

TESTIMONY

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Good morning. Thank you Representative Grove, Representative Harkins, and all the committee members for inviting me to be with you this morning. As you know, I serve as the Executive Director of the national Association for Career and Technical Education or A-C-T-E, and am joining you from our headquarters office in Alexandria, Virginia. ACTE is the nation's largest not-for-profit association committed to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for successful careers. Our association represents the community of CTE professionals, including educators, administrators, researchers, guidance and career development professionals and others at all levels of education—and from all parts of the country.

We are committed to excellence in providing advocacy, public awareness and access to resources, professional development and leadership opportunities to our members and the entire field of CTE. Like you, we want to ensure that every student has the opportunity to pursue a meaningful career, and are excited about the work you are doing in Pennsylvania to enhance your CTE programs to meet needs of students and of current and future employers in your state.

At ACTE, part of our efforts center around helping states and local schools achieve these goals, and we have launched several projects to help in these efforts. For example, we have recently spent a great deal of time thinking about what quality CTE looks like. The term “high-quality career and technical education” has become a national catchphrase—in use by policymakers, practitioners and a wide variety of influential education and workforce development stakeholders. But what is high-quality CTE? How should this term be defined, and can it be used to evaluate programs, determine areas for targeted improvements and recognize successful elements that should be scaled?

To help synthesize the myriad voices that are a part of the dialogue on high-quality CTE, we have embarked on a multi-step project to identify a comprehensive, research-based quality CTE framework, test the framework and integrate it into our efforts to recognize and disseminate information on best practices within CTE. This framework will be built around the Programs of Study model, a comprehensive, structured approach for delivering academic and CTE curricula to prepare students for postsecondary education and career success. While still in the early stages of the project, a number of states have already used our initial research to inform their CTE program development, approval and evaluation processes.

In addition, we work at the federal level on policy and research efforts that seek to strengthen CTE's role in federal legislation, and share many of your goals, such as increasing connections between secondary education, postsecondary education and employers. High-quality CTE programs of study are at the cornerstone of our federal advocacy, and we hope to continually make progress in reducing barriers to these seamless pathways.

In my role over the past few years, I've had the privilege of traveling around the country and seeing firsthand the value that CTE programs have to their local states and communities. I've also been able to witness a resurgence of interest in CTE in many of these states and communities, as educators and policymakers have come together to promote policies and programs much like the ones you are working to strengthen there in Pennsylvania. I'll talk more about what we've been seeing in state policy across the country in just a few minutes, but first I want to highlight some of the national research that lends credence to our collective work to promote CTE.

Significant research has been conducted to determine the effectiveness of CTE in preparing students for college and careers. The data speaks for itself – CTE is a critical component to student learning and enhances the educational experience as a whole. Research indicates that students participating in CTE programs increase student engagement and persistence in secondary school, and sets students on a path toward a rewarding career.

In terms of student performance, CTE improves student outcomes both at the secondary and postsecondary level. A report by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation indicates that 81 percent of students who have dropped out of high school say that relevant, real-world learning opportunities would have motivated them to stay – opportunities that are integral to the mission and structure of all CTE programs. The evidence in support of this approach is clear. Students who concentrate in CTE programs, according to data from the U.S. Department of Education, are 13 percent more likely to graduate from high school than their peers. Further supporting the role of CTE in improving student persistence, a report from the National Research Center for CTE also demonstrates that a ratio of one CTE class for every two academic ones minimizes a student's risk of dropping out.

In addition to ensuring that these students will stay in school, CTE improves the work that they do while they are there. Students enrolled in CTE high schools, according to research from 2013, are more likely to graduate on time, accumulate more credits and are more likely to successfully complete a college preparatory mathematics sequence. Another national longitudinal study by the National Research Center for CTE showed that students participating in CTE Programs of Study or career pathways outperformed their peers in the number of credits they earned in STEM fields and earned higher GPAs in their CTE classes. In sum, the benefits of CTE for student persistence, engagement and performance cannot be overstated. These benefits are also growing thanks to the scaling of innovative approaches from the field and new program delivery strategies, like career academies, programs of study, early college high schools, and more.

