



Association of California School Administrators CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION POSITION PAPER

Overview – California Faces a Student Dropout & Achievement Gap Crisis

California public education is facing a crisis and career technical education (CTE) can be one of the keys to meeting this challenge. CTE can be a powerful strategy for advancing key education reforms and can have its most powerful impact in revitalizing and reforming high schools, addressing the growing achievement gap between white and minority and English learner students and curbing the alarmingly high student dropout rate. CTE can re-engage the thousands of students considering dropping out due to boredom, and a perceived lack of connection between school work and workforce preparation.

In addressing these issues, career technical education has become one of California’s most important policy discussions over the last several years. In the 1970s, California high school education moved from a broad-based curriculum that included “vocational education programs” to a more college-and university-driven curriculum that focuses on the need to complete the “a-g” course requirements in order to gain entry into a California State University or University of California campus.

This change to “a-g” has had a significant impact on how high schools are organized, the types of programs that are offered and how high school students and their parents have reacted to these requirements. The move to a more rigorous academic curriculum has enabled more students to meet the “a-g” course requirements for entrance into UC and CSU. However, we can no longer afford to adhere to a model that is exclusive to academic rigor without including relevance and application provided by CTE. The “a-g” coursework is aimed at entering UC and oftentimes alternative rigorous and relevant coursework is not recognized by CSU. Additional rigorous and relevant coursework must be allowed to expand in order to help alleviate the current dropout rate and increase the number of students that decide to continue their education following the 12th grade. For every 10 students who enter the ninth grade, only four will enter college and only two of those will graduate. These statistics are even more profound for minority students.

As ACSA looks at the need to reform California’s pre-K–adult education system, it is critical that academic rigor is maintained while relevance is enhanced. Expanding career technical education at the elementary and secondary levels — through awareness, exploration and training — will support this goal. Career technical education in California’s high schools, regional occupation programs and adult schools can play a critical role in engaging students in academics that offer career and job opportunities of interest to students that might otherwise drop out of school. Preparing students for both college and work is a critical objective to achieve. The entire curriculum needs to be meaningful and useful to all students. It is imperative that California’s pre-K–adult education system be reformed to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to complete rigorous academic coursework and acquire the necessary skills that will lead to postsecondary education, as well as training and employment. Comprehensive changes in policies that will lead to fully integrated and well-funded CTE programs are necessary to achieve this goal.

A Vision for Career Technical Education

Every student should leave school with employable skills which can only be gained by access to career technical education coursework and training. Career Technical Education courses and programs are those educational options that offer specific occupational and technical skills related to identified industry clusters. A key element of these educational offerings is applied, hands-on learning that simulates and directly relates to activities and skills utilized within the corresponding occupations and careers. Academic content standards are naturally embedded into quality career technical education programs. It is through the explicit instruction of these standards within an authentic and practical context (i.e. career technical education) that students' understanding of the purpose of their academic program and how they will apply their knowledge and skills in the world beyond the classroom walls is enhanced. Quality career technical education programs, while incorporating academic content standards, provide a non-duplicative sequence of courses leading to an industry-recognized credential or certificate and/or articulate with postsecondary educational/training programs. CTE educational opportunities should be provided to both youth and adults in a range of occupational/career areas that correspond to current and future labor market demands and need. These programs should be offered in middle schools, high schools, regional occupation centers and programs, adult schools, apprenticeship programs, community and technical colleges and other postsecondary institutions. Career technical education should be integrated with academics to provide students with a rigorous and relevant educational experience, along with preparation for advanced educational and training opportunities and employment.

High quality CTE programs encompass a number of key elements, individualized to the needs of the local community and student population. The key elements of high quality programs include:

- Leadership at all levels of the district education system
- Rigorous curriculum and instruction
- A comprehensive system of career exploration, guidance and preparation, K-16
- Student support and student leadership development
- Industry partnerships
- System and course alignment and coherence
- Effective organizational design
- System responsiveness to changing economic and workplace demands
- Skilled faculty with ongoing professional development
- Evaluation, accountability and continuous program improvement
- Systematic promotion, outreach and communication at all levels

Need for CTE Reforms

In considering the need to reform and reorganize our state's educational system, it is critical we ensure that the curriculum is meaningful and useful to all students and that students are provided with a wider range of options. All students will prepare for a career, and most 21st century jobs will require some post-secondary education or training. The traditional four-year college after high school represents only one of multiple pathway options to achieving a fulfilling career. A comprehensive career technical education program that is available to all students is essential and can benefit all students, including those who are college-bound. However, there is ample data to show that career options, beginning immediately after high school or with a limited amount of post-secondary training, can be very well paying and lead to even greater career and financial success. In order to ensure that multiple options exist for all students, career technical education needs to be improved, expanded and supported to become an integral part of this reform effort. This effort must include multiple pathways that combine academic and career exploration and study. These pathways

should be multi-year, comprehensive programs of academic and technical study that are consistent with the 15 broad industry sectors and include the rigor and content of California’s academic standards.

