



The Commissioner's Blog

Thoughts from
Kentucky's Commissioner of Education
Kevin C. Brown, Interim Commissioner



September 11, 2015

I have asked Associate Commissioner Dale Winkler to pen this week's blog concerning the future of career and technical education (CTE) in Kentucky – one of our main areas of focus. Dale is leaving the Kentucky Department of Education soon to take a position with the Southern Regional Education Board, a great opportunity for him to share his talents more widely, while still having an impact on CTE in Kentucky. Best of luck to Dale, we will miss him, but are committed to carry on the important work he started in the Office of Career and Technical Education at the Kentucky Department of Education.

*Kevin C. Brown
Interim Commissioner*

The vital role of career and technical education

Kentucky's economic future depends on retaining and expanding current business as well as attracting new companies to Kentucky. A critical factor in our success is a skilled and ready workforce. So, in recent years, Kentucky has worked to build and strengthen its workforce, beginning even before students graduate from high school by increasing the college- and career-readiness of our students.

As part of the state's college- and career-readiness strategy, in the past four years Kentucky has placed a huge emphasis on elevating the prominence of career and technical education (CTE) programs and integrating high academic standards within them. It began in 2011 when the Kentucky Board of Education adopted a definition and measure for career readiness. The half-point bonus schools receive under the Unbridled Accountability Model for any student that meets college-ready benchmarks and completes a technical pathway while earning an industry certificate has caused many in the education arena to take notice of CTE. Then in 2012, Governor Steve Beshear issued an executive order, later ratified by the Kentucky General Assembly, creating a new Office of Career and Technical Education in the Kentucky Department of Education. The new office has been tasked with creating a new vision for CTE, one that provides rigorous programs of study that prepare students for careers of the 21st century.

Since the creation of the new Office of Career and Technical Education several studies have been conducted regarding CTE in Kentucky. The first study was conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board related to technical centers in Kentucky, and the [final report](#) included four over-arching recommendations for building a world-class system of technical centers. The recommendations include:

- Commission an in-depth study that will identify funding priorities and formulate recommendations to create an equitable and adequate funding system for all technical centers.
- Establish an accountability system that not only measures outcomes, but also measures the implementation of best practices that will maximize opportunities for students.
- Create a single system of world-class technical centers.
- Establish stronger, more formal ties between the state's secondary and postsecondary education institutions and business and industry partners by creating a robust system of state, regional, and local advisory committees.

The second study focused on the funding of CTE programs in the Commonwealth. This study was conducted by Thomas P. Miller & Associates, Inc., and the [final report](#) provided questions for consideration and recommendations for Kentucky's policy makers. Some of the key recommendations include:

- Base funding for CTE on state goals and business and industry needs.
- Provide adequate funding for CTE in order to accomplish state determined priorities.
- Create a proactive, intentional process of funding large equipment purchases and maintaining and/or upgrading current equipment.
- Explore CTE performance funding.

The Kentucky Office of Career and Technical Education is working diligently to implement the recommendations in these two reports. OCTE is also partnering with other state agencies in the development and deployment of an economic competitiveness agenda that impacts the talent pipeline. The common themes of the competitiveness agenda include: career pathways and sector strategies; work-based learning infrastructure; workforce services infrastructure realignment; data and performance-informed decision making; and communications. Through implementation of these themes in its strategic plan and daily activities, OCTE will have a positive impact on the future talent pipeline.

In the past three years CTE has witnessed increases in student enrollment, college- and career-ready attainment and graduation rates. Opportunities for participation in work-based learning has expanded with the implementation of a pre-apprenticeship program known as Tech Ready Apprentices for Careers in Kentucky (TRACK), and the number of career pathway offerings has increased – providing students with opportunities to study in new and emerging occupations. As CTE continues to grow in the education arena, attention must be given to adequate funding for up-to-date equipment, industry certifications and professional learning opportunities for teachers. In addition to funding, attention must be given to ensuring project-based learning is included in all CTE courses, and accelerated pathways, such as dual credit, must be expanded.

Career and technical education has a long and varied history in Kentucky. It can assist schools in providing students with skills necessary for a successful transition to postsecondary education or work and instill a desire for life-long learning in a global society. All students can benefit from participation in CTE!