

# Giving a measure of support to California career tech education



AUGUST 22, 2014 BY JOHN GUENTHER

The state of California's career technical education (CTE)--and middle-class jobs here--just took step closer to getting a shot in the arm. The state Senate unanimously passed [ACR 119](#), a measure that will give a nudge toward figuring out the long-term funding problem for programs that create middle-class workers.

In the past 10 years in California, there's been a [decline in funding and enrollment in CTE programs](#), despite the median wages of workers five years after they received an associate's degree in a vocational career [being \\$66,600 compared to \\$38,500 \(PDF\)](#) for those with non-vocational associate degrees.

According to the [California EDGE Coalition](#), of the more than 17 million jobs in California, 14 percent of the positions in 2013 are centered on CTE-relevant trades and those jobs are in high demand.

While there was [some support for CTE](#) in the recent state budget, there's more work to do. Commenting on the CTE system at the California Economic Summit Capitol Day last week, state Senator Carol Liu said, "It's a mess."

[ACR 119](#), if ultimately signed by the Governor, would encourage the California Community Colleges Chancellor and a range of CTE-connected groups to create three options for create long-term funding for CTE and present it to the Legislature by April 1, 2015.

Because the measure's ultimate goal is stable, long-term funding for career-technical education to prepare workers for high-demand fields, the [California Forward Action Fund](#) and [other groups](#) invested in workforce development endorsed the measure. The California Economic Summit's [Workforce Action Team](#) also is encouraging the state to adopt 'shared investment' approach that provides incentive funding for CTE aligned with workforce demand in each of the state's regions.

We sent the author, [Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi](#), some questions about why he crafted the measure. Here's what he had to say:

***1. It seems like there's a lot of talk of support for CTE in the Capitol and around the state. Why do you think it fell into a decline in the last decade, whereas other states seem to still value their CTE programs more?***

California supports career technical education, but many programs were cut during the Great Recession. Just a few years ago, our state was struggling with budget deficits of over \$40 billion. Now, we are projecting budget surpluses while restoring education funding. So the overall state budget situation has dramatically improved in the past two years.

However, CTE programs like our high school regional occupation centers and programs are now facing a new challenge. Last year, the Governor enacted the Local Control Funding Formula and dramatically overhauled how California's public schools are funded. While our schools are getting more overall funding, the Governor eliminated the dedicated funding for regional occupation centers and programs. As a result, these successful CTE programs are at risk of being downsized or shut down.

As Chair of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Education Funding, and as a former trustee of the Southern California Regional Occupational Center in the City of Torrance, I am fighting to save ROCP programs and to strengthen CTE programs statewide. High school CTE programs have a proven record of engaging students with career pathway-oriented coursework that meet the A-G university requirements and improve high school graduation rates. CTE programs are strongly supported by both business and labor as successful workforce development programs. While the Governor has supported one-time funds such as the Career Pathways Trust funds, we need to make CTE a statewide priority with dedicated, ongoing funding.

***2. How does ACR 119 do something different than previous efforts to help the programs?***

ACR 119 calls upon the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges to work with educators, industry leaders, and labor to make recommendations to the Legislature on how to strengthen career technical education programs in our state. It is a call to action as well as a political statement that CTE is a statewide priority.

***3. What's the biggest return-on-investment for California's regional economies in figuring out this long-term funding issue?***

CTE programs prepare our students for the jobs that exist today as well as the jobs of tomorrow. By bridging the skills gap and investing in our workforce, California's regional and statewide economies will become more competitive and grow and create more jobs as well as more revenues for education.

According to a recent report by the Centers for Excellence for Labor Market Research, there will be more than 1.3 million job openings projected for California through 2015, with 175,000 jobs in CTE-relevant occupations. Despite this clear need, the current funding structure for CTE creates a fiscal disincentive to support these relatively higher-cost programs. By addressing the long-term funding challenges, we can ensure that we are investing in our future workforce and providing for our students' career and educational needs.