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CHANGING THE IMAGE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

by
Laura Timberman

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 1, 1999

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved May 1, 1999

ABSTRACT

Laura Timberman

Changing the Image of
Vocational Education
1999
Advisor: Dr. Don Bagin
Educational Public Relations

The purpose of this study was to (1) determine existing opinions of vocational education and (2) identify steps to be taken by vocational schools to improve image problems and to attract students.

A written survey was sent to the 21 New Jersey public vocational school superintendents. Twenty responses were received.

The results of the study indicate that the term “vocational” indeed carries a stigma. The leading association for vocational education recently underwent a name change. Many vocational schools are following suit, changing their names to eliminate the word “vocational.”

The study also addressed the new courses being taught at vocational schools. While traditional classes in auto mechanics and welding still exist, vocational schools are offering “high tech” classes to meet the needs of the job market.

The survey results point to public relations as being the key to solving the image problem of the vocational schools. Public relations efforts can assist with informing the community about the changes taking place in the vocational schools.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Laura Timberman

Changing the Image of
Vocational Education
1999
Advisor: Dr. Don Bagin
Educational Public Relations

This thesis determined existing opinions of vocational education. A written survey of vocational school superintendents was used to gather data. The results show that vocational schools are modifying their names and their courses to improve their image. Public relations can play a vital role in helping vocational schools overcome image problems.

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I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. William H. Adams, who has served as my mentor through the completion of this study. Dr. Adams was instrumental in providing specifics for my vocational education study and for assisting with my survey.

Last, but not least, a big thank you to my family for their support. My husband Bruce has, over the past four years, served as editor, babysitter, and morale-booster. My 11-year-old son Ryan helped by setting up the laptop computer for me to work on my survey. And a note to my son Cory--Mom doesn't have to go to class anymore!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Vocational technical schools are in a state of transformation. New technologies and a changing work environment have created a need for a new focus in vocational education.

To meet this challenge, vocational technical schools are offering high-tech courses and specialized academy programs, in addition to traditional occupational preparation programs. Many of the new courses link to both further education and employment opportunities. Students often have the chance to earn college credit through their technical studies. Partnerships with local businesses are also instrumental in strengthening vocational offerings.

Vocational schools need to attract students to these programs. The perception that people have of vocational education, however, must be changed to attract higher-level students. According to the Association for Career and Technical Education (which was, until December 1998, the American Vocational Association), “Attempts to change people’s views of the term ‘vocational’ are ineffective. No matter what is said, ‘vocational’ is viewed as non-college bound training meant for someone else’s children.”¹

¹AVA Online, 10/5/98, Internet resource.

Fighting a negative image has been a long, ongoing battle for those involved in the field of vocational education. James Lucy, who conducted research for his thesis on students' attitudes toward attending a Pennsylvania vocational school in the early 1980s, found that students held an unfavorable feeling toward vocational education. Lucy cited a 1974 National Advisory Committee Council on Vocational Education report that echoes the American Vocational Association's argument for its name change. According to the 1974 report, "At the very heart of the problem is a national attitude that says vocational education is for someone else's children."

This negative attitude toward vocational education is also held by many professional educators. In his book High School - A Report on Secondary Education in America, Ernest L. Boyer relates a conversation he held with a vocational teacher. The teacher told Boyer that "They (the counselors) are sending us kids who are not really interested and are failing in school, so they put them in the vocational classes to strengthen their needed credits." Another teacher complained to Boyer that the vocational school was "nothing more than a dumping ground."²

University Professor James R. Stone III, project director for the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, believes that years of negative comments about vocational programs have done damage to the image of vocational education. "Like old wives' tales, the negative comments gradually have become accepted as fact by many,

²Boyer, Ernest L. High School - A Report on Secondary Education in America, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Harper & Row, 1983, p. 124.

without regard to the truth.” He continues, “If the quest for a positive public image can be considered a battle, then vocational education is on the defensive.”³

During his testimony on the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act given on behalf of the American Association of School Administrators, New Jersey Vocational School District Superintendent Dr. William H. Adams was questioned by Senator Nancy Kassebaum regarding the image of vocational education. Senator Kassebaum asked Dr. Adams whether changing the name of vocational education would have any impact on improving its image. Dr. Adams’ response was that changing the name is not as important as focusing on the quality of services and types of programs being offered through vocational education. He stressed the need for vocational education to continue to change and grow by preparing students for jobs not yet invented.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to:

1. Determine existing opinions of vocational education.
2. Identify steps to be taken by vocational schools to improve image problems and to attract students.

Importance of the Study

This study will help vocational technical schools change their image. As vocational schools implement new courses to meet the needs of a changing workplace, they need to attract students to these courses. The stigma associated with vocational education must be lifted to do this.

³Stone, James R. III, “Debunking the Myths - Research Offers Ammunition to Fight Misperceptions of Voc Ed,” Vocational Education Journal, American Vocational Association, January 1993.

Richard Van Gulik, a vocational textbook author and the superintendent of New Jersey's Hunterdon County Polytech Institute, provided his views on this study.

According to Van Gulik, "The knowledge level of parents of high school-aged children regarding vocational education, for the most part, is based on what vocational education was like when they were in school. The decisions they make regarding their children's futures are too often based upon that knowledge. Unfortunately, their knowledge of the past has little bearing on the present or future. Vocational schools are forced to repackage themselves to overcome the stigma of the past. The question remains--What will it take to eliminate the stigma of yesteryear? We need answers now to overcome vocational education's image problem."

