

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE  
BILL ANALYSIS**

**Bill Number:** SB 496

**52nd Legislature, 1st Session, 2015**

**Tracking Number:** .199793.1

**Short Title:** Career Tech Education Courses as Electives

**Sponsor(s):** Senator John M. Sapien and Others

**Analyst:** Christina McCorquodale

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**Bill Summary:**

SB 496 amends the *Public School Code* to require school districts to offer career technical education (CTE) courses as electives for meeting high school graduation requirements. The bill also:

- requires the Public Education Department (PED) to promulgate rules to allow students who complete an industry-recognized credential, certificate, or degree to receive a maximum of 1.0 in the calculation of the student’s grade point average; and
- defines the following terms:
  - “career and technical education” (sometimes called “vocational education”) means organized programs offering a sequence of courses, including technical education and applied technology education that are related to the preparation of individuals for paid or unpaid employment requiring an industry-recognized credential, certificate, or degree;
  - “career and technical education course” means a course with content that provides technical knowledge, skills, and competency-based applied learning and that aligns with educational standards and expectations as defined in rule;
  - “career cluster” means a grouping of occupations in industry sectors based on recognized commonalities that provide an organizing tool for developing instruction within the educational system; and
  - “career pathways” means a sub-grouping used as an organizing tool for curriculum design and instruction of occupation and career specialties that share a set of common knowledge and skills for career success.

**Fiscal Impact:**

SB 496 does not have an appropriation.

**Fiscal Issues:**

The Higher Education Department (HED) analysis indicates that there could be some possible costs to both high schools and colleges in making CTE courses available to students if such courses are not already offered. However, PED analysis notes that the majority of New Mexico high schools currently offer CTE courses (see “Background, *Clear Definition of Career*

*Pathways,*” below) and many of those schools received federal funds through the *Carl D. Perkins Act* to support their career tech programs.

### **Substantive Issues:**

The PED analysis notes that New Mexico students who completed three or more CTE courses during high school (also known as CTE concentrators) are more likely to graduate than other New Mexico students. In school year 2013-2014 the statewide graduation rate was 68.5 percent, while students with a career technical concentration had a graduation rate of 89.6 percent (see **Table 1**, attached).

A recent study of New Mexico’s CTE programs by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) concluded that New Mexico needs a clear definition of high-quality career pathways (see Background, *Clear Definition of Career Pathways,*” below). Included in the bill are definitions that clearly define CTE as it relates to a “career pathway” and or “career cluster.”

The College and Career Readiness Bureau at PED has established the New Mexico Career and Technical Education Standards for grades 8-12<sup>1</sup>. These standards include benchmarks with applied language arts and reading, and applied mathematics as it may pertain to a particular career pathway. However, there does not appear to be an indication that these standards are aligned with New Mexico content standards.

The PED analysis of two related bills introduced during the 2015 session – HB 308, *School Workforce Assessment System*, and SB 157, *High School Workforce Assessment* – notes that New Mexico does not currently specify an acceptable workplace readiness exam or appropriate cut scores adding that the Workforce Solutions Department (WSD) would need to coordinate with PED to ensure that the assessment system that WSD develops, measures appropriate reading and math ability as aligned to New Mexico content standards. Even so, PED suggests the ACT WorkKeys (see “Background, *ACT WorkKeys Assessment,*” below) which the WSD offers as a possibility for the nationwide assessment system in both bills.

ACT WorkKeys assesses:

- skill level requirements for specific jobs;
- applied mathematics used for reasoning, critical thinking, and problem-solving techniques for work-related problems;
- reading text for information; and
- varying levels of complexity.

In addition, ACT WorkKeys (Reading for Information and Applied Math) has been aligned to scores on the College Readiness Benchmarks on the ACT Reading and Mathematics<sup>2</sup>. The benchmarks reflect the ACT scores students need to earn to have at least a 75 percent or greater chance of obtaining a course grade of C or better. Level 5 of ACT WorkKeys assessment for reading and math is comparable to these benchmarks. However, because ACT WorkKeys and

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<sup>1</sup> To view the New Mexico Career and Technical Education Standards, please visit [http://ped.state.nm.us/ped/CCR\\_index.html](http://ped.state.nm.us/ped/CCR_index.html).

<sup>2</sup> Level 5 in WorkKeys Reading for Information and Applied Math are comparable with the College Readiness Benchmarks in Reading and Math, based upon analysis of Illinois high school criteria. For more information, go to [http://www.innovate-educate.org/files/uploads/SummaryReady\\_For\\_CollegeReadyForWorkStudy.pdf](http://www.innovate-educate.org/files/uploads/SummaryReady_For_CollegeReadyForWorkStudy.pdf).

the ACT do not measure the same things and are not perfectly correlated, scores on the two tests are not interchangeable.

