



Career and Technical Education in Texas Strengths, Challenges and Recommendations

STRENGTHS

The Texas career and technical education (CTE) system has many strengths:

- There are flexible pathways of entry into the CTE teaching profession; part-time teachers are used constructively to tackle the challenge of recruiting CTE teachers.
- Texas has a strong system of university and community college education.
- There are promising initiatives to ensure a well-articulated CTE system, linking high school CTE to postsecondary level CTE. In postsecondary CTE state standards allow students to move easily from one institution to another in the state while retaining earned credits.
- There are various initiatives to increase performance in CTE, including the “AchieveTexas” and “Closing the Gaps” initiatives.
- The benefits of contextualizing learning and integrating general education into CTE are widely recognized by schools and policy makers.
- There are good data in many areas of CTE.
- Encouraging participation in some form of postsecondary education is a key policy goal in Texas. At the same time, achieving this is a major challenge.
- The Texas economy is doing relatively well despite the global economic downturn.

CHALLENGES

Some challenges remain.

- Quality assurance in the career-specific element of CTE is weakly developed.
- Career advice is often marginalized in school counseling and it is not ensured that all students receive high quality career information.
- High school CTE makes limited use of workplaces as a learning environment and employer engagement with the CTE system is highly variable according to local circumstances.
- While Texas has achieved progress in academic performance among high school students, many young people still do not have sufficient basic skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish a state-wide CTE quality assurance framework to increase attention to the quality of career-specific learning, support quality improvement and underpin accountability. The framework should involve employers and draw on quantitative indicators as well as qualitative assessments.
2. Strengthen and develop career guidance by:
 - Ensuring that career guidance receives sufficient separate attention and resources relative to other forms of school counseling.
 - Strengthening the career guidance element in the initial and in-service training of counselors. Ideally, a career advisor profession should be established, which would be separate from psychological counseling.
 - Clearly setting out the career advice responsibilities (for school counselors, or career advisors if a separate profession is established).
3. Increase the use of work-based learning opportunities in high school CTE, providing substantial work-based learning opportunities to those following a CTE *program of study* and those likely to seek employment directly after high school.
4. Sustain the effort to improve literacy and numeracy in high school, enhancing teacher quality and promoting good practices.

Sustain the effort to make postsecondary education available to all, by ensuring that all high school graduates are college-ready and, while that is not yet achieved, supporting students who are not college-ready.

Assess whether the current balance between support for basic skills in school as opposed to developmental postsecondary education represents an optimal use of resources.

FURTHER READING

Vocational education and training (VET), typically called career and technical 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: Texas \(OECD, 2011\)](#) was released in February 2011 and assesses the main challenges faced by the CTE 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