SETTING A NEW STANDARD

with a Common Career Technical Core

BY DEAN R. FOLKERS

The pursuit of common educational expectations, or standards, among the states has long been a conversation met with strong opinions—for and against. On the one hand, it can be argued, education outcomes should be determined locally to meet the needs and expectations of the community responsible, both fiscally and politically, for the education of youth and adults. On the other hand, the available options associated with jobs and careers often transcend a local community—to a national or international marketplace.

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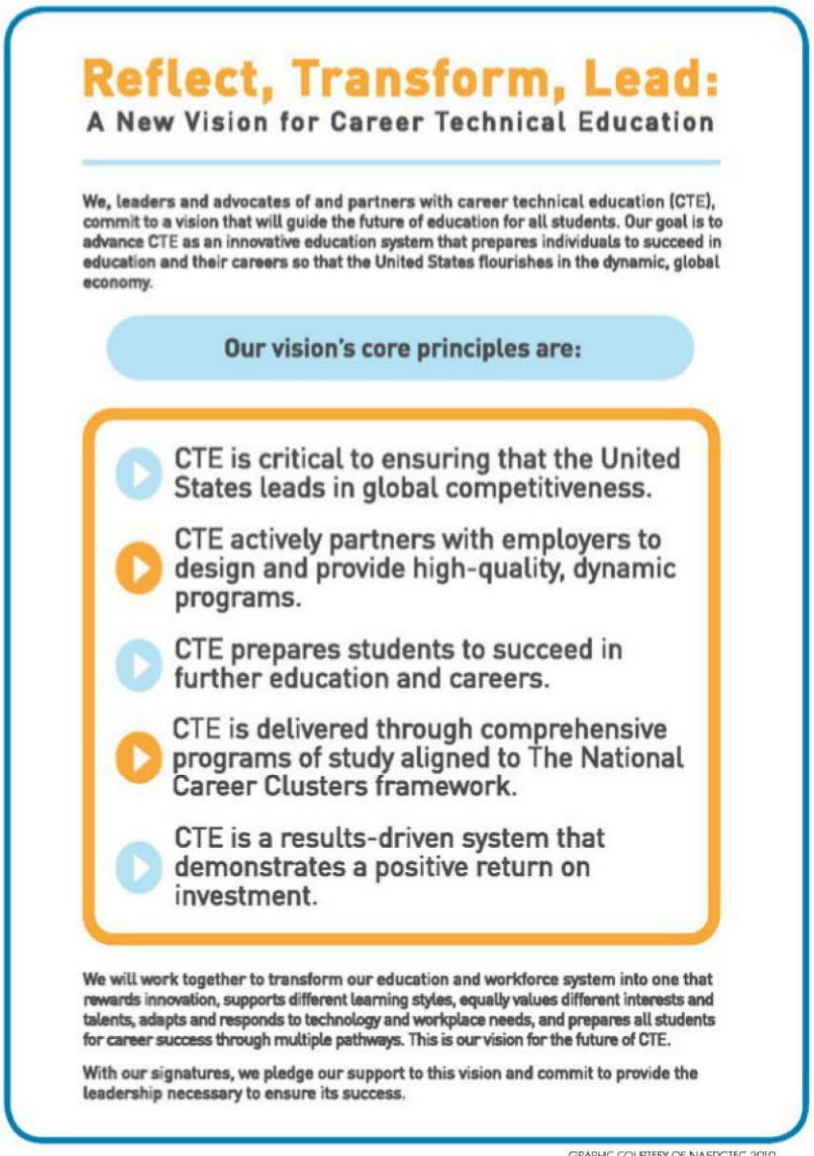
However, whichever sentiment one supports, it seems clear that high standards and consistency are both critical characteristics to have in educational programs. The task to achieve such is certainly not expected to be easy. Using the influence and input of business and industry, the resources of the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium's (NASDCTEc) Career Cluster Knowledge and Skill Statements, and a critical engagement of participating states, the creation of Common Career Technical Core (CCTC) standards is on the way to reality. CCTC intends to support a consistent alignment of high expectations among career technical education (CTE) programs.

Proof that such a large task can be achieved is the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The state-led effort was first coordinated by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in the spring of 2009. The effort relied on strong leadership, state involvement, and was fostered in a belief in the goals of student preparation, competition, equity, clarity and collaboration. To be sure, the creation of a common set of standards is no simple task, but through work from 48 states, two territories and the District of Columbia, the creation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in mathematics and English-language arts (ELA) has demonstrated that a process can be implemented and outcomes achieved.

