



## Career and Technology Education in South Carolina Strengths, Challenges and Recommendations

### STRENGTHS

The South Carolina career and technology education (CATE) system has many strengths:

- CATE programs are provided within high schools and career and technology centers, and enjoy relatively high status.
- Strong general skills are embedded in CATE and all high school students are expected to be college ready upon high school completion.
- South Carolina has launched an ambitious set of reforms in CATE and other parts of the education system initiated by the 'Education and Economic Development Act'. The Act aims to improve skills in South Carolina's workforce.
- Career and counseling guidance is exemplary in many respects. It encompasses all education levels, involves various stakeholders and agencies, and has a clear objective of improving career information and career awareness in students.
- There are numerous pathways leading to a CATE teacher profession that help to attract the best people to the field.
- Employers are actively involved in CATE.
- South Carolina has a strong technical college system.

### CHALLENGES

Some challenges remain. Many of them are related to a wider context that bears on CATE and on skills development in the state – in particular high levels of poverty and school standards in the US as a whole which are relatively weak for an advanced country. More specifically, the challenges for South Carolina include:

- The resources of any school depend to a large extent on the resources available to the locality (school district) and are collected through local taxes. This arrangement contributes to an unequal distribution of resources across districts and schools. The state compensates for the differences in local wealth by allocating more resources to poor districts. But this allocation may be undermined by the current recession and severe budgetary cuts.
- Very few high school students receive extensive work experience during their high school studies. While a high school model with extensive work experience provided to most students is not necessarily a desirable route to follow for South Carolina, some students could benefit from more diversified options for work experience.
- Too many students leave high school without sufficient basic skills for either the labour market or postsecondary education. As a result, many students in technical colleges need remedial courses to catch up and develop skills that should have been developed in high school.
- Many adults also lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. Division of responsibilities for adult education and training across different agencies may lead to duplication of efforts and overlap of services. The current recession will potentially reduce the provision and availability of adult education and training.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Monitor the impact of budgetary cuts on CATE provision in poorer districts and schools, take remedial action if necessary and ensure that funds are invested efficiently through careful evaluation of initiatives. Ensure that teacher allocation policies support this objective.
2. Provide high school students who wish to enter the job market directly with more substantial work experience while in school. Make targeted efforts to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have such access. Take action to increase the level of co-operation across school district boundaries in the provision workplace learning opportunities.
3. Sustain the effort to improve literacy and numeracy and preparedness for college in high school CATE students, in particular among disadvantaged students. Strengthen co-operation between academic teachers and CATE teachers to this end.
4. Maintain efforts to ensure that all adults without basic skills have an opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills. While recognising the priority attached to basic schooling, give particular attention to the needs of young adults. Enhance co-ordination between different agencies dealing with adult education.

## FURTHER READING

Vocational education and training (VET), typically called career and technology education in the United States, has a key economic function in up-skilling and integrating young people into the labour market and in providing high quality technical skills. But in recent decades, VET has been a neglected part of initial education: education policy research and reform have tended to focus primarily on school and tertiary education.

The OECD's policy review of vocational education and training (VET), *Learning for Jobs*, comprises a programme of analytical work and individual country reviews and is designed to help countries make their VET systems more responsive to labour market needs.

[Learning for Jobs, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training Policies, United States: South Carolina \(OECD, 2011\)](#) was released in January 2011 and assesses the main challenges faced by the CATE system and presents an interconnected package of four policy recommendations. For each recommendation, the report describes the challenge, the recommendation itself, supporting arguments, and issues of implementation.

Further information about the policy review and reports on VET systems in other countries is available on the OECD website [www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs](http://www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs)