

Public Hearing for Statewide Plan for Higher Education Notes:

Good morning, my name is Denise Poland, and I am the Director of Professional Culinary Academy here in Buffalo. We are located within St. Mary's School for the Deaf.

We are a Vocational school licensed by Bureau of Proprietary School of Supervision, and primarily receive our funding for students from ACCESS –VR.

We work with students who are currently overcoming life challenges and provide them a “hands “ learning environment. Our 600 hour program not only provides in classroom training, but job placement as well.

We have approximately 80-85% graduation rate and an 80% placement rate of our students.

I would ask that you allow me to take a few minutes to talk with you about a past graduate of our program. She was a middle aged woman who was in computer technology sales for Fortune 500 companies.

One afternoon a drunk driver would change her life and career forever. She would suffer a severe concussion, and a few weeks later realize she was suffering some cognitive issues as well. A dr's visit would confirm something was not quite right. Her brain could handle the concussion, but was essentially on overload now because of an undetected brain tumor that was also in place. This student would undergo 4 brain surgeries in 3 months and come out with a label of traumatic brain injury. She would now be labeled permanently disabled, learning disabled due to short term memory loss, and eventually loss her executive position she once held.

She decided to pursue her lifelong dream of becoming a professional pastry Chef. She enrolled in The French Culinary Institute in NYC, also a vocational School. It was when she finished and tried to get employment in Buffalo she realized quickly that Buffalo doesn't fully embrace classically trained French Pastry Chef's. It was

then she knew she needed to go back to culinary school. This is when she found out about the gift of training through VESID now known as ACCES.

They sent her to school at Professional Culinary Institute and she graduated from the program approximately 7 years ago. She got employment at Muscoreils' and eventually Panera Bread.

Some of you may be wondering how I remember the details of this women's story so well... It is because I am that student. I eventually had my tumor come back a second time. I would need a craniotomy, so I gave up my life in the food service industry and took a position at PCI as their admissions director. After I recovered from my surgery, I was promoted to the Director position. All of this was made possible because of ACCES which I will be eternally grateful.

I can say with confidence not every student is a 2 or 4 year traditional college type student. The training available through non-degree granting career school is an important part of the training initiatives needed for a competitive 21st century workforce in countless fields.

In closing, vocational and career schools need to be seen as an integral part of the k-16 continuum and should be integrated into the Statewide Plan for Higher Education.

Thank you.

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