David Smoker, former National School Public Relations Association president, says vocational education faces "intellectual snobbery." According to Smoker, this is not a new problem, but it is one that must be addressed and corrected now. A former Albuquerque vocational school administrator, Smoker is a strong proponent for vocational technical education. He addressed vocational education concerns in several publications in the 1970s, including one article entitled "Let's Get Serious About Vocational Education." Smoker believes vocational education needs to find a new title. He explained that the vocational school district where he spent his career is successful in attracting students because it offers two-year associate's degree programs. The school also uses the slogan, "Education You Can Use," to promote itself. According to Smoker, high school vocational classes have moved out of the basement, but need to keep moving ahead for the image to change.

Definition of Terms

Vocational education: An integration of both academic and vocational proficiencies, including competency-based applied learning that contributes to an individual's academic knowledge, higher order reasoning, problem-solving skills, work attitudes, general employability skills and occupational specific skills.⁴

Academy programs: High school programs that are usually "schools-within-schools" (i.e., smaller administrative units operating within larger schools) that are occupationally focused.⁵

Work-Based Learning: A component of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 designed to provide students with work experience, job training, workplace mentoring, instruction in workplace competencies, and instruction in all aspects of an industry.⁶

Assumptions and Limitations

People's beliefs will be based on pre-conceived notions that vocational education is for students who cannot succeed in academic classes or go on to further education.

People believe vocational technical schools offer only traditional instruction in classes such as automotive repair, cosmetology, and welding.

This study focused on the public vocational schools operating in New Jersey. These schools serve high school and adult students through shared-time and full-time programs. There are 21 schools in the state, one per county. The schools are located in diverse parts of the state--from seashore towns, to rural communities, to highly-industrialized cities.

⁴1990 Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act.

⁵U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 10/21/98, Internet resource.

⁶Brustein, Michael and Marty Mahler, AVA Guide to the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, American Vocational Association, 1994.

Plan of Study

To determine the direction of vocational education in New Jersey, a written survey will be used. Specifically targeted will be the superintendents of the public vocational schools in New Jersey.

It is foreseen that answers provided by the superintendents through the written survey will give insights into how other vocational schools are changing their image and attempting to change or correct misconceptions about vocational education.

Research to be conducted will focus on how other vocational schools in other states and vocational education associations have dealt with image problems.

Interviews of vocational administrators, teachers, and students will provide feedback on the image problem and help with solutions to this problem.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of related literature incorporated a variety of sources. The topic of vocational education image was found discussed in books about reforming American education. Entire articles and debates on vocational image problems were located in vocational education journals and on Internet bulletin board discussion groups and web sites.

The Gloucester County Library, Mullica Hill, New Jersey, was used in the search for books on the topics of educational reform and vocational education. Nine were found to be relevant to the topic of changing the image of vocational education.

The library database of Rowan University, Glassboro, New Jersey, was accessed electronically. A link was made through this site to the ERIC database, which provided access to research on this thesis topic. The United States Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education web page was identified through ERIC and provided resources.

Salem County Vocational Technical Schools' Technology Services Center, Woodstown, New Jersey, maintains education-related periodicals. Issues of *TECHNIQUES*, a periodical specifically geared to the field of vocational education, were searched. Several relevant articles and editorials were identified for use in this study.

Using Internet search engines and the key words "vocational education image," "vocational schools," "vocational associations," and "perceptions of vocational education"

yielded results. These matches included excerpts from the *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education*, research papers from the National Center of Research in Vocational Education and the *ERIC Digest*, and information from the site of the Association for Career and Technical Education (formerly American Vocational Association). Dr. Donald Bagin, Rowan University, provided names of vocational education leaders to assist in the Internet search for related material.

Resources were also provided by Dr. William H. Adams. Dr. Adams is a national executive board member of the American Association of School Administrators and is the district superintendent for the Salem County Vocational Technical Schools. *The AVA Yearbook--The Future of Vocational Education*, *The 1995 AVA Legislative Guide*, and *The AVA Guide to the School-to-Work Opportunities Act* were provided by Dr. Adams.

The National School Public Relations Association's reference catalog was consulted. To assist with this study, the book Making/Marketing Your School the School of Choice--How to be Competitive in Today's Education Marketplace, 1994, was obtained.

A search of the amazon.com Internet bookstore found many titles dealing with vocational education. The book Life-Long Learning Through Vocational Education: The Path of the Snake by Lisa Whatley was acquired.

The School and Community Relations textbook used by this author in graduate studies at Rowan University was consulted.

The thesis, *An Investigation of Students' Attitudes Toward the Eastern Montgomery County Area Vocational Technical High School in Willow Grove*,

Pennsylvania, by James Lucy, Glassboro State College, provided insights into changing the image of vocational education.

Information was obtained from New Jersey Education Association publications and editorials regarding School-to-Work issues.

The following sections of this chapter contain reviews of issues related to improving vocational education image problems.

Changing A Name to Change An Image

In December 1998 the American Vocational Association passed a vote to change the name of its organization to the Association for Career and Technical Education. Announcing the “new name for a new century” on its web site, the association summarized the reasons for changing the name. “Vocational and technical education today is a far cry from the ‘shop’ classes that were stigmatized as only for the non-college-bound students in public schools. Today’s career and technical education curricula in high schools, community colleges, technical colleges and four-year universities prepare youth and adult students with technical and integrated core academic skills that can lead to career success in the high-tech world economy.”¹ The association plans to launch a 1999 public relations campaign about the benefits of career and technical education.

Earlier Introduction to Vocational Education

An Internet bulletin board site discussed the topic of vocational education image. The starting point of the discussion was a statement decrying the poor image of vocational education. A request for ideas on how vocational education can be better portrayed as a

¹American Vocational Association, <http://www.avaonline.org/newnamepress.html>, 1998.

viable option was posted on the computer bulletin board. Follow-up comments included statements that people do not know the “true potential of vocational education.”² A suggestion for improving image was to introduce the vocational education option to middle school students and parents, as opposed to waiting until the high school years.

