



## WE'RE STILL LOOKING FOR NEW IDEAS ABOUT NONTRADITIONAL

It's important for students to have an open mind when it comes to the careers they explore and the courses they take. The more options students experience, the better chance they have of finding successful and rewarding careers. That's why it's important that the traditionally gender-specific Career and Technical Education courses are welcoming to both female and male students.

With that goal in mind, this year we have been visiting schools, interviewing teachers and looking for fresh ideas about attracting and retaining nontraditional students.

This is not a scientific study. We won't be able to interview every successful teacher, only a few who have time in their schedules to talk to us. We hope their experiences will be interesting and even motivating to others. We would love to continue this work, visit more schools, and talk to more teachers. If you are interested in sharing what you have done, please let us know.

### TRAILBLAZERS BLOG

There is more to say about *Trailblazers'* topics than will fit in our newsletter, so we're writing a blog now. Take a look: <http://ctetrailblazers.blogspot.com/>

### COMPLETER FOLLOW-UP

The 2011 Follow-up of 2010 CTE completers is nearing the deadline, July 1st. Over 70 divisions have reached or exceeded the 75% response rate target and 95 are over 50%.

Administrators who have not yet collected their passwords to begin the survey should contact us at [CTEcompleters@virginia.edu](mailto:CTEcompleters@virginia.edu)

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## Modeling Gender Equality And Serious Recruiting Increase Nontraditional Enrollment

This spring I have been visiting schools with Career and Technical Education programs that are able to recruit and retain nontraditional students. One of these was Parry McCluer High School in Buena Vista, a small city in Rockbridge County. In this high school, unusually large numbers of young women enroll in technology courses; half of the programming students are female, for example, and young women are even signing up for HVACR and cabinetmaking courses. It seemed a great place to visit in order to learn more about how to encourage young women to enroll in a wider range of CTE courses.

CTE Director, Mike Craft, led off our conversation by saying

*I don't know if you can replicate what we do. Being a small school system we are more of a family. When you have just 340 students, you know everybody by name and they know you. Students have a lot more knowledge of our programs. They feel like they're part of our community and we can be a little more relaxed than some teachers*

*Also, this has always been an industrial community so the value of CTE has always been high. I have been CTE director since '98 and we have never had a problem with nontraditional. Ninety-seven percent of our students take a CTE course. We have great participation. We have all levels of our students taking our CTE courses. Eighty percent plus of our seniors are CTE completers.*

In fact, career and technical education is such a central part of life at Parry McCluer, that when the current school was built in 2001, the CTE faculty were consulted about school design and were able to place their classrooms and labs in the center of the building, where all students can see and experience them.

Although the small school atmosphere and the community support for CTE can't be replicated everywhere, some of the features at Parry McCluer that support nontraditional enrollment could be a model for other schools.

## What It Takes

### Commitment to CTE and to Gender Equity

Teachers are the heart of any CTE program. It is obvious in even a short visit to Parry McCluer that the high levels of team spirit and cooperation that the CTE staff share are one key to the success of their programs and would help to increase enrollment and retention in schools of any size or environment. Teachers at Parry McCluer are passionate about what they do and want to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with students. According to Shannon Presnell, the cabinetmaking instructor, "We care about our programs. I'm not teaching cabinetmaking because it's just a job. I love what I do."

They also understand the importance of showing students, through their own lives and the choices they make, that gender does not limit opportunities. Male and female teachers treat each other as equals and believe that they model for the students a community in which men

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and women are welcome in any career. Business and Information Systems teacher, Donna Frazier, commented on this,

*Students see us interacting with each other as a group, role modeling. We don't corner ourselves into only the men can do this or only the women can do that. We cross roles and are examples for the kids. It's the openness and sense of belonging that makes the students feel more comfortable. Kids look more at what you do than what you say.*

*We teach not as a male or as a female, but as a person. And we treat our kids that way. We don't treat them as a girl or a boy but as a person who can be successful. Because we're small, we can really help and individualize and tailor instruction so that they find success. We don't put them in a gender. We don't treat them that way.*

Setting high expectations for students' performance and gender equity have been important. Shannon Presnell told me:

*I teach cabinet making and that's in a traditional environment. I specifically targeted females to try to see if I could get interest. I remember when I first started, the girls would walk in and just be completely nervous because that's a traditionally male dominated environment and working condition. But once they got in there, they noticed that I don't treat anyone any differently. They are all expected to do the same thing. I held them to the same expectations as the boys and didn't distinguish. I didn't say "Oh honey, if you can't lift this..." I said, "Here's what you've got to do." And it got done. And I found out that because they haven't been able to do that sort of thing at home or other places, they got way excited about it.*

Ms. Frazier added, "We also set them up for success. We keep it the same, but when they see, I can do that... Once you get them motivated, they love it."

Motivating young women to consider nontraditional programs has become easier, teachers say, because the programs and the occupations for which they prepare have changed. This is particularly true for the Trade and industrial Programs, which were once dirty, but are now high tech.

