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>> Welcome to Disabilities At Work Radio where every week we explore issues, ideas, initiatives and innovations involving the employment of people with disabilities. We feature employers that go beyond compliance in supporting people with disabilities in the workplace and elsewhere. We bring you prominent members of the business community, service providers, government officials, researchers, educators and people who successfully manage their disability and careers. Join us now for Disabilities At Work.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Hello, I'm Donna Custard sitting in for Ray Zardetto today and welcome to Disabilities At Work Radio here on the VoiceAmerica Business Network. Each week at noon

Eastern Time, Disabilities At Work Radio explores issues, ideas, initiatives and innovations involving the workplace and people with disabilities and discusses them with prominent members of the business, government and disability communities.

Disabilities At Work Radio is brought to you this week by two distinguished organizations, both are dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled. The Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services. We will talk a little bit more about them later in the program.

But I'd like to open today by asking everyone a couple of questions. Did you know that students with disabilities are two times as likely not to finish high school as their peers? And did you also know that people with disabilities are only half as likely to earn a college degree as their peers? This information comes from a report by the Social Security Administration and the National Council on Disability. Those statistics really aren't very encouraging, but it does set the tone for today's discussion.

Our guests today will explore the importance of all people becoming college and work ready. My first guest is Dana Egreczky, and she is the President of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce Foundation. She is also the Vice President Workforce Development for the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce. Dana has been with the Foundation since its inception in 1996 and her background includes training and organizational development as

well as 16 years as a public, middle school and high school teacher. So I can see why being college and work ready would be so important to her. Dana, welcome to the program.

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Thank you, Donna. I'm very pleased to be here.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: I'd like to start off by clarifying a little bit about what a chamber is.

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Well, thank you for that question because that would be, I think, helpful to the audience. A chamber is a business association. Businesses of all kinds join chambers for various reasons; sometimes to network, sometimes for political advocacy, but chambers basically represent business interests.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay, so you have a role within the Chamber of Commerce, but you also have another role within the Chamber of Commerce Foundation. So it's two organizations, kind of as one?

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Correct. And very separate organizations with different missions, but the Chamber of Commerce established the foundation way back in 1996 because the Board of Directors of the Chamber had become exceptionally concerned about the quality of the workers that became available to them. And they noticed that over the years, fewer and fewer people were coming to them looking for jobs with the skills that were necessary for those jobs.

So the chamber established its foundation, a 501C3 organization and the foundation focuses on three areas of interest. The first is K to 12 education because K to 12 is the workforce pipeline. The second is the New Jersey Nursing Initiative, where we are focused on the nursing shortage. And the third is employment of qualified people with disabilities. So we have broad areas of interest in terms of the workforce and what it needs to be so that our businesses can be successful.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay. So I can see why you would focus on K-12 education because, as you said, that is the workforce pipeline. So what is it that you and your board and the Chamber of Commerce are finding is necessary for people to be successful in the workforce today?

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Well, indeed, one of the reasons why we are focused on K to 12 is essentially if people come out of middle, high school -- middle school, not ready for high school, and high school not ready for college and work, then we are in trouble, because then we have to begin remediation and people won't be ready to get jobs. So our focus on K to 12 education is essential because it is, in fact, the first chance system. It's the first chance and the best chance for people to get the education they need, which is why the statistics you cited earlier upon launching the show are very troublesome because today more and more people need more and more qualifications.

We are slowly but surely moving to something that we might be able to call a college economy, um, where people need more training and more skills than ever before.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm. I can see why that would be so important. So if we need this college economy and you are focusing on preparing these students to enter the workforce, what kind of impact does this have on students who might have disabilities?

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Well, also, given the statistics you cited earlier, this is very troublesome, that high school -- that high school students, middle school students, that students with disabilities have among the highest dropout rates in the country, they drop out of high school. That essentially means that they virtually will not be able to support themselves.

Today, the gateway to a middle class existence is a high school diploma, plus education after high school. Once upon a time a high school diploma meant you had a pretty decent life, you could get a pretty decent job, but that is not the case anymore. In fact, right now there is only about 20 percent of the employer population out there that will even hire people if all they have is a high school diploma.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Wow.

>> DANA EGRECKZY: So students, uh, need to be prepared to exit high school and go into other, um, modalities of training, whether that be a technical school for an industrial

certification, a two-year college for an associate's degree, or a four-year institution. And that's also why the dropout rates among students with disabilities are very, very worrisome.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Do you know why we see such high dropout rates among disabled high school students?

