

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION
CHALLENGE TASK FORCE

2001 Report

ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE BOARD	ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
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INTRODUCTION

In March of 2000, 40 leaders in the fields of education and workforce development were invited by the State Superintendent of Education and the President/CEO of the Illinois Community College Board to help explore ways to energize and elevate the role of Career and Technical Education (CTE) within the larger educational framework. This group, which became known as the CTE Challenge Task Force, embarked on an intense year of fact-finding and system designing.

Although the Task Force was asked to develop a blueprint for CTE in grades 9 through 14 that was needs-driven, results-oriented and accountable, the focus quickly turned to first articulating a vision of the relationship between school and work. The members reasoned that any effort to strengthen CTE must be undertaken within the broader context of the entire educational system. After many months of work, the task force ultimately embraced the concepts within the vision developed by the Education-to-Careers State Steering Committee and tailored its vision statement after these concepts. The focus of this overarching vision of education is to prepare students for personal and career success in the 21st century. It weaves standards-based achievement and career preparation with rigorous and relevant learning for each and every student and encompasses all aspects of education from basic academic competency to advanced placement in all curricular areas. Career and technical education is an important part of this total vision for systemic school improvement.

This report is a summation of the work produced by the Task Force. First is its affirmation of the Education-to-Careers concepts through its vision statement; second are the broad goal areas; and third are the short-term and long-term action steps the Task Force identified as suggestions to move the goals forward. The Task Force intentionally avoided references to existing educational programs or initiatives that could be construed as educational “jargon” or might convey unintended meanings. Its body of work will serve as an important resource and reference point as the Illinois State board of Education (ISBE) and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) pursue a shared path of continuous improvement for career and technical education. Our two agencies are indebted to the dedicated members of the Task Force for the passion, expertise and time they invested in this ambitious and complex task.

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PREFACE TO THE VISION

In order to connect the various ideals the individual Task Force members held regarding the desired future of career and technical education, the first effort on which the Task Force embarked was to craft a vision statement. The concepts of Education-to-Careers helped to lay a solid foundation upon which the vision was built. The Task Force's vision served as a consistent reference point for its work and connected its thinking to that of the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Community College Board.

*This vision reinforces and clarifies the responsibility of the state in preparing K-12 students for the world of work as stated in the **Illinois School Code**: "The State of Illinois, having the responsibility of defining requirements for elementary and secondary education, establishes that the primary purpose of schooling is the transmission of knowledge and culture through which children learn in areas necessary to their continuing development and entry into the **world of work** (emphasis added)." (105 ILCS 5/27-1)*

Likewise, the Illinois Community College Act defines a comprehensive community college program as "a program offered by a community college which includes 1) courses in liberal arts and sciences and general education; 2) adult education courses; and 3) courses in occupational, semi-technical or technical fields leading directly to employment." (110 ILCS 805/1-2).

The vision is not only grounded in the above state statutes, but also in the two Boards' most recent vision of where education should be headed at the elementary/secondary and postsecondary levels. For example, by focusing on this relationship between education and the world of work, the task force has attempted to expand upon the Illinois State Board of Education's vision of providing all Illinois children and youth with an education that is Second to None. In its vision statement the Task Force has recast career and technical education to address the five Illinois "Second to None" education goals adopted by the Illinois State Board of Education in the areas of student performance, access to quality education, the education workforce, learning environments and educational accountability.

This vision supports and expands upon many of the ideas brought forth in the Illinois Community College Board's "Promise for Illinois." The Promise outlines seven pledges that, when accomplished, will facilitate the development of a locally and globally competitive workforce in Illinois. Many clear and distinct connections can be made between The Promise and the Task Force's vision, including the need for a flexible, responsive and progressive educational model that offers rigorous programs and emphasizes high quality.

CTE CHALLENGE TASK FORCE VISION

Education is the foundation of a quality life and a globally competitive workforce. As such, education must encompass the knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences to equip each and every student for lifelong learning, successful careers and long-term economic self-sufficiency as responsible, fully contributing adults. These educational goals can be accomplished if all teachers are supported in effectively integrating and delivering quality standards-based instruction that addresses the relationship between education and work.