Vocational Education Needs to Change

Kenneth Gray, Wen-Jyh Wang, and Sharon Malizia co-authored “Is Vocational Education Still Necessary?” in the *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education*. The authors cited the National Center for Educational Statistics’ findings that by 1990 less than 10 percent of all high school students identified themselves as being enrolled in vocational education. “In fact, the only group that showed increases in credits earned in vocational education were low achieving or disabled students (National Assessment of Vocational Education, 1994). Even among those who took vocational education, the number of students who completed a coherent sequence of courses that would lead to labor market advantage declined.” According to the authors, “The evidence suggests that the very existence of vocational education is in danger, at least in the form that has existed since the 1960s.”³ It was also noted in this article that the U.S. Department of Labor Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) report of 1991 cited the need for “a core of standard academic competencies as the foundation for all other

²<http://reach.ucf.edu/~reach/wwwboard/data/evt3502/messages/85.html>, re: Vocational Education Image, posted 30 Oct. 1996.

³Gray, K., W. J. Wang, & S. Malizia, (1995). “Is Vocational Education Still Necessary? Investigating the Educational Effectiveness of the College Tech Prep Curriculum. *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education* 32 (2), 6-29.

occupational skills; occupationally-specific vocational education is largely unmentioned in this document.”⁴ The authors conducted a research study of 1991 graduates from seven public high schools to determine these graduates’ success in college or occupational endeavors. Based on the results of their research findings, the authors found that:

In conclusion, the drift into the college prep program by the majority of today’s high school students seems to be creating significant transitional problems for growing numbers of high school graduates who now graduate academically unprepared for college and equally unprepared for work. Without reform, the college prep curriculum is no more effective for all students than it was at the turn of the century, when its failure led to the development of vocational education. However, this is not 1916, and while the college prep curriculum of old cannot serve even a majority of today’s students, neither can an unremodeled vocational education. Although high school vocational education is still necessary, growing numbers of students need a vocational education that is integrated with the academic college preparatory curriculum and designed to prepare them to be successful in two-year technical education.⁵

In The Future of Vocational Education--1981 American Vocational Association Yearbook, vocational education’s mixed public image is debated. The author points out that “most people (parents, students and the public) are aware of vocational education and yet they are puzzled by it. To most, vocational education makes sense.” But the author continues, “Some, though, make no secret of their view that vocational education is a permanent social tattoo, a type of education intended for the poor and culturally unaccepted, something to be avoided like the pox.”⁶

⁴Gray, K., et. al.

⁵Gray, K., et. al.

⁶Buila, Theodore. “Capacity Building in Vocational Education,” The Future of Vocational Education, American Vocational Association, 1981, p. 57.

In High School--A Report on Secondary Education in America, Ernest Boyer predicted, "Increasingly, it appears, high school vocational programs will be either irrelevant or inadequate. At one end will be low-paying, dead-end jobs for which formal education will not be required...At the other end will be high-tech jobs that require *more* technical training than most high schools can provide."⁷

A chapter entitled "Voc-Ed: A Cancer in Education?" detailed image and structure problems of vocational education in the book Educational Renaissance--Our Schools at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century. Authors Marvin Cetron and Margaret Gayle studied existing vocational education programs. The authors blame the overall decline in student enrollment at vocational schools on the increased academic requirements needed for high school graduation. "The reforms of the 1980s may also have diluted the value of a vocational-school education. Spending more time on academic studies inevitably means spending less on job-related courses."⁸ The authors believe that good vocational programs are very much needed now, due to the growth of technology and the shortage in the work force of skilled workers. "Treated in the 1980s as a poor relative of college-preparatory courses, our national voc-ed system has been unable to

⁷Boyer, Ernest L. High School--A Report on Secondary Education in America, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1983, p. 123.

⁸Cetron, Marvin and Margaret Gayle. Educational Renaissance--Our Schools at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century, St. Martin's Press, New York, New York, 1991, p. 68.

attract and train the students who need its help.”⁹ A real problem for industry, state the authors, is that “twenty years ago, employers could take their pick of motivated entry-level workers, many of them with good vocational skills. Ten years from now, there will be too few new job-hunters with any level of training.”¹⁰

Career Academies--Changing Vocational Education

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education (NCRVE) was established by Congress in 1978 under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act. One of the main objectives of the Center is to “rethink what vocational education should be and how it can best be delivered.”¹¹ A search of the NCRVE web site unveiled information about two vocational schools (Southgate and Prairie) and their quest to restructure and reform vocational education. The two schools introduced the concept of career academies into their districts. According to a NCRVE study of the effects of the career academies at Southgate and Prairie, “Overall, the restructuring environment in both schools was one in which new forms of vocational education--most specifically the career academies--could be made visible and could gain the acceptance and admiration of teachers, administrators, parents, and community. Contributing to that more favorable image were the symbolic support of influential advocates inside and outside the school, an

⁹Cetron, Marvin and Margaret Gayle, p. 69.

¹⁰Cetron, Marvin and Margaret Gayle, p. 70.

¹¹National Center for Research in Vocational Education, <http://www.rand.org/centers/vocationaleduc/index.html>, October 1996.

academically heterogeneous student clientele, and a standard program of academic coursework (not remedial). For industry partners--but not typically for the school's academic teachers--support was also linked to the school's commitment to achieve credible connections between school and work."¹²

Television station WRAL 5 in North Carolina featured a story on how vocational education is changing on its Eye On Schools web site. "Vocational education used to mean auto mechanics and bricklaying. Businesses wanted workers with more training, but not necessarily a college degree. Vocational education is known by some other names today--Workforce or School-to-Work initiatives. Students still get training in automotive, cosmetology, and carpentry. However, industry asked schools to prepare students for jobs they can't keep filled. High schools responded with high tech." Citing the Information Technology Association, WRAL's web site gave statistics that 346,000 technology jobs remain unfilled. In Wake County a networking academy program was created to potentially meet this demand.¹³

Salem County Vocational Technical School District Superintendent Dr. William H. Adams shared a document with this author entitled "New Jersey Regional Career Academies: Reform of Vocational-Technical Education and Rebirth of the American High School." Prepared by Susan Mullins, director of institutional development at Bergen

¹²National Center for Research in Vocational Education, <http://vocserve.berkeley.edu/MDS-812/MDS-812-Question.html>, "Question 1: Did the Restructuring Environment Create a Favorable Disposition Toward Vocational Reform?", (12 Oct. 1998).