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Well, I really don't know the ultimate answer to that question. But I guess maybe I can share a story that might point to an answer. A teacher, a special needs teacher once told me that that she told her students that they don't have to worry, that employers really want diversity in the workforce and because those students had a disability of one kind or another, they could be virtually assured of getting a job. And I can't emphasize enough how not true that is. How, indeed, any person seeking a job will have to demonstrate that they have the knowledge and the skills for that job, or they just won't get it.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm-hmm.

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Competition for jobs today, you know, it's coming from all over the world. The internet allows employers to hire people in other countries without too much of a burden. And so, in order to be able to compete, people have to have the skills that employers need.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Which is so important, and that is why we do this show. We want to get people with disabilities employed, so it's good that we are working on the pipeline in K-12

education and really preparing these students.

So we talked a little bit about the dropout rate in high school and the other statistics that I quoted is about people with disabilities earning a college degree, or not earning a college degree. Do you have any statistics on overall graduation rates and dropout rates?

>> DANA EGRECKZY: In college?

>> DONNA CUSTARD: In college, yeah.

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Um, sure, well, um, nationally, the studies tell us that about 45 percent of young adults who have just graduated high school and entered the county college, community college, essentially a two-year institution; by the end of freshman year, about 45 percent of them do not return for sophomore year. So within one year, almost half of the kids wash out for good.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Wow.

>> DANA EGRECKZY: At a county college. And in a four-year institution, that statistic is about a third of students. And the reason it's a little less worrisome, or the statistic is a little lighter on the four year side is because four-year colleges have more hurdles that people have to pass.

They usually have to have, you know, SAT scores or certain courses and certain grades before they can enter a four-year institution and typically county colleges are open admission. So regardless, those statistics are way too high.

Forty-five percent and the two-year and the 33 percent in the four-year, way to high considering so many jobs, in fact, about 84 percent of available jobs are going to require a college degree in just about a decade.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: That's just astonishing. Why is it that these college students are not graduating?

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Well, the research actually is very clear on that. And the answers in the research say it's because students are just not working hard enough in high school and that, of course, presupposes that they also haven't worked and prepared in middle school. So it's that middle school, high school period of time that is so critical for kids to get the academic foundation they need, whether they are disabled or non-disabled, those years are absolutely essential, which is why the story about a special needs teacher talking to her kids and saying you don't have to worry, you know, you will be hired regardless, is really not the case.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And when you say the academic foundation is so essential, is there some sort of formula to build a strong academic foundation?

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Once again, the research on that is really, really clear. And, yes, there is. And what the people in my age bracket would have called college prep programs, that's the formula. Whether kids plan to go to college or not, those courses, the ones we used to think of as college prep, are now

required for everyone. And those courses include the sciences, biology, chemistry, physics; the math, difficult math courses, algebra, algebra two, geometry; two years of the same world language; four years of college prep English; social studies, three years; economics, half a year. Um, those college prep courses are what all students need to be prepared because we are moving into, as you said earlier, a college economy.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So I can see the connection between the Chamber of Commerce and forming the foundation and focusing on K through 12 education so that the businesses in your area have a qualified workforce to choose from, so, and I can see the point of building this solid foundation. So, what is it that the Chamber is actively doing to address this issue?

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Well, we began a long time ago, well past eight or nine years ago, developing a program that tells kids about all of these astonishing statistics. Unfortunately, too many kids do not know how important these middle and high school years are. So we developed a program called LearnDoEarn. It stands for Learn More Now. Do More Now. Earn More Later. But LearnDoEarn -- I'm sorry, Donna.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: I said I like that.

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Oh, good. Its name is its message. And through what is essentially informal curriculum for middle and high school students, um, kids get that message. They have to learn more now and they have to do more now while they can and

build the academic and the other behavioral and other foundations they need in order to earn more later.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: That's great. We need to take a short break right now, but when we come back, we will be joined by the director of the Learn More Now, Do More Now, Earn More Later program. And she is going to give us some insight into the difference the program is making in the schools. So stay with us. I'm Donna Custard sitting in for Ray Zardetto, and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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>> You are listening to Disabilities At Work Radio. We welcome questions and comments from our listening audience, which you can send to us on Twitter at DisabilitiesAt, or on our Facebook site, Disabilities At Work. Also visit [disabilitiesatwork.org](http://disabilitiesatwork.org). Welcome back.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Welcome back to Disabilities At Work Radio here on VoiceAmerica's Business Network. The show this week is brought to you by the Kessler Foundation and New Jersey's Division of Disabilities Services.

