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April 27, 2016
Future of CTE Education
House Education Committee Testimony

Excerpts from *Pathways to Prosperity* (February 2011) Harvard Graduate School of Education

*In 1973, nearly a third of the nation's 91 million workers were high-school dropouts, while another 40 percent had not progressed beyond a high school degree. Thus, people with a high-school education or less made up 72 percent of the nation's workforce. In an economy in which manufacturing was still dominant, it was possible for those with less education but a strong work ethic to earn a middleclass wage, as 60 percent of high school graduates did. **In effect, a high school diploma was a passport to the American Dream for millions of Americans.***

Radical changes in the nation's job market— including growing demand for post-secondary graduates, sharply diminished opportunities for high-school graduates, and a relative decline in the earnings of many young people—mean that it is now far more difficult for young adults to become economically self-sufficient.

The message is clear: in 21st century America, education beyond high school is the passport to the American Dream. But how much and what kind of post-secondary is really needed to prosper in the new American economy?

"College for all" might be the mantra, but the hard reality is that fewer than one in three young people achieve the dream

About 4 in 10 Americans have obtained either an associate's or bachelor's degree by their mid-twenties. *Roughly another 10 percent have earned a certificate. Still, this is a sobering situation. Only 56 percent of those enrolling in a four-year college attain a bachelor's degree after six years, and less than 30 percent of those who enroll in community college succeed in obtaining an associate's degree within three years.*

Too many can't see a clear, transparent connection between their program of study and tangible opportunities in the labor market.

Given these dismal attainment numbers, a narrowly defined "college for all" goal—one that does not include a much stronger focus on career-oriented programs that lead to occupational credentials—seems doomed to fail.

Is time to widen our lens and to build a more finely articulated pathways system—one that is richly diversified to align with the needs and interests of today's young people and better designed to meet the needs of a 21st century economy.

Thoughts and Actions.

1. Vision: All citizens, by their mid-twenties, have occupational credentials with currency. Attainment rate of such credentials should replace the graduation rate as the main success measurement of our secondary education system.
2. Occupational credentials can be earned in technical certificate programs, industry training programs, military, stackable industry credential strategies, apprenticeships, internships, cooperative education initiatives, and 4 and 2 year colleges. All need to be fostered, developed, and valued equally. CTE centers greatly facilitate the attainment of credentials.
3. Too many secondary schools greatly value the “selective college” curriculum strategy and subject all students to it to some degree. Critical masses of students hate it, see no relevance in it, and refuse to participate in it. This model strategy is a paradigm that must change dramatically. Career and Technical Education is a needed weapon to engage students.
4. Career and Technical Education (career focus, skill development) is a major departure from the selective college strategy and comes to students largely in the later grades. It is, sadly, not universally encouraged by secondary decision makers. However, it is a place where many students do flock to find relevance and success. It needs to be fostered, expanded and better implemented at all levels of secondary education including CTE centers.
5. Currently, CTE centers are funded largely by student enrollment. This causes programs to be developed for students based on short term popularity as opposed to long term relevance and rigorous occupational credential programming. CTE centers need a funding mechanism that encourages long range planning and collaboration with community stake holders.
6. CTE centers remediate many students with deficient academic skills. This necessity hinders the timely attainment of occupational credentials. Also, CTE centers are being held accountable by SBAC scores. An accountability system that hinges on student progress would be more meaningful.
7. Career and Technical Education Centers could be better utilized by becoming satellites of the state college system. Idle facilities with associated programs are available for adults and secondary students to earn occupational credentials in the evening, on week-ends, and during summer break.
8. Ultimately, CTE is the single most important strategy to raise overall student achievement. Rigor, relevance, and relationships are the main characteristics of CTE.