To support these instructional efforts, local partnerships must be established and maintained among educational institutions, communities, families, and business and industry that add context and relevance to education. These partnerships must ensure that each individual learning experience becomes part of a larger standards-based system. This system must seamlessly connect the various educational levels and lead to rewarding and high-wage, high-demand, careers for every student.

Moving to this vision of education will require shared accountability between the educational system and students, both collectively and individually. The following guiding principles can lay a foundation for improved educational outcomes for every student in Illinois.

Guiding Principles

- Every student should have access to rigorous, relevant courses and varied teaching and learning strategies.
- Every student should achieve rigorous learning standards.
- Every student should obtain the skills necessary to seek and keep employment.
- Every student should learn the skills necessary to access, analyze, evaluate, organize and present information in a technologically advanced society.
- Every student should be provided with the skills and knowledge to make a lifetime of informed career decisions.
- Every student should prepare for education/training beyond high school and understand the need for lifelong learning.
- Every student must have access to a full spectrum of quality career awareness, exploration, planning, and preparation opportunities that enables them to acquire the level of career-specific skills they desire.
- Every student should have the opportunity to benefit from an education system that is able to respond to the rapidly changing needs of employers and society.

To this end, every student must be equipped with the competencies he or she will need to participate fully in society and the economy. Students should have instruction in core academics coupled with career exploration at all levels, a practical knowledge of current technology, and opportunities for work-based learning experiences and career-specific training in their area of interest. Instruction must be both cost-effective as well as appropriate to the learning needs and learning styles of all students.

Components of the Vision

To achieve this vision of education, three educational components must be made available to every student in Illinois.

Rigorous and Relevant Learning

Every student must be equipped with the competencies he or she will need to participate fully in society and the economy. There must be renewed emphasis on problem solving, teamwork, communication skills, and using businesses and communities as resources for education. The following components should be imbedded into all instruction and taught in ways that address different learning styles:

- Rigorous academic instruction applied to real-world problems and examples that draw from the community and the workplace.
- Basic workplace readiness skills instruction with appropriate assessment.
- Community and work-based learning experiences tied to students' interests.
- Technological literacy that addresses how technology impacts daily life and the workplace.

Career Awareness, Exploration and Planning

Career education must be a responsibility of each student, parent, community member and educator at every grade level, in every discipline and in every class. The career development process must begin in early elementary school and be coordinated, supported and linked to classroom learning throughout every student's educational experience. There are three elements of career education that lay the groundwork for career-specific preparation.

- Career Awareness. Helps students understand the nature of work and acquire basic knowledge about broad career areas.
- Career Exploration. Helps students discover their individual interests and abilities by exploring career areas and learning how education relates to work. Students test their preliminary career interests through such activities as career orientation courses, field trips and job shadowing.
- Career Planning. Students develop a career plan that addresses both their educational and career goals. This plan is continually updated and revised as student interests, aspirations and accomplishments change.

Career-Specific Preparation

This vision calls for an education that weaves together rigorous and relevant academics, a career focus, critical thinking, ethics, interpersonal skills, and opportunities to acquire career-specific knowledge and skills. It is built around broad career clusters or groupings of related career areas that enable a student to pursue a wide array of occupations. The academic core for every cluster will include the same high-level rigorous courses in math, science, English, and social studies but is infused with applications related to the chosen

career cluster. Students progress along a continuum of career-specific preparation that encompasses three broad components.

- Students experience and understand the nature of work in their chosen career cluster. Based on what the student learns, he or she may choose to change clusters. The curriculum must allow this flexibility.
- Students may take courses that are a part of the technical core of the career cluster. These courses are not "skills-only job training" but incorporate high levels of academics that students learn within the discipline. Students participate in career-related internships.
- Students may enter occupations within their chosen career cluster through specialized skill training at the secondary and postsecondary levels that leads to employment, certification and professional recognition.

