

Senate Education Committee Hearing
May 19, 2008
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Recommendation

Improve Career and Technology Education (CTE) and Texas high school outcomes by *directing state funding for school district provision of CTE to courses and a coherent sequence of courses that culminate in an industry-recognized credential, an occupational certificate issued by an approved national body, a state license, college credit, or degree.*

Replace the model of funding CTE contact hours with a model of student-centered funding that is based on completion of an approved course and its end-of-course examination. Funding should represent a specific allotment that is biennially indexed to reflect cost-of-living increases, and initially distributed without regard for the student outcomes.

Rationale for Reform

- A growing number of states are successfully using external credentialing to improve, validate, and assure the quality of CTE courses and programs.
- A growing number of states are successfully leveraging the quality of their CTE by predicating funding on external credentialing.
- This model has already been successfully pioneered in several states, including –
 - *Virginia* administers industry certification exams for high school CTE coursesⁱ and awards a technical education diploma (seal) to over half of the states' 2007 high school graduates.ⁱⁱ
 - *Alabama* requires all high school CTE programs to be externally certified, by national certifying agencies or state industry-certifying entities when no national agency exists.ⁱⁱⁱ
 - *Vermont* only funds CTE programs that result in industry certification, meet industry-approved standards for curriculum, facilities, and instruction or offer dual credit form a higher-education partner.^{iv}
 - *Maryland* directs Perkins Tech Prep funds only to high schools redesigned to meet the state's goals for high school graduation and postsecondary completion.^v
- State funding for externally-credentialed courses would exert immense pressure on school districts to prioritize high quality CTE courses, and, as a result, graduates of Texas public schools would find real value from their school diploma in the labor market and in postsecondary education/training.
- This reform will encourage school districts to expand and improve the selection of externally credentialed courses that most, even small rural, districts already offer. For example, Waco I.S.D. offers industry certification in^{vi} –
 - 3 courses in the Family and Consumer Science Career Cluster (such as Child Development Associate)

- 6 courses in the Health Science Technology Cluster (such as EMT Technician)
- 4 courses in the Business Education Cluster (such as A+ Certification)
- 7 courses in the Trade and Industrial Education Cluster (such as Automotive Service Technician)
- State-funded external credentialing of CTE is likely to make most or all of the CTE courses in Texas public schools eligible for federal funding from The Carl D. Perkins Act.
- This reform honors the state's long-held compact of local control for public schools by establishing state incentives for school districts to prioritize and improve CTE, but not mandating what CTE courses must be offered.
- Using student-centered funding based on course completion offers Texans the opportunity for more precise, understandable information about school spending on CTE, student performance in CTE, and the relationship between the two.
- The Texas Legislature has previously demonstrated support for this policy. During the spring of 2005, the Texas Public Policy Foundation introduced the idea of funding externally credentialed CTE courses to members of the Texas Legislature; it was consequently proposed and accepted as a floor amendment to House Bill 2, however, the school finance omnibus failed to pass.
- State-funded external credentialing of CTE is a policy that is consistent with and extends reforms introduced by House Bill 3485, groundbreaking legislation passed by the 80th Texas Legislature. Like HB 3485, this proposal is designed to increase the rigor of CTE, and it supports the definition of CTE being a course or part of a course sequence that leads to industry-recognized credential, certificate, or a degree.
- Additionally, state-funded credentialing of CTE supports the state's new college and career initiative and model for high school redesign, AchieveTexas. AchieveTexas has already aligned hundreds of industry-related certifications to the state's 81 Cluster Pathways for CTE in Texas public schools.
- State policymakers have a unique window of opportunity to introduce state funding of externally credentialed CTE before the State Board of Education reviews and adopts the curriculum rewrite produced by the Review Panel for Career and Technical Education Curriculum (established by HB 3485), and when the 81st Texas Legislature considers refinements to the state's public school finance system.

Need for CTE Reform

Approximately one of four students drop out of Texas schools before earning their diploma, and only about one in four students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in postsecondary training and college.^{vii} For the small group of students who travel through the narrowing pipeline throughout Texas public schools to college, less than 50 percent will earn a diploma.^{viii} Because CTE serves three out of four students in Texas high schools today, it is vitally important to improve the quality of CTE and redesign CTE to equip students with the skills necessary for postsecondary education and training.

Postsecondary training and education is an economic imperative for graduates of Texas public schools. In today's economy, less than 20 percent of jobs are classified as unskilled,^{ix} and the real average earnings of full-time workers with a high school diploma or less have markedly decreased over the past 30 years.^x Workers with little education and few skills generally enter the labor market and remain in low-wage, unskilled jobs because on-the-job training or postsecondary education is generally required to earn a wage sufficient to support a family.^{xi} The state demographer warns that the economic and social wellbeing of every Texan will be diminished unless we substantially increase the percentage of students graduating from Texas public schools and completing postsecondary education and training.^{xii}

Conclusion

Both Texas Institute of Education Reform and Texas Public Policy Foundation believe that a diploma earned in Texas public schools should tell admission officers at colleges, universities, and career and technical schools that the bearer is ready for the rigors of postsecondary education, and tell potential employers that the graduate possesses the reading, writing, and computational skills required for success in the workplace.^{xiii} For this reason, both organizations propose that the Texas Legislature consider legislation to predicate CTE funding on courses that culminate in external credentials. This policy promises to decrease the dropout rate, enhance postsecondary readiness of high school graduates, and improve their transitions to and success in postsecondary opportunities.

Endnotes

ⁱ Shreve, D. (2006). *State Policy Trends Affecting Career and Technical Education*, National Association of State Directors of CTE Spring Conference, April 11, http://www.careertech.org/upload_files/Schreve.ppt.

ⁱⁱ *High Stakes Credentialing for High School Career and Technical Education Students in Virginia* (accessed on line May 2008). Virginia Department of Education, http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/Instruction/CTE/certification/Credentialing_Position_Paper.pdf.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Certifying a New Vision for High School* (2008); Wilcox, D. (2006). The role of industry based certifications in career and technical education (The Certification Advantage), *Goliath*, Jan. 1, http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-5135585/The-role-of-industry-based.html.

^{iv} Wakelyn, D. (2007).

^v Ibid.

^{vi} *Career and Technical Education* (accessed online May 2008). Waco Independent School District, http://www.wacoisd.org/industry_certs.php.

^{vii} *Student Performance in Texas Public Schools* (2007). Texas Institute for Education Reform, http://www.texaseducationreform.org/media/global/pdf/ND_TIER2_StudentPerformance.pdf.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Lynch, R. L. (2000). High School Career and Technical Education for the First Decade of the 21st Century, *Journal of Vocational Education Research*, Volume 25, Issue 2.

^x Jenkins, D. (2006). *Career Pathways: Aligning Public Resources to Support Individual and Regional Economic Advancement in the Knowledge Economy*, Workforce Strategy Center, http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/WSC_pathways8.17.06.pdf.

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} *Student Performance in Texas Public Schools* (2007).

^{xiii} This statement is taken from the State of Virginia's description of its high school diploma. *Virginia Graduation Requirements* (accessed online May 2008). Virginia Department of Education, <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/2plus4in2004/>.