

Career Technical Education White Paper

Submitted to

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

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Career Technical Education Summit

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By:

California Association of Leaders for Career Preparation
(CALCP)

Authors:

Don Bertucci, Treasurer

Teri Burns, Legislative Advocate

As a state that prides itself on its cutting edge technology and innovation, it is important that the students of California develop skills that will help them be competitive in the workforce. The California Association of Leaders for Career Preparation (CALCP) understands and believes that the purpose of career technical education is preparing students and adequately training them with the necessary skills for the workplace and society. CALCP is composed of a wide cross section of CTE practitioners representing school districts, Regional Occupational Centers/Programs, community colleges, school site programs, and county offices of education. Members of CALCP are actively involved in programs to help students find the connection and applicability of career technical and academic education. We believe all students have the ability to learn and succeed in a relevant, rigorous and engaging curriculum. All educators must accept the responsibility for preparing all students to participate successfully in a technological and global community. All stakeholders must work collaboratively to help all students become contributing members of society.

Key issues for resolution

CALCP identifies the following key issues for implementation of a dynamic career education curricula in California.

1. Recruitment and retention of qualified career education educators with experience in their fields.
2. Lack of respect for professions requiring less than a 4-year degree and a drive to direct all students toward a university track.
3. A State accountability system that does not include recognition of career technical education in its measurements.
4. Limits on the school schedule that make accessing CTE difficult for many students.
5. A counseling system that recognizes the value of CTE for all students.

Workplace Projections

According to the International Center for Leadership in Education, eight out of ten jobs will require technical skill and nine out of ten jobs will require education beyond high school for students graduating between 2007 and 2050. Skilled workers are needed for highly paid, technical and service oriented occupation such as automobile repair, construction, health fields and many more. Employers are eagerly seeking people with high skills that are dependable, adaptable and flexible. Projected retirements in the next ten years demand that today's youth attain the skills and education necessary to be a part of this new workforce.

Despite career technical education offering the tools to provide students with workplace competency, there are still many challenges in place that hinder the ability to meet these future workplace projections. Though the California Education Code cites that "Districts are encouraged to provide all students with a rigorous academic curriculum that integrates academic and career skills, incorporates applied learning in all disciplines, and prepares all pupils for high school graduation and career entry," most of the emphasis is being placed on academic curriculum. In fact, between the 1997-98 and 2004-2005 school years, there was a 15% enrollment decline in secondary career technical education courses in California.

Teaching Credentialing and Career Technical Education

The federal No Child Left Behind Act requires teachers in academic classrooms to be “highly qualified” while career technical education instructors are exempted from this requirement in an attempt to recognize the importance of utilizing teachers with current industry experience. Most career technical education teachers come from industry, while 99.9% of teachers in A-G courses have a four year degree. An unintended consequence of efforts to make more career technical courses A-G credit eligible has been to require teachers of such classes to meet the “highly qualified” definition. Thus, a police officer with only an AA degree might not be eligible to teach a police science course if it is intended to meet the A-G requirements.

This calls for a re- examination of the way we evaluate and credential career technical education teachers. Instructors of career technical courses must have credentialing options available so that CTE courses qualify for academic credit and CTE teachers are considered “highly qualified” to teach them. They must also have an expedited process of learning the necessary pedagogy to teaching their workforce experience to a classroom of students.

Incentives for people with technical skills to leave their industry, particularly new and emerging fields, to teach career technical education courses are critical due to the obstacles imposed by credentialing requirements, program funding, and low salary schedules.

A-G Courses

The imposed A-G course requirement to gain entrance into a California State University or the University of California creates a system where students are funneled into the A-G course requirement track to fulfill the high school graduation requirement. Though this is done to increase the likelihood of a student attending a CSU or UC, this A-G track fails to take into account labor and economic market demands, nor does it acknowledge that a career technical education leads to high school graduation and beyond. This system can drive students who are coerced into the A-G track to drop out of school.

Only 4,705 career technical education courses are classified as an A-G course, very few in most districts. We are being challenged to classify more career technical courses as A-G so that there is a stronger connection with academic preparation and career skill development. Doing so will strengthen the relevance in education and learning and students will not only develop their academic cognitive skills but be prepared for future careers. Cross teaching by academic and technical teachers will go a long way toward resolving concerns, however there is a financial cost to districts for this scenario.

