

# Career Technical Education & Global Competitiveness

## *A Five-Year Progress Report on Reflect, Transform & Lead*

In 2010, the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium (NASDCTE) convened a seminal event that resulted in all 50 states and many partners committing to the principles and action steps defined in [\*Reflect, Transform & Lead: A New Vision for Career Technical Education\*](#), specifically that, for CTE to reach its full promise, it must:

1. Ensure that the United States leads in global competitiveness;
2. Actively partner with employers to design and provide high-quality, dynamic programs;
3. Prepare students to succeed in further education and careers;
4. Be delivered through comprehensive programs of study aligned to The National Career Clusters® Framework; and
5. Be a results-driven system that demonstrates a positive return on investment.

This Vision has been impactful, resulting in tangible advances – some of which we will highlight below – as well as many intangible benefits. Most importantly, this Vision has provided a clear signal to the CTE community about the direction in which we are moving collectively and to the nation that we are committed to high-quality programs.

Now, five years later and with more interest and activity around CTE and career readiness than ever before, it is time to revisit this Vision. In anticipation of “The Future of CTE Summit,” we have written a series of short briefs to take stock of what has been accomplished and what still needs attention since the release of the original Vision.

### **This brief will explore the first principle:**

#### ***CTE is critical to ensuring that the United States leads in global competitiveness***

By meeting the current needs and anticipating the future demands of the economy, CTE is critical to our nation’s economic success. CTE is unique in that it sits at the nexus of education, economic development and workforce development to support the alignment of policies and program delivery. When done right, CTE closes the skills gap, prepares students at all levels for success and provides employers with the talent they need to compete in the global economy.

*To accomplish this, we must:*

- ✓ Develop a national common core of technical standards
- ✓ Initiate federal policy that secures CTE’s leadership role in leading alignment among education, economic develop and workforce development and increases U.S. investment in CTE
- ✓ Launch a marketing and communications campaign to showcase CTE’s critical role in transforming the way education is delivered to all students and to underscore the positive economic impact it provides for all individuals and our nation

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### PROGRESS TO DATE

Since 2010, CTE has advanced in a number of significant ways to meet the promise of this principle.

#### The Common Career Technical Core

Over a period of 18 months, 42 states, DC and Palau came together to develop new CTE standards, the [Common Career Technical Core](#) (CCTC). Released in 2012, the development of these benchmark standards engaged over 3,500 K-12 and postsecondary educators, business and industry representatives, and leaders from nearly every state in the country.

- The CCTC identify what students should know and be able to do at the end of a program of study or after completing a sequence of courses aligned with challenging academic and CTE content that spans both secondary and postsecondary settings. As such, the CCTC provide a common set of expectations that help raise the bar for current CTE programs and ensure students have opportunities to master the full range of knowledge and skills they need to be successful in the careers of their choice.
- States have begun using the CCTC in a variety of ways, from adopting the full standards and Career Ready Practices as their new CTE standards to using them as an anchor during the state-led standards revision process.

#### CTE: Learning that Works for America®

In 2012, the CTE: Learning that Works for America® communications campaign was launched, offering a consistent way for CTE advocates to create awareness of the value and promise of CTE.

- Since its inception, 49 states have joined the effort and adopted the brand. Another 650-plus local districts, schools and institutions of higher education have also signed onto the campaign, making it truly a national brand of high-quality CTE.
- At the same time, there has been the beginning of a groundswell of support in favor of CTE from policymakers, the media and the business community in recognition that if the U.S. is going to be globally competitive and address the skills gap, CTE must be part of that solution.

*“Rigorous, relevant and results-driven CTE programs are vital to preparing students to succeed in the global economy of the 21st century.”*

*– Secretary of Education Arne Duncan*



#### **The Brand Promise – Career Technical Education promises an unrelenting commitment to:**

- Continually improve the relevance and value of a student’s educational experience;
- Prepare students for success in both career and college, by employing The National Career Clusters Framework to ensure contextual learning and academic standards that reflect the goals and interests of all learners;
- Provide American business and industry with a highly skilled, sustainable workforce;
- Provide dynamic, innovative leadership for the nation’s educational system; and
- Serve as a strategic partner with secondary and postsecondary educators, and business/industry to strengthen America’s competitive position in the global economy.

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- For example, CTE has begun to experience more positive attention with significant media coverage in outlets such as [NPR](#), [American Radio](#), [National Journal](#) and the [Atlantic](#), among many other national and local sources.
- Employers and industry organizations have launched efforts to support CTE in their communities, such as U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's [Talent Pipeline Management](#) work.

### Increased State Activity to Expand CTE

In recent years, every state has taken up action to advance CTE at the secondary and/or postsecondary level, acknowledging that CTE is critical to U.S. competitiveness and economic success. In fact, between [2013](#) and [2014](#), every state and DC passed at least one policy, regulation, executive order or budget adjustment impacting CTE, accounting for over 200 different policies in just a two-year period.

For example, in the last two years:

- Forty-three states approved new funding for CTE programs or initiatives;
- Twenty-nine states have worked to elevate, support and incentivize business-education partnerships and work-based learning; and
- Thirty-two states passed policies to encourage learners to earn industry-recognized credentials.

### Support from Capitol Hill

CTE has also seen movement at the federal policy level, with leaders from both parties signaling their commitment to CTE and the belief that CTE is key to our nation's global competitiveness.

- In 2014, Congress reauthorized the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act, which offers many opportunities for CTE to be better aligned with workforce development and training.
- Despite an increasingly difficult budget process, Congress restored 96 percent of the funding cuts to the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act's (Perkins) basic state grant program after the initial sequestration ended in 2013.
- The Senate launched a CTE Caucus, joining the long-standing House CTE Caucus in championing CTE on the Hill.

*"In today's competitive job market, high-paying, high-demand jobs require technical skills and training. CTE programs have been historically under-utilized yet – in an era of record high unemployment – these programs are the key to bridging the skills gap."*

*– Congressman Glenn Thompson (R-PA)*

### Support from the Administration

The executive branch has supported a range of activities to advance CTE and technical training.

- In a unique demonstration of cross-agency collaboration, the U.S. Departments of Education, Health & Human Services and Labor came together to support career pathways by issuing a rare [joint letter](#) from all three agencies. Through this collaboration, the Departments are encouraging states to align policies, services and funding to build and sustain career pathways extending from K-12 through adult training programs.

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- Between 2009 and 2014, the Administration issued \$2 billion to fund the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCT) competitive grant program for community colleges and other eligible postsecondary institutions to expand career training programs. To build on this effort, in 2015, the Administration proposed a \$200 million American Technical Training Fund for new and existing community and technical college programs that have strong employer partnerships, offer work-based learning opportunities, provide accelerated training and are in high-demand fields.

### WHERE MORE WORK IS NEEDED

While the progress described above is extensive, there is no question that more work needs to be done for this principle to be fully met. The United States continues to lag on most international comparisons, such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

[The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies](#) (PIAAC), which measures the applied skills of working-age adults, also found the United States close to the bottom in all three domains assessed: literacy, numeracy and technology-enabled problem solving. Much of the trend data show that the U.S. continues to stand still while other countries leapfrog ahead of us. CTE must be part of the national strategy for strengthening student achievement and the skills of all of our citizens if we are to maintain our competitive advantage.

*“CTE can be a source of competitive advantage for the United States, by rebuilding a skilled workforce better trained than ever to compete in the global marketplace.”*

*– John McGlade, former Chairman,  
President & CEO of Air Products*

### Reauthorizing Perkins Act

First and foremost, until the Perkins Act is reauthorized, we will continue to rely on an almost decade-old policy. Just as our economy and workforce needs have changed significantly since 2006, so must CTE and the federal policy that supports that system.

NASDCTEc and the Association for Career and Technical Education collaborated on priorities and recommendations for Perkins, some of which have been used in various bills such as the Educating Tomorrow’s Workforce Act (introduced by Senators Tim Kaine, D-VA, and Rob Portman, R-OH), and Pathways to Prosperity Act of 2014 (introduced by Senator Mark Warner, D-VA). However, until we have a comprehensive reauthorization that supports access to high-quality CTE programs of study for all students, and is fully funded, we will be at a disadvantage to our international peers.

### Aligning Systems

While career pathways and alignment among K-12, postsecondary and workforce development systems are receiving tremendous attention and support, there are still many disconnects between these education systems and the workforce.

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National initiatives such as Jobs for the Future's and Harvard University's Pathways to Prosperity, the National Governors Association's Education and Workforce Policy Academy and the Alliance for Career Pathway Quality are working to advance system alignment in many states, yet much work remains.

### **Continuing to Improve Perceptions of CTE**

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, despite overwhelming evidence pointing to CTE's ability to engage students and prepare them academically and technically for the workforce, many people still don't understand the full value of CTE. This manifests itself in many ways – parents discouraging their children from taking CTE courses, counselors advising against CTE in lieu of core academics, community colleges still viewed as a “back up” to four-year institutions, and policymakers continuing to support CTE programs for those students who aren't “college material.”

However, the tide is turning. Over 90 percent of all high school graduates are taking at least one CTE course, demand for technical high schools and community colleges at an all-time high in many states and communities, and there is more positive attention from the media and policymakers for CTE. Yet as we look to update our Vision for CTE, we must address this challenge by continuing to lift up quality in CTE and improve or replace those programs not meeting the bar of excellence.

### **CONCLUSION**

As we approach this five-year anniversary and gear up for an even bolder and broader initiative for a common vision for high-quality CTE, it is critical to step back and recognize the advances we have made in recent years.

But we also must look ahead to consider those issues and challenges still not fully addressed:

- How can we change the perception of CTE among all stakeholders?
- What are the full range of knowledge and skills CTE programs of study need to include to ensure students' readiness for the global economy? How can states ensure programs of study are imparting such knowledge and skills at the secondary and postsecondary levels?
- What will it take to reauthorize the Perkins Act? What other federal or state policies must be reauthorized or updated for CTE to advance?
- How can K-12, postsecondary and workforce systems be better aligned while retaining program integrity and focus?