

**CAP Annual Report July 2020 - June 2021  
Attachment**

Dear Commissioner, State Board of Education Members and other interested parties,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment. My name is Helena van der Merwe and I am a small business owner.

YOU are the decision-makers and policymakers with the power to transform education in the state of New York. That is why I am here to discuss in-school apprenticeships.

**A Registered Apprenticeship program is a student-centric approach that matches high school students (18-21 years old) diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) with appropriate employers for apprenticeships.**

Apprentice programs as a training method have a long, successful history. Customizing Community Based Instruction (CBI), Person-Centered Approaches (PCAST) and Career Technical Education (CTE) programs from the Department of Education (DOE) with the addition of Registered Apprenticeship curricula from the Department of Labor can accomplish the goal of smart, reality-based transformation in schools.

Using student IEPs to customize curricula with the assistance of school principals, SLE teachers, job coaches and other special needs team members is the transformation I am talking about. This can also be mapped to New York State skill needs to address skills gaps in the state. Concentrations in graphic design, e-commerce, digital marketing, estimating, welding, driving, cashiers, auto testing and repair are a few of more than 1,000 apprenticeship roles to mention.

Leveraging government resources and infrastructure by providing programs **in-school and not after school can provide not only a career but a life path for ASD students.**

Instructors give 144 hours of related technical instruction, and apprentices work 2000 hours per year, supervised by schoolteachers and an employer mentor in the school. After completing the program, **each apprentice earns a national designation from the Bureau of Apprenticeships, a federal agency.**

The problem of unemployment and underemployment among autistic adults also has a huge economic cost. The annual cost of autism is estimated to be \$126 billion in the US, a number that has more than tripled since 2006. **There are more than 2 million people in the state of New York with disabilities and most of these people have an autism diagnosis.**

Primary caregivers, typically mothers, are called upon to serve as their children's case managers and advocates, and on average, earn 56 percent less than mothers of children with no health limitations.

There is no cure for autism. Only fifteen percent of those with autism have full-time jobs, while nine percent work part-time. Thus, there is a high unmet need for employment and suitable careers.

Advocates for children with disabilities are cheering a 2017 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court involving an autistic student. In establishing more-ambitious academic standards for special education students this represents a clear win for the modernization that I am promoting here and now.

**This a true collaboration between the DOE, DOL, special education teams, support staff, parents, students and service providers for an even better outcome. I would love the opportunity to further discuss it with you and look forward to hearing your thoughts. Thank you for listening.**

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Helena van der Merwe

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