Achieving the goal of providing high quality CTE options to all students will require a number of important policy changes. This position paper asks policymakers to consider reforms in the following key areas:

- I. **Increase program development**, including expanding student access to CTE programs, developing and disseminating best practices in CTE and ensuring **greater flexibility of time and program delivery** including the need to alter statutory requirements in order to meet local CTE implementation needs;
- II. Ensure that there are **appropriate levels of career guidance on career options** for students and robust awareness efforts for both students and parents;
- III. **Expand professional development opportunities** for existing CTE teachers and administrators and improve our CTE certification programs offered by institutions of higher education;
- IV. **Expand funding for CTE**, including resources for professional and technical expertise;
- V. Ensure that there is **full accountability for CTE** courses and work experience programs and ensure that these courses and programs have appropriate performance standards;
- VI. **Redefine the role of other educational systems**, including the UC and CSU, to ensure that labor market needs are being met and that the mission and policies of California’s institutions of higher education are meeting the needs of all students.

Linking CTE Reform to Comprehensive High School Reform

Over the last several years, ACSA has been working aggressively to develop policies on comprehensive high school reform. Given the data on increasingly higher student dropout rates, it is critical that any comprehensive approach to reforming high schools must consider the need to embed greater relevance. The integration of career technical education with core academics can serve as the impetus for students to find relevance to the academic content of the core curriculum while providing a different delivery system that accommodates a broader range of learning styles. ACSA’s High School Reform Position Paper states that reform efforts should expand the range of opportunities for students and prepare all students for life. Any comprehensive high school reform effort must include a strong component of career technical education opportunities for all students. This must be done in a way that creates opportunities for all students but does not mandate that all students take CTE coursework.

Guiding ACSA Principles on Career Technical Education

In developing a position paper on career technical education, ACSA has based its policy recommendations on several key guiding principles. These include:

Student Preparation: All students graduating from high school will be prepared with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to enable them to exercise the full range of options for entering the workplace including pursuing post-secondary education, training, apprenticeships and entering the workplace. Students should not be “tracked” into a non-college-bound path that reduces their options for the future.

Dropout Prevention: The dropout rate is continuing to grow and threatens the future competitiveness of the state in this global economy. All students must be given the opportunity to succeed and complete high school. Data shows that students participating in a college preparatory program or vocational program are twice as likely to graduate. California’s K-adult system must offer fully integrated career technical education programs for all its students.

Local Control: Because education is a state responsibility that is implemented through local education agencies, the state should exercise its leadership by establishing standards and outcomes with assessments, providing adequate fiscal and information resources, and holding LEAs accountable for developing, selecting and implementing strategies that will enable students to attain the established educational outcomes, including CTE programs.

System Coordination: Because education is a state responsibility, state policy should assure continuity of service and seamless transition for students between all levels of the educational system (P-20). This must include significant roles for both adult education and regional occupation centers & programs.

- **K-12 Career Technical Education Role:** CTE is an essential component to a comprehensive education system that provides career awareness, exploration and occupation-specific preparation to K-12 grade students. At the secondary level a sequenced program of study that articulates with post-secondary institutions allows for a seamless curriculum that results in a more academically and technically skilled graduate. The role of the CTE teacher in enhancing academic standards through applied learning brings relevance and purpose to student’s academic studies.
- **Regional Occupation Centers & Programs Role:** ROC/P programs are essential components to providing industry driven and occupation-specific education and training, as well as multiple career options to 9-12 students. ROC/P courses should be included in sequences of courses that encompass high school CTE classes, ROC/P courses and academic courses which should all sequence to postsecondary education and to initial employment. ROC/P courses should be articulated with local community colleges for credit which expand secondary students’ career and postsecondary options while still in high school. ROC/P also includes providing work-based learning experiences for students as paid or unpaid internships.
- **Adult Education Role:** Adult education serves as an available extension of pre-school–12th grade (P-12) education and serves as a bridge to further post-secondary education and training for the workplace. Adult education must also be viewed as a critical component of any policy strategy for bringing high school dropouts back into the education system and preparing them for careers. Adult education is also an important resource for career preparation for adults who are seeking entry-level to advanced employment opportunities.