I'm Donna Custard and I have been speaking with Dana Egreczky who is the President of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce Foundation. And right now Dana and I are joined by Sue Herring; she is responsible for the planning, coordination and deployment of the Learn More Now, Do More Now, Earn More Later student achievement system. We call that LearnDoEarn for

short. So, Sue, welcome to the show.

>> SUE HERRING: Thank you, Donna. I'm very happy to be here.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Oh, thanks so much. Um, we'd like to discuss the LearnDoEarn program a little bit more in depth. Dana had started to tell us about it prior to the break, maybe you can pick up where you left off, Dana, and explain more about LearnDoEarn is.

>> DANA EGRECKZY: LearnDoEarn is, as I mentioned in the earlier segment, informal curriculum aimed at middle and high school students that teachers can use.

Our various classroom lessons, which don't take a lot of time in the school year, really present kids with a road map of what they need to do in middle and high school to be ready for college or work. And it tells kids in unequivocal terms what courses they need to take, the homework they need to do, the grades they need to achieve, how important attendance is, and it also talks to them very specifically about other behaviors that are inappropriate and that will make them possibility less employable. Including getting in trouble with the law, doing drugs, having visible tattoos, everything that employers are telling us they look for when they look for job candidates; we turn all that into information for students that teachers can use in the classrooms. And that's what LearnDoEarn is.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay. And who is using the program? Is it just in your state in New Jersey?

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Well, actually, um, I'll suggest that Sue Herring answer that question because she can do that better than I.

>> SUE HERRING: Yes, actually, Donna, we decided to make LearnDoEarn -- it was developed here in New Jersey several years ago and about four years ago we decided to make it a national program because we were getting so much interest from groups outside of the state. And they were saying it's a message that all students have to hear, not just kids in New Jersey.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm-hmm.

>> SUE HERRING: And so today it is being used in pockets throughout the state. As a matter of fact, um, for example, we are partnering with the Rochester area Chamber of Commerce in Minnesota, and they are deploying the program to all of the schools in the Rochester, Minnesota area. And they are being sponsored by the business community in that area, including the Mayo Clinic.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Oh, impressive. Now, I'd like to throw this out to both of you, you mentioned that when you talk about this program that is being implemented in the schools, what do you mean by this program? Is this a box of materials that gets disseminated or how does this program really function in the classroom?

>> SUE HERRING: Well, the specifics of it, um, when a school

decides they want to implement LearnDoEarn program, they are given a flash drive, a LearnDoEarn flash drive that contains 29 Power Point presentations, which are the student lessons, and they range from grades 6 through 12.

In addition to those students lessons that cover all types of topics, as Dana was mentioning, from academic achievement to work ethic and behavioral skills to employability skills, in addition to financial literacy skills. So it really covers the gamete of things that the students are going to need to be successful after high school.

Um, but the schools are given that flash drive with those Power Point presentations. On that flash drive are also small parent videos or short parent videos that the school district or the school can play at back-to-school nights, show on their cable or access channels, or show really at any time that parents are gathering, because that's such an important component that the parents hear the same messages that the kids are hearing.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So the videos are of parents speaking?

>> SUE HERRING: No. The videos are actually businesspeople speaking to the parents about the kinds of things that businesses are going to require of their youngsters.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And these Power Point presentations that the students see, you had mentioned that it covers a lot of different areas. So it's just not a laundry list of the

courses that Dana was mentioning before like biology, chemistry

--

>> SUE HERRING: Oh, absolutely not. No.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay.

>> SUE HERRING: As a matter of fact, each of the presentations is introduced by a virtual businessperson. We want to set up right away that these messages are coming from the business community. So it's not their mothers telling them what to do, it's not their teachers telling them what to do, it's their future employers letting them know what is going to be important for their future.

And they are bright and they are colorful, and they tell little stories that wrap around the research data that makes it very clear to them why they need to take rigorous courses, why they need to be careful about their behaviors, why they need to start building strong work ethics while they're in middle and high school.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: It sounds very engaging.

>> SUE HERRING: Yes, they are very engaging. It's not a Power Point presentation like you might see if you go to a business meeting. They are bright, they are colorful, they are full of pictures and stories that really tie in for the students what they are doing in school today to the skills they are going to need in the real world.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And I think it's interesting, you said that

the message comes from virtual businesspeople, which I think is really interesting because, I'm a parent myself and I can tell my kids these messages over and over again and it just doesn't sink in. And I know that Dana, as a prior school teacher, you must know that you probably banged your head against the wall several times telling the kids. So I think it's interesting that it's coming from the business community.