### Personal Recruiting Year-Round

The faculty actively recruit students into their CTE courses, rather than relying only on school counselors to do this through the registration process: "You really have to recruit. You can't

be afraid to go up to a kid and say, "I need you in my program" or "why don't you come and see what we're doing."

Faculty also see the job of recruiting and retaining students in CTE programs as a mutual responsibility. They recruit for each other, and if a student isn't happy or successful in one CTE program, they actively seek to connect that student with another teacher or program where he or she can be more successful.

Marketing teacher Jennifer Balkey spoke about this:

*"We promote for each other. In my course, I poll them, 'Are you coming back to take my second year course.' And some say, 'This was ok, but it's really not my thing.' I say, 'that's fine, but what else do you like. Here's what else we've got.' So I steer them in towards graphics or business. We are really good about finding their talents and trying to lead them to where their talents are because that's where they are going to be successful."*

Teachers recognize that this kind of joint recruiting requires that the faculty work very closely and cooperatively together with recruiting as a common goal. Ms. Balkey commented, "You have to be close as a department for this to work. We talk to each other every day. We don't see it as someone else's job, as guidance job, or the principal's job. Being in a small school everyone does everything."

### Building Connections with Middle School

Informal recruiting is not enough on its own to fill CTE classes or to ensure a high level of nontraditional enrollment. At Parry McCluer the process begins with INSIGHT, Inspiring New Students in Technology Education, a three-week summer camp put on by CTE teachers for 6th, 7th and 8th grade students. The camp brings students into the high school, so they can experience CTE classes first-hand and to see what it would be like to become a CTE student when they move up to high school. When students find subjects that interest them, they can then plan those courses into their curriculum from the beginning: "Students get a chance to do things they would not normally have even know existed, so they would not sign up for. They have a chance at a young age to see what we have. Then when they sit with their counselors and do their planning, they know what we have and they can plan ahead."

Each of the three weeks is devoted to a set of projects that students can complete and have something to take home. Teachers

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work hard to keep the subject matter current. Each session is evaluated to see if it was successful. If not, they either revamp it or replace it with a different program. In this year's evaluation they decided that their audio program had become dated with the introduction of MP3 players and other newer technologies, so they will develop something more current like video or a multi-media presentation. They are always asking themselves, did this session work? If not, what can we do to improve it?

According to Ms. Balkey, the main reason for the camps effectiveness is that:

*The camp is set up so that these kids are very successful and it's hands on and they get to see a project to fruition. There is a lot of success in that camp. That success, they get excited about. This year we're going to have six instructors. The kids love that summer program and that builds the level of expectation as they come into high school.*

On the last day of camp, they have a cook out with the kids and their parents and siblings. This too is an important part of the recruitment process because it is an opportunity to make sure that parents have a first-hand look at the program now being taught in high school. This means that when scheduling starts, the parents remember the programs and can encourage their children to enroll in them.

The camp is locally funded and everything for the students is free. It is run in conjunction with summer school, so they can ride the school buses. In the first years of the camp, students could only attend during a specific week, but the camp administrators discovered that this structure often conflicted with vacations and other family plans, so they now allow students to attend at any point during the three weeks and for any length of time.

### Staying Connected to Teachers and Administrators throughout the Division

Active engagement with teachers and counselors from elementary and middle schools also facilitates student enrollment. Every year Parry McCluer runs an in-service program for instructors and administrators in the entire school division, K-12, to teach them about CTE and the courses students take. This past year, for example, they held a progressive breakfast at the high school that required participants to visit all of the CTE rooms to collect their meal, thus exposing them to each of the

programs. One CTE instructor heard again and again, "Oh, I didn't know you did that."

### Staying Connected to the Community

In the small city of Buena Vista, the high school is the center of the community. Residents, who are also parents and employers, frequently visit the school for football games and community activities. Many take adult education classes there. Every visit is an opportunity to promote career and technical education and to show that all programs are open to all students. The community connection is easier to build here than in many school divisions because so many Buena Vista parents, plant managers, and other employers completed CTE classes when they were in high school.

Parry McCluer has extensive cooperative education and mentorship programs with local employers. Approximately 8% percent of students participate in the co-op program and 4% in the mentorship program. Teachers believe that these experiences in the real world of work help to break down gender stereotypes rather than reinforcing them. Ms. Balkey shared her perspective:

*When you think about the state of the economy and down-sizing, when you are in a job you may be asked to do all sorts of things. Being with the co-op a student might not just go in, stand behind the register and wait on customers and think, "This is a girl's job." You take the trash out; you do all of the things that are required at that place of employment. I don't hear many of my students complain, "They made me do this, but he should have had to do it." I think because of the times, students will come into the programs and be more willing, more open to the material and to what we're asking them to do.*

### Leadership Support

As in every school, leadership is key. The Buena Vista superintendent, Rebecca Gates, is vested in the success of CTE programs and was involved in CTE long before she started in the Buena Vista school system. She has a goal of 100% credentialing. The principal, Anna Graham, is also a shetrong supporter of the CTE programs and is excited about the work that the CTE instructors are doing. In the interview, she spoke highly of the way the instructors have structured the summer camps for middle-schoolers: "They set it up so it is hands-on and exciting and there is a lot of success in that camp."