ACSA Career Technical Education Policy Recommendations

ACSA believes that relevant and rigorous career technical education courses and programs are critical components of the comprehensive academic program for students in middle school, high school, regional occupational centers and programs and adult education. In order to fully prepare all of California’s students for post-secondary education and careers, we must revise the ways we provide program and course offerings so that we can fully engage all students and provide the broadest range of opportunities, as well as the academic rigor needed for post-high school opportunities, jobs and careers.

ACSA recommends a number of comprehensive policies that will lead to fully integrated and well-funded career technical education programs. ACSA recommends changes in the following policy areas:

I. Increase Program Development and Add Flexibility of Time & Program - Improve Student Access to CTE Courses & Best Practices

All students must have a rigorous, standards-based core curriculum with embedded career relevancy where it is appropriate. CTE curriculum and coursework must be relevant to the needs of the workplace and the regional economy. To ensure this relevance, school districts must coordinate and consult with statewide and regional business, industry and labor representatives. All local education entities should collaborate to

provide students with a seamless, articulated education and training pathway leading to a high-skills, high-wage, high-demand occupation and career. This includes high schools, regional occupational centers and programs, adult education, community colleges and CSU/UC. Of significant importance is the need to avoid tracking of students to any one approach or path and to begin, at both the state and local levels, to enhance perceptions of and attitudes about CTE. It is the responsibility of California's educational system to prepare all students for both college and careers and we must ensure that the delivery of services is revised in order to better meet local CTE implementation needs.

To accomplish these goals, all CTE courses should be considered as a part of the secondary comprehensive program, called "programs of study," which includes course sequencing consistent with federal Perkins requirements that include both academic core and CTE courses. This program of study should also be designed to provide students with access to multiple pathways to post-secondary options.

Policy Recommendations:

- Encourage high schools, through additional funding, to organize into career pathways and to offer every student the opportunity to select and participate in a career pathway. Additionally, we should encourage all school districts to develop career pathway options based on the 15 industry sectors approved by the state of California that would be available for every student.
- Remove barriers to dual enrollment between high schools and community colleges in order to ensure the highest levels of collaboration on CTE programs.
- Develop school district public awareness and marketing plans for CTE programs. These plans should target students and their parents at all grade levels within the district, including students with Individual Education Plans.
- School districts should develop and promote, in collaboration with business, industry and local government, summer and weekend CTE work experiences for both students and teachers. These collaborative efforts must be accompanied by incentives for transporting students to and from internship programs during the school day. Ways must be found for both districts and businesses to be held harmless against unreasonable litigation. These financial constraints and legal risks reduce the opportunities for internships to flourish.
- Encourage districts, including adult schools and regional occupation centers and programs to establish partnerships with business, labor and local economic development agencies to collaboratively develop workforce-related programs.
- Expand and prioritize existing state-level clearinghouses to collect CTE best practices in career academic integration models and disseminate that information to school districts.
- Expand the opportunities for e-learning and distance learning in order to ensure that all schools have access to the skills and expertise of career-related teachers. This is especially important for rural and isolated communities.
- Encourage the elimination of artificial barriers to program delivery, which would include shifting from Carnegie (seat time) units to performance-based outcomes, revising the minimum day to ensure that students have the opportunity to take hands-on courses, and funding adult education and community college classes with full apportionment for all programs.

- School districts should be encouraged, through incentive funding, to consider an additional period and a longer school day as an option to ensuring that the core academic content and CTE can be offered to all students.

II. Strengthen Career Guidance & Awareness

In order to develop and expand quality CTE programs and pathways, schools must have well-informed school counselors and greater public awareness by both students and parents. In order to create comprehensive programs and utilize career pathways, we must ensure that our counselors are fully prepared to provide guidance to students on labor market needs and opportunities as well as academic offerings and post-secondary entrance requirements. In order to achieve this goal, we must reduce the student caseloads for counselors so they can broaden their focus to include CTE. Additionally, it is critical that school districts develop marketing and public relations programs that will begin to change the mindset of parents and local communities regarding the value, rigor and quality of CTE programs and pathways.

