

Maryland Career and Technology Administrators



advancing career and technology education for all students

Dr. William (Brit) Kirwan, Chair
Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education
Room 121, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

September 10, 2018

Dear Dr. Kirwan:

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland Career and Technology Education Administrators (MCTA), as their Executive Director. The MCTA members' perceptions of Maryland's system of Career and Technology Education (CTE) differ strongly from those set forth in the report submitted to the Commission by Working Group 3. Had the Commission's research team carefully examined the current CTE system in Maryland, the report would have acknowledged the long-standing commitment at state and local levels to expanding high-quality CTE programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels. Furthermore, the report implies that there is a fragmented system of CTE, when in fact, Maryland's system of CTE is among the most widely respected in the nation.

MCTA does not see the necessity to create a whole new system of CTE with added levels of bureaucracy when the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has functioned as a leader and partner in workforce development, with representatives from all of the workforce development agencies fully engaged in all aspects of promoting, monitoring and improving CTE. In addition, the ability of local school systems to develop and implement CTE programs that are tailored for and specific to the workforce needs of their locality as well as a global community has served Maryland well.

Maryland CTE programs are informed by the most relevant skill standards available and include opportunities for students to earn college credit as well as industry-recognized credentials. They are guided by program advisory committees, at both state and local levels, consisting of representatives from business, industry, labor, education, and government. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) is a direct partner in approving all postsecondary CTE programs and ensuring articulation between and among secondary and postsecondary CTE programs.

The following addresses each recommendation and our responses:

Element 3e: The post-CCR program pathways appear to revert to a time when students were "tracked" based on their abilities. While some European countries continue this practice, it tends to bifurcate "college AND career" readiness. The Commission appears to be taking CTE back over forty (40) years by focusing on teaching students procedures instead of problem-solving which helps them build "transversal" skills as they are called in the [article](#) titled: *6 Key Principles That Make Finnish Education a Success* by Maria Muuri (July 2018). What makes Finnish schools consistently excellent is a curriculum focused on developing "transversal skills." Maryland may want to model Finland's work rather than basing its reform on practices that other countries are beginning to abandon.

CTE should continue to be available to students who demonstrate that they are able to do grade-level work upon entry into ninth grade. With the reauthorization of the Federal Perkins Act, funding will be available to begin exploring careers as early as grade five. It is unfortunate that the Commission's recommendations place CTE as a post-CCR program making it available only to those students who achieve CCR by grade 10. This may result in increasing the drop-out rate, or at least leading to greater disengagement by students for whom

CTE is a preferred way to learn. The proposed system works in countries like Germany because there is government support, employer buy-in, and a national commitment by employers to invest in their employees. The missing pieces of such a system in Maryland have neither been thoroughly researched nor addressed.

Element 3h: MCTA questions the need to establish a CTE subcommittee. Extensive accountability requirements for all local school systems are already in place and overseen by MSDE. The proposed added levels of bureaucracy have the potential to make the work in CTE less efficient and more burdensome for local school systems and community colleges. Before considering such a move, the costs associated with implementing the plan submitted by Work Group 3 must be provided so they can be carefully reviewed to determine the anticipated return on the investment in staffing and levels of bureaucracy when there are so many other programmatic needs with greater direct benefit for students.

Resources could be better spent by investing in local high-quality programming. For example, currently there is no State funding to support the costs associated with students taking the assessments that lead to industry-recognized credentials. Federal funding for CTE has been level or flat since 1998 at approximately \$15 million per year. The overarching deficit in CTE is the lack of funding to expand high-quality programming. Several school systems report waiting lists for students who cannot access CTE, or who must enroll in their “second choice” CTE program due to overcrowding.

Element 3i: A Skills Standards Board is duplicative of work that is already being done. Employers decide which standards are most appropriate and then they are aligned to programs and operationalized. The technical skill assessments leading to industry-recognized credentials are all determined by employers and labor representatives. Teachers implement programs and curricula through courses aligned to industry standards. There is no need for a Skills Standards Board. Consider the reasons why a national skills standards board was not successful to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

Element 3j: MCTA supports the need to expand career counseling for every student at much earlier grades than is currently provided. The reliance on the American Job Centers are of concern since they are not available in all counties and are not accessible to every student unless they have transportation. As stated in a letter from Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation Secretary Schultz, these centers are not prepared to serve a majority of the youth clientele. Considerable costs are involved with this section of the proposal, both in training and staffing that must be evaluated. MCTA suggests that career experiences are best coordinated by additional work-based learning coordinators housed in each secondary school.

Element 3k: Moving all CTE to a comprehensive CTE high school model is another costly and narrowly-focused expectation of the Work Group 3 plan. It does not consider the equipment and facility needs required for many CTE programs. Relocating these highly specialized programs to comprehensive CTE high schools also creates additional transportation and building expenses that are currently minimized by centrally located shared time centers in some school systems. In addition, the value and positive outcomes for students at shared time centers that include: strong focus on CTE education; related academics; industry certification; and next step higher education seem to have been ignored. There is a general lack of consideration of the unique qualities and situations of individual school systems.

The idea of combining students’ education and work experience is a good one. The issues of transportation and student readiness must be considered carefully. In addition, employers must be willing to hire large numbers of students for this plan to succeed. Barriers to hiring youth that are often expressed by employers such as the inability to hire employees under the age of 18 and the impacts of the employment of minor laws must be addressed. Without fully disclosing the costs associated with implementing the plan submitted by Work Group 3, it is impossible to determine the anticipated return on investment.

Element 3l: The plan submitted by Work Group 3 was largely written with input from representatives of careers related to the trades (electrical, plumbing, carpentry, and other construction trades). In addition to the trades, Maryland’s future economy will be largely based on high-technology occupations in information technology, cybersecurity, biomedical and health sciences, engineering and manufacturing. All students

regardless of their career pathway need to develop employability skills. This plan suggests those skills are only needed for those students pursuing CTE, another example of a lack of focus on career AND college readiness. While not every student will need a four-year degree or higher, every student must possess the academic, employability and citizenship skills necessary to pursue a career and lead a satisfying life.

Element 3m: Increased funding is essential for the expansion of and continued support for high-quality CTE programming at secondary and postsecondary levels. MSDE has a fair and effective process of managing and monitoring CTE funding through both formula and competitive grants. For many years, CTE at both the secondary and postsecondary levels have lacked adequate funding to fully expand high-quality programming to ensure access for all interested students. MCTA fully supports the Commission's desire to **develop a world class instructional system** that will enable Maryland high school graduates to match the achievement of students in the highest achieving countries in the world. However, we feel that Maryland students would be better served through state funding focused on creating additional career experiences and expanding high quality CTE programs for our students.

MCTA urges the reconsideration of the elements listed in order to accommodate the unique needs of all students and to meet the specific requirements of local communities in planning, implementing and evaluating quality career and technical programs for students. The current system of CTE in Maryland is a solid foundation that has been a model of continuous improvement over the years as it has responded to needs of students, the workforce and local and global economies through a system of strong career development coupled with rigorous academic and technical education.

Respectfully,

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