

## Testimony by CTA Representative Mike Patterson before the Little Hoover Commission, April 26, 2007

Good afternoon. My name is Mike Patterson. I am representing Barbara E. Kerr and the 340,000 instructional personnel across the state in the California Teachers Association.

I would like to express my appreciation to the committee for seeking the perspective of a vocational technical education teacher.

I have taught for nineteen years at South Tahoe High School and Central Sierra Regional Occupational Program. My teaching load includes Automotive 1, Automotive 2, Small Engines, and Regional Occupational Program Auto.

I am also a regional vice-president for California Association for Career and Technical Education.

But most importantly, I am a product of our public schools who graduated high school and gained AA degrees at San Joaquin Delta College. The training I received allowed me to work as an auto mechanic and to earn ASE Master Automotive Technician certification. Later, I returned to CSU Chico to earn my degree and my teaching credentials. I hold a B.A. in Industrial Arts and am rated as a Highly Qualified Teacher.

It's important to recognize some important realities about the projected workforce our state needs. Experts assert that only 25% of the workforce will need college undergraduate degrees or postgraduate degrees. Another 10% will work in jobs that are unskilled and require high school diplomas or less. But the lion's share of the jobs – somewhere around 65% of them – will require high school degrees plus another one, two, or three years of training.

Experts have also pointed out that the skill set we are currently teaching in our K-12 schools does not have all of the instructional career components outlined in the state's new CTE framework. A focus on building careers is vital because current projections are that students will have on average 10 different careers in their working life – not 10 different jobs, but 10 different careers.

So, our challenges are large ones. How do we provide a quality vocational career education programs that prepare students for jobs in the real world, prepare them to pass the state's rigorous high school exit exam, and give them the sound academic foundation so that at a later time in life they can pursue higher education, should they decide to do so.

CTA believes:

- *Students deserve and require workforce preparation to enter the technical global economy.*

- *All students in the public school system should have access to career technical education programs which include proper counseling and guidance services.*
- *Career specialization education opportunities offered at postsecondary levels should lead students to advanced certification and appropriate degrees.*
- *Legislation and regulations must reflect the importance of integrating academics and career preparation to the extent possible.*

We have plenty of challenges.

We need teachers with skills to teach these students, and we need to revamp the credential program to recognize the vital skills that these persons would bring to the teaching profession.

We also need to expand the program and coordinate it in a realistic way. But we need to be very careful not to hold the 65% of our future workforce to university requirements that may impede their graduation and movement into the world of work.

We need to prepare students for jobs in burgeoning industries like medical technology, transportation technology, and computer technology.

It makes little sense to train a student with yesterday's tools for tomorrow's jobs. We need the funding to assure that the machinery, the computers, the software that we have in our career and technical education programs is the same that students will use on the job.

First and foremost, we need more funding that is targeted and directed to make strong career technical education programs that reflect the needs of the current workforce and the anticipated needs of the future workforce. This funding must not come at the expense of other ongoing K-12 and community college programs.

While funding for these programs should be part of the regular school calculations, most of the remaining CTE classes are funded by categorical sources, including the federal Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act – and those federal funds could be cut by as much as 44.3% by 2012. About 98% of those cuts would hit CTE programs that support secondary and community college CTE career training programs.

Instead of expanding these career and technical education programs, California has been cutting them back. An unintended consequence of high academic standards and the California High School Exit Exam has reduced the focus on the benefits provided by career and technical education.

About 75% of high school technology programs have disappeared since the early 1980s. The State Department of Education reports that the number of CTE high school courses has declined from 40,000 in the late 1980s to about 24,000 in 2005-2006.

Since 1950, 75% of high school industrial arts programs have been eliminated as have about 90% of exploratory industrial arts programs in junior high schools. Only three college campuses offer teacher credential programs in Industrial Arts.

Ironically, research indicates that Career Technical Education may be an important pathway to better academic performance and a tonic for the state's dropout rate. In fact, career and technical education provide a reason for many students who are currently dropping out to stay in school. These programs are important because they keep students in school and because they provide students with a marketable skill.

Some 65% of career and technical education students maintain grade point averages of 2.5 or higher. About 95% graduate from high school. After a one-year period, at-risk students boosted their GPAs from 1.2 to 2.3 after participating in career and technical education programs.

What is the secret for creating 21st Century Education – a school curriculum that balances academic achievement with a rich selection of career technical education (CTE) courses? Both hands-on and brains-on education should be valued. Career technical and academic programs should complement rather than conflict with each other.

Throughout California, schools are working to achieve this blend of career and technical classes and core subjects. The integration of career technical courses with core academic classes requires stakeholders to consider several critical questions:

1. Do the curriculum demands (concentration on the A-G college entrance requirements) at the high school level restrict student access to career technical education (CTE) programs?
2. Has the elimination of career and technical education courses at the middle school and high school levels impacted the high school drop-out rate?
3. Should the A-G requirements be expanded to include career and technical education courses that meet "rigorous academic standards"?
4. Is it in the interest of the citizens and students of California to require that the primary focus of the public school system be the preparation of all students for entrance to the California university system?
5. Should career and technical education courses be required for graduation from high school?
6. Does the California State University system have the capacity to provide credential programs for new career and technical education teachers?
7. Does the present emphasis on "remedial" classes to raise the school's test scores eliminate the opportunity of students to take career and technical education courses?
8. If the restoration of career and technical education is important, how will the state provide the funding to restore or replace facilities for career and technical education programs?
9. Should college-bound students have the opportunity to take career and technical education courses?

10. Should California support a career and technical education system that is articulated with the Adult Education, Regional Occupation Programs and the California Community College System?

A collaborative effort should be established and maintained among local schools, private employers, and policy committees to meet specific job and employment training needs. The California Teachers Association believes three bold steps can restore the balance – and perhaps tip the scales to the advantage of schools and students:

- Expand the availability of CTE courses and ensure the students receive a rigorous curriculum, provided in a sequence of courses which prepare them for career or higher education. Support innovation by expanding the Academy Partnership Grants.
- Increase the pool of available teachers, particularly from industry with recent experience, who can provide instruction in the latest technical programs.
- Create new, intense and rapid alternative certification programs to help them translate existing skills into classroom skills and provide an experienced teacher as a mentor.

The essence of it is that we are not looking at going back to the past. What we are looking at is moving forward to a future. Our career and technical education programs need to be state of the art and aimed at the industrial demand that is there.

Among these materials I am leaving with you today is a copy of CTA's White Paper on Career and Technical Education. It will spell out CTA's policies in detail and provide you with additional information about our perspective on this important issue.

Thank you.

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