¹³<http://www.wral-tv.com/features/eyeonschools/1998/0506-vocational-ed/>.

County Technical Schools in New Jersey, this 1998 white paper examined how vocational-technical education is changing to meet national educational reform directions and guidelines. Mullins' paper is written in defense of vocational school districts offering career academies. In the preface of her paper, Mullins explains that county vocational technical schools in New Jersey are being challenged by comprehensive school districts. The comprehensive districts believe the career academy programs offered by the vocational schools duplicate the programs offered at their local high schools. In defense of the vocational schools, Mullins states, "Vocational schools have always been schools of choice. Teachers and administrators are used to a client-centered approach to education. If students and/or parents are not satisfied, students leave." Citing reasons why career academies can be successfully operated by the vocational school districts, "Perhaps the structure of the vocational-technical school organization has enabled change. Perhaps vocational schools have always realized that students benefit most from direct learning experiences. Perhaps the irony is that vocational education--replete with its old labeling as second class education--emerges as the preferred model for the New American High School. Students in career academies flourish."

School-to-Work Works in Vocational Education

In the book The School to Work Revolution, a section entitled "The Failure of Vocationalism--and a Way Out" addresses the image problems of vocational education. "Throughout the twentieth century, criticisms of vocational programs have been remarkably consistent: Vocational education focuses too much on narrow job training. It is out of step with changes in industry. It prepares young people for occupations without

regard to labor-market demands. It lacks intellectual content and academic rigor. It is too isolated from the rest of the curriculum.”¹⁴ The author cites a 1994 report to Congress from the U.S. Department of Education, which found increasing numbers of disabled students and low-achievers in vocational courses. According to this report, “this trend could slowly increase the isolation and stigmatization of these programs and students.”¹⁵ The author examined vocational schools belonging to the High Schools that Work consortium. Created in 1990, this consortium is comprised of 15 southeastern and mid-Atlantic states. Its goal is to strengthen academic offerings while preparing students for the workforce. Seven of the most improved schools were featured in a 1993 High Schools that Work report. “In just three years, these seven schools had managed to close the gap between their career-bound students and the consortium’s goals by 65 percent in reading, 36 percent in mathematics, and 70 percent in science. Moreover, students who had taken the full sequence of mathematics, science, and English courses generally exceeded the consortium’s targets.”¹⁶ New Castle County, Delaware, English teacher Mary An Scarbrough believes vocational schools are being hurt by the recruiting of students with stronger academic abilities. “The shops where the kids want to get dirty are not getting filled up.” The author describes the debate over how to incorporate academic and technical studies as a dilemma that needs a solution.

¹⁴Olson, Lynn. The School-to-Work Revolution--How Employers and Educators are Joining Forces to Prepare Tomorrow’s Skilled Workforce, Addison-Wesley, Reading, Massachusetts, 1997, p. 42.

¹⁵Olson, Lynn, p. 43.

¹⁶Olson, Lynn, p. 49.

Postsecondary Vocational Education

In The School-to-Work Revolution, a chapter is devoted to tech prep linkages between secondary and postsecondary institutions. The author defines tech prep as programs that “prepare students for technical careers through courses of study that combine the last two years of high school with two years at a community college leading to an associate’s degree.”¹⁷ Tech prep programs were created during the early 1990s by the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education and Applied Technology Education Act. The author states that the education requirements for employment are rising. “In 1994, male college graduates earned on average over 50 percent more than those with a high school diploma and nearly twice as much as high school dropouts.”¹⁸ According to the author, studies of well-paying technical jobs have found that the educational requirements for those jobs are rising. Olson believes that for tech prep to be successful, all students must be prepared for both higher education and life-long learning.

“Vocational education appears to have an image problem that even millions of dollars cannot solve,” says Peter West in his “Scholarships for Voc.-Ed. Training Go Untapped” article. In Florida, nearly a million dollars in scholarship money for technical and vocational schools went untapped in 1995. Postsecondary school officials there point to image problems and are worried about future consequences. A spokeswoman for the Florida Association of Postsecondary Schools and Colleges says the problem is more

¹⁷Olson, Lynn, p. 127.

¹⁸Olson, Lynn, p. 113.

worrisome now because local and national employment trends project a growing need for technical training.¹⁹

School Reform and Vocational Education

Lisa Whatley, Ph.D., says she is committed to the vocational education field. In her book Life-Long Learning Through Vocational Education: The Path of the Snake, Whatley details her career and educational background. Her beliefs related to the future of vocational education are based on her experiences as a vocational school administrator and as an apprentice in her father's business in Brazil (her native country). Her research in the area of school reform led to the following recommendations:

1. Integrate vocational education in all levels of schooling.
2. Start the work component early in the elementary school level.
3. Set up part-time internships with different businesses for children older than 10 years while accompanied and supervised by their mentors.
4. Make it mandatory for all teacher/mentors to be partners with private sector trainers.
5. Make it mandatory for principals of schools to do an internship every two years with a CEO or president of one of the businesses in the community.²⁰

How Schools Change examines three high schools that implemented changes to better prepare students for the workplace of the next century. In his summary, author Tony Wagner describes the workplace skills needed for high school graduates. Wagner

¹⁹West, Peter. "Scholarships for Voc.-Ed. Training Go Untapped," Education Week on the Web, April 3, 1996. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/vol-15/28voc.h15>

²⁰Whatley, Lisa. Life-Long Learning Through Vocational Education: The Path of the Snake, Melvett Chambers, Publisher, Denver, Colorado, 1997, p. 174.

states that graduates must have the ability to learn on their own, work effectively in teams, solve problems, and take initiative. He continues:

Over the last 25 years, we have shifted from a society where most people earned their living with skilled hands to one in which more and more people must have and use a skilled intellect to earn a decent living. We have gone from a predominately industrial, blue-collar economy to one that is based on white-collar work related to services, information analysis, and technology. This fundamental change requires that we have a more highly educated labor force. Where in 1960 we only needed 20 percent of our work force to have completed high school and some college, today that figure is somewhere between 60 and 80 percent.²¹

At the Hodgson Vocational-Technical High School in Delaware, students are not required to take final examinations. Instead, seniors must prepare “exhibitions.” These exhibitions are long-term projects built, designed, created, or written by the students. Students are required to make presentations about their exhibitions to a faculty committee. The process of presenting presentations to a committee is designed to be similar to the process that doctoral candidates undergo when presenting their dissertations. Following their presentations, students answer the committee’s questions. The Hodgson faculty prepare students for this culminating project beginning in ninth grade. Underclassmen are required to perform tasks that require the same skills they will employ as seniors. Hodgson is a member of noted reformer Theodore Sizer’s Coalition of Essential Schools. The Coalition is a proponent of using exhibitions, because it believes exhibitions “gauge students’ abilities to think, analyze, adapt, and integrate their knowledge and skills.”²²

²¹Wagner, Tony. How Schools Change, Beacon Press, Boston, Massachusetts, 1994, p. 254.

²²Wilson, Kenneth G. and Bennett Daviss. Redesigning Education, Henry Holt and Company, New York, New York, 1994, pp. 144-146.

In a 1994 policy statement included in the U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of Vocational Education report, an independent advisory panel of businesspersons, vocational-technical education leaders, and researchers made recommendations to Congress about future vocational education reform. The panel suggested changes to improve vocational education, including the incorporation of industry skill standards into a competency-based program curriculum. "Vocational education is not a dinosaur--at least not in its reformed, reinvigorated state," the statement says. "Technical and occupational skills are critical to building a high-skill, high-wage American workforce. Individuals with vocational training (especially at the post-secondary level) who obtain related jobs enjoy higher wages than their peers with a general secondary education."²³

Driving Change--How the Best Companies Are Preparing for the 21st Century defines the qualities that corporations will need for survival in the next century. Based on eight years of research at the Wharton School, the authors describe the effect of changes in information technology and the global marketplace on competition. "Today's employees have to be better educated and better trained than they were. Managers foresee that finding and keeping qualified people will be crucial to competing in the 21st century."²⁴ According to the authors, educational reform is needed. They explain that, except for the addition of a few computers, teaching is the same as it was in the early

²³Denby, Stephen. "Good Intentions Gone Bad?," Vocational Education Journal, American Vocational Association, November/December 1994.

²⁴Wind, Jerry Yoram and Jeremy Main. Driving Change--How the Best Companies Are Preparing for the 21st Century, Simon & Schuster Inc., New York, New York, 1998, p. 269.

1900s. Involving students in the teaching/learning process (called student-centered learning) is suggested. “Students retain 15% of what they hear in a lecture, but they will remember 80% of what they experience.”²⁵

²⁵Wind, Jerry Yoram and Jeremy Main, p. 269.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The methods used to compile the research in this thesis were:

- 1) Internet searches of relevant vocational-related web sites;
- 2) library database searches of books and periodicals;
- 3) a review of books and journals suggested by noted educators during interviews;
- 4) a search of back issues of *TECHNIQUES*, the monthly publication of the American Vocational Association;
- 5) interviews with vocational educators.

Relevant literature on the image of vocational education was obtained in the following manner.

Internet computer searches were conducted using America On Line's NetFind and the Yahoo! search engine. The key words used in the search were "vocational education image," "vocational schools," "vocational associations," and "perceptions of vocational education."

The Rowan University, Glassboro, New Jersey web site provided access to its library databases. This led to searching the ERIC database, which provided connections to research conducted by others on the education-related topics.

Continued searching of ERIC research led to related links. These links, which provided research material for this thesis, included the sites of the National Center for

Research in Vocational Education, the United States Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education, and the Association for Career and Technical Education.

The on-line book catalog of the Gloucester County Library, Mullica Hill, New Jersey, was searched. The key words "image of vocational education" and "vocational education reform" were used. As a result of this search, three books were found and provided information for this study.

During interview meetings with Dr. William H. Adams, American Association of School Administrators national executive board member and Salem County Vocational Technical Schools district superintendent, resources were suggested and provided. The following suggested American Vocational Association materials were used in this study: *The AVA Yearbook--The Future of Vocational Education*, *The 1995 AVA Legislative Guide*, and *The AVA Guide to the School-to-Work Opportunities Act*. Dr. Adams also provided a written copy of the testimony he gave before the U.S. Senate on behalf of the American Association of School Administrators. This testimony concerned the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act in 1989.

Richard Van Gulik, a New Jersey vocational school superintendent and vocational textbook author, was contacted and interviewed via electronic mail. Van Gulik provided insights into the importance of the study.

David Smoker, past president of the National School Public Relations Association, was interviewed via telephone. Smoker, a vocational school administrator for many years, has published books and articles on vocational education. He gave his ideas on how vocational schools can overcome image problems.

