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Testimony

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**U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Education and Labor
Hearing on "Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary
Education Act of 1965"**

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Chairman Miller, Ranking Member McKeon and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of career and technical education professionals in the United States, thank you for the invitation to present testimony today. CTE is a major enterprise within the United States' P-16 education system. More than 95 percent of high school students take at least one CTE course during their high school career, and about one third of high school students take a concentration of three or more related CTE courses before they graduate.

In addition to CTE courses offered within most of the nation's more than 16,000 typical high schools, there are approximately 1,000 regional CTE centers that offer more intensive CTE programs preparing students for further education, and in some cases for direct entry into the workforce. A large number of high school reform strategies and new small schools employ interest-based programs, including CTE, as a way to increase motivation and student engagement. Further about one third of all students in postsecondary education are considered to be in postsecondary career and technical education programs.

Given the magnitude of the CTE enterprise in secondary and postsecondary education, it is vital that CTE educators and leaders be active participants in discussions about how to improve schools for the needs of the 21st century, and the discussion about No Child Left Behind. We realize you have put much time and thought into the proposed bill and look forward to working with the Committee as NCLB is reauthorized. We view NCLB as a very important law related to ensuring the United States' future economic competitiveness, as well as the vehicle that ensures students are able to meet their own personal education and workforce goals.

Since our time is limited today and the turnaround time for comment has been short, I am focusing my comments on a limited number of issues related to high school reform and workforce readiness. However, ACTE has been thinking about the reauthorization for some time and has produced several sets of recommendations that inform this discussion. I am attaching the full set of our NCLB recommendations and the Executive Summary of our high school reform position paper as addendums to my testimony.

Graduation Promise Fund

ACTE advocates for clearly focusing American high schools on the goal of preparing *every* student for full participation in a spectrum of college opportunities, meaningful work, career advancement, and active citizenship. We call upon leaders to make needed changes in school culture, instructional strategies and organizational priorities that will support this new purpose

We are very pleased that your bill includes a new Graduation Promise Fund for high schools with the lowest graduation rates to support school-wide improvement activities.

For far too long NCLB has provided support primarily to elementary schools. Secondary schools have been “left behind” and I believe that is one of the contributing reasons we see U.S. student performance stagnate and fall as these learners get closer to graduation. As a nation, we have not focused the time and attention necessary related to this issue of quality secondary schools.

ACTE’s high school reform position paper entitled “Reinventing the American High School for the 21st Century” includes a set of nine recommendations that we believe are critical to improving the system. The recommendations recognize that teaching and learning in the United States must change if we are to have the skilled workforce required to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. An important facet of this change includes a focus on the technical and “soft” skills that students need in addition to the basic academic knowledge that is required in the workforce.

I want to emphasize this point. A recent report issued by ACT entitled “Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different” provides empirical evidence that the levels of readiness that high school graduates need to be prepared for college and for workforce training programs are comparable. Further, the report shows that both academic and technical skills can be acquired through rigorous high school courses, regardless of the context (academic or career focused) within which they are taught.

Indeed Mr. Chairman, I sometimes worry that we are focusing only on academic rigor without giving equal consideration to the context and delivery of this knowledge or the workforce skills that students will need in the 21st Century. Career and technical education is directly connected to the needs of business and industry. And many of these programs are leading the way on how to incorporate both academic and technical skills into secondary programs.

Postsecondary and Workplace Readiness

In addition to the Graduation Promise Fund, ACTE commends you for including a new section in the legislation (Section 1111A) focused on Postsecondary and Workplace Readiness. This language provides funding incentives to states and localities to ensure vertical alignment from grade to grade and with what students should know in order to be successful in postsecondary education and the workplace.

ACTE believes the addition of this language begins to address our call to “require states to develop content standards, assessments, and teacher quality standards that are aligned with postsecondary and industry standards,” a recommendation included in another of our position papers, “Expanding Opportunities: Postsecondary Career and Technical Education and Preparing Tomorrow’s Workforce.” We believe this new section is affirmation that alignment of secondary, postsecondary, and workforce standards is critical to ensure a competitive workforce. It only makes sense that schools and industry improve communication so that education is a continuum and a seamless pipeline for entering the workforce. We are hopeful that states will take advantage of this new source of funding and ACTE stands prepared to help support states as they

incorporate this important provision of the law. If schools are not providing students with the skills needed to enter the workforce, we have failed.

