

**Title**

**CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN THE ERA OF COLLEGE FOR ALL  
Exploring Diversity of Youth Postsecondary Aspirations in “Middletown,” USA**

**ABSTRACT:**

In recent years, a revitalized version of vocational education known as career and technical education (CTE) has gained widespread momentum as an alternative to the four-year college ideal promoted by the “college-for-all” (Rosenbaum, 2001) movement. Citing the rising costs of college tuition along with low four-year college completion rates, especially for low-income students, CTE advocates argue that purposeful vocational education can offer cost-effective pathways towards viable middle-skill careers. Central to contemporary CTE programming is the viewpoint that such careers, which tend to require applied one- and two-year certificates and degrees, are not backup options for failing youth, but instead can be considered as successful and worthy of respect as careers that require a four-year college degree. Yet little is known about the aspirations and ideals of success youth who participate in CTE actually hold. My study uses a developmental perspective to investigate the educational and occupational aspirations of youth with varying levels of engagement in CTE and college preparatory courses, as well as myriad contextual influences on their aspirations. In a case study of a manufacturing region of Pennsylvania, I am recruiting low-income youth from a variety of public high schools to participate in a survey on vocational identity development and a semi-structured interview about long-term goals. I am also conducting interviews and observations with a subset of youths’ parents, educators, employers, members of workforce development organizations, and members of other postsecondary readiness organizations. Preliminary findings will be presented.

**BIO:**

Sarah Cashdollar is an Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Pre-doctoral Fellow in the Department of Comparative Human Development. Her research is funded by the Hymen Milgrom Supporting Organization (HMSO) Successful Pathways from School to Work Initiative as well as IES.