>> DANA EGRECKY: Right. Together, there are two things in LearnDoEarn that really, we believe, that really make kids sit up, take notice and change what they do. The first is, as Sue suggests, the fact that the message is coming from their future employers and LearnDoEarn really leverages the power of that positioning.

But the other thing that LearnDoEarn really leverages is the research data, which tells kids things like if all you get are C's and D's in high school, you only have a 50/50 chance of earning even one college credit. If all you know is algebra one, then you only have an eight percent chance of earning a college degree.

So those kinds of statistics, coupled with facts like over 84 percent of employers will be looking for college degrees in employees, all of a sudden, kids start putting two and two together. They realize, oh, I want a job, I want it to be a good job, I want to make a lot of money. But then, they hear that, oh, in order to do that I need a college degree and

then they hear that it takes rigorous courses and good grades to be successful in college. So with those statistics, they usually change the way they think of school and they really begin to work hard.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: That is just amazing. What kind of reaction have you been getting from the students?

>> SUE HERRING: Well, I'll answer that, Dana. In one word? They are shocked. They don't believe the data we are giving them in the Power Point presentations, but once they start internalizing that information, we actually had a young man in eleventh grade who heard these messages for the first time and he said why didn't anybody ever tell me this years ago? He was feeling like maybe he was hearing these messages maybe a little too late and he would have changed his behaviors earlier if he had known the information that was presented.

We do have a short audio clip of a young woman in high school and it's her reaction once she heard the information in the LearnDoEarn program. And this is pretty typical of what we are hearing from students.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Oh, great.

>> DANA EGRECKZY: I'm going to play that now.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay, great.

>> VIDEO CLIP (GIRL SPEAKING): The real world is scary out there and you have to be ready for all this and it just opened your eyes. We are getting help from LearnDoEarn. To tell

them, like, guys, not, we are not only saying this - they're not lying to you, but also other people are saying it, and professionals are telling you.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: That is really interesting that she cited just what we were saying just a minute ago about the other people saying, not just -- I'm assuming she meant parents and teachers telling kids that these are important messages, but also there are other people out there telling you as well. So I found that very interesting.

>> SUE HERRING: Yes, it's having quite an impact.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So have you been able to measure successes with the program?

>> SUE HERRING: Well, the way we measure success, a very large component of the LearnDoEarn program is really trying to increase academic achievement, because if students have that academic foundation, they are going to be prepared to go on and do whatever they need to do to make sure they are employed in future jobs. Who knows what future jobs are going to be available to them?

So the way we measure the success of LearnDoEarn is by tracking enrollments in some key courses. And the courses, as Dana mentioned before, include the higher level math, like algebra one, algebra two and geometry, and the sciences, chemistry, biology and physics.

And I'm just going to give you a couple of examples of

what we have seen with some of the schools we have been working with. In one of our high schools, we saw a 107 percent increase in the number of students enrolling in physics, and in that same high school, we saw almost a 50 percent increase in enrollment in geometry and a second year of world language. And this, by the way, was a school that had almost 50 percent low income students.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Wow!

>> SUE HERRING: So it was really quite an achievement. Here is a story about another school who had offered the course economics and you heard Dana say that's one of our key courses. They had offered economics and they got to a point where none of the students wanted to take it, so they actually eliminated it from their course offerings. Once the students saw, even just one lesson from LearnDoEarn, in the next school year, they had 220 students enrolled to take economics. And of course the school had to reinstitute the program.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Wow!

>> SUE HERRING: So they saw a huge upswing. As the country and states individually are moving towards higher standards and requiring their students to take higher level courses, we are going to start tracking, even more importantly, the college level type of courses that students are taking in high school. And that would be like the advanced placement courses or the international baccalaureate courses. And we do have a school

we have been working with for about four years that has seen, um, a great uptake in the number of students who are taking international baccalaureate courses and the number of certificates those students are earning.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: That's amazing.

>> SUE HERRING: There is a big difference in that.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Yeah. We do have to take another break.

We have been talking today about LearnDoEarn, and how this program motivates students of all abilities to work hard while in school so they can succeed in college, work and life. We have talked about what the program is and some statistical rationale for its existence, but when we come back, we are going to be talking with a special needs teacher about how he has implemented the program with his students.

But before we go on break, let me invite all of you listening to Disabilities At Work Radio to join our tteam at DisabilitiesAt, and also friend us on Facebook at Disabilities At Work Radio. If any of our listeners have comments or suggestions, you can email them to [info@DisabilitiesAtWorkRadio.org](mailto:info@DisabilitiesAtWorkRadio.org). I'm Donna Custard, and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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>> DONNA CUSTARD: This is Disabilities At Work Radio, and I'm Donna Custard sitting in for Ray Zardetto. Today's show is sponsored by the Kessler Foundation, which is dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled. It does so through the rehabilitation research done by the Kessler Foundation Research Center and through the work of the Kessler Program Center, which prepares the disabled for the demands of the workplace.