## **Background:**

### ***College and Workplace Readiness***

In current law, the provisions relating to the statewide college and workplace readiness system require the components to test:

- in grade 9, a short-cycle diagnostic assessment in reading, language arts, and mathematics to be locally administered in the fall and at least two additional times during the year;
- in grade 10, a short-cycle diagnostic assessment in reading, language arts, and mathematics that also serves as an early indicator of college readiness, to be locally administered at least three times during the year; and
- in grade 11, in the fall, one or more of the following chosen by the student:
  - a college placement assessment;
  - a readiness assessment; or
  - an alternative demonstration of competency using standards-based indicators.

### ***Clear Definition of Career Pathways***

During the December 2014 interim meeting, the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) heard testimony on a preliminary analysis conducted by the SREB. The report indicated that New Mexico needs a clear definition of high-quality career pathways that connect high school and postsecondary studies with 21<sup>st</sup> Century job opportunities. The Senior Vice President of SREB informed the committee on the following CTE attributes for New Mexico:

- high school students have access to at least 320 CTE courses;
- over 130,000 students were enrolled during school year 2013-2014 in one or more CTE courses;
- approximately 46 percent of seniors in school year 2013-2014 will complete four or more CTE courses; and
- not enough students are completing a sequence of four CTE courses in a planned, structured career pathway.

The SREB representative summarized the preliminary analysis by stating that, while there was a sufficient quantity of courses, they were not a well-defined set of expectations for courses that were linked to postsecondary study and employment opportunities. He further noted that most of the courses appeared to be at the introductory level, although there were over 130,000 students enrolled in CTE courses. He added that the analysis also indicated the following:

- small schools have limited capacity to offer quality career pathways;
- few students take advanced/capstone CTE courses or participate in work-based learning experiences;
- online and dual credit CTE courses are limited, introductory, and often are not part of a structured career pathway; and

- fewer than 400 high school students earned credible industry credentials or licensures in 2013.

The SREB representative further noted that New Mexico not only should clearly define a career pathway but also should include a rigorous program that is aligned with employment opportunities with such features as:

- rigorous, relevant, career pathways;
- college- and career-readiness standards in literacy and math;
- assessments of technical and workplace readiness that are linked to more advanced certifications;
- increased number of young adults earning credentials by age 25;
- restructuring low-performing high schools with low graduation rates and create a guidance system for career information, exploration, and advisement; and
- attracting, preparing, and retaining high-quality CTE teachers.

Finally, the SREB representative recommended that New Mexico provide all high school students in the many diverse regions of the state with access to high-quality career pathways that lead to advanced credentials and good jobs. The state can use various policies and incentives to encourage districts, postsecondary institutions, and employers to develop career pathways that include:

- access to early advanced credential programs or early college programs that will enable them to enroll in occupational programs;
- offer high-quality, web-based CTE courses; and
- establish in policy a definition of what constitutes a career pathway/program of study.

### ***ACT WorkKeys Assessment***

ACT WorkKeys is an assessment system designed to measure the skill that employers have identified as crucial to success in today’s work environment. Educators can use ACT WorkKeys to assess whether students are gaining the foundational skills necessary for success in the workplace and to identify necessary curricular changes.

There are three components to ACT WorkKeys, which can be used independently but are designed to be used together:

1. skills assessments: ACT WorkKeys assessments measure “foundational workplace skills” in the 10 areas of applied mathematics, applied technology, business writing, listening, locating information, observation, readiness, reading for information, teamwork, and writing. The assessments are available in both computer-based and paper-based formats;
2. job analysis: the WorkKeys system includes processes to determine what types of skills are needed for success in a particular job. The most intensive process is called job profiling, which involves focus groups and employee collaboration. The types of jobs that have been profiled by WorkKeys include manufacturing, healthcare, law enforcement, hospitality, and a range of white-collar professional jobs such as accountants and Web masters; and

3. training: ACT offers a variety of training options, many of which focus on WorkKeys skills. In addition, ACT certifies training programs offered by other organizations that align with the WorkKeys goals.

According to WSD, 575 students have taken at least one of the WorkKeys assessments.

**Committee Referrals:**

SEC/SPAC

**Related Bills:**

SB 157 *High School Workforce Assessment System*

SB 217 *Individual Choice on Some School Tests*

HB 15 *Limit School Days for Statewide Tests*

HB 129 *Clarify School Test Individual Choice*

HB 178a *Career Technical Education Courses & Terms (Identical)*

HB 308 *School Workforce Assessment System*