Academic and Skills Integration

While the Graduation Promise Fund and Postsecondary and Workplace Readiness additions are a good start, I hope the Committee will consider additional language that encourages academic and technical skills integration. Incentives should be provided in the bill for research and dissemination of best practices related to this issue. Such integration provides relevance of core academics for many students who are at risk of dropping out because they have become disengaged.

Students at schools with highly integrated rigorous academic and CTE programs have significantly higher student achievement in reading, mathematics and science than do students at schools with less integrated programs, as reported by the Southern Regional Education Board. The 2004 National Assessment of Vocational Education (NAVE) Final Report found that occupational concentrators increased their 12th grade test scores on the National Assessment of Educational Programs (NAEP) by 8 scale points in reading and 11 point in math, while student who took little or no career and technical education course work increased their reading on NAEP by only 4 points and showed no improvement in mat achievement.

Multiple Indicators

I commend the Committee for tackling the difficult issue of multiple indicators. I realize there is a lot of concern about how to incorporate multiple measures into the current NCLB accountability provisions. ACTE believes that multiple assessments offer a better picture of student achievement than a single assessment. Although this is a difficult task, the new NCLB must identify ways to incorporate these multiple measures of student progress.

ACTE strongly believes that multiple measures should allow the use of CTE credentials and measurements. In addition, our recommendations ask that NCLB give schools credit, and incorporate into accountability, the learning that takes place in work-based and other contextual types of education that is gained outside of the traditional classroom. NCLB is setting the parameters for what is important for students to learn and clearly, skills in addition to core academics are just as important. Explicit language allowing states to use such credentials and measurements is important and would improve the bill.

A survey performed in the spring of 2006 by the Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills and the Society for Human Resource Management indicates that too many of our students are not prepared for the workplace. The survey indicates that over one-half of new workers are deficiently

prepared in the most important skills: Oral and Written Communications, Professionalism/Work Ethic, and Critical Thinking/Problem Solving. In fact, this report indicates that these skills are more important to employers than basic levels of knowledge. I want to be clear to note that the report is not saying that basic core academic skills are not important, but that these “soft skills” are more important for employers.

The report notes that this ill-preparedness comes at a particularly inopportune time for Americans, a time when baby-boomers like you and I, Chairman Miller and Ranking Member McKeon, are retiring and leaving the workforce. If we do not consider student performance with relation to technical skills and the “soft skills” that students need in order to perform in the workplace, we are falling short.

Graduation Rates

ACTE acknowledges the need for consistent definitions related to graduation and completion. Although we would rather see state development of a common definition of graduation we recognize the difficulty of this endeavor. We also would ask that the new NCLB not make it a disincentive for schools to reenter students who have dropped out of school. CTE’s focus on applied learning reengages many high school dropouts who come back into the system – I call them “drop in” students. The law should support schools that do this important work.

Our recommendations call for a definition of graduation by subject and skills competency rather than by “seat time.” ACTE recommends basing graduation on skills competency that is linked to workforce needs and postsecondary standards rather than on timeframe of “standard number of years” as currently defined in NCLB.

Many CTE programs are leading the way with regard to concurrent enrollment and middle college programs but the rigidity of NCLB with regard to the strict timeline by which students must graduate threatens to hinder such innovative initiatives. For instance, some students do not receive their high school diploma until after their fifth year of study; however, these students are taking five years to graduate because they also are earning an associate degree during that same time. This is but one example of why we should measure competency rather than “seat time.”

While we appreciate the inclusion of the option for a 5 year graduate rate in the draft legislation, we are concerned about the complexity related to these provisions and hope that does not deter schools from implementing the option.

Guidance and Career Development

Lastly but certainly not least, I strongly urge you to review what the draft bill includes in terms of guidance and career development. Links to career exploration help to provide

relevancy and understanding about why core academic knowledge is so important for students' future postsecondary and workforce aspirations. A cursory review of the draft legislation indicates more needs to be included in this area. I could only find one reference in the bill to "career counseling."

The most recent iteration of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins) includes a strong link to career development through the new requirement that states must include at least one "program of study." These "programs of study" are very similar to and build on, positive initiatives already underway in CTE programs around the county such as Tech Prep, career pathways, career academies, and career clusters. The Perkins language will be of great benefit to CTE students, but similar language should be considered for NCLB for the benefit of all students.

ACTE has strongly supported the development of individual graduation plans for all students. These plans map a defined program of student on how to reach academic and career goals and are an important component of providing individualized instruction tailored to the unique academic needs of each student.

