



Addressing the Crisis in Vocational Education in Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Vocational Education program (sometimes called “Career/Technical Education” or CTE) is inadequate for our students and our economy. Every year, thousands of students are left on waitlists for seats in the state’s vocational schools, while employers desperately seek the skilled workers the vocational schools could provide. And many vocational schools use selective admissions policies that discriminatorily deny access to untold numbers of students of color, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners. The fundamental objectives of the CTE program are:

- **To provide educational opportunities suited to students’ learning styles and career plans.**
- **To promote economic growth by providing employers with skilled workers.**
- **To provide economic opportunity and career paths for students from all backgrounds.**
- **To advance social justice by providing equal opportunity for all students.**

CTE schools offer an education that is well suited to the needs and interests of many students. The best current research suggests that high-quality CTE programs have a range of benefits for young people, including greater engagement in and graduation from public secondary schools, acquisition of enhanced career skills, and the ability to earn levels of income that will satisfy their needs after they graduate.

At the same time, the Massachusetts economy is in desperate need of workers with the skills that CTE schools are equipped to teach. Many sectors of the economy – from home renovation to early childhood care to advanced manufacturing – are hampered by shortages of skilled workers. To keep our economy strong, we need a more robust pipeline of workers with these skills.

Problem: Across Massachusetts, CTE schools are in great demand to prepare students for jobs in the trades, industry, and productive services. But the supply of these schools’ programs is insufficient.

- **For 2020-2021, there were 1.75 completed student applications for every vocational program seat.** In some communities, there were twice as many applications as available seats. Approximately 8,000 students who applied are currently on waitlists to attend a CTE program. At least 2,000 more students want to attend but are not served by any vocational school.
- **The waitlists are longest in the regional vocational schools that serve our Gateway Cities.** It is the students from these communities who are likely to reap the greatest benefits from vocational education and the resultant career opportunities; yet they are the students least likely to have access to these programs.
- **This situation has created a serious civil rights and social justice issue because of CTE programs’ discriminatory admissions policies.** The vocational schools have restrictive admissions policies based on middle school grades, discipline, and attendance records, counselor recommendations, and sometimes interviews. These biased policies lessen the number of students of color and from disadvantaged backgrounds who gain admission, even though these are public high schools, which should be equally open to all. The state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has recently revised its regulations about selective admissions policies, but early indications are that little real change has been accomplished.

PDM is a volunteer-run, statewide network of grassroots activists, who are seeking to advance public policies of opportunity and inclusiveness at the state and local level via public education and advocacy.

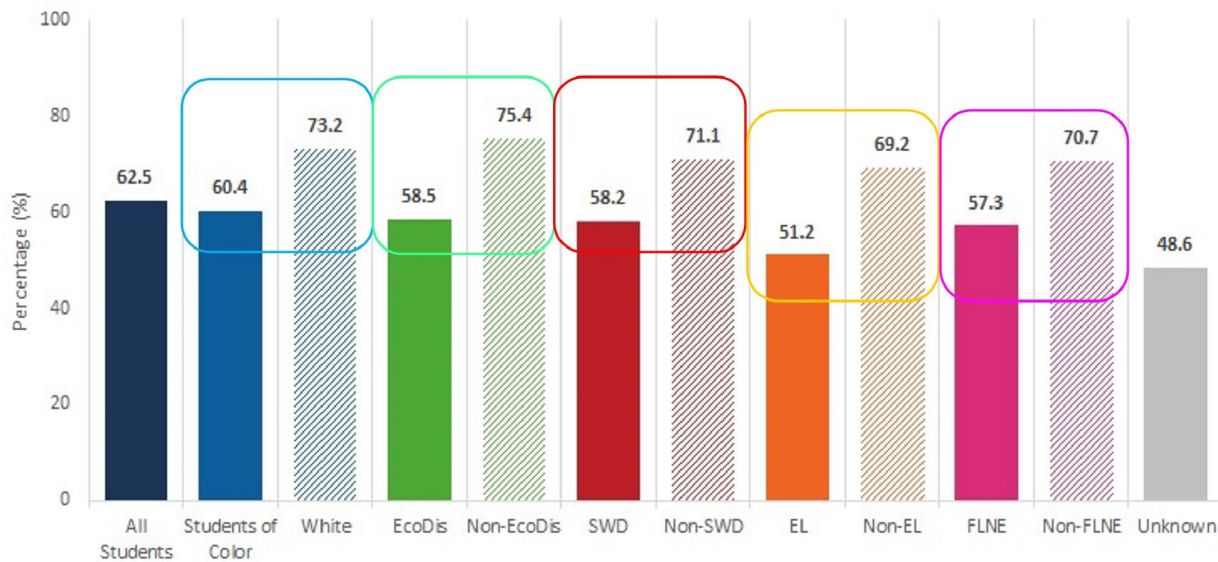
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The discriminatory impact of these admissions policies can be seen from an examination of the results shown in the table below. For example, out of the total number of students who applied and whose applications were completed for 2020-2021, 60.4% of students of color were accepted compared with 73.2% of white students. Similar results are shown for other categories.

Discriminatory Impacts of Current Admissions Policies

Offers of Admissions Made, As Percentage of Those Who Apply



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Fair Access to CTE Programs is a Critical Need: Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts's (PDM) Education Working Group has identified fair and universal access to high quality CTE as a critical need. Finding solutions to this need requires prompt action to invest in the infrastructure to expand CTE capacity and increase operating budgets to cover associated higher costs.

Creating and funding more seats for students is the best way to meet existing and future demand for CTE programs. As a member of the Alliance for Vocational and Technical Education (AVTE), PDM has helped craft proposed legislation (H.666/S.348) to fund expanded capacity in CTE schools and programs, and to make better use of existing facilities, such as dual enrollment programs.

Please help move this critical legislation forward by:

- Contacting your state legislators and asking them to actively support this legislation. If you don't know how to contact your legislators, go to: <https://malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator>.

PDM is also part of the Vocational Education Justice Coalition, which is working on the discriminatory admissions policies currently in place in many schools. See our website for next steps in that campaign.

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