The timing of the Common Core could not have been better for the CTE community, which had been seeking its own approach to achieving quality and consistency among programs. Also in 2009, in an effort to identify a new strategic vision for CTE, NASDCTEc convened a group of state and national education leaders, education policy partners, business and industry. The results of their strategizing culminated in a vision document (available at **www.careertech.org**, and shown on this page) that identified five guiding vision principles and several subsequent action steps intended to guide CTE's transformation into the new global era. Among these action steps was the creation of a *common core of technical standards*, to ensure that the United States leads in global competitiveness and the preparation of students to succeed in further education and careers.

These standards would bring consistency to CTE programs and ensure that students are learning technical skills that truly prepare them for the jobs of the future. Of course, the next natural question for those involved in the instruction and administration of CTE in all discipline areas is: "Is it also possible to create standards for a CCTC?" The answer is yes, and the time is now.

The Core Principles for CTE's New Vision



GRAPHIC COURTESY OF NASDCTEC 2010

Five core principles frame a new vision for CTE.

Career Cluster Knowledge and Skills

Fortunately, the foundation for the CTE community's effort had been laid down in the early 2000s when groups of educators, business and industry, and government officials worked to create a set of industry-validated educational expectations for

FIGURE 1: **THE VISION**

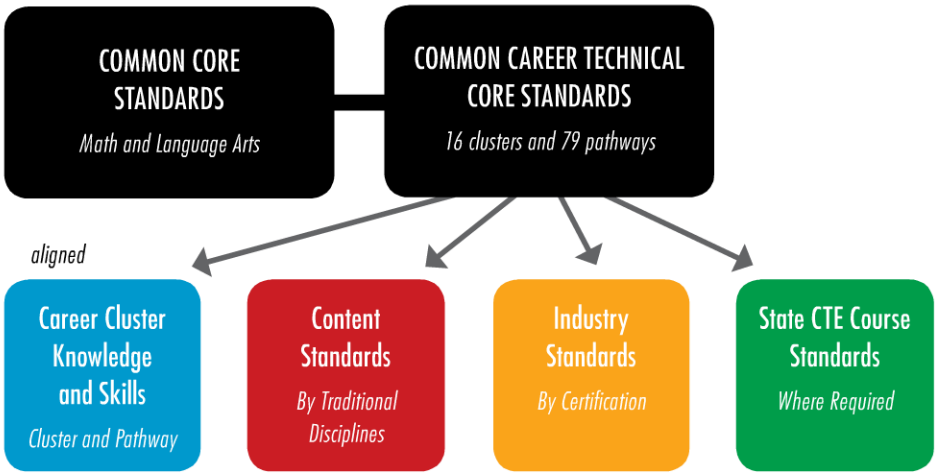
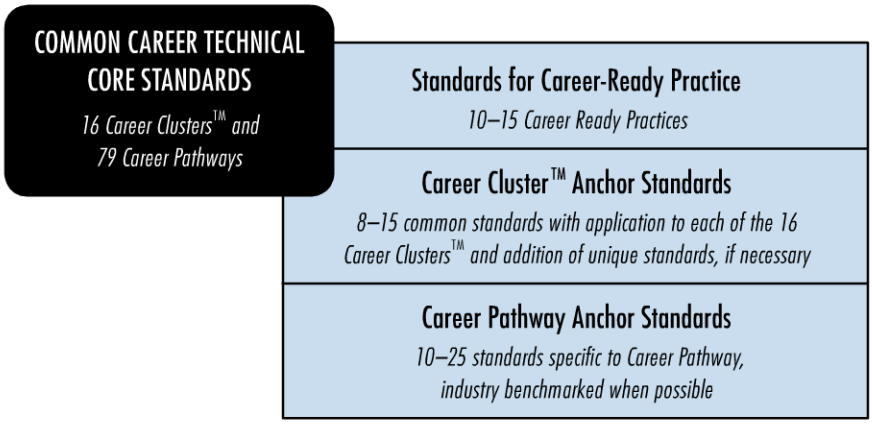


FIGURE 2: **COMMON CAREER TECHNICAL CORE**



CTE using the National Career Clusters Framework. Building off of the 16 career clusters that represent 16 categories of our nation's economic industries, they identified the broad workplace and specific industry knowledge and skills that students should learn in order to be successful in their careers.

The results of these committed groups served as the first version of the Career Cluster Knowledge and Skill Statements. For a variety of reasons, the efforts toward commonality and the career clusters became the work of the states through the States' Career Cluster Initiative (SCCI). The SCCI was a collaboration among states to continue the work of career clusters and ensure that the knowledge and skills, Career Clusters Framework, and other resources were provided to support implementation within the states. Ultimately, the continued oversight resides with the states through NASDCTEc and the National Career Technical Education Foundation (NCTEF), led by the state CTE directors.

