

FACT SHEET: Middle School Technical Education Program Act (Middle STEP Act)

The key to America's continued success lies in improving our nation's educational system to meet the demands of the 21st century job market. Today, many students enter high school and college with little knowledge of the careers available to them outside of traditional pathways. With college costs continuing to rise, it is critical that students have exposure to the wide range of available work and career choices early in their academic careers so that, by the time they enter high school, they will be more informed about future paths and what they need to do to pursue them.

Career and technical education (CTE) programs are a proven way to help students explore their own strengths and preferences, as well as how they match up with potential future careers. However, limited funding for middle school CTE programming often means students have to wait until high school for this exposure.

Studies¹ have found that middle school students greatly benefit from career and technical education development programs that promote career exploration skills, as well as increase knowledge of career options and career pathways.

The Middle School Technical Education Program Act will establish a pilot program for middle schools to partner with postsecondary institutions and local businesses to develop and implement career and technical education exploration programs.

Specifically, middle school CTE programs will provide students with:

- *Introductory courses, hands-on learning or afterschool activities* – students should have access to student apprenticeships or project-based learning opportunities focused on career exploration
- *Career guidance and academic counseling* – counselors should help students understand the educational requirements for high-growth, in-demand career fields in the region
- *Development of individualized graduation and career plans* – programs should help students draft a high school graduation plan that demonstrates what courses would prepare them for a given career field

In addition, the partnerships must 1) be accessible to students from economically disadvantaged, low-performing, and urban and rural communities, 2) provide a clear transition path from the introductory middle school program to a more narrow focus of CTE study in high school, and 3) complete a thorough evaluation on the impact of the programming for the middle school students.

¹ ACT. (2005) *College readiness begins in middle school*. Iowa City, IA: Author.

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