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State policy changes, State of the State addresses highlight increasing interest in career and technical education for workforce development

DENVER – A growing number of state policymakers are focusing on career and technical education (CTE) for workforce development as states strive to meet projected employment demands.

[An analysis by the Education Commission of the States](#) found 2013 alone saw at least 78 substantive policy changes via legislation, state board rules and executive orders specific to CTE and workforce development.

Governors in many states have made clear that CTE and workforce development remain top priorities in 2014, according to ECS Senior Policy Analyst Jennifer Dounay Zinth in *The Progress of Education Reform*.

“This year, State of the State addresses in 18 states and the District of Columbia included proposed initiatives or budget increases to expand or enhance the quality of career counseling, CTE and/or workforce development programs,” Zinth said.

Why the intense focus? Zinth explored preambles and legislative findings in enacted 2013 bills and noted a similar refrain: “States must produce greater numbers of individuals holding industry-recognized certificates to fill labor market gaps, including in high-wage, high-demand jobs.”

Among some of the state policy trends highlighted in the report:

- **Formalizing ways for business and industry to inform CTE offerings.** In **Indiana**, regional councils were created to evaluate CTE offerings at area high schools and to develop alternative curricula if necessary. Other state examples include **Alabama**, **Florida** and **North Carolina**.
- **Blending high school and postsecondary learning opportunities.** Examples include **Louisiana**, where teams of K-12, community college and industry leaders will create courses and work experiences leading to statewide credentials for in-demand jobs.
- **Incentivizing completion of industry certifications and credentials.** In **Kansas**, school districts earn \$1,000 for every graduate completing a credential on a state list of in-demand jobs. Other state examples include **Minnesota**, **Oklahoma** and **Texas**.
- **Expanding opportunities for internships and apprenticeships.** Leveraging a state investment of \$11 million, with matching private funds, **Ohio** is offering almost 2,500 students at public four-year institutions, community colleges and technical centers new or expanded opportunities to participate in internships and co-op programs.

Zinth drew on recent research, U.S. Census data and labor statistics to note, “CTE credentials may be a viable but largely overlooked pathway to the middle class.” However, she points out, “for many CTE fields, students will be unable to fill high-demand job vacancies without either a postsecondary credential, associate’s degree or beyond.”

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[The Education Commission of the States](#) was created by states, for states, in 1965. We track policy, translate research, provide unbiased advice and create opportunities for state policymakers to learn from one another.