As I mentioned earlier, we have seen a surge of interest in CTE at the state level. ACTE and the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium have been working to track promising CTE policies that are being enacted across the nation. Our most recent 2015 report released last month is included as an addendum to my submitted testimony. The report covers over 125 new policies enacted in 39 states, signaling consistent fiscal and programmatic investments in CTE.

The report findings indicate that there is significant activity around development and support of Programs of Study and career pathways in many states. The federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act includes requirements related to development of Programs of Study in all schools and states. Career pathways is a broader term used at the federal level to describe a series of programs that support student transitions from education into the workforce, which may include CTE Programs of Study.

Related to this topic, a number of states have initiated governance related policies to address interagency collaboration to develop state career pathways systems. For instance, Virginia's Board of Workforce Development, Employment Commission and Community College System are directed to develop and execute a strategic plan combining public and private resources in support of industry sector strategies and career pathways.

Colorado has perhaps initiated the most significant work around Programs of Study and career pathways last year. Colorado's Workforce Development Council, in collaboration with the Colorado Community College System and other partners, has been tasked to develop integrated career pathways for in-demand industries within the state, such as construction and skilled trades, information technology and health care. The first career pathway should be implemented by or before the 2016-17 school year and at least two additional career pathways developed in each subsequent year. Once the career pathways are developed, the state Department of Higher Education and the Department Labor and Employment must create a free, state-provided online microsite with information about industry-specific career awareness, salary and wage information, an employment forecast, financial aid opportunities and online student support services.

Congress is currently working to reauthorize federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and ACTE expects a significant focus on Programs of Study/career pathways as a way to bridge connections between secondary and postsecondary education and better prepare students for employment and lifelong learning.

Another connecting strategy being used effectively at the state and local level is that of dual and concurrent enrollment and articulation of college credit, which is providing students the opportunity to earn college-credit while in high school. The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships reports that 30 percent of dual enrollments are in Career and Technical Education courses. These efforts have evolved in many communities due to efforts of CTE

programs at the secondary and postsecondary level. States are now seeking to replicate and expand dual enrollment and other types of credit transfer agreements, through a variety of proposals.

Fourteen state legislatures and boards enacted dual/concurrent enrollment and articulated credit related policies in 2015, such as modified or expanded eligibility for dual/concurrent enrollment in states including Georgia, Hawaii and Washington. Georgia streamlined its dual enrollment initiatives into one program, "Move On When Ready," which now authorizes CTE courses and electives as being eligible for dual enrollment. Alabama, Michigan and others appropriated funding or expanded access to dual enrollment and early/middle college programs, and Alabama's fiscal year 2016 education budget appropriated an additional \$5.1 million to expand CTE dual enrollment. The funds are to be distributed by the chancellor of the Alabama Community College System, who is directed to work with industry partners to identify workforce needs.

In California, community colleges and school districts are authorized to enter into a College and Career Access Pathways partnership to develop seamless CTE pathways and increase dual- and concurrent-enrollment opportunities for students. The legislation also increases the number of allowable postsecondary credits that students may take to 15 per term.

In addition to secondary-postsecondary connections, states are seeking to better connect the education system to employer needs more directly. In 2015, there was a strong focus on leveraging CTE in meaningful ways to boost state economies and close the skills gap, including encouraging business and education partnerships and improving work-based learning opportunities for students. I would like to describe a few of the areas where we are seeing significant activity and where we believe there is potential.

Sector strategies focus on forging connections between employers, education and training providers such as CTE programs, and other partners that are focused on skills training for individuals needed in specific employment sectors. States such as California are working to implement improved systems such as codifying definitions of career pathways and sector strategies.

In addition to sector strategies, states are taking other approaches. Colorado has created a statewide coordinator for postsecondary and workforce readiness who reports to the state's Workforce Development Council. The coordinator functions as an intermediary to raise the level of postsecondary and workforce readiness that high school graduates must achieve for success, particularly as it relates to skilled professions. This position also helps to coordinate the efforts of local school districts, area technical centers, community colleges, the state education agency, the workforce development council and the state CTE office, among others.

