

Guest Editorial

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CTE helps many students get a jumpstart on the future

*A Career and Technical Education Month guest editorial
by State Superintendent Tony Evers*

I have been an advocate for career and technical education programs since my first years of teaching. I couldn't help but notice that the kids who were truly involved in these classes were driven; they connected their learning to their future and that motivated them to succeed.

That's why I'm so excited to join February's observance of Career and Technical Education (CTE) Month. During school visits I have made across the state each year since I was elected state superintendent of public instruction, students and their teachers showcased the coursework and experiences that ground CTE in the real world. And, it's not just the classroom that makes CTE so powerful. It's the co-op programs, work-based learning, and apprenticeships as well as opportunities through Career and Technical Student Organizations that help students learn about leadership, teamwork, communications, and critical and creative thinking as well as gaining experiences for the skill-based careers employers say they need.

In Wisconsin, more than 88,000 high school students, or roughly two-thirds of high schoolers, are taking CTE classes in areas such as health occupations, marketing and entrepreneurship, manufacturing, technology and engineering, agriculture and business, and family and consumer science. Partnerships with local businesses and technical colleges support these course offerings and allow students to explore career options, receive industry certification, and earn postsecondary credits while progressing toward high school graduation. Transcribed credit is one area that's seeing strong growth. During the 2014-15 school year, 24,779 students earned technical college credits while in high school, a 78 percent increase from five years ago.

Because CTE students experience the connection between what they learn and what a future career demands, they have a higher graduation rate than other students across the state. It's a serious mistake to think CTE is a lesser route. Today's CTE coursework requires understanding core academics applied in relevant, real-world applications. In fact, the applied academics of CTE are the kind of skill-building every student needs regardless of their plans after high school, be it the workforce, military service, technical college, or a two- or four-year degree.

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Coupled with the opportunities of CTE, Wisconsin is piloting academic and career planning. The process will be in place statewide for the 2017-18 school year to help students starting in sixth grade identify personal strengths and interests. Because academic and career planning is comprehensive, involving parents, teachers, and the community, it gets everyone thinking early about possibilities that match a student's interests and are informed by workforce needs. It might mean a student takes certain academic classes to build a foundation for a career, joins an after-school activity to gain some out-of-classroom experiences, or works an apprenticeship to experience the real-world of a specific field. Overall, academic and career planning will give kids more control over their future and help them plan to graduate college and career ready.

Whether our students take one CTE class to get a glimpse of a certain career path or they concentrate on a series of courses that jumpstart a technical degree or industry certification, there's lots of opportunity for lifetime learning and success through CTE. Join me in celebrating Career and Technical Education Month and the importance of CTE classes and technical careers.

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NOTES: A high resolution photo of the state superintendent is available on the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/news/contacts-resources>. This editorial is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2016_12.pdf.