Policy Recommendations:

- In order to ensure that new guidance counselors are fully versed on CTE pathways, programs and career opportunities, we should require all preparation programs to include at least one course in career preparation. Additionally, in order to ensure that counselors currently working in California middle and high schools are prepared to offer guidance on CTE programs and career options, we must expand continuing education opportunities for counselors that would: a) invest in training counselors in labor market information and industry career options, b) create internships for counselors to better understand the needs and opportunities offered in business and industry, and c) encourage that this training include internships in business and industry.
- The California Department of Education, in collaboration with the Workforce Investment Board and the Department of Labor, should publicize the need for workers in high wage/high skill careers that do not require a four-year college degree.
- Districts should be encouraged, with incentive funding, to develop “career awareness and instruction plans” that focus on career options and pathways and would include ways to fully integrate the core curriculum into the programs. These plans should be developed collaboratively by elementary, middle and high school teachers, administrators and counselors.
- Support the hiring of additional school counselors in order to reduce the current student caseload and provide more time per student. This additional time should be devoted to guidance in career opportunities and courses. Additionally, more school counselors should be hired to work with students in regional occupation centers and programs and in adult schools.

III. Expand Professional Development & Certification

In order for California’s public schools to fully coordinate CTE courses and programs with core academic offerings, it is critical that we have teachers, counselors and administrators who are qualified and fully versed in CTE programs and career opportunities. Successful pathways must rely on teachers who can work in cross-disciplinary ways between academic and applied learning. Additionally, counselors and administrators will play critical roles in creating and maintaining comprehensive CTE programs, developing partnerships with local business and industry, and marketing CTE programs to parents and students. To accomplish these goals we must provide extensive professional development programs for existing teachers, counselors and administrators and significantly expand the certification options for new CTE teachers.

Policy Recommendations:

- Ensure that teachers and administrators at the school site have time to collaborate on the development of CTE curriculum, the integration of academic and applied learning in pathways, and the collection and analysis of data to ensure that these programs are standards-based and outcome-based. Additionally, because not all students learn in the same manner or are motivated by the same programs and ideas, we must provide time for teachers (both core and CTE teachers) to develop CTE curriculum strategies for intervention and remediation.
- Support additional state-level funding for local professional development programs for teachers, counselors and administrators, Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) expansion for CTE, incentive funding for local CTE planning and the development of CTE internships.
- Support efforts to streamline the credential process for retirees with industry experience to allow them to teach CTE courses in school districts. This effort should include the development of a CTE certificate in emerging career areas.
- Identify resources and opportunities for core academic teachers to observe existing programs that integrate academics with applied learning. These programs should include teacher-shadowing for teachers, counselors and administrators.
- Support adding a career technical education component to professional development programs for school administrators.
- Include CTE teachers in Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment programs and district intern programs. These BTSA programs must include training on methods for integrating the academic content standards into courses and programs in career pathways as well as how to embed career technical applications in academic courses. Additionally, because professional development is critical in assisting teachers to develop quality CTE courses, we must include all CTE teachers, including those in ROP and adult education, both full- and part-time, in the district-level professional development, including the state's existing professional development buy-back program.

IV. Expand Funding & Resources

Comprehensive CTE reforms cannot be accomplished on a statewide basis without adequate funding available for the planning and implementation of CTE programs, facilities, equipment and professional development. ACSA strongly supports additional resources for Proposition 98 that allows for the infusion of new Proposition 98 funding into career technical education programs. CTE funding must be expanded to serve more high school students, to begin serving younger elementary and middle school students and to ensure that adults who have either dropped out of school with no diploma or who wish to transition from one job to another will have opportunities through adult education. These funds must be available to comprehensive high schools, regional occupation centers and programs and adult schools. To accomplish this funding goal, CTE funding must be prioritized as a part of any future legislative reform efforts. But state funding is not enough. We must also explore all of the options that will allow school districts to take advantage of the professional and technical expertise that is offered by business, industry and labor.

Policy Recommendations:

- Eliminate the current student participation caps on both regional occupational centers and programs and adult education in order for these programs to offer larger CTE programs. This should include an expansion of concurrent enrollment between the high school and adult program for adult education. Additionally, the state should enhance the state’s current funding formula for both adult education and regional occupation centers and programs for CTE courses and programs in order to ensure that these programs can be delivered at state-of-the-art levels.
- Add a “necessary small school” provision to any CTE funding formula to ensure that small districts can offer a basic minimum CTE program. Small school districts have a difficult time offering quality CTE programs and pathways due to the cost and their low number of students and encourage joint powers options to ensure greater economy of scale for these programs.
- Support additional state-level funding for CTE facilities and equipment. After years of neglect or the local need to use all available facilities for regular classroom space, many school districts have no school facilities dedicated to CTE programs. A state policy for CTE facilities funding must ensure that adult schools and ROC/Ps are included. Additionally, very few CTE programs have the state-of-the-art equipment that is needed to prepare students for technical jobs.
- Expand funding for both categorical CTE entitlements (for equipment, professional development, etc.) and competitive grants to develop the targeted expansion of pilots to enhance and expand best practices including innovative programs with business.
- Support incentives for businesses for their time and investment as partners with school districts and for providing technical assistance, staff on loan, internships and equipment.
- Provide incentive funding for the development and expansion of K-12 career awareness programs at both the state and local levels. These funds should be used to develop software, written materials and pamphlets; for activities with local businesses, chambers of commerce and labor; and for the development of state-initiated corporate, labor and industry partnerships.
- The state should provide funding for the California Department of Education to provide support in both programs and professional development to school districts in order to build a comprehensive education system that includes CTE.