In closing, I would like to again thank the Committee for including the career and technical educator's voice as part of the NCLB discussion. ACTE believes there are distinct purposes and reasons to have both NCLB and Perkins as two separate and distinct laws, but there is much more that can be done to align the two pieces of legislation to ensure that both academic and technical skills attainment is provided to all students.

The Committee has "moved in the right direction" with the development of the NCLB draft bill. I urge you and the other members on the Committee to take the time necessary to fully explore the effect the new proposals in the legislation and to put into place a new law that builds upon and improves the 2001 legislation.

I am happy to answer any questions.

The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) is the nation's largest education association dedicated to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for successful careers. For more information, contact: Steve DeWitt (sdewitt@acteonline.org) or Alisha Hyslop (ahyslop@acteonline.org), ACTE, 1410 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314, (703) 683-3111, (703) 683-7424 (Fax), www.acteonline.org.

Recommendations for the Reauthorization of *No Child Left Behind*

Career and technical education (CTE) is a major and long-standing enterprise within the United States' education system that has evolved to meet 21st century needs. More than 95 percent of students take at least one CTE course during high school, and the strengths and resources of CTE play an important role in improving outcomes for all students. Building on these strengths and resources, the Association for Career and Technical Education presents the following recommendations for the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act. We urge Congress to incorporate these principles into the reauthorized legislation in order to support enhanced student achievement. While not specifically addressed in the recommendations, it is important to note the relationship between adequate funding and the law's promise. Successful NCLB implementation will be jeopardized by merely redirecting funds from existing quality programs or underfunding new initiatives. A true commitment to both improved policy and adequate resources must be adopted if NCLB is to be successful.

Recommendation 1:

Integrate Academic and Technical Education to Better Engage and Prepare Students for Their Futures

- Align NCLB to the Perkins Act through the use of programs of study, and encourage schools to use CTE courses to support students working to meet academic proficiency.
- Give schools credit, and incorporate into accountability, the learning that takes place in work-based and other contextual types of education that is gained outside of the traditional classroom.
- Require states to develop content standards, assessments, and teacher quality standards that are aligned with postsecondary and industry standards.
- Provide schools incentives to integrate academic coursework such as math, science and language arts, with CTE coursework.
- Provide funding for state- and professional organization-led initiatives for gathering, organizing, and disseminating integrated lesson plans and curriculum frameworks.

Recommendation 2:

Support Comprehensive Guidance and Career Development Strategies to Assist Students in Determining Clear Pathways to Postsecondary and Workforce Goals

- Recognize the importance and need for leadership and policy to implement comprehensive guidance programs throughout the P-16 system.
- Ensure adequate resources for career development and planning across the education continuum.
- Encourage schools to develop individual graduation plans for each student that map a defined program of study on how to reach academic and career goals.

Recommendation 3:

Increase the Focus on Secondary School Completion through Comprehensive Dropout Prevention and Reentry Strategies

- Provide incentives and eliminate disincentives for schools to register “drop in” students – students that are returning to continue their education.
- Develop a consistent definition of secondary school “dropout.”
- Support research and development for flexible re-entry and completion programs, including those that employ career development and CTE strategies.
- Ensure federal flexibility for reporting “extended-time” graduation rates.
- Require schools to disaggregate and report dropout and graduation data.
- Put additional emphasis on secondary school completion rates within calculations for Adequate Yearly Progress.

Recommendation 4:

Ensure that Highly Effective Educators are Supported, and Available Across the Curriculum in All Schools

- Require that federal professional development funding support integrated academics and contextual teaching strategies for academic teachers and CTE teachers.
- Ensure that federal professional development funding specifically focus on supporting administrators in their role as educational leaders and creating an environment where rigor and relevance spans across all course offerings.
- Invest in research on curriculum structure and teaching methodology.
- Maintain flexibility in defining highly qualified teachers, such as through the use of provisions like HOUSSE, to ensure that schools are able to recruit and retain professionals from a variety of backgrounds and through alternative pathways.

Recommendation 5:

Improve Adequate Yearly Progress and Accountability Provisions to More Accurately Reflect Student Learning Progress

- Give schools credit for growth in student achievement, even if AYP is not fully met.
- Allow the use of multiple assessments to measure student progress, including the use of CTE credentials and measurements.
- Define graduation by subject and skills competency rather than by “seat time.”
- Focus accountability more on incentives rather than sanctions.