For more information, please visit [www.kesslerinstitute.org](http://www.kesslerinstitute.org).

Also sponsoring our show today is the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services which is part of the State of New Jersey's Division of Human Services. The division focuses on helping people who have become disabled as adults so they can live more independently in their communities. Disabilities At Work Radio thanks both the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services for their consideration and sponsoring this week's show.

I have been speaking with Dana Egreczky and Sue Herring from the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce Foundation about the Learn More Now, Do More Now, Earn More Later Student Achievement System.

We are now joined by John Capasso from the Mainland Regional High School in New Jersey. John works with special needs students to place them in local businesses that provide work experience to help make a smooth transition from high school into college and into the workforce. You may remember John from a previous show where he talked about how partnering with companies can make a big difference for students who have disabilities. So, John, welcome back.

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Thank you, Donna. It's nice to be back.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Now I understand that you have been using the LearnDoEarn program with your special education students.

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Yes. Yes, I have. Uh, there are two, and

Sue can correct me if I'm wrong, there are two different segments to the program. There is School Counts, World Class Students is the second one and Work the Money is the third segment and then there are various modules and Power Point presentations under each one.

And I started out using World Class Students and Work the Money. Uh, I have taught what we call academic maintenance, or academic support classes, and that's a class specifically designed for students who have specific learning disabilities or higher functioning students who make take college credit courses but because of their disabilities need some help in terms of extra time or just rewording of concepts, things like that. So I did World Class Students for them. And in my other special needs in my school to work classes, part of which I also have summer courses, I did Work the Money. And I'll tell you, the students were very engaged from the start in both incidences.

And what seems to work best for me was the classes where I started with Work the Money. And why was that? I found out that a lot of the students want to make lots of money, but they have little or no real idea of what that takes. And the fact that Work the Money showed that there are workable rules on how to deal with money and that anyone, virtually anyone who works hard enough can be a millionaire, or at least make enough money to do what they want, uh, if they are disciplined enough. That

program kind of took the mystery out of being rich and really seemed to hit home with the kids.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Were they shocked by some of the information? I know that Sue said that she found that reaction a lot.

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Yeah, oh, yeah. I'll tell you, it started a lot of conversations and the reactions were, come on, get out of here. And other students were saying, no, man, yeah, I think that's how it really is. Then they would go into a back and forth with very little prompting. So we got into quite a lively discussion. And, yeah, they were shocked and by the end of the Work the Money segments, um, I think the four rules for becoming a millionaire really sunk in.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay. How did you learn about this LearnDoEarn program?

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Well, I attended two New Jersey Chamber sponsored seminars. One was back in December of 2008. It was called the Skills First Conference. And I don't know if it was LearnDoEarn, it might have been another organization under the umbrella of the New Jersey Chamber that sponsored that one. And I heard it mentioned, and that there was going to be a future conference on that. And then the conference did present the follow February, 2009, so I and another teacher went and we got the discs, the flash drives that Sue mentioned, and I started using it in my summer program in the summer of 2009.

I was very impressed with it, I thought that the students really need to hear from that third arm or third wing, so to speak, other than parents and teachers, but from the business community that, hey, this is how it is and this is what you gotta do, no ifs, ands or buts about it. So I tried to work it into my work curriculum and I'm still improving on it. It's great.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Yeah, it sounds like it's a really fascinating program. Now in the beginning of the program, Dana had talked about making sure that all people are college and work ready. And in your capacity as a special education teacher, are you finding -- she mentioned that, well, a teacher she spoke to said that that her special needs students wouldn't need to be college and work ready because they would get a job regardless, what are you finding?

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Okay, when Dana said that's absolutely not true, that is what I have found. Uh, I can tell you in another life prior to my teaching career, I was an attorney and I practiced in special education law for about ten years. I represented students with disabilities, trying to get them appropriate programs for their, you know, for their education and their IEP's. And one of the biggest things that I saw firsthand and through other experts who were associated with the various cases was that the transition plans were weak, if existent at all, and that you really, really had to be ready

when you left high school because the protections of IDEA wouldn't be there. ADA certainly is there, the Americans with Disabilities Act, if you are going to go on to postsecondary education, but they are not as stringent as the IDEA is for high school students. So you really have to have a level of independence, self advocacy and just knowledge and skills to be ready to meet the world.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: It sounds like you are in agreement.