The Technology Services Center at the Salem County Vocational Technical Schools maintains education-related periodicals. Back issues of the American Vocational Association's *TECHNIQUES* magazine were searched for relevant articles and editorials. Several were identified for use in this study.

The bibliography from James Lucy's thesis, *An Investigation of Students' Attitudes Toward the Eastern Montgomery County Area Vocational Technical High School in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania*, provided reference sources directly related to this study's topic of the image of vocational education.

The catalog of materials on sale through the National School Public Relations Association was searched. To assist with this study, the book Making/Marketing Your School the School of Choice was purchased.

The School and Community Relations textbook used by this author in graduate studies at Rowan University was also consulted for research purposes.

Dr. Donald Bagin, thesis advisor, provided names of prominent vocational educators to assist in the Internet search for related topics.

Interviews of educators from Salem County Vocational Technical Schools were conducted for use in this study. This was accomplished in person.

A written survey was developed to gain input from the 21 New Jersey public vocational school superintendents. The questions were designed with the assistance of Dr. Don Bagin and Dr. William H. Adams. Before mailing the survey, the questions were pretested in a graduate seminar course at Rowan University. Included with the survey was a cover letter written by Dr. William H. Adams, superintendent of the Salem County

Vocational Technical Schools. The survey contained 18 questions. Information was sought about program offerings, career exposure, student organizations, and community involvement. The superintendents were offered a copy of the final results of the survey. No follow-up letters or phone calls were necessary, because a 95 percent response rate was realized within 10 days.

Results were tabulated, conclusions drawn, and recommendations made.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF SURVEY

To assist with this study, New Jersey vocational school superintendents were surveyed regarding current and developing vocational school practices. This was accomplished through a written survey sent by mail. There are 21 public vocational school superintendents in New Jersey (one per county). All 21 were mailed a survey; 20 responses (95 percent) were returned.

Of the 20 vocational schools responding, three are shared time (students attend their home high school for one-half of the school day and the vocational school for the other half); three are full time; and 12 offer shared-time and full-time options. Two superintendents did not respond to this question.

Remaining questions were categorized and responded to as follows:

About Your School

1. Has your vocational school district changed its name in the past 10 years?
If NO, please skip to question #4.

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	10	50
No	10	50

2. Was the name change made to: (circle all that apply)

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
♦ change the public's perception of the district	9	90
♦ take the term "vocational" out of the school's name	7	70
♦ better reflect the programs and services we offer	7	70
♦ move the district into the Information Age	5	50

3. Has the school experienced an increase in enrollment since the name change?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	5	50
No	5	50

If enrollment has not increased, to what do you attribute this?

Four superintendents responded to this question as follows:

Name change occurred at the start of the 1997-98 school year.

It is premature to determine whether enrollment has been affected.

We are already at capacity--2,000 plus. Receive 1,500 applications a year.

“Old image” about vocational education still persists.

An introduction in 1996 of a placement exam for entering high school students

Your District's Program Offerings

4. Does your district offer career academy programs?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	11	55
No	8	40
No response	1	5

5. Are any of the programs offered at your school linked to colleges through Tech Prep agreements?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	19	95
No response	1	5
No	0	0

6. Is the use of technology incorporated into all of the programs offered at your school?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	20	100
No	0	0

7. Does your district offer any “high tech” courses such as computer-assisted design and drafting, computer networking, or telecommunications?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	20	100
No	0	0

8. What is the earliest grade level a student can enroll in your school?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
9th grade	14	70
10th grade	3	15
7th grade	1	5
8th grade	1	5
11th grade	1	5

9. Are academics integrated into the technical curriculum for all of your course offerings?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	18	90
No	1	5
No response	1	5

Career Exposure and Student Organizations

10. Is your district involved with School-to-Careers Initiatives?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	20	100
No	0	0

11. Does your district have active vocational student organizations?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	20	100
No	0	0

Involving the Community

12. Does your district have a Community Relations Plan?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	15	75
No	5	25

13. Does your district have someone responsible for school/community relations?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	18	90
No	2	10

If YES, please indicate whether that person is employed:

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Full time	14	78
Part time	2	11
Contracted	2	11

14. Do you utilize “key communicators” (persons who talk to large numbers of people in the community) to help keep the public informed about your school’s activities?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
No	11	55
Yes	9	45

15. Does the community have access to your school’s facilities (examples: room usage after hours for meetings or for healthy walk programs)?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	19	95
No	1	5

16. Does your district actively seek partnership-with-business opportunities?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	20	100
No	0	0

17. In *Educational Renaissance--Our Schools at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*, futurists Marvin Cetron and Margaret Gayle noted vocational education’s struggle to survive. The authors researched vocational schools and found that the most successful schools were the ones that kept up with the changing job market by offering new courses.

Within the last five years, has your district surveyed the needs of the community and added new courses based on their input?

<u>Response</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	19	95
No	1	5

18. What should vocational schools be doing to improve the image of vocational education?

As this was an open-ended question, a variety of answers were provided by the superintendents. They were provided with three blank lines on which to write their suggestions. Their responses, which have been grouped by topic, are as follows:

Using Public Relations

Make the public more aware of programs.

Continue public relations campaign.

Highlighting student and school accomplishments.

Showcase the school as the “best kept secret.”

Market ourselves as a statewide deliverer of technical and career education with over 30 campuses and over 40,000 students, delivering over 50 difference career programs.

Promote the school of “choice” “magnet school” concept.

Promote the success of graduates, enhance linkages with institutions of higher learning and establish community and business partnerships.

Talk about new program to the community via TV, radio, newspaper articles.

Quality graduates provide word of mouth advertising via employers, family members and friends.

Keep a constant presence in the media and with the community.

Invite everyone as often as possible to the facility.

Provide dinner for public to view the opportunities offered.

Talk directly with parents.

Educate our constituency.

Use cable TV.

Public relations.

