



Policy Issues Affecting Career and Technical Education Identified through AYPF Forums

The American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) held a series of four forums on Capitol Hill from May – September 2007 to showcase effective and innovative Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. This series of forums was supported by the James Irvine Foundation. The forums highlighted different aspects of CTE, including effective state, district, and school policies and practices, and the needs of employers. During the forums, speakers raised a number of policy issues needing attention. The following is a brief summary of the key policy issues identified during the forums.

Skills and Competencies

Several presenters discussed the need to improve academic skills but said that a strong focus on workplace skills (e.g. work ethic, punctuality) and 21st Century skills (problem-solving, critical thinking, communication) is also required to ensure that our workforce has the competencies employers need. The focus on academics in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has drawn attention away from the 21st Century skills and competencies, and we need to put a higher priority on the development of those skills.

Curriculum

Every presenter agreed that high school curriculum needs to be rigorous and support the development of core academic skills, but presenters also called for curriculum that is relevant to students and helps them understand the connections to their future career and education plans. High schools should provide a relevant, hands-on education utilizing innovative curricula and technologies integrated with core curricula. At the same time, CTE curriculum needs to be aligned with core academic standards.

Several presenters suggested that much more curriculum should be developed in the fields of engineering, informational technology, and emerging technologies, but that these fields have largely been ignored because of the narrow focus on improving math and science in response to NCLB. Suggestions included developing interdisciplinary courses that support the development of math and science skills through engineering and technology applications in lieu of traditional high school courses required for graduation.

Teachers

Many CTE teachers lack the academic training necessary to integrate academic content into lesson plans. Many academic teachers lack the understanding to explain how math and science concepts are applied. Both groups of teachers need ongoing professional development to encourage greater integration of concepts and applications. Almost no curriculum exists to train teachers on developing and executing quality CTE classes. Teachers also need ongoing professional development to stay up-to-date with industry trends.

There is a shortage of qualified CTE teachers and drawing expertise from industry is critical. Therefore, most presenters suggested continued flexibility in the definition of highly qualified teacher in NCLB. One presenter suggested revising the teacher certification process to require an associate's degree and updated industry certification for CTE teachers.

Building capacity for teachers and administrators is essential to maintain sustainability of high quality CTE programs.

Multiple Pathways, Flexibility, Options

Several presenters endorsed the concept of creating “multiple pathways to graduation” for students, with CTE being a major pathway. All pathways need to be academically rigorous but taught and presented in various ways. Pathways can include college preparatory academic curriculum, a focused program of study in a career pathway, and/or programs that articulate postsecondary credit for students. Presenters noted that while offering choice is a positive step, students must be provided information and advisement on their options.

As school systems begin to offer various options, they bump into existing attitudes and structures that can pose barriers. For instance, one speaker noted that the majority of educational funding is focused on traditional students that follow a traditional educational pathway into traditional programs, and that funding needs to be flexible to allow more choice by students.

Another challenge is the limitations of many high school schedules and the fear that an integrated CTE program of study will not allow a student to complete college prep or Advanced Placement courses because of time conflicts. Policies could support more flexible school scheduling and organization to alleviate these concerns.

Standards and Assessments

Presenters urged that standards be developed to include industry and 21st Century skills. Because they are not valued to the extent academic standards are, assessments and accountability systems do not reflect the development of these competencies and skills.

All presenters agreed that there are currently no assessment instruments that allow educators to completely measure the benefits of CTE programs and that an assessment tool is needed to effectively evaluate the success of their programs.

Credit Articulation to Postsecondary Education

Presenters agreed that students need opportunities for dual enrollment and college credit attainment through articulation agreements. However, there are many barriers that keep students from earning credits even if they complete a college-level CTE class in high school and earn credit. One policy suggestion was to conduct a system-wide review of articulation agreements to ensure credits are accepted at the postsecondary level. Another approach is for K-12 to work with postsecondary institutions to convince them that CTE courses are postsecondary credit worthy. (In California, for example, individual teachers submit course content and curriculum to the University of California and California State University for credit review. Today, 6,000 CTE courses out of 25,000 CTE courses count for postsecondary credit.)

Guidance and Counseling

High school counselors have an enormous impact on the courses and pathways students select, and they need to be better informed about labor market opportunities for students interested in technical fields of study. Students need more realistic and supportive guidance and counseling to make their decisions about educational pathways and career choices. Policies should support increased guidance and counseling for all students.

Quality of Programs

Several presenters recommended tighter quality control measures, particularly at the state level, to weed out weak CTE programs and promote strong ones.

2007 Forums:

- 5/10 **The Role of Career and Technical Education in High School Reform: Career and Technical Education Responding to Industry Needs** with Phyllis Eisen, Vice President, The Manufacturing Institute and Executive Director, The Center for Workforce Success; Duane Crum, California State Director, Project Lead the Way; and Mike Ogilvy, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, intelitek, Inc.
- 6/22 **The Role of Career and Technical Education in High School Reform: State Efforts to Integrate CTE with Rigorous Standards** with Patrick Ainsworth, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary, Postsecondary & Adult Education, California Department of Education; Kathy Oliver, Assistant State Superintendent, Maryland Department of Education; and Alex Harris, Senior Policy Analyst, National Governors Association
- 7/20 **The Role of Career and Technical Education in High School Reform: Linking Secondary and Postsecondary Education through CTE** with Dr. Laurel Adler, Superintendent, East San Gabriel Regional Occupational Program, West Covina, CA and Mark Whitlock, CEO, Central Education Center, Coweta County, GA
- 9/21 **Exemplary CTE Districts and Programs** with Gary Hoachlander, Executive Director, ConnectEd: The California Center for College and Career; Michael Hanlon, Founder, Health Careers Academy at Palmdale High School, California; Michael Owens, Associate Secretary, Adult Education and Workforce Development, Delaware Department of Education; and Patrick Savini, Superintendent, Sussex Technical School District, Delaware

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