



Raising Expectations for Career and Technical Education

By PJ McGrew, Indiana Governor's Workforce Cabinet Executive Director

February is Career and Technical Education month, an opportunity to highlight the importance of high-quality career and technical education (CTE) programs in our schools. For Indiana, it's also an opportunity to shine light on the great work happening across the state to improve these opportunities for students.

The real-life impact of CTE is seen every day in students' lives and the communities they join after high school. CTE is a key catalyst for employers' talent pipelines and an important driver of our state's economic growth and prosperity. Here in Indiana, we're committed to furthering this impact through new programs of study launching in the fall of 2021.

Career and technical education in Indiana doesn't have to look like yesterday's shop class. Today's CTE students are learning skills and competencies to prepare them for high-paying and high-tech careers in STEM fields, Advanced Manufacturing, IT, Health Sciences and more. CTE students have opportunities to earn credentials while in high school and reduce their education and training costs after high school, get real-world experience through internships and other work-based learning opportunities, and ultimately increase their earning potential.

Schools and career centers across the state are raising the bar for what CTE can be for students. Too often, career and technical education is seen as a place to send students who are struggling in core academic courses. While it's true that CTE can be an outlet for students who learn better through hands-on methods, this doesn't mean we should reduce our academic expectations for these students.

That means career and technical education doesn't begin and end in high school; it continues on to education and training at our state's postsecondary institutions and/or through apprenticeship programs. Indiana's high school students shouldn't have to choose between a workforce or a college pathway. Whether students pursue CTE coursework or a more academic path, like the Indiana College Core, either route should open opportunities to a quality credential and a great career.

For the last two years, the [Governor's Workforce Cabinet's](#) Office of Career and Technical Education has worked with CTE directors, principals, teachers, and postsecondary faculty to redesign Indiana's CTE courses. This initiative, called [Next Level Programs of Study](#), will allow students to jumpstart their postsecondary education while in high school.

The programs of study will provide students with the opportunity to earn degree-aligned dual credits, embedded industry-recognized certifications, and postsecondary credentials. Students who participate in and complete a Next Level Program of Study will be able to enter the workforce with the skills necessary to earn quality wages or continue their postsecondary education in a [Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready Grant](#) program or other degree path with a reduced time and cost to complete.

The overarching vision of the initiative is to improve the consistency, quality, and intentionality across the various delivery models for CTE. Whether a student enrolls in courses at their home school, local career center, or through dual enrollment at their local Ivy Tech or Vincennes campus, students should be ensured a high-quality experience with comparable academic standards.

Too many students are currently not advancing past high school and we know that simply earning a high school diploma is not enough for success in today's workforce. The evidence is clear that the surest path to economic mobility is through some sort of postsecondary credential, a key reason the state is focused on having at least 60% of Hoosiers earn a quality credential by 2025. Accomplishing this goal will require us to have similar expectations for all students, regardless if they are bound for 4-year college or participate in a CTE program while in high school.

As we finish CTE month, the Governor's Workforce Cabinet is dedicated to partnering with all stakeholders to see more students take advantage of the opportunities Next Level Programs of Study presents. Now is the time for us to raise our expectations for students pursuing CTE to ensure every Indiana student is placed on a path to personal success.

###

PJ McGrew is the Executive Director of Indiana's Governor's Workforce Cabinet