Adapting to Job Market

Remove programs that are no longer relevant and upgrade programs to meet changing needs of employers and society. Provide programs that offer transferable skills.

Keep abreast of the changing career paths.

Adapting to Job Market

Work aggressively to change school culture to reflect the reform movement in schools and the changes in the business.

Add new courses that reflect job in year 2000 and beyond.

Realize that we are a market-driven operation.

Educate the public on the realities of the future workforce.

Strengthening Academics

Offer academically and technically enriched academy programs.

Maintain high academic standards.

Stress academics along with vocational training.

Maintain high standards relative to academics and technical skill development.

Improve academic offerings.

Increasing Use of Technology

Continue to develop new technology programs (innovative).

Be the leader in computer based technical education.

Become the county leader in technology.

Be a "high tech" resource to business.

Continue to offer "cutting edge" programs.

Partnering with Business

Encourage more partnership affiliations with business and industry.

Involve the parents and business community in everything and remember that "the kids come first."

Maintain business/industrial certification, where applicable.

Focusing on Further Education

Provide college opportunities for all general students.

Develop more pathways (options) for students, i.e. college, post-secondary training, mentoring, employment.

Provide courses, programs and services to prepare students for the 21st century employment and further education.

Adjusting Admissions Standards

Institute attainable standards for admission.

Raising admission criteria.

Working with the Government

Seek positive leadership from state officials.

Testing

Improve HSPT scores.

Improving Instruction

Quality instruction/staff development. Accountability--results.

An analysis of these results, recommendations for further study, and conclusions will be provided in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study examined the image problem faced by vocational technical schools and sought solutions to overcoming the problem. Related research on vocational education reform was reviewed. Research was conducted to find out how and why vocational education is surviving, even thriving, in some school districts. New Jersey public vocational school superintendents were surveyed to identify the steps being taken by these schools to change their image.

It was a premise of this study that the general public does not fully understand what vocational education is all about. The last decade has brought tremendous change to vocational education. Research was done to determine how course offerings have changed in vocational education and how schools are attracting students to these new courses.

The survey of the 21 New Jersey vocational school superintendents was conducted by mail. Twenty responses were received. The survey was designed to discover the direction of vocational education in New Jersey. Questions on current program offerings, community and business involvement, and career awareness provided insights on what New Jersey vocational schools are doing to attract students and remain competitive. The survey also sought input from the superintendents on what vocational schools should be doing to improve the image of vocational education.

Findings and Conclusions

Responses from the 20 returned surveys of the New Jersey vocational school superintendents were tabulated and analyzed.

The results of the survey show that:

Fifty percent of the schools have changed their names in the past 10 years.

Reasons for the name change included (superintendents were able to choose more than one reason): changing the public's perception of the district (90 percent), taking the term "vocational" out of the school's name (70 percent), better reflecting the programs and services we offer (70 percent), and moving the district into the Information Age (50 percent). Fifty percent reported an increase in enrollment since the name change.

Under the area of program offerings, 100 percent of the schools incorporate the use of technology into their courses. "High tech" courses are offered at 100 percent of the schools. College credit for coursework completed in some of the vocational classes is available through Tech Prep agreements at 95 percent of the schools. Academics are integrated into the technical curriculum for all of the course offerings at 90 percent of the schools. Career academy programs are an option at 55 percent of the vocational schools. Students can enroll in the vocational schools as early as the following grade levels: 9th grade (70 percent), 10th grade (15 percent), 7th grade (5 percent), 8th grade (5 percent), and 11th grade (5 percent).

Career exposure and student organizations play a key role in the New Jersey vocational schools. All schools (100 percent) reported having active vocational student organizations, such as Vocational Industrial Clubs of America, FFA, and Future Business Leaders of America chapters. School-to-Careers initiatives provide students with career

exposure through job shadowing, internships, and partnership-with-business projects. All schools (100 percent) reported involvement with School-to-Careers.

Community involvement is undertaken by a majority of the New Jersey vocational schools. Seventy-five percent report having a community relations plan in place.

Someone is responsible for school/community relations in 90 percent of the schools.

School/community relations personnel are employed full time in 78 percent of the schools, part time in 11 percent of the schools, and contracted in 11 percent of the schools. The

community has access to its school facilities in 95 percent of the school districts. All schools (100 percent) reported working with the business community. Community needs

have been surveyed and new courses added based on their input in 95 percent of the school districts. The “key communicators” concept is used by 55 percent of the schools.

In an open-ended question, superintendents addressed what vocational schools should be doing to improve the image of vocational education. The majority of their responses (a total of 16 comments) centered on the need for public relations efforts. Their suggestions included making the public more aware of programs, highlighting student and school accomplishments, and keeping a constant presence in the media and with the community.

Adapting to current and future job market needs was addressed through six comments. Superintendents stated that the schools should keep abreast of changing career paths and remove programs that are no longer relevant.

Five suggestions involved strengthening academics in the vocational schools. According to the superintendents, schools must offer academically and technically enriched academy programs and stress academics along with vocational training.

Increasing the use of technology in the vocational classes was addressed by five superintendents. Their suggestions for schools included continuing the development of innovative technology programs, becoming the county leader in technology, and being a “high tech” resource to business.

Partnering with the business community was suggested by three superintendents. Their remarks centered on encouraging more partnership affiliations with business and industry.

Students should be provided with college opportunities according to three superintendents. The vocational programs should prepare students for further education.

Two superintendents cited the need to adjust admissions standards for the vocational schools. One stated the need to institute attainable admission standards, while the other superintendent recommended raising admission criteria.

Other suggestions provided by superintendents for improving the image problem were to seek positive leadership from state officials, improve HSPT scores, and provide quality instruction.

The results of this survey support the following:

1. Vocational schools are changing. The schools are offering programs that incorporate the use of technology and are academically-enriched.

