

Opening Statement of Rep. Kevin Kiley (R-CA), Chairman  
Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee  
“From Classroom to Career: Strengthening Skills Pathways Through  
CTE”

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(As prepared for delivery)

The notion that every student should go to college was perhaps well-intended. But it was never compatible with the needs of young people or of our country.

While every student should have the opportunity to go to college, this is not the only path to success. Thankfully, in recent years we have seen a renewed commitment to supporting alternate pathways – in particular, career and technical education.

While CTE is not new, its value has often been overlooked or dismissed in recent decades as the fallback option for students who don’t fit into the traditional academic mold. Today, there is no denying its critical role in preparing the workforce for a skills-forward economy. CTE is for students who want to build, create, and lead. It is for students who learn best by doing.

Over 8 million secondary school students nationwide are already participating in CTE programs. They’re learning to design, weld, code, and provide lifesaving care. These students gain hands-on experience that leads to good and stable jobs.

The results speak for themselves. Students who concentrate in CTE, completing more than two credits, graduate at rates above 90 percent, significantly higher than the national average. CTE participation also boosts academic achievement, and even promotes college readiness itself.

More than 40 states allow students to take CTE courses through dual enrollment programs at technical or community colleges, enabling them to earn college credits in high school. This can lead to associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, and industry-recognized credentials. Students are eager for these opportunities. Eighty-five percent of recent high school graduates took at least one CTE course.

CTE classrooms are filled with future engineers, health care professionals, business owners, and innovators. It is not a second option, it's a pathway to success in high school, higher education, and the workforce.

How we prepare our students today will determine not just their future success, but our nation's economic strength. Job creators across the country are struggling to find workers who have the right skills. This present and growing gap threatens our nation's economic competitiveness. Employers are looking for candidates who can demonstrate skills—not just degrees—to meet the demands of an economy with 7.2 million open jobs.

In a dynamically changing economy, we must reimagine student programs to meet the demands of today's and tomorrow's labor market. And that is what CTE is all about: by design, it equips students with skills that match real job opportunities, providing pathways to immediate employment. That means fewer unfilled jobs, more career-ready graduates, and a stronger economy.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses who have built exceptional career and technical education programs, and to discussing how we can strengthen and expand their work at schools across America.