



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

TO: P-12 Education Committee
FROM: Ken Slentz
SUBJECT: CTE Technical Skills Assessment Study
DATE: June 15, 2012

AUTHORIZATION(S):

SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

Does the Board of Regents wish to commission an operational study led by researcher Stephen F. Hamilton, Cornell University, and supported by researcher William C. Symonds, Harvard University, to develop a methodology by which comparability of selected CTE technical assessments to Regents exams might be determined?

Reason(s) for Consideration

Review of Policy

Proposed Handling

This item will come before the P-12 Education Committee for discussion at the June 2012 meeting.

Background Information

In April and May 2012, the Board considered the item, "Proposal to Create Multiple Pathways to a NYS High School Diploma," which suggested the establishment of a CTE graduation pathway. A CTE graduation pathway is supported by the Harvard Graduate School of Education 2011 study, *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*.¹ That report examines

¹ Symonds, William C., Robert Schwartz, and Ronald F. Ferguson. 2011. "Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century." Cambridge, MA: *Pathways to Prosperity Project*, Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

how a single graduation pathway leading to a bachelor's degree has resulted in a lack of preparation for success in adult life for many young people. The report advocates the development of meaningful alternative graduation pathways to enable young people to successfully navigate from adolescence to adulthood. An approved CTE program, ending in a technical skills assessment, is the instructional base for a potential NYS CTE graduation pathway.

In February 2012, the P-12 Education Committee heard from a panel of CTE experts on the topics of approved CTE programs, technical skill assessments, and measures of college and career readiness. Panelists were asked to comment on a series of questions, including:

- Do you think technical assessments are a valid measure of college and career readiness?
- What are some of the national trends you see in technical assessments and how might that affect New York State?
- What evidence do you have that technical assessments are rigorous, valid, and reliable?

Thomas Rogers, District Superintendent of Nassau BOCES, presented information about CTE students that illustrated the definition of college and career readiness from a CTE perspective. Students who have earned college credit in their approved CTE programs are the definition of college ready because they have met the standards set by an institution of higher education for college credit or advanced standing. Additionally, those who pass an industry-recognized, national standards-based technical skills assessment, are the definition of career ready because they have met the standards set for initial employment in their field. He suggested that an aspirational performance measure for a CTE pathway should have different metrics than those already established and should include student performance on approved technical assessments.

Hans Meeder, President of Meeder Consulting Group and former Undersecretary of Education, addressed these questions from a national viewpoint. He underscored the value of technical assessments to CTE programs as drivers of ongoing program improvement that force programs to remain current with industry practice. He noted, however, that technical assessments vary in scope and purpose; some focus on narrow careers, others on all aspects of the industry. He suggested that a review committee and process were necessary to examine technical assessments' rigor, validity, and reliability if technical assessments were to be used to define students' college and career readiness.

Recommendation

The Department recommends that the Board of Regents commission an operational study, led by Stephen F. Hamilton of Cornell University. Stephen F. Hamilton is Professor of Human Development and Associate Director of the

Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research. His research on adolescent development and education emphasizes the interaction of school, community, and work during the transition to adulthood, especially in the contexts of work experience, experiential learning, community service, and mentoring relationships.

The study will be supported by William C. Symonds of Harvard University. William C. Symonds is the director of the Pathways to Prosperity Project, which is based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The Pathways Project was created to find promising solutions to our national failure to prepare many young adults for success. The report has generated enormous interest from around the nation. The Pathways Project plans to work with several states to implement the Pathways vision for preparing their young people.

The goal of the commissioned study is to develop a methodology by which comparability of selected CTE technical assessments to Regents exams might be determined. The study will guide decisions on the establishment of a CTE graduation pathway, including processes by which:

- the rigor of CTE technical assessments might be equated to the rigor of Regents exams and might therefore be approved as substitutions for a Regents exam, and
- technical assessments might be evaluated for inclusion on an approved list.

Next Steps

Should the Board of Regents commission this study, a report will be provided with an update at the September and/or October 2012 meetings. The study will include an analysis of access to CTE programs that meet the college and career readiness criteria.