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Oh, yeah.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Sounds like you are in agreement with what Dana was saying earlier.

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Absolutely.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Regardless of disability, all students need to be ready. And are you finding that this program, the LearnDoEarn program, is helping your students?

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Yes. I think we always have the credibility issue and I think you were talking about that earlier. The students hear it from their parents, they hear it from their teachers, but it's kind of like, well, that's what moms and dads have to say and that's what teachers have to say. You know, but then you hear it from the business community and the message that they are getting is, hey, the boss is not your mommy, the boss is not going to have a party for you every day at work, you are not going to be promoted because you are attractive. [Laughter.] It's, um, yeah, so that message

coming from the businesspeople, it's like, uh-oh, okay maybe I better start concentrating a little bit.

So I'm seeing a little bit of movement, actually a pretty descent amount of movement in terms of the students taking seriously their courses, their basic skills work so they can read, write, do basic math. Because I also tell them a lot of employers are going to give them a basic skills entry test.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm-hmm.

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Along with the criminal background check and a drug test. And if you can't pass that, that's not saying a lot about you and it's certainly not saying a lot about the schools you are coming from either. But a lot of kids, unfortunately, do graduate basically functionally illiterate. We are trying to just get on top of that, make sure, at least at Mainland, that that doesn't happen.

[Talking simultaneously]

>> DONNA CUSTARD: I'm sorry.

>> SUE HERRING: I'm sorry, this is Sue, I was just going to say, we hear that a lot from employers, that they are having high school graduates come to them looking for jobs and they can't pass a standard skills test that might be at the seventh or eighth grade level. So, I just wanted to throw that out there.

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Yeah, and New Jersey's HSPA, maybe Dana knows more about this than I do, I think that's geared to a ninth

grade level, a ninth or tenth grade level average student. As difficult as it is supposed to be, and I know they are working on it to improve it, but our high school --

>> DONNA CUSTARD: That's the exit exam, right?

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Yes. That's New Jersey's exit exam, correct.

>> DANA EGRECKZY: John, you are right. But it's not just New Jersey, across the country, high school exit exams typically represent only some of the knowledge that the average high school student should know, but more worrisome, most American states, again, across the country, the high school exit exams we give our high school kids are the same exams that other countries give their middle school kids, which also then goes back to the fact that if I'm an employer and I need a skilled worker and I can't find it in this country, if I can't find the person with the skills in this country I'm just going to look abroad and that is why so many jobs are leaving our shores. And once they are gone, those jobs rarely come back. So we need every person to be ready for that competition.

>> JOHN CAPASSO: And that point is made in the World Class Student topic of the LearnDoEarn very nicely.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And I'm wondering, could you share with us, John, because your role as a special needs teacher is very interesting to us as promoters of LearnDoEarn and promoters of that message, how do you think special needs kids take that message? Do they react the same way that the able bodied kids

do? Do they resent being pushed like that? Can you give us some sense of how they deal that?

>> JOHN CAPASSO: I don't think there is resentment. My experience is more like, you know, like I can't do that. I mean, because I have got a special -- I have an issue or something like that, or that's too hard for me. And in some cases of students, ones with more developmentally delayed challenges, I mean, they are not even thinking along those lines. I mean, maybe they can't even grasp the concepts because of their capacity for processing and just intelligence. So the barrier I have is, number one, for these higher functioning kids to get them to believe in themselves, to believe that they can do it, that they can be a millionaire if they want to work and follow the rules. And for the other kids who function at a somewhat lower level, it's just to raise their expectations a little bit. They can do a little bit more.

I noticed the program is not about having those students function in jobs, but there are things we can do for them. There is something called job carving where you take a skill set and employers will work with you and say, okay, you have someone with Down's syndrome who functions at this level, they can do certain things. Let's say it's a casino and they put them in their food department and all they do is get the napkins folded a certain way and the place sets. And they have

got that skill set and that frees up other workers to do things. So my view is that even though students are capable of functioning reliably in the workplace with the proper motivation and the proper training.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So that's an interesting marriage with what you provide them in the classroom and what is being provided through the LearnDoEarn system.

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Yeah. I found LearnDoEarn to be a great wake up call for the students that I deal with. They just don't believe what is going on out there, they just are not aware, they are not thinking like that. And this is like a bucket of ice water being thrown in your face while you are sleeping.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: I like that. I have been talking with Dana Egreczky, Sue Herring and John Capasso about the Learn More Now, Do More Now, Earn More Later Student Achievement System, Or maybe we will call it the Student Ice Bucket System, and how it can be used by students of all abilities to prepare for college and work, which we are finding is so important for students to be prepared for college and work so that they can get the jobs that are going to be available to them.