The National Career Clusters Knowledge and Skills provide three levels (or sets) of Knowledge and Skills Statements:

- Essential level: The knowledge and skills expected for all careers or entrepreneurship pursuits.
- Career Cluster level: The knowledge and skills expected within a broad industry or sector.
- Career Pathway level: The knowledge and skills expected within a specific group of careers.

The current Knowledge and Skills Statements are also organized by 10 common areas and provide a series of *Performance Elements* that provide more specific examples of performance, along with *Sample Indicators* that serve as examples of potential evaluation and assessment expectations for the knowledge and skills.

In order to ensure that these Knowledge and Skills Statements reflect the needs of the economy today and tomorrow, they are scheduled for re-validation every four to five years. The current revision process includes the engagement of subject matter experts (SME) from across the country, in all 16 career clusters areas and the 79 career pathways, through an online rating system of the existing statements. In addition, a comprehensive collection of benchmarked standards from industry, postsecondary institutions, discipline groups, and state CTE standards will inform a team of writers that will synthesize and propose any changes to the statements. The adjustments, if any, will then be industry-validated using the online rating system.

The results of revisions are scheduled to be released in June 2012 at the 10th National Career Clusters Institute in Washington, D.C. The current version of Knowledge and Skills Statements, including information about the revision process, are available at **www.careertech.org**. These newly revised Career Clusters Knowledge and Skills Statements will serve as the basis to inform the state development of the Common Career Technical Core Standards.

Common Career Technical Core Standards

The revision of the Knowledge and Skills Statements was already planned, but several factors emerged that influenced the revision work. Some of the factors include

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the development of the Common Core State Standards in math and ELA, the implementation of action steps associated with the CTE vision principles and a desire to connect the versions of state CTE standards, curriculum discipline standards work, and industry-benchmarked standards; these were all influencers in support of creating a "Common Career Technical Core" (CCTC).

The concept of the CCTC standards builds on the results and experiences that occurred in the development of the CCSS. The use of standards-setting criteria (**www.corestandards.org/assets/criteria.pdf**) for rigor, the implementation of Standards for Career-Ready Practices, and an approach that identifies "anchor standards" all influenced the approach taken to create the CCTC. The final list of CCTC standards are expected to reflect those most critical to the success of students at the career cluster and career pathway level.

The CCTC framework has three primary levels. At the base are the Standards for Career-Ready Practices. These practices, whose concept is modeled after the CCSS math practices, intend to reflect the 10-15 industry expectations that every student and adult will continue to practice, potentially at increasing levels of complexity, throughout the educational process. An emerging example might be ethics. Students would not necessarily take an assessment in middle school about ethics and forever demonstrate that they are ethical. The standard is something intended as a strategy for infusion in the instructional process at increasing levels of complexity. A second level is identified as the Career Cluster Anchor Standards. The use of the term "anchor standard" was derived from the work of the CCSS in ELA, in which anchor standards provide broad expectations across grades and content areas. At the career cluster level these anchor standards represent eight to 15 of the critical expectations for students at the career cluster level. The third and final level is the Career Pathway Anchor Standards. Driven by industry, these standards are more specific to the expectations within a career pathway area, associated with a career cluster. The potential for 10-25 unique anchor standards within a career pathway are internationally benchmarked, when possible, and reflect core expectations of industry.

The end goal of the CCTC is not to replace existing industry standards, but rather to provide a resource that builds from the specific industry expectations of the Knowledge and Skills Statements, builds from the curriculum and state CTE standards, supports the industry standards preparation, and also aligns to the CCSS in math and ELA in support of ensuring all students are college- and career-ready.

Common Versus National or Federal Standards

An important distinction to make is that the creation of common educational standards is something that a state chooses to commit to and participate in, and is not something driven from a national or federal level. The participation and engagement of the states in the creation of a common core is essential, but also assumes that states will work to implement the standards once they are developed. The creation of a CCTC requires the same engagement by the states for development and adoption.

Timing

The development of the CCTC moves forward; this month, a toolkit of resources will be provided to states that participate in the creation of the CCTC. Of the states that commit, the work of convening state groups begins in February 2012. The final work is externally validated and will be ready for release and adoption in June 2012, along with the revalidated National Career Clusters Knowledge and Skills Statements.

The Time is Now

The uncertainty of many aspects of our world continues to challenge our assumptions and approaches, but the CCTC can serve as one step forward. It is something that brings alignment among participating states in the life-changing work delivered through CTE, and supports continued collaboration to support CTE: Learning that works for America. T

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