Recommendation 6:

Provide Support and Incentives for Innovation, Replication and Improvement

- Promote dual and concurrent enrollment programs for secondary-postsecondary CTE programs, which enable students to accelerate learning while gaining technical skills.
- Ensure dissemination of best practices so that all schools, districts and states have access to successful strategies and programs that can be replicated.
- Support the development of robust, dynamic and integrated data systems that provide a clear picture of each student’s educational progress.

- Create incentive grants for states and state consortia to focus on multi-pronged high school redesign strategies, and promote close linkages at the state and local levels with CTE strategies.
- Encourage better links between secondary and postsecondary education such as improved alignment between high school assessments/exit exams and college entrance exams.

Addendum 2

Executive Summary ***Reinventing the American High School for the 21st Century***

The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), on behalf of career and technical Education (CTE) professionals in the United States, advocates for clearly focusing American high schools on the goal of preparing EVERY student for full participation in a spectrum of college opportunities, meaningful work, career advancement, and active citizenship. We call upon leaders to make needed changes in school culture, instructional strategies and organizational priorities that will support this new purpose. CTE is a major enterprise within the United States' P-16 education system. More than 95 percent of high school students take at least one CTE course during their high school career, and about one third of high school students take a concentration of three or more related CTE courses before they graduate. In addition to CTE courses offered within most of the nation's more than 16,000 typical high schools, there are approximately 1,000 regional career technology centers that offer more targeted and technology-intensive CTE programs preparing students, both young people and adults, for further education, and in some cases, for direct entry into the workforce. Further, a large number of high school reform strategies and new small schools employ interest-based programs, including CTE, as a way to increase student motivation and engagement. Given the magnitude of the CTE enterprise, it is vital that CTE educators and leaders participate in the important discussion about how to redesign American high schools for the needs of the 21st century and bring CTE's resources and areas of expertise to that discussion. In our discussions about high school redesign, we suggest a number of strengths and resources CTE can bring to the table for overall high school improvement. To provide clarity for the role of CTE, we suggest a three-fold purpose of career and technical education at the secondary school level. CTE should:

- **Support students in the acquisition of rigorous core knowledge, skills, habits and attitudes** needed for success in postsecondary education and the high-skilled workplace;
- **Engage students in specific career-related learning experiences that equip them to make well-informed decisions** about further education and training and employment opportunities; and,
- **Prepare students who may choose to enter the workforce directly after high school** with levels of skill and knowledge in a particular career area that will be valued in the marketplace. In light of the current and future challenges facing our youth, the members of ACTE believe a new working model for high school is long overdue. We make the following recommendations to help guide the reinvention of the American high school:

Recommendation 1

Establish a Clear System Goal of Career and College Readiness for All Students

All students need a strong arsenal of reading, comprehension, reasoning, problem-solving and personal skills to be ready for the world of meaningful postsecondary education and training as well as entry into the high-skilled workplace. Standards should be aligned to the demands of career and college readiness, and all students should be challenged to enroll in a rigorous college

and career readiness curriculum. Extra help, including structured transition services, should be provided to support this curriculum, and opportunities for additional advancement across broad areas should be provided. Traditional academic and CTE teachers must share the goal of preparing students for both further education and careers.

Recommendation 2

Create a Positive School Culture that Stresses Personalization in Planning and Decision-making

At a minimum, every student should be led through a process of academic and career awareness, exploration, and planning. This should include learning about the economy and career options, self-assessment for areas of interest; deeper exploration of how personal interests relate to career opportunities and gaining education and career decision-making skills; and knowledge and understanding of local, state, and national educational, occupational, and labor market opportunities, needs, and trends. Policies must be in place to ensure that career development and postsecondary planning are core activities within the high school as part of a comprehensive guidance program. Each student, and his or her parents/guardians, should develop an individualized plan for graduation and beyond that will guide the high school experience.

Recommendation 3

Create a Positive School Culture that Stresses Personalization in Relationships

Schools remain one of the best opportunities for connecting youth and adults in positive ways, giving students the sense that they are valued and cared for, and reinforcing the message that whether they succeed or fail actually matters to someone. A system goal must be to help every youth become involved in structured activity that strengthens positive relationships with peers and adults and encourages the student's sense of confidence and belonging in school. These activities could include advisory periods, smaller learning communities, co-curricular interest-based activities—such as career and technical student organizations (CTSOs)—or other activities that provide a positive adult relationship.