Not every course is, or should, be forced into the university’s theoretical and research mold. Many apply directly to current labor force needs in our communities and statewide economy. Training for those jobs is also a key component of our role in education. Meeting the demands of our society for trades and talents, trained by experienced professionals, will keep our communities thriving.

The “If You Don’t Go to College, You Will Not be Successful” Myth

Our culture, teachers, and schools place heavy emphasis on receiving a college education. Decision-makers, mostly college graduates themselves, continue to advance the requirement as their path to success. Yet, education experts addressing at-risk youth, attribute high school drop out rates to students’ failure in connecting their education with their life needs. High schools often do not provide opportunities where all students feel connected with what they are learning. Career technical education can help bridge that gap and provide an avenue for success.

One third of new incoming jobs do not require four year degrees, but rather, employees with high technical skill. There are more students with four year degrees enrolled in community colleges, than students looking to transfer to a four year university. Students return to get skills necessary to get and keep high paying jobs.

Most students enrolling in a certificate program enter the workforce with far less debt and far greater starting salaries than their university counterparts. It is important to put a high value on hard working people in skilled areas where there is a high demand.

Counselor Professional Development

Counselors must also be provided with the necessary training so that they may be able to understand and help guide students through any course, be it an academic or a career technical education path. For too long, the few counselors serving our schools have been focused only on helping students meet their academic requirements. Many are out of touch with community and industry needs and demands.

Counselors must be aware of the current and projected demands of industry and workforce so that may guide students and remain well informed. Counselors must come in contact with students early on, beginning in middle school, to guide them through the course selection process and introduce them to career exploration. Counselor guidance is extremely valuable in helping students identify their interests and helping them find the most effective manner to pursue those interests. Counselors must realize that career technical education is not a dead end, but rather a means to further accomplishment.

Graduation Requirements

In order to ensure all students graduate from high school and are adequately prepared for what they chose to do thereafter, a career technical component should be a standard part of the high school graduation requirement. Introducing students to career technical education offers students the opportunity to explore potential career paths and to begin building upon any particular interest. Doing so familiarizes them with many key life skills and helps students make more educated decisions about their choices to go to college to learn more about their interest, gain industry experience, or both.

Funding

Career technical education lacks a funding base. This year, the governor’s budget includes \$52 million for the career technical education improvement grant program, this however is a drop in the bucket given the years of neglect. Career technical education needs a steady funding base to make up for the lack of investment. Career technical education facilities must be up to date in

order for students to learn, practice, and develop new skills and techniques. Funding is also necessary to attract teachers and maintain programs. Investment in career technical education will bring a high return in the long run. We are encouraged that the CDE is preparing a comprehensive plan for federal career tech funds that is more comprehensive than simply a plan to meet Perkins fund requirements.

Measurement

Include career technical education in the API. It will prove an incentive for schools to pay more attention to their career technical education program and place it on equal ground with other academic requirements. Schools must also appropriately allocate time in their daily schedules for career technical education to make it convenient for students. In addition, students enrolled in career technical courses must have the opportunity to connect what they are learning with community college, industry experience through internships, and beyond. Forming partnerships with businesses, nearby industry, and community colleges will help further expose students and build strong partnerships so students can explore opportunities to further their career education.

It is important then, that career exploration begins early in elementary and junior high school so that student abilities and interests can be developed and provided with career guidance. Career preparation is necessary for anyone and career technical education supports all different kinds of students, despite of their background and abilities, be they economic, language, mental or physical. The public school system must provide rigorous academic content standards, relevant industry-specific knowledge and skills while preparing all students for the workplace and or higher education. Students enrolled in career technical education should have access to a rigorous, individualized curriculum with the opportunity for industry certification programs with high industry standards. Career technical education must have pathways into careers based on the skills learned and developed.

With career technical education's ability to incorporate industry specific knowledge and skill as well as rigorous academic content standards, students will be ready to face the demands of the workplace as well as the preparation for post secondary education. Career technical education offers invaluable opportunities to the students of California and the ability to contribute to the Golden State.