

Deputy Secretary of Education Tony Miller: "Coordinate with Business to Build Needed Job Skills"

In honor of Career and Technical Education (CTE) Month, I want to emphasize the importance of building high-quality CTE programs that focus on meeting the needs of the 21st century economy. We know that strong CTE programs require collaboration among secondary and postsecondary education institutions, employers, industry, and other partners, for example labor unions and trade organizations. We also must ensure that these programs provide students and workers with skills that are adaptable to the needs of local and regional economies.

The skills that an individual needs to work in a variety of industries are constantly evolving. The Bureau of Labor Statistics recently reported that the hardest jobs to fill are those requiring "middle skills," that is, those jobs that require education beyond a high school diploma but do not necessarily require a bachelor's degree. Middle-skill jobs include occupations such as software engineers, aircraft mechanics, and electricians. Jobs that previously could be filled by workers with no more than a high school degree now require more specialized training—for example, many manufacturing jobs require knowledge and skills in computing technology. We also know that the current demand for workers with associate degrees, particularly in fields like health care, computing, and business services, is outpacing the demand for those with bachelor's degrees.

Therefore we must keep working to provide programs of study at all levels—from K-12 through advanced degree programs—that maintain challenging academic standards tailored to local, regional, and future workforce needs. We should expand opportunities for secondary school students to participate in dual or concurrent enrollment programs, create challenging work experiences for students through apprenticeships and industry-based training, and ensure that educational content is engaging for students in the fields where they will find jobs available upon graduation.

Thank you very much for your efforts to build, support, and highlight high-quality CTE programs that meet the needs of tomorrow's economy.

Tony

Tools You Can Use: DOL's Industry Competency Model Clearinghouse

Need help developing curriculum or talking to employers about the skills needed in their industries? The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) [Competency Model Clearinghouse](#) can help. The online resource provides validated industry competency models and [tools](#) that can be used as the basis of educational programs and curricula for a variety of industry sectors.

DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) collaborates with other federal agencies and workforce development experts from industry, labor, and education to document the skills and competencies required in emerging and economically vital industries. ETA's goal is to ensure that workers have the knowledge and skills needed for success in jobs with good pay and advancement opportunities. The industry models support education and workforce development efforts serving as resources to:

- Identify employer skill needs in changing and emerging industries;
- Provide business services that support human resource functions such as recruitment, selection, and performance evaluation;
- Develop or evaluate a competency-based curriculum;
- Identify credential requirements for certifications, or licensure; or
- Support career exploration and guidance.

The clearinghouse provides access to these industry-validated models as well as a collection of resources to support their use. The agency has developed over 20 models across a wide spectrum of industry sectors, from advanced manufacturing to health information, to transportation and logistics.

Each model can be a valuable resource for educators and administrators as they work to develop curricula and credentials relevant to employers. The models illustrate the cross-cutting competencies that are essential for success in an industry or industry sector. Industry competency models are based on a tiered building-blocks framework, resulting in a pyramid-shaped graphic that depicts how competencies become more specific as one travels up its tiers. The model's levels are divided into blocks representing the skills, knowledge, and abilities essential for successful performance in the industry or occupation represented by the model.

U.S. High School Graduation Rate Increase in the 21st Century

In his first [State of the Union address](#) in February 2009, President Obama noted the difficult U.S. education profile economists have struggled to understand: "...three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require more than a high school diploma. And yet, just over half of our citizens have that level of education. We have one of the highest high school dropout rates of any industrialized nation." In spite of the increasing economic premium paid in the U.S. labor market for those with a high school diploma, as well as a postsecondary certificate or degree, the high school graduation rate stagnated during the last three decades of the 20th century. Yet it picked up in the first decade of the 21st.

According to new [research](#) from Harvard University economist Richard Murnane, which is set to be published in the *Journal of Economic Literature*, the U.S. high school graduation rate increased substantially between 2000 and 2010. Murnane draws on several data sources in calculating his estimates of the change in the U.S. high school graduation rate over the last 40 years, including the decennial Censuses of Population, the American Community Survey, the GED Testing Service, and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.

Murnane's estimations show that the U.S. high school graduation rate increased steadily for most of the 20th century, peaking at about 80 percent in 1970. Between 1970 and 2000, however, the percentage of 20- to 24-year-olds who earned a high school diploma, excluding recent immigrants and recipients of GED credentials, stagnated and fell slightly. At the end of the century, he estimates the rate was about 78 percent. By 2010, it increased by six percentage points. He observes that although there are many hypotheses trying to explain this phenomenon, "...to date, there is no compelling evidence to explain this encouraging recent trend." He also points out that while the increase was particularly strong for black and Hispanic students, significant completion-rate gaps between racial and ethnic groups and the genders remain.

Murnane concludes his paper with a detailed discussion of the policy interventions for which there is some evidence of impacting the high school graduation rate or the dropout rate. He argues that in addition to investing in proven strategies to increase the school readiness of economically disadvantaged children, it is also necessary to focus on policies to increase the quality of teaching in schools serving high concentrations of poor children so they do not enter ninth grade without the skills and behaviors to succeed in high school. Murnane concludes by noting "...it seems important to create a variety of high school options for students, including ones that provide significant experiences in workplace settings and clear connections between the skills students are asked to master and access to jobs that make use of these skills."

OVAE 2013 Community College Webinar Series

The first webinar in OVAE's 2013 community college webinar series will be held on Thursday, March 7 from 1 to 2:30 p.m., EST. This event will bring together experts from the field and local practitioners for a discussion about current efforts to transform adult education so that adult learners are better prepared for successfully transitioning to postsecondary education. The webinar will feature Barbara Endel from Jobs for the Future, who will discuss the work of the Accelerating Opportunity initiative in scaling up its adult education reform model in seven states. Judy Alamprese from Abt Associates will share the key findings from her recent study on transforming reading instruction in adult education programs. The webinar also will highlight the work of LaGuardia Community College in developing bridge programs that ease Adult Basic Education and GED students' transitions to postsecondary education and training.

Registration information for this webinar will be sent out in the coming weeks.