or higher. No career school graduate has a debt level even close to that. In fact, career school programs are shorter, more focused and less expensive than any program required to receive an associate's or bachelor's degree, with a much higher likelihood of a good paying job. It is also a fact that any career school that does not do a satisfactory job training its students is soon out of business. This is not the case with traditional colleges.

It is past time for the career schools to get the recognition for the work they do for students every single day. They are an important segment of the postsecondary world. They are THE fastest growing segment of postsecondary education and they are not being subsidized by the taxpayer. There is much to be applauded in the work they do. Let the critics take note!

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