

Career Education Standards in the United States

The term “vocational education” has been rephrased in the United States in order to improve the attractiveness of job-oriented training. The new term used now is “career and technical education (CTE)”. It addresses various forms of job-oriented learning that takes place in a variety of institutions starting in K-12 schools. There is no standard qualification framework in place in the United States and standards for occupational training programs differ from state to state and even within states. There are different names for standards and benchmarks, as well as different indicators, frameworks for duties and tasks, definitions of content versus performance standards, means by which competencies are measured, and levels of competence that are expected. Precise performance criteria are rare.

The availability of competency standards in a state largely depends on available state funding. Federal funding generated through the legislation of the current Perkins III Act allots funding to states by formula related to each state's per capita income and the number of students enrolled in CTE. The grand amount of CTE funding needs to be provided by the individual state or industry stakeholders.

A study by Castellano (2007) shows that 30 out of 51 states in the U.S. have a statewide CTE standard system. Eleven states are in the process of developing standards, 8 states did not have standards and two states did not participate in the study. The development of CTE standards comprises various steps: 1. The state convenes a committee/panel for each CTE program area. 2. The panel researches and writes standards. 3. The standards are sent out for review and comments. 4. They are validated by the industry and approved by the Board of Education. Mississippi is the only state that crosswalked the secondary CTE standards with the states academic standards. In Ohio state authorities are currently in the process of developing technical content standards for each of Ohio's 16 career fields. The Integrated Technical and Academic Competencies (ITACs), Occupational Competency Analysis Profiles (OCAPs) and Technical Competency Profiles (TCPs) are replaced by the career field technical content standards as each document is completed.

This paper will provide the following information:

1. A description of the accountability movement in K-12 education in the United States and its consequences for the development of competency standards in CTE.
2. The legislation which provides the foundation for accountability measures (No Child Left Behind Act, Carl D. Perkins Act).
3. A brief description of selected methods for measuring competencies in the country.
4. An exemplary examination of Ohio's career technical content standards for the competency standards in the career cluster “Hospitality and Tourism”.

References:

Castellano, M. (2007). Secondary CTE state standards: Developing a framework out of a patchwork of policies. Paper presented at the AERA conference. Chicago.