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Dr. William J. Crowder, Jr. (B.J.) is the Assistant Director of Workforce & Career Development (CTE) for Henrico County Public Schools in Henrico, Virginia. He has formerly served as a building principal, associate principal, assistant principal, classroom teacher and athletic coach. His desire is to assist students in finding their passion and directing them towards a career pathway and for each student to graduate either enrolled, enlisted, and/or employed. Dr. Crowder's entire 19-year career has been surrounded by CTE from being a CTE teacher, supervising CTE at the middle school level, a CTE building principal, and his current position of Assistant Director of CTE.

Dr. Crowder also serves as a doctoral capstone mentor and adjunct professor at the collegiate level in educational leadership and curriculum and instruction.



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## **Blog Post**

One of my passions is changing the perception of all stakeholders that CTE students are “less than” vs. “greater than.” As educators, we all know that there are many professions out there that make an exorbitant amount of money in comparison to teaching. We also know that many of these professions require far less formal college education, but yet, we still hesitate to promote these careers. Why? I’ve thought about this a lot over the last several years and I think the answer is simple. I think it is lack of familiarity or knowledge of these career paths. Many educators I have seen support students in choosing trade careers are those whose spouse is in that career, or their parent was in that type of career, so they have a frame of reference and understanding.

Unfortunately, we still live in a society where if I lined up 100 seniors and asked them what they were going to do next school year, chances are all 100 would say “college” because that has become the societal expectation for graduates. How do we change that perception and congratulate and support the many students who chose an alternative post-secondary path?

Postsecondary education will always be important, and I think every young professional needs to continue their education; but this does not have to come in the traditional format of a two-year or four-year university. There are so many more postsecondary options that students can take advantage of if we as educators stop limiting them to only traditional paths.

In Henrico County Public Schools, we have stated that we want our students to graduate “Triple E”, meaning they need to be either enrolled, enlisted, and/or employed. This is our goal for every graduate, every year.

Luckily, our school board supports our work in CTE in both policy and funding. We are in the process of doubling our footprint for our ACE Centers. These were formerly our technical centers but were rebranded as Advanced Career Education (ACE) Centers in an effort to change the decades-old perception of the centers. Until last year we had two ACE Centers but added a third because of the need. Currently all three ACE Centers are undergoing full renovation with an additional building being constructed as well. The upstairs of this new facility will be shell space for future expansion that our students will build out themselves.

With these new facilities comes the addition of programs that will hopefully help change the perception as well, including cybersecurity, food sciences and dietetics, motorsports technology, and television media productions. Forecasted programs for coming years include surgical tech, senior day care facility, and more.

In addition to curricular programming, our school division offers a multitude of events to help change the perception of CTE including three signature events we host each year: CTE Expo, CTE Rodeo, and our CTE Letter of Intent Signing Day. Students participate in county-wide initiatives including our house building project, renovating a police substation, renovating a local mall for our adult education programs, and more.

With all of the great things going on in the world of CTE, we continue to fight the uphill battle of awareness and perceptions. As educators our goal should always be to support student needs and find traditional and non-traditional pathways to make them successful!