

# TURNING CLASSROOM LEARNING INTO COMMUNITY LEARNING

American philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) once stated, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” Dewey, a strong proponent of progressive educational reform, believed that education should be based on the principle of learning through doing.

While Dewey’s “learning through doing” has always been the foundation of Career and Technical Education, this particular educational concept continues to evolve in many previously unforeseen ways.

In 2013, OCM BOCES brought hands-on learning to the next level by physically embedding some of their New York State Education Department-endorsed Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs at local businesses.

OCM BOCES Assistant Superintendent for Student Services Colleen Viggiano played a key role in implementing the embedded CTE programs. “BOCES has a long history of working with local employers. Because of the strong relationships formed over the years, we worked with businesses to start the embedded model,” says Viggiano.

With embedded CTE programming, student classrooms are physically housed at an appropriate local business. OCM BOCES currently has embedded physical therapy (Sports Center 481 in East Syracuse and Fadden & Associates in Cortland), automotive technology (Driver’s Village in Cicero), media marketing communications (WCNY in Syracuse) and early childhood education (Cortland County Community Action Program, Inc.) classrooms and is exploring the potential for additional mutually beneficial partnerships.

While OCM BOCES embedded programs indeed provide the trademark hands-on learning of Career and Technical Education, the classroom is no longer the only educational setting. With programs housed at businesses, experts and professionals in the field are also the teachers.

WCNY President and CEO Robert Daino has been an advocate for embedded programming even

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long before it came to fruition at WCNY. He said, “Today, the students are hungrily learning from us. Tomorrow, they will be leading companies and making ideas realities. WCNY has the honor to serve as the incubator for their professional career and success.”

OCM BOCES District Superintendent Jody Manning likens embedded CTE programming as a three-legged stool supporting students. “These programs have three pillars all standing together to provide students with a solid educational foundation. One leg is 9-12 education, one is higher education and one is local businesses,” he says.



Agreements with various higher education institutions have enabled students in OCM BOCES embedded CTE programs to earn up to 22 college credits and begin their post-secondary education while in high school.

Manning discussed the benefit of earning true college credit in high school. “These students are essentially starting college with their first semester already under their belt. When admissions departments look at applications and see that, they definitely have an edge on the competition,” he says.

Explaining how the embedded concept benefits business partners and students, Viggiano says, “Through our CTE Advisory Committee, we work closely with our local employers to make sure that we are teaching skills that align with their needs. That way, the businesses are actually taking part in educating their incoming workforce with the skills they need them to have. And of course, what better way to teach students the necessary skills than to immerse them in that environment?”

The embedded concept allows students to garner experience and knowledge from their teacher as well as business staff. Kathy Labulis, instructor for the OCM BOCES Media Marketing Communications program at WCNY, says, “It is an excellent way for the students to grow in different areas. By the time [students] are in their second year, they are asking permission to go speak to employees throughout the organization to gain clarification about a topic or for assistance with something they are doing.”

Manning is enthusiastic about the many benefits of embedded programs for students. “This model is so unique and collaborative. Learning is constant ... and it isn’t just the students learning. Teachers, business staff and college staff are all discovering new and better ways. Students are no longer educated just in a classroom, they are educated by a community of experts.”