



Graduate School of Education & Human Development

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Embargoed until 10.29.13 12:01 a.m.
PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Megan Cotten
(301) 656-0348
megan@thehatchergroup.com

States and School Districts Use Wide Range of Assessments to Gauge Students' Career and Technical Skills, New Report Finds

Common Core has little impact to date on states' career and technical tests

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Oct. 29, 2013—While most states give one or more assessments of career readiness, technical, or employability skills to high school students, the types of tests used vary considerably across states and are sometimes decided at the school district level, according a new report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP). These career and technical assessments are distinct from the academic tests that states currently administer to all students in English language arts, math, and other subjects and from the new tests being developed by two state consortia to measure students' mastery of the Common Core State Standards.

"With so much attention being paid to what it means for students to be college- and career-ready, it is important for policymakers and the public to understand how states and school districts are defining and assessing career and technical readiness," said Maria Ferguson, CEP Executive Director. "The sheer number of assessments being used by both states and districts indicate that career readiness can mean many different things even within one state or district."

The CEP report, *Career Readiness Assessments Across the States: A Summary of Survey Findings*, offers the first broad overview of state policies for defining career readiness and assessing career and technical skills since the 2010 adoption of the Common Core. The data come from a survey conducted in the summer of 2013 of state directors of career and technical education in 46 states, counting the District of Columbia.

Among the most commonly administered career and technical assessments are national tests of applied academic and employability skills, such as ACT's WorkKeys, used in 32 of the states

surveyed, and the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, also used in 32 states. In addition, 38 states use industry-based certification and licensure exams in carpentry, cosmetology, plumbing, and many other fields. And state- or locally-developed assessments of career readiness or technical skills are used in more than one-third of the states.

In many states, the report finds, school districts or students rather than the state pay the costs of taking tests of employability skills, applied academics, or technical skills. States cover the costs associated with state-developed assessments, however.

While 45 states report that they or their districts assess students for career readiness, just 14 states have established a definition of what it means for a high school student to be career- or work-ready: Colorado, Delaware, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Dakota and Virginia. Another 20 states are in the process of developing such a definition.

While the Common Core standards will shape curriculum, instruction, and assessment for all students in the 45 states (plus D.C.) that have adopted them, results from the CEP survey, which included 40 of the adopting states, suggest the Common Core has had little impact thus far on career and technical assessments. Survey respondents in just 11 states reported that their career readiness assessments have been aligned or are currently being aligned to Common Core. Respondents in 20 states said it was too soon to know whether or how their career and technical assessments might change in response to the new standards.

“Some of this uncertainty about the impact of the Common Core may be related to the huge variety of career and technical education assessments being used and the nature of some of these assessments,” said Jennifer McMurrer, co-author of the report. “The specific technical skills assessed by an industry certification exam or a state- or locally-developed assessment linked to a particular career pathway would be inherently different from the broader skills that all students should have to be career-ready.”

The survey also includes information about how states use the results of career and technical assessments. A majority (38) of responding states reported using these results to meet the federal accountability requirements of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act, but less than half of the survey states use these results for school accountability (21 states) and/or student accountability (19 states). Only a few states (4) permit students to substitute scores on career and technical assessments for scores on the high school exit exams that students must pass in some states to receive a diploma.

“States are facing quite a few challenges with their assessments systems—even those states that have defined what it means for a high school graduate to be career- and work-ready,” said McMurrer. Nearly all of the survey states (45) are experiencing some type of challenges in assessing high school students’ career readiness or technical and employability skills. The most commonly cited challenges include funding the assessments, getting assessment results from

third party providers, and defining which career education and career readiness standards should be assessed.

The summary report can be accessed free of charge at www.cep-dc.org. Also available on this CEP website are four related papers containing additional details on the main topics covered in the summary report, including the responses of specific states; and profiles of major career and technical assessments, including information for particular states.

###

Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy at The George Washington University is a national advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent special interests. Instead, it helps citizens make sense of conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.