Conclusion

To achieve and maintain successful economic development and global competitiveness in Illinois, we must seize this opportunity to re-engineer traditional education. Strong partnerships within education and among educational institutions, communities, families, and business and industry are the foundation to building one integrated educational system that improves the quality and relevance of public education and prepares every student for a personally and professionally rewarding life in the 21st Century.

THE GOALS

Using the Vision statement as a conceptual compass, the Task Force quickly moved to operationalize the ideas they had articulated. What sprang from these discussions was a list of six goals and corresponding action recommendations that provided the Task Force and the partner agencies with their first tangible link between the ideals of the vision and the potential policy recommendations that would necessarily follow.

These goals and action recommendations are meant to help illustrate and explain the system that the vision seeks to create. Taken individually, they represent important steps towards potential CTE reform, but when viewed as a whole, they become a powerful tool for holistic educational reform.

Goal 1 - Equity and Access

"All Illinois students will have access and opportunity to participate in this vision of education."

Goal 2 - Standards Based Instruction and Assessment

"Align the instructional content for all students with rigorous and recognized standards."

Goal 3 - Teacher Preparation

"Integrate the relationship between school and careers throughout the teacher preparation, certification and continuing development system."

Goal 4 - Curriculum and Instruction

"Provide instructors with the resources and knowledge they need to infuse the relationship between school and careers throughout the curriculum."

Goal 5 - Accountability

"Hold all educational programs accountable for outcomes and progress."

Goal 6 - Governance

"Ensure that system planning, coordination, implementation strategies, policy-making and legislation support this vision of education."

ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Goal 1 - Equity and Access

"All Illinois students will have access and opportunity to participate in a this vision of education."

Action Steps to be Taken in 1-2 Years

- Market this vision of education as preparation for careers, employment and citizenship to all stakeholders (P-16).
- Establish partnerships to develop models for work-based learning, integrated academics and organized course sequences to help students understand the interrelationships of school and career skills (P-16).
- Examine the role of the delivery system in the administration and support of this vision of education (P-16) for high quality and consistency.

Longer-term Actions Envisioned to Take More than 2 Years

- Establish a legislative task force to develop and improve/increase mechanisms to codify this vision of education.
- Provide career advisement and support services for all students.
- Provide scholarships for technical careers through the Illinois Student Assistance Commission.

Goal 2 - Standards Based Instruction and Assessment

"Align the instructional content for all students with rigorous and recognized standards."

Action Steps to be Taken in 1-2 Years

- Develop, adopt, and assess learning goals, standards, and benchmarks for workplace skills and career development competencies in an 8th fundamental learning area. The process for development and adoption will follow the model used for existing standards. In addition to being specifically defined in an 8th fundamental learning area, these skills and competencies should also be infused throughout the original seven learning areas culminating in an Individualized Career Plan (ICP) for all students no later than the 8th grade.
- Develop, adopt, and assess learning goals, standards, and benchmarks for career-specific preparation areas in a 9th fundamental learning area. These should be based upon the five career cluster areas, which include Agriculture and Natural Resources, Business and Marketing, Family and Consumer Sciences, Industrial Technology, and Health Occupations. The process for development and adoption will follow the model used for existing standards. Only districts with programs in the career clusters would be held responsible for these goals, standards and benchmarks.

Longer-term Actions Envisioned to Take More than 2 Years

- Base all career-specific programs on the Illinois Learning Standards, employer-identified occupational skill standards and /or industry certifications.
- Require secondary and post-secondary programs to complete a joint program review process that has an assessment component that encourages movement to standards-based P-14 or P-16 instruction.
- Continuing professional development opportunities should be made available for all career and technical education instructors to assist in writing curriculum in all career and technical education areas. These opportunities should also be offered to academic instructors.

Goal 3 - Teacher Preparation

"Integrate the relationship between school and careers throughout the teacher preparation, certification and continuing development system."