When we come back, we will be talking to our guests about LearnDoEarn in the community. Stay with us, I'm Donna Custard and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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>> DONNA CUSTARD: Welcome back to Disabilities At Work Radio. Remember that Disabilities At Work can be heard each Wednesday at noon Eastern Standard Time on VoiceAmerica Business Network. We have been discussing the LearnDoEarn program and how schools are using it to prepare students of all abilities for the

rigors of college and the workforce.

And right now we have got all three of our panelists here and we would like to open it up to a broader level and just ask some more questions about the integration of LearnDoEarn into the school day.

So I'm going to open this up to all three of you and just see how LearnDoEarn is actually being used. I know you had talked a little bit about how it's being used in the school classroom. Are will other ways that it is being used?

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Um, I guess I can address that a little bit. Yes, I have now got a few of our guidance counselors on board with the program. Sue gave a presentation in February at Atlantic Cape Community College, which is here in Southern New Jersey, and four of our guidance counselors attended and we are very impressed with the program and bought into the concept. So, uh, they are on board with it and the way I envision or actually, they envision using it is we are going to get the parent video and we are going to be showing that at freshmen orientation when parents and prospective or incoming freshmen are here. And we are hoping that there will be some conversations going on between parent and children, and maybe teachers after that is being shown. And also I heard some discussion from the guidance counselors about them doing presentations for various classes, like freshman, sophomore, on segments of the program School Counts, I think they were

primarily discussing.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: You will make sure that the parents get the same message that the kids are getting and what they are doing in school is so important?

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Oh, yes, yes. And once, I'm sure once that presentation is made, we have a Mainland TV channel that we can run that on a regular basis on the channel.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Oh, that's great. Sue, I'd like to ask you, we have talked a lot about the program and how we are preparing students to enter college and the workforce, and I know John is with a high school, is this program strictly for high schools?

>> SUE HERRING: No, it's definitely for middle schools also. Students need to start preparing for high school while they are in middle school, and the program starts at sixth grade. And schools are using the program in all different ways. It's really very flexible. It can be integrated into the school's curriculum or into their advisory periods. I have one school I'm working with that got a grant to start small learning community groups in their high school and they are using LearnDoEarn as a big component of being able to implement that program. So it's being used in all different ways.

And I also wanted to just mention that the ways that schools are get a hold of this program is either directly through the Chamber of Commerce or we also partner with other local Chambers of Commerce who use the program as part of their

workforce development initiatives in their local area. As I mentioned, the Rochester Chamber of Commerce before, Rochester area Chamber of Commerce in Minnesota.

We are also working with colleges and universities who use LearnDoEarn as part of their K-12 outreach initiatives. And a big part of what we are just starting to get into now is after-school programs using LearnDoEarn in those kinds of settings.

So, it's very flexible, the messages -- we just want the message to get out to every student and so we are trying all different ways to make sure that every student can hear that message.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Now, Sue, when you said that they could get the program directly from the Chamber of Commerce, you are not talking about their local Chamber of Commerce, I'm assuming you are talking about the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce.

>> SUE HERRING: Yes, the New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So if they wanted to get in touch with you at the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, how would they go about doing that?

>> SUE HERRING: They could e-mail us at [info@LearnDoEarn.org](mailto:info@LearnDoEarn.org).

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm-hmm.

>> SUE HERRING: Or else they can give us a call.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: 609-989-7888. And they could also visit your web as well, right?

>> SUE HERRING: Yes, [www.LearnDoEarn.org](http://www.LearnDoEarn.org).

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay. Now I want to ask John this question, because it sounds like there is a lot in the package, does it take a lot of time to implement this in the classroom?

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Um, let's see, uh, not really. Uh, with the summer program, we really got into the Work the Money program and I wanted them to get the rules down. I think there are like six Power Point presentations, I believe. And I was able to do that an hour a day, four days a week, 28 days.

And, of course, there are assignments now at the end of each segment. And, you know, those can get kind of involved and time consuming. So, you can actually take a lot more time if you want to do that, depending on how in depth you want to get with the assignments that the segments request of the students. And, by the way, they are very good too, very thought provoking. The students really have to do some thinking and use their computer skills to get information and whatnot.

So and in my academic maintenance class was one day a week. I did the World Class Students and that generated a lot of discussion. I was able to do that in a semester, one day a week. So that was about 20 or 30 days, I believe. So I mean, you can edit it if time is an issue or you can make it last a marking period to a semester, depending on how much time you have.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So it really is flexible enough to lend itself to however you want to implement it?

