

## **A Vision for the Future: Oklahoma's Career and Technology Education Career Clusters Design**

### **The Challenge**

Oklahoma's economy is fundamentally changing. This new, fast paced economy is technology-driven, knowledge-based, and global. These changes in Oklahoma's economic landscape are forcing us to rethink the design and delivery of career and technology education. These changes will enhance our ability to help all Oklahomans succeed in the workplace, education, and life

Oklahoma employers face increasing challenges in finding workers who possess the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in their jobs. As documented by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, key industries, such as health care, manufacturing, and aerospace, are looking for workers who bring substantial knowledge and skills to their work, along with the desire for continuous career growth. The stakes are high for Oklahoma. We must engage every potential worker at all stages of their careers. Our system must help students prepare for careers and provide them reskilling opportunities throughout their careers.

The following state and national initiatives are helping to reshape the environment in which we operate. These initiatives all contain the common thread of increased accountability as well as the realization that education is a true partner in economic development.

The **Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development (GCWED)** puts unprecedented emphasis on creating a globally competitive workforce. Specifically, GCWED (a) creates a sense of urgency about the importance of workforce development; (b) improves productivity and competitiveness of Oklahoma's workforce; (c) builds a stronger education and training pipeline to support new and existing industries, and (d) places an emphasis on key industry clusters that provide optimum opportunities for high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand careers.

**Oklahoma's Economic Development Generating Excellence (EDGE)** project combines the strengths of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, the Oklahoma CareerTech System, common education, higher education, business, industry, government, and citizenry to create an economic development blueprint that sustains growth. An integral part of EDGE is an educational model that creates a skilled, high-tech workforce.

The **Alliance Initiative** allows students to begin working on a college degree while still in high school. Its goals are: (1) get more high school students into college, (2) get more adults to continue their education or begin college, (3) expand access to postsecondary education, and (4) efficiently use federal, state and local resources.

The new **Carl Perkins** legislation shifts focus away from narrow job-specific training to preparing students to be ready for employment in the modern workplace, for success in postsecondary education and for life-long career mobility. It also places greater emphasis on high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand careers.

**No Child Left Behind**, is based upon four basic principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work. The accountability standards for No Child Left Behind and the new Carl Perkins have similar guidelines.

**Achieving Classroom Excellence (ACE)** will require a college preparatory/work-ready curriculum for all students. ACE will also soon require Oklahoma students to take more end-of-instruction exams and pass four of these seven exams.

Our challenge is to ensure that the Oklahoma CareerTech system builds on its successful past while at the same time takes the necessary steps to be responsive to the needs of an ever-changing economy. Our system must provide a workforce that is robust, aligned to economic development initiatives, and responsive to the current and future needs of employers and students.

## **Our Solution**

The Oklahoma Career and Technology Education system is transitioning its educational delivery design to the Oklahoma Career Clusters framework. This framework is based on the National Career Clusters model and incorporates additional components to meet the specific needs of Oklahoma's unique delivery system. The Oklahoma Career Clusters framework allows us to meet the needs of both short term and full time students in all areas of our delivery system and prepares all students for challenging technical training, rigorous academics, and life-long career preparation. It will increase our students' ability to transition within our system, and to postsecondary education. This design also increases our system's ability to meet employer expectations for a high-skilled workforce that contributes to the economic vitality of our state. Ultimately, our system will become industry-focused, student-centered, and performance-driven.

To guide our transition, we are creating the Oklahoma Career Clusters Framework that aligns our curricula and standards to the 16 Career Clusters, their associated pathways and knowledge and skills statements. The Oklahoma model incorporates career majors and courses that are aligned to industry credentials. To accomplish this step, we are realigning our existing programs to a sequence of courses that are based upon industry-identified knowledge, skills, and credentials. Once completed, new instructional tools and resources will be developed to close the competency gaps within our existing course offerings.

In order to effectively implement the new instructional framework it is necessary to examine existing core business processes to ensure alignment. To begin evaluating and revising our core business processes we have created project teams that will be seeking input from technology centers, comprehensive schools, skills centers, and our educational and economic development partners. We are currently working on a comprehensive implementation timeline for each core business process.

The core business processes that must be addressed include:

- CareerTech Information System (CTIS) Implementation
- Programs to Course Transition
- Accreditation and Evaluation Standards
- Financial Aid Requirements
- Performance Measures
- Career Major Approval Process
- Career and Technology Education Rules
- Funding Structure
- Professional Development
- Communication and Marketing
- Carl Perkins IV
- Strategic Planning

Revised: March 8, 2007