States are also taking steps to increase access to work-based learning opportunities through CTE. Work-based learning is one way to improve students' understanding and application of the knowledge and skills they have learned in school.

Arkansas created the Skills Development Fund and Office of Skills Development, which will award grants to public and private organizations for the development and implementation of workforce training programs and Colorado has created a new program to partially reimburse companies offering quality internships to high school students or recent high school graduates, as well as two- and four-year college students in industries such as advanced manufacturing, aerospace and information technology.

CTE programs and employers are also forging relationships to better align education and training without formal policy guidance. For example, local high schools in the Columbus, Georgia area are collaborating with jet engine manufacturer Pratt and Whitney and the Columbus Technical College to deliver high-quality CTE instruction. Here, students recommended by their high school teachers take a Certified Manufacturing course at Columbus Technical College and, if they perform well, intern at Pratt & Whitney for a semester. Upon completion of the internship, they may earn official recognition as a Certified Manufacturing Specialist, a credential that they can use in full-time jobs at Pratt & Whitney or upon completion of additional postsecondary education.

Other companies are engaging in similar partnerships, as explored in ACTE's "Taking Business to School" series (https://www.acteonline.org/resources_business). Toyota offers students from certain technical centers and community colleges the chance to train at its factories for two years while working toward an associate degree or certification. AAR, an engineering firm, works with community colleges, technical schools, and universities to create curricula and apprenticeship programs, and allows students to earn a paycheck as they learn. Furthermore, Hypertherm, a company that produces plasma- and fiber laser- based cutting tools, has created a nine-week program with a local community college that offers graduates not only a career with the company, but also the chance to earn a machine tooling certificate and credit toward an associate degree should they choose to continue their education.

As you likely know, today's CTE programs go far beyond the outdated stereotypes about what career-focused education has to offer. However, CTE students and professionals still struggle to overcome outdated perceptions about CTE's place in every student's education and the types of opportunities offered in these programs.

At one time, "vocational" education was designed to prepare students for immediate entry into the labor market in specific occupations after high school. Today's CTE classrooms provide a much deeper learning experience for students, and are organized with the goal of preparing all students to graduate college- and career-ready. This approach has ensured that students who enroll in CTE programs will be well prepared for post-graduation opportunities by attaining strong academic, technical and employability skills, rather than limiting their education and

training to any one outcome. In addition, today's CTE prepares students for careers in an ever-expanding range of professions in fields from health care to information technology – industries that increasingly require some form of postsecondary education. By 2018, the majority of information technology jobs and 85 percent of financial services jobs will require postsecondary education such as an associate degree or postsecondary certificate, and by 2020, 82 percent of health care jobs will. These facts show that today's CTE breaks the mold of what was once considered a path for students not bound for postsecondary education and labor market success.

ACTE remains committed to educating policymakers, businesses and the public about 21st century CTE. A series of Sector Fact Sheets (<https://www.acteonline.org/factsheets>) we have developed over the past few years succinctly communicate the opportunities offered. These publications show that CTE offers students the education they need to attain careers in growing fields that offer high wages and will power our national economy, such as:

- Health care, where the amount of openings for professional and technical positions such as nurses and pharmacy technicians will grow 31 percent by 2020
- Information technology, where employment is expected to increase 18 percent by 2022
- Financial services, where the amount of jobs for cost estimators and financial advisers will increase by 26 and 27 percent, respectively, by 2022; and
- Veterinary medicine, which may see career opportunities grow 20 percent by 2018.

Furthermore, ACTE works regularly to communicate the successes of CTE educators and students to the media and public. A current example is that of CTE Month® (<http://www.acteonline.org/ctemonth>), a national effort to build positive awareness of the opportunities available in all CTE programs.

I ask for your leadership in helping us overcome these misperceptions surrounding CTE so that more parents and students understand the true potential and benefits of these programs.

In closing, I want to thank you for the opportunity to share information, data and research related to CTE. We have only touched the surface on many of these issues, and there is much we did not have time to discuss. If I or my staff may be of assistance as you move forward in deliberations concerning your legislative agenda, please do not hesitate to contact us.