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mployers are looking to career and technical education (CTE) programs to supply a workforce possessing academic and employability skills to complement the technical component. In Kentucky, the state has instituted assessment standards to ensure that CTE programs are working to increase student achievement. Kentucky Administrative Regulations require that CTE programs:

• provide a rigorous curriculum, leadership skills through student organization and work-based learning opportunities;
• be accountable for students completing a technical program and positive student transitions after high school; and
• include stakeholder involvement.

CTE programs are directed to incorporate academics in instruction and to be active partners in increasing student achievement as measured by the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS), Perkins performance measures, and the Kentucky Occupational Skills Standards Assessment (KOSSA). CTE teachers are dedicated to fulfill all the requirements expected of them.

How it Began
In 2001, Kentucky legislators asked the Office of Career and Technical Education (OCTE) and the Division of Career and Technical Education in the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to review secondary technical programs in both the 55 state-operated area technology centers and the 36 departments and centers operated by local school districts. These schools provide CTE instruction in primarily business, communications/information technology, construction, health sciences, manufacturing, marketing and transportation programs. To comply with legislators’ request and meet the accountability criteria set by CATS, KOSSA, CTE regulations, Perkins performance measures, and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation standards, CTE stakeholders developed the assessment process and program assessment document (Figure 1). Stakeholders were business and industry, OCTE and KDE-ICTC staff, two- and four-year postsecondary institutions, teachers and administrators, the Kentucky Occupational Skill Standards Assessment (KOSSA), OCTE and KDE, OCTE staff, two- and four-year postsecondary institutions, teachers and administrators, the Kentucky Occupational Skill Standards Assessment (KOSSA), OCTE and KDE, OCTE staff, two- and four-year postsecondary institutions, teachers and administrators, the Kentucky Occupational Skill Standards Assessment (KOSSA), and Technical Education in the Kentucky Department of Education. OCTE staff then developed a Web site to assist teachers and administrators in documenting the assessment standards and a database to collect, manage and analyze the data gathered from the process.

Assessment Process
The program assessment process identifies gaps and brings strengths and weaknesses to the forefront. From 2001-2005, 365 secondary programs were reviewed by assessment teams. A second, two-year cycle of assessment team visits began with the 2005-2006 school year and assessment teams visited 504 programs. Data for the third cycle from 2007-2009 will be available in June 2009.

Self-Assessment
In addition to an assessment team visit every two years, all programs submit a self-assessment in May that maintains the continuity of the process. The assessment document is revised every two years for use in beginning a new cycle of assessment team visits. The standards are listed in Figure 1. Each standard lists required documentation and includes a scoring guide, related resources and instructions. (Figure 2 shows Standard 8—one of the two safety standards.)

Program Assessment Web site
A program assessment Web site provides teachers with the tools needed to complete the activities and documentation required for an assessment team visit and the annual self-assessment. The Web site includes:

-Detailed program assessment visit.
-Program assessment database.
-Program assessment documentation.
-Program assessment guides.
-Program assessment materials.
-Program assessment Web site.

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A Step Closer to Excellence

OCTE went one step further to become the first group of career and technical schools in the nation to be accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI). In the process, OCTE was identified as a district. The OCTE district has the responsibility to monitor and support the progress of the area technology centers. The teachers’ responsibilities in SACS CASI accreditation process are limited to documenting the standards as required by program assessment.

Summary

With pressure from employers for well-prepared employees and from the education community to meet accountability requirements, CTE teachers are responsible to many stakeholders. The program assessment standards bring all the accountability requirements together in one package making it easier for teachers to satisfy their many stakeholders.

The program assessment process is a work in progress for CTE teachers and administrators. The assessment process is a tool to measure progress and provides the analytical data needed to guide the district through continuous improvement. Although student achievement has increased, students’ scores need to be higher to meet CATS proficiency levels. Figure 4 outlines the progress, challenges and concerns identified by data from program assessment data. Figure 5 shows student achievement as measured by CATS, KOSSA and Perkins.

The scores of all CTE programs continue to improve the program assessment process and to use the data to increase student achievement through quality CTE programs.