Action Steps to be Taken in 1-2 Years

- Design and implement a system of teacher, counselor, and administrator pre-service and in-service training and ongoing professional development that addresses: Illinois Learning Standards, occupational skills standards, career awareness, the relationship between school and careers, a variety of assessment techniques, innovative teaching strategies, interactive learning, technological literacy, learning styles, problem-based instruction, and contextual learning.
- Design and implement an alternative teacher certification process that includes an organized professional development system to upgrade provisionally certified teachers.
- Request that the teacher certification board streamline and expedite the process for experienced career and technical education teachers to gain additional certification in another fundamental learning area and vice versa.

Longer-term Actions Envisioned to Take More than 2 Years

- Develop and implement a professional development system for provisional and fully certified career and technical education instructors to upgrade their skills and knowledge, provide resources to enable all instructors to function as learning facilitators, and to understand how their curriculum interfaces with the world of work.
- Offer incentives/scholarships to all career and technical education areas to recruit new teachers.
- Create a joint task force of the teacher preparation institutions and educational practitioners to discuss the skills and knowledge needed by P-16 teachers, thus addressing the need for uniformity.

Goal 4 - Curriculum and Instruction

"Provide instructors with the resources and knowledge they need to infuse the relationship between school and careers throughout the curriculum."

Action Steps to be Taken in 1-2 Years

- Align all curricula and related assessments with applicable Illinois Learning Standards, occupational skill standards, industry certifications, workplace skills, and career development competencies, and strengthen teaching materials to reflect this alignment.
- Develop a comprehensive P-16 model curriculum for career-specific program areas aligned to all standards (as referenced above). Use the FCAE (Facilitating Coordination in Agriculture Education) model as a guide. Integrate Career Exploration Labs into all schools.

Longer-term Actions Envisioned to Take More than 2 Years

- Convince four-year institutions to accept, encourage and standardize the use of dual credit and/or articulation agreements in career and technical education and academic programs.
- Provide a source of reliable funding (including private-sector matching funds) to ensure programs are equitable and accessible to everyone in Illinois. Use of funds includes updates on technology, providing transportation, and professional development for teachers.

Goal 5 - Accountability

"Hold all educational programs accountable for outcomes and progress."

Action Steps to be Taken in 1-2 Years

- Develop a system to ensure that priority (i.e. high-demand/high-wage) skill gap areas in the marketplace are being met.
- Develop effective methods of ensuring and measuring progress toward achieving all relevant standards (e.g. Illinois Learning Standards, occupational skill standards, workplace skills, etc.) through a variety of appropriate educational and assessment strategies.
- Build on and use existing Perkins III indicators (technical skills, learning standards, educational attainment, continued education, employment, nontraditional, etc.) as measures of program accountability.

Longer-term Actions Envisioned to Take More than 2 Years

- Deliver programs based on job placement within identified labor market areas of shortage.
- Attach consequences (e.g., funding, recognition, technical assistance, review cycle) for program providers related to accountability objectives.
- Develop a uniform, benchmarked system of accountability to ensure that this vision of education and the goals of the CTE Challenge Task Force are accomplished.

Goal 6 - Governance

"Ensure that system planning, coordination, implementation strategies, policy-making and legislation support this vision of education."

Action Steps to be Taken in 1-2 Years

- Create an ad hoc policy advisory council comprised of decision makers within the educational agencies, the Illinois Workforce Investment Board, the General Assembly, and other appropriate organizations to discuss, develop and make policy recommendations for the implementation of this vision of education and the goals of the CTE Challenge Task Force to the General Assembly, the Joint Education Committee and other involved.
- Establish an interagency team to align structures and responsibilities of the state's educational agencies to assure that they are organized in a way that can effectively carry out this vision of education.

Longer-term Actions Envisioned to Take More than 2 Years

- Identify changes in state statutes and rules and regulations needed to give local boards and administrators the flexibility to implement this vision of education.
- Work with state agencies, advocacy groups and other interested parties to advance these needed changes.