2. Vocational schools are modifying their names in an attempt to improve their image.
3. Public relations is seen as the key to solving the image problem of the vocational schools.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, survey results and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

Change the name. Within the past year the American Vocational Association changed its name to the Association for Career and Technical Education. Half of the New Jersey vocational schools that changed their names reported an increase in enrollment. It appears that the word “vocational” carries a stigma. Schools still carrying the word vocational in their names should consider removing it.

Offer career academies. Career academies provide intensive, ongoing study of a career area. Career academies are often four-year programs of study that begin in the ninth grade. The academies are, in many cases, linked to programs at higher education institutions. Business and industry input is a vital component. Students in many academies are placed in internships as a part of their program. What better way to gain support from the community than to offer an academically-enriched academy program? Currently 55 percent of the vocational schools in New Jersey offer academy programs. Regular high school districts in New Jersey are beginning to offer academies. Vocational schools need to remain competitive by offering high-quality career academy programs.

Incorporate Tech Prep agreements. Tech Prep agreements give students college credits for studies taken at the vocational school. Research projects a growing need for technical training. Education requirements for employment are rising. It makes sense for vocational schools to form partnerships with community colleges and universities to offer students a career pathway. Ninety-five percent of the New Jersey vocational schools surveyed stated they offer tech prep programs.

Restructure courses. Courses offered at vocational schools need to match current and future job market needs. Additionally, vocational schools need to provide students with more than just technical skills. Tony Wagner, in How Schools Change, found that employers want employees who can work effectively in teams, think on their own, and use initiative. Theodore Sizer, noted education reformer, emphasizes the need for students to be able to use analytical skills.

Use public relations. A strong public relations program should be in place at every vocational school. In New Jersey, 90 percent of the vocational schools employ a public relations practitioner. When asked what vocational schools should be doing to improve the image of vocational education, most of the New Jersey superintendents mentioned public relations activities in their answers. Erasing the stigma of vocational education can be done through a variety of ways. New Jersey superintendents offered a variety of suggestions: face-to-face communication, holding a community dinner at the school, television and radio advertising, and newspaper feature stories. Public relations staff can find out existing attitudes about the vocational school. This is of great benefit in seeking to change the community's perception of the school.

This author further recommends using the Internet as a way to promote vocational education. Vocational schools should maintain websites that are constantly updated with new information. Website information could include student achievements, the school calendar, lunch menus, school newsletter articles, and faculty. Photographs of students involved in their classroom activities could be used in a school's webpage to better showcase vocational programs. The Family Education Network (FEN) offers schools the opportunity to create a website for free. FEN's partners include the National School Public Relations Association, the American Association of School Administrators, and the National PTA. Of course, schools can choose to develop websites on their own, but linking their sites with a group like FEN might result in more people visiting the site.

Schools should consider actively using their students to spread the word about vocational education. Students should be encouraged to bring a friend to visit their vocational classes at least once during the school year. This could encourage potential students to enroll. Students could also be enlisted to speak at local community meetings and functions, such as the Chamber of Commerce's annual dinner. This would help inform the community about the benefits of vocational education.

Recommendations for Further Study

Due to time constraints, the survey used for this study was limited to the 21 public vocational school superintendents in New Jersey. It is recommended that further study examine the efforts being undertaken by other states to improve the image of vocational education.

In addition, it is recommended that future studies examine the public's perception of vocational education.

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6. Is the use of technology incorporated into all of the programs offered at your school?

YES

NO

7. Does your district offer any "high tech" courses such as computer-assisted design and drafting, computer networking, or telecommunications?

YES

NO

8. At what grade level can a student enroll in your school?

_____ 7th

_____ 10th

_____ 8th

_____ 11th

_____ 9th

9. Are academics integrated into the technical curriculum for all of your course offerings?

YES

NO

CAREER EXPOSURE AND STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

10. Is your district involved with School-to-Careers Initiatives?

YES

NO

11. Does your district have active vocational student organizations?

YES

NO

INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

12. Does your district have a Community Relations Plan?

YES

NO

13. Does your district have someone responsible for school/community relations?

YES

NO

If YES, please indicate whether that person is employed:

Full time _____

Part time _____

Contracted _____

14. Do you utilize “key communicators” (persons who talk to large numbers of people in the community) to help keep the public informed about your school’s activities?

YES

NO

15. Does the community have access to your school’s facilities (examples: room usage after hours for meetings or for healthy walk programs)?

YES

NO

16. Does your district actively seek partnership-with-business opportunities?

YES

NO

17. In *Educational Renaissance--Our Schools at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*, futurists Marvin Cetron and Margaret Gayle noted vocational education’s struggle to survive. The authors researched vocational schools and found that the most successful schools were the ones that kept up with the changing job market by offering new courses.

Within the last five years, has your district surveyed the needs of the community and added new courses based on their input?

YES

NO

INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

18. What should vocational schools be doing to improve the image of vocational education?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

March 5, 1999

Dear

As a follow up to a request that I made at our winter meeting in Atlantic City, I am asking for your help in completing a short survey regarding the changing image of vocational education. The survey was prepared by Laura Timberman, a member of our staff, who is completing her master's degree program at Rowan University in the School Public Relations Program. Ultimately, while the information will help Mrs. Timberman complete her master's degree requirements, I believe that it will also be beneficial to us as we review the direction for vocational-technical education in the 21st century. Mrs. Timberman has agreed to share the results with each of you and will make available a copy of her complete dissertation if you would like to receive a copy.

The five minutes that you take to complete this survey will really be appreciated. Rather than faxing back the survey, please place it in the enclosed stamped envelope and send it to my attention. Again, thank you,

Sincerely,

William H. Adams, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

WHA:wls
Enclosures
xc: L. Timberman