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Absolutely.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Well, that's great.

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Absolutely.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Now, Sue, you mentioned some after-school programs in the after-school arena, how is it being used there?

>> SUE HERRING: Well, we actually redesigned some of those Power Point presentations to be shorter and more targeted for after-school settings. And so now we have a separate kit for after-school programs that educators or the people running the after-school programs can use these shorter Power Point presentations and some ancillary activities. We give them some neat activities that they can use also with their students in the after-school setting. And in addition to that, these shorter Power Point presentations work really well if the after-school program wants to bring in business speakers. It's a wonderful way for them to engage the business community into that after-school program.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Kind of like mentors?

>> SUE HERRING: Yes, or in a mentor situation, definitely.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Wow, that's great. So it looks like this can be used with the school district in middle and high school, after-school programs, we can show parent videos to keep the parents informed and also in the business community through

mentor programs. Looks like you have hit every point.

>> SUE HERRING: Absolutely. As I said before, our real goal is to make sure as many students as possible hear these messages because we think every student deserves to hear these so that they can make the best decisions they can while they are in middle and high school and have their options open to them when they graduate from high school.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: That's great. And during the break, Sue and I had a little discussion about some of the reactions that students have been having, and she mentioned that she did have another clip that she wanted to get to with regard to the impact LearnDoEarn has been having. Can we get to that now, do you think?

>> SUE HERRING: Yes, I would love to. This is actually a high school student and her reaction to hearing the messages in LearnDoEarn regarding taking rigorous course work. So I'm going to play that now.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay.

>> VIDEO CLIP: This is the guide to my success, the guide to my future. If I follow this advice and abide by what is going on, then most certainly my future is looking bright. Like, physics, that's one thing, you know, I'm not planning -- I was never really planning on taking physics or anything like that, but they were like, you need to have at least, like, one year of physics, chemistry, biology.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Wow that is interesting. She was not planning on taking physics and not only did she say she was going to now decide to take physics, she also referred to the program as a guide to her future. I think that's that bucket of ice water that John was talking about before.

>> SUE HERRING: That's right. LearnDoEarn really does give students a road map to follow, to make sure they can start setting goals while they are in middle and high school and it doesn't just say to them, work hard, it tells them exactly what they need to do. They need to take this set of courses. They need to make sure they maintain a 95 percent attendance in punctuality rate. They need to start building these skills and behaviors while they are in middle and high school because it doesn't just click on once they get out of high school, which a lot of them think happens. They really have to start practicing those things while they are in school.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: I think that is such important messaging too, because you are right, it doesn't just click on, there is no switch that gets flipped to teach these kids the skills that they are going to need in the workforce. And it sounds like you are building a solid work ethic with them as well so that they will understand what is expected in the workforce.

>> SUE HERRING: Absolutely. And the parents need to hear this information too. You know, getting back to the parent video, the whole reason why we created those parent videos is because

the teachers were saying us, well, this is fine that I'm telling the kids what they need to do, but then we are getting parents coming in saying we don't want to have our students have to read during the summer or we don't think they should be getting this amount of homework. And the parents many times don't understand how important it is that their students take rigorous courses, that they cut out the study halls, that they come to school every day and on time.

We were just talking a superintendent the other day that was saying the parents in her schools take their students out for a dentist appointment or to go on different vacations and they are not projecting that importance of school and being there on time every day to their students. And so it is important for parents as well to hear these messages.

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Yeah.

>> JOHN CAPASSO: I would absolutely agree with that.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Yeah, sounds like a lot of common sense, but it has got to really be driven home to them. Well, I want to thank all three of you for joining us today. Dana, Sue, John, I really appreciated your time today and all of your input on the Learn More Now, Do More Now, Earn More Later Student Achievement System. So thank you.

>> JOHN CAPASSO: Thank you.

>> DANA EGRECKZY: Thank you. You are welcome. Anyone who would like more information can go to the website at

[www.LearnDoEarn.org](http://www.LearnDoEarn.org)

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Great. Thank you so much. Again, the e-mail address if you would like more information is [info@LearnDoEarn.org](mailto:info@LearnDoEarn.org).

I'd also like to thank this week's sponsors, the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services. Next Wednesday at noon Eastern Time we will be back with another show exploring ideas, innovations and initiatives involving the workplace and people with disabilities. Until then, I'm Donna Custard sitting in for Ray Zardetto and this has been Disabilities At Work Radio.

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