

**Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the German Federal  
Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)**

**“Skilling the Future: VET and Workplace Learning for Economic Success”**

***Parallel Working Group 1 - “VET & Higher Education: Transition Pathways, Innovative Blends”***

**Opening Panel Remarks by Dr. Brenda Dann-Messier, U.S. Assistant Secretary for  
Vocational & Adult Education**

**Friday, July 5, 2013 - 11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. | Leipzig, Germany**

Good morning. It’s an honor to join my colleagues on this distinguished panel, and a pleasure to participate in *any* conversation moderated by Simon Field! Simon is a true friend to our efforts, and I’m especially grateful for his tremendous work in producing the Learning for Jobs and Skills Beyond School reports.

The concepts this working group will consider – *transition, integration, and innovation* – have never mattered more to our field.

In today’s knowledge economy, we must provide students with seamless transitions – in other words, with clear pathways and expansive options – as they pursue their education and career goals.

In the United States, old distinctions between “college-bound” and “non-college bound” students are giving way to the understanding that, to succeed, every student needs some form of postsecondary education. And, today’s marketplace requires workers to keep “skilling up” throughout their lifetimes – whether it’s acquiring basic literacy, or taking targeted training to obtain new skills and certifications, or pursuing a higher degree at the associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s or even the doctorate level.

Today’s realities also require a greater integration of rigorous academic and technical coursework. All successful employees must possess a blend of academic skills, occupation-specific skills, and more general career skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork and communication.

All of this calls for fresh thinking, and a commitment to innovation. These are the points we’re grappling with as we seek to reinvent career and technical education, or CTE, for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

And, as I noted this morning, these are common elements that cut across our Blueprint for Career and Technical Education, our new High School Redesign program, and several related investments that President Obama recently proposed.

One promising integration model is the career academy, which typically has several features. A career academy is a secondary school program, usually organized as a school-within-a-school to provide a supportive, personalized learning environment. Academies offer a combined academic and technical curriculum, including CTE courses for which students receive academic credit. In addition, students participate in work-based learning and career exploration activities, offered in

partnership with local employers. The curriculum is organized around a career theme – such as Finance, Information Technology, Health Sciences, or Engineering – aligned with the State's college-and career-ready standards and with postsecondary entrance requirements. Groups like the National Academy Foundation in the United States have developed a strong track record and created successful templates for this approach.

Now, our goal is to accelerate learning, even as we enrich it with career content. That means encouraging transition models – like dual enrollment and early college programs – that bridge high school and postsecondary, and enable students to earn college credits or degrees during high school. Our plan for transforming CTE includes measures to change the way that programs are funded - moving from separate competitions for secondary and postsecondary CTE efforts, and instead rewarding consortia of secondary and postsecondary institutions, in partnership with business and labor.

In addition to programs that help students bridge high school and postsecondary, we're also exploring ways to help postsecondary students complete their degrees faster, and move more easily between two-year and four-year degree programs. We are also encouraging programs that help adult learners to move much more quickly and smoothly from acquiring basic skills, to intermediate skills, and on to postsecondary education and training programs.

Let me close with two innovative examples – one at the high school end of the spectrum, and one for adult learners.

The Pathways in Technology Early College High School, or “P-TECH”, offers students a blended high school and college curriculum that focuses on science, technology, engineering and math, and equips students with essential workplace skills like collaboration and communication. Taking students from grades 9 through 14 in a seamless pathway, and ensuring that they are equally prepared for success in higher education and the working world, the first P-TECH program began in New York City as a partnership between IBM, the city school district, and the local community college.

P-TECH graduates receive both a high school diploma and a free Associate in Applied Science degree in Computer Systems Technology or Electromechanical Engineering Technology. They're also the first to be considered for IBM entry-level positions. Business advisors help keep the curriculum aligned with evolving industry needs and standards, and each P-TECH student has an IBM mentor who helps teach workplace skills and serves as a role model. Based on strong outcomes in New York, this framework is being replicated elsewhere in the country.

In contrast, Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program, or I-BEST, applies the principles of transition, integration and innovation to engage adult students in career pathways that offer college-level professional-technical credits. I-BEST refutes the belief that learners must complete all basic education before they start a job-training program or begin earning

college credit. Instead, this nationally-recognized model works to boost students' literacy and work skills simultaneously, and allows them to begin earning college credit immediately.

In Washington's 34 community and technical colleges, I-BEST pairs workforce training with adult basic education or English as a Second Language coursework, so students learn literacy and workplace skills at the same time. Adult literacy and CTE instructors work together to develop curriculum, assess the students, and deliver instruction, including real-world scenarios. The community college partners also provide the transition and support services that adults need to persist. I-BEST launched in 2006, and now offers more than 170 approved programs.

To summarize, we can picture a person's education and career experience, over the course of a lifetime, as a network of roads and highways, with a variety of interim stops along the way. Our 21<sup>st</sup> Century CTE system, then, must offer clearer signposts, more on-ramps, and faster and more direct routes, for that person to attain a high-quality education and good jobs. Easing transitions from learning to work and back again, as necessary, is what an effective career pathways system can do – whether a student is a 17-year-old or a 47-year-old. Of course, these pathways also provide employers with the highly-trained workforce they need to compete – and are an effective way for companies to keep upgrading the skills of their workers, as their business needs grow and change.