



Linking Career and Technical Education to a State's Accountability System: Kentucky

Purpose of the Paper

New accountability systems under ESSA and strengthening Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are two of the leading topics in state education policy today. With the recent passage of Senate Bill 1, drafted by State Education Committee Chair and CL4E Member Mike Wilson, Kentucky became one of the first states to legislatively respond to ESSA with comprehensive standards and a strong accountability plan.

The new law gives “credit” in the accountability system to schools where students complete industry-recognized certificates in areas of high demand, as established by existing regional workforce development boards.

This new provision will encourage schools to develop stronger partnerships with local businesses and establish programs that offer more options for students to obtain career and technical certificates. Instead of driving this result with specific mandates or state-wide regulations, SB 1 produces goals and incentives while allowing local schools and leaders the flexibility to design programs that will work best for them.

This paper will review how this innovative concept was developed, enacted, the impact it will have on students, and conclude with key thoughts from Senator Wilson for states that are interested in pursuing this idea.



Senator Mike Wilson was first elected to serve in the Senate in 2010. Senator Wilson serves as chair of the Senate Education Committee and Co-chair of the Education Assessment and Accountability Review Subcommittee (EAARS).

Senator Wilson is a graduate of California State University and in December of 1972, he joined the United States Marine Corps serving his country for 8 ½ years. He is currently the Vice-President of Sales by SOKY Jobs Inc. which is a regional workforce communication firm in Bowling Green with national reach.

Senator Wilson is very involved in the community as a member of The Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber Ambassador's Club. He has served on the Agri-Business Committee and the Government Relations Committee. He helped develop the Police Chaplain Program for the Bowling Green Police Department and served as a Police Chaplain for a period of time.

“ Senator Wilson’s Senate Bill 1 exemplifies how state leaders can use the flexibility under the ESSA to advance new ideas. His creative idea to directly link the state’s school accountability system with its existing workforce development boards in order to drive stronger CTE programs at the local level is a great example of this. ”

Dr. William Bennett
Chairman of Conservative
Leaders for Education



Development and Enactment of the Idea

For far too long, schools have been focused on directing students exclusively towards a 4-year college track while underserving students whose interests and skills would be better served by additional educational pathways. Research suggests that strengthening CTE programs not only leads to significantly increased employment and wages post-high school, but also the pursuit of more post-secondary degrees. (See: <https://edexcellence.net/publications/career-and-technical-education-in-high-school-does-it-improve-student-outcomes>.)

The advancement of school accountability systems is overly reliant on simply achieving “proficiency” at any given grade level, and does little to address the problem of neglecting the development of multiple and strong CTE options.

ESSA should be viewed as an opportunity to help address severe shortcomings in the CTE career area.

Every state has the two fundamental components of this initiative: A school accountability system and regional workforce development boards. The key provision of SB 1 is to link these two existing state systems in a manner that empowers and incentivizes local school and business leaders to develop more robust CTE programs that produce graduates with the skills and qualities regional businesses need - and are ready to compensate for.

For decades, both states and the federal government have poured resources into workforce training and development, largely directed through regional workforce investment boards. Some argue that part of the problem in our workforce today is the failure to create and promote robust CTE programs in our K-12 system that leads to real and recognized credentials.

The strongest programs rely on the foundation of a robust relationship between school districts, local companies, and teachers who provide significant influence to students. These collaborations are not “one-size-fits-all” and are best developed by leaders at the local level.

The key is not to mandate what a school district must do within their accountability systems, but instead incentivize the results that we are looking for – graduates that are truly college or career ready. Specific to this initiative, graduates who are ready to be employed in positions where local industries are looking to hire young professionals at very strong starting salaries and provide the opportunity for potential advancement and growth.

How It Works

CTE programs are designed to advance two critical state goals simultaneously. First, it focuses on providing more equity in access to quality programming and ensuring students are better informed of the potential benefits of additional pathways. An emphasis should be placed on CTE programs that provide well-paid and rewarding careers. With the rapid evolution of many technical fields, such as medical and manufacturing, this reality is growing.

Second, as many policymakers are aware, companies often suffer from an underqualified workforce. States that find ways to provide a strong workforce with the skills needed for local businesses will also have a major advantage in the development of the state’s overall economic development efforts.

When drafting legislation, accountability points can be awarded to schools and districts that provide credentialed or industry-recognized certification (not merely completion of CTE classes). Extra “bonus points” are available when those certifications are in areas of high demand in the region.

Additionally, the accountability system should identify regional areas of “high demand.” In Kentucky, the state relies on the Technical College System, the Chamber of Commerce, and regional workforce investment boards. It is key that each of these groups annually develop a list of industry recognized certificates or credentials in high-demand by employers in each area of the state.

Page 42 of the full bill focuses on these points: <http://www.lrc.ky.gov/record/16RS/SB1/SCS1.pdf>



A Student's Story

I wanted to make a name for myself. My family has been poor most of my life, and it has been hard for us. When I learned about CTE programs and the chance it gave me to get my associates degree as an advanced manufacturing technician, I saw this is an opportunity and my way out.

With the program I am in, I go to school two days out of the week, and the other three days I am at work. With this system, it allows me to apply what I learn in school the next day at work.

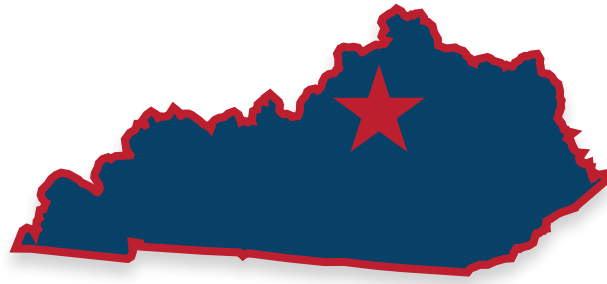
The opportunity with the CTE program was a blessing to me. I have been able to help my family financially and give back. If I have a family in the future, I can now provide for them, and give them the things I never had.

I have also been able to work with other students who come from similar backgrounds, and show them that these educational opportunities are available. I am trying to provide a way for others to enjoy this career path as well.

CTE allows me to have a powerful impact on people's lives, more than I was before. It is a blessing.



Austin Rodriguez
Blowing Green Metal Forming



Key Advice for Other States

Senator Wilson offers the following points to state leaders who are interesting in pursuing this innovative concept:

- “Clearly define the framework of what post-secondary and career ready means. CTE programs and college preparatory programs need to make a student employable right out of high school, in addition to college ready scores on ACT or SAT, an industry recognized certificate, college credit, or credential, or apprenticeship completion.”
- “Incentivize schools to pursue high demand industry certifications by using the power of your existing Workforce Investment Boards to inform the state accountability system and school districts what certificates are in high demand. Since these boards are filled with people from industry, business, and healthcare, they are able to accurately identify where the major needs and opportunities exist.”
- “Encourage the creation of a collaboration between school districts, chambers of commerce and local companies to develop career fairs for 8th graders and above two times a year, and offer externships for teachers to engage directly with these companies. Being accountable, as SB1 established in Kentucky, causes leaders to look at these programs more, and schools can present them as the viable and vibrant career paths that they are in today's economy.”

