**Affiliated Organizations**

**ACTEA**
Association of Career and Technical Education Administrators

**BTANYS**
Business Teachers Association of NYS

**NYAAE**
NY Association of Agricultural Educators

**NYSAFCSE**
NYS Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Educators

**NYSHOEA**
NYS Health Occupations Educators Association

**NYSTEEA**
NYS Technology and Engineering Educators Association

**NYS WECA**
NYS Work Experience Coordinators' Association

**VIAC**
Vocational Instructors of Academics in Corrections

# Recommendations for Developing College and Career Ready Students

Testimony to the

**New York Education Reform Commission**

Mohawk Valley Community College
Technology/Performing Arts Conference Center

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**Chartered by the New York State Board of Regents**

## Introduction

Good afternoon. I am Edward Shafer, director of the Career and Technical Education Technical Assistance Center (CTE TAC) of New York, which is operated by the Successful Practices Network, Inc. On behalf of the New York State Association for Career and Technical Education and its president, Terry Hughes, I am pleased to provide testimony to the New York Education Reform Commission. NYSACTE is an association of professional organizations representing those who teach career skills to students across the state, including students who choose an academic path in technology and engineering.

We are sensitive to the economic condition of the state and nation and concerned over student dropout rates, the expense of the system, and the need for reform to achieve improvements in outcomes and efficiencies. We believe that high-quality career and technical education can assist in meeting these challenges and demands.

We are at a crossroads. Since the issuing of the *Nation at Risk,* our country's education system has been on a relentless path to provide every child with the academic skills to enter college and succeed. After three decades of this effort, much of it directed at developing a uniform system of standards and assessments, the underlying assumption must be questioned. Nationally, only 30% of students achieve a bachelor's degree by their mid-twenties, and only 40% achieve a postsecondary diploma of any type. Harvard's *Pathways to Prosperity* study revealed that 27% of students who earn a certificate, which is less than an associate's degree, earn more than 50% of those individuals who possess a bachelor's degree.

Neglected in the discussion of college readiness is the contribution of the preK-12 education system in preparing our nation's workforce for the work that must be done in a high imagination economy to make us globally competitive, meet our daily need for services and sustenance, and create a vibrant society and community life.

NYSACTE and its affiliate organizations operate from a core set of beliefs founded in CTE research that focuses on preparing students for success in life and the world economy. There are a number of ways that CTE benefits students:

1. CTE provides practical application of core academic, technical, and employability skills that contributes to a rigorous and relevant education and increases student engagement.

2. CTE deepens the students' ability to understand, apply, and master academic skills through the challenge of real-world predictable and unpredictable problems.

3. CTE is a natural and effective vehicle for students to explore interests, discover talents, and develop technical skills to prepare them for career success and a transition to further education.

Through its *High Schools That Work* initiative, the Southern Regional Education Board, along with ConnetEd California and the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education, has found that students who participate in high-quality CTE with a strong convergence of academics and career education have ***improved learning outcomes, higher academic achievement including persistence in higher education, higher wage earning potential, and***

***lower dropout rates***.[1] This research is more fully discussed in the attachment to our testimony, *The Efficacy of CTE: Research and Professional Opinion*.

NYSACTE offers the following recommendations for the Commission's consideration to reinvent our education system and help our students meet and embrace the challenges of this century.

**Recommendations**

1. **Adopt a unified definition of "college and career ready" and implement changes in the system to make it a reality.** The phrase "college and career ready" is thrown about without clear definition. We believe that any redefinition of standards for high school graduation should be informed by a clear definition of "college and career ready." The definition must recognize the power of convergence in academic and career-based instruction as a tool for school improvement to prepare students for their adult roles and meet the employment needs of businesses in our communities and throughout the nation. Student mastery of three skill sets should be addressed in the definition: (1) academic, (2) employability, and (3) technical.

   Clarifying the definition would provide the philosophical base for decision making in graduation requirements and signal the value of integrated academic and career-based instruction to enhance student engagement and raise achievement.

[1] www.connectedcalifornia.org/linked_learning/evidence

2. **Affirm the Common Core State Standards, Career Development and Occupational Studies. and Next Generation Assessments by expanding the following areas:**

   a) **CTE programs of study** with integrated academics consistent with the Common Core State Standards should be embedded in career instruction and offered through a variety of comprehensive programs of study, such as the New York State Education Department's CTE approved programs. This will give students the opportunity to learn, retain, and apply core academic content in a more proficient and effective way.

   b) **The availability of embedded/integrated credit** will allow students to meet academic requirements through CTE courses that engage them in career exploration and encourage them to apply high-level academic learning in meaningful ways.

   c) **Alternative assessments** will provide alternative pathways to graduation as an important means to increase student engagement. We support the successful completion of CTE technical assessments of equal quality to substitute for some combination of Regents exams.

These actions would fully open career clusters as valued pathways to graduation for all students and enhance the ability of students to demonstrate college and career readiness.

3. **Avoid imposing additional academic course requirements.** Simply adding credits increases seat time, but may not increase rigor or relevance. The alternative is the provision

of relevant learning and application of the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines to encourage students and help them apply what they are learning for work and academic life.

Additional academic press through additional courses has limits and may decrease school completion rates without substantively changing achievement while increasing cost. Increased participation in CTE and engagement with the higher order skills present in career-based instruction and context offer the best opportunity for students to become engaged, achieve and avoid remediation in postsecondary education.

4. **Restructure existing middle-level and early high school CTE.** Create programs of study that begin in middle school and continue into high school to solidify the curricular connections between grade levels and build capacity at grades 6-10 for exploration of career pathways. Currently, students are rarely able to begin career instruction in grades 9 and 10 and do not seriously consider a career pathway until grade 11.

5. **Set goals for increasing the number of students who earn technical endorsements on their diplomas.** The technical endorsement must be recognized in a manner consistent with the status it deserves. A Regents diploma and a Regents diploma with advanced designation *and* a technical endorsement are the gold standard diplomas. Incentivizing schools to increase the number of CTE approved programs and the number of endorsed diplomas would give additional credence to the college and career ready standard that the state has established.

6. **Enact policies that assist *all* students in developing knowledge of career pathways that lead to specific occupations and in developing a personal career plan with flexible career goals**. Exposure to career pathways based on student interests and based on the realities of the labor market and work-based opportunities are the key elements to meet this objective. Goal setting and planning are important elements in student engagement and development of a connection with the adult world.

7. **Consider the reallocation of fiscal resources** from efficiencies achieved in reforms to build the infrastructure needed to provide high-level CTE programs. These infrastructure needs include ongoing development and maintenance of facilities and technology.

Sir Ken Robinson, correctly points out that communities require citizens with different skills, passions, and dispositions to make society vibrant, successful, and democratic. Recognizing and validating this by creating a dynamic set of pathways to college and careers is our best hope to fulfill this need.

On behalf of NYSACTE, I would like to thank the Commission for the opportunity to provide testimony and hope that this will help to inform the difficult and demanding task of proposing meaningful change for our education system.