V. Include CTE in Accountability, Assessment & Performance Standards

Under current law, California’s accountability and assessment system is focused almost solely on the outcome of the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test and the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE). Given this high stakes testing, teachers and administrators focus attention on these outcomes. In order for school districts to begin emphasizing career pathways, it is important for CTE content to be a part of our accountability system. It is also important for districts to track student success in career preparation programs, and to recognize and celebrate the students who complete career pathways that have industry certification and that lead to career path jobs.

Policy Recommendations:

- State-level data collection must be fully funded to ensure reliability and quality. Maintain the California Student Information System (CSIS) student identifiers for students after graduation from high school in order to develop appropriate data on post-secondary education and/or workplace performance. Additionally, the California Partnership For Achieving Student Success (CALPASS) should be expanded to ensure program accountability.
- School districts must be encouraged to communicate all appropriate CTE-related student data to the critical stakeholders, including the superintendent, school board, high school administrators, community members, business/labor/industry partners, counselors and parents. This effort will expand the knowledge, awareness and value of CTE within the district and will create greater impetus for companies to hire students with CTE backgrounds and create more opportunities for partnerships. Where it is appropriate, CTE data should be a part of the School Accountability Report Card.
- All school-level planning for student achievement done as a requirement of categorical funding should address career technical education options as a part of a comprehensive plan for student achievement.
- In order to ensure that career technical education becomes a core component of the high school curriculum, California should seek to expand the current CTE criteria in the accreditation process for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.
- Explore adding test items that require application of academics to workplace problems to the current California Standards Test.

VI. Role & Responsibilities of Postsecondary Educational Systems

For career technical education programs and career pathways to become a part of the regular education program offered by school districts throughout the state, it is imperative that institutions of higher education (IHE) accept CTE courses for admission. To aid in the acceptance of these courses, it is important that courses that are “a-g” approved are as uniform as possible and are accepted by all IHEs. If these courses are approved by UC and CSU, they should be available for use by any school district without having to resubmit the course for approval. If CTE courses and pathways are to expand at the school district level and be academically accepted, there needs to be far greater communication, articulation of programs and courses and support between school districts and IHEs. Additionally, the California Department of Education needs to expand its support role for the development of CTE courses and programs in the pre-K–adult system and expand its role in professional development in the 15 industry sectors.

Policy Recommendations:

- The California State University should be required to accept high school courses for admission that are aligned to their standards and for which they offer majors. CSU should also maintain a centralized list of its approved courses and their content.
- Teacher credentialing requirements need to be restructured in order for industry-based teachers to be considered “highly qualified” under NCLB. To aid in the acceptance of these courses, it is important that courses that are “a-g” approved are as uniform as possible and are accepted by all IHEs.

- Community colleges should be required to develop common assessments for purposes of placing incoming students.
- CSU should be required to expand its teacher and administrator credential programs to include CTE curriculum and content.
- California must require articulation standards between school districts and community colleges and CSU based on mastery of the course content and performance outcomes.

Summary

ACSA is committed to supporting comprehensive reforms in California policy that will enhance and expand career technical education opportunities for all students. Succeeding in this effort is critical if we are to address the growing achievement gap and the expanding dropout rate in our schools. ACSA looks forward to working with the governor, superintendent of public instruction, the state Legislature and key leaders in industry, business and labor to accomplish this goal. In order for meaningful reforms to become reality, ACSA believes it is critical to: 1) increase program development and add greater flexibility of time and program delivery, 2) ensure that there are appropriate levels of career guidance on career options, 3) expand professional development opportunities for all teachers and administrators, 4) expand funding for CTE, 5) ensure that there is full accountability for CTE courses and work experience, and 6) redefine the role of other critical education systems to make sure they are meeting the needs of all students. ACSA looks forward to the challenge of accomplishing these important goals and creating all the educational and career options our students need to succeed and prosper.