Recommendation 4

Dramatically Improve How and Where Academic Content is Taught

Teachers and researchers must work together to identify strategies that show promise for helping all students attain proficiency in high-level courses. As each state refines and clarifies its standards for career and college readiness, it should recognize that “academic” skills can be acquired in a variety of settings, not just the traditional academic classroom. The achievement problem is not just one of low-level course-taking; it is also related to unfocused curriculum and instructional methods that are not reaching all students. Integration of academic competencies into CTE curricula and of real-world content and applied methods and examples into traditional academic classes can raise student achievement levels and increase understanding of rigorous concepts. Flexibility must be in place for delivering academic content across the curriculum.

Recommendation 5

Create Incentives for Students to Pursue the Core Curriculum in an Interest-based Context

From across the school reform spectrum, there is ample evidence that connecting rigorous academic expectations with the relevance of an interest-based curriculum can help connect

students to learning in powerful ways. Interest-based areas can be organized around various broad themes, such as the fine arts, or more specific themes like biotechnology, pre-engineering, hospitality, and finance. There must be resources and policies in place to support the development, implementation, and review of these interest-based areas.

Recommendation 6

Support High Quality Teaching in all Content Areas

The No Child Left Behind Act creates mechanisms for assuring that every teacher in the academic core subjects is highly qualified, meaning the teacher holds a bachelor's degree or higher, grasps content at a deep level and can teach that content effectively. The crux of these standards, deep knowledge of content and skills in effective teaching methods, should apply to CTE teachers as well, including those entering the teaching profession through traditional teacher education programs and those transitioning into teaching from business and industry through alternative certification programs. CTE teachers should be able to demonstrate content mastery through a method appropriate to their areas of expertise, utilizing industry-based credentials or assessments aligned with career clusters where available. An expanded focus must be placed on professional development for all teachers in academic and technical integration and contextual teaching strategies.

Recommendation 7

Offer Flexible Learning Opportunities to Encourage Re-entry and Completion

True quality high school reform must include effective strategies to re-engage and reconnect young people who have failed or are in danger of failing to complete high school. These young people have been failed by the current high school system. With a national graduation rate of approximately 71 percent, millions of young people are out of school and grossly ill-equipped to compete in the 21st century workforce and economy. To reform high school without a strategy to re-engage these young people who have already dropped out would be to abandon them to, and accept the social costs associated with, bleak futures marked by reduced earning potential, poverty, crime, drug abuse, and early pregnancy. High schools must provide a continuum of flexible interest-based learning opportunities that utilize effective teaching methodologies and are responsive to students' varied needs and life circumstances.

Recommendation 8

Create System Incentives and Supports for Connection of CTE and High School Redesign Efforts

In many states and school districts, CTE leaders are providing the major impetus and resources for rethinking the instructional and organizational design of the traditional high school. However, in some locales, superintendents, school leaders and school reform advocates are reportedly overlooking the role of CTE in providing meaning, relevance, and experience in deeply contextualized learning of subject matter. This oversight will limit the effectiveness and impact of the high school redesign agenda. Policymakers at the federal, state and local levels should see academic and interest-based courses as complementary of one another, and create initiatives that support rich, interest-based programs to be built around a core of rigorous academic expectations.

Recommendation 9

Move Beyond “Seat-Time” and Narrowly Defined Knowledge and Skills

U.S. high schools operate on a well-established set of expectations for size, time of day and seasons of the year that programs and classes are offered, how instructional material is delivered and what constitutes success in terms of the students’ knowledge and skills. In order for our education system to adopt the new goal of getting every student ready for careers and college, we suggest a shift in focus to the underlying principles for what students learn and how we teach it, including what knowledge and skills are measured, how students are asked to demonstrate their knowledge and skills and how school is offered for all young people, particularly for the many students who are currently disengaged and leaving, or have already left, the traditional high school. Clearly, we believe that CTE courses and instructional methodologies have a place in the high school environment, and that there should not be an artificial split between academic coursework and vocational studies, nor should exposure to CTE-type coursework be delayed until late in high school or college. Rather, we believe that all coursework, with clearly articulated standards and expectations, can help build within students the mix of skills, aptitudes and attitudes they will need for success after high school. Designing American high schools around the needs of students in the present and the future requires honesty, courage, and a willingness to change familiar structures and practices in the best interests of our young people. Real change, made for the right reasons and toward the right mission, will yield dramatically better results and a more hopeful future for America’s young people and for our national economic and cultural well-being.