

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION POLICY BRIEF

Career Awareness

Students benefit from an experience that allows them to explore their passions, interests and aptitudes and to review the career opportunities that best align with those interests. In addition, students need to learn which educational pathways most efficiently can provide them with the knowledge and skills that will be needed for success in their career goal.

Unfortunately these kinds of experiences are largely absent from our schools in Arizona and across the country. As a result, from a student's perspective their education is not an efficient one for them and the system as a whole is less efficient than it could be.

The very best time for students to have a Career Awareness experience is in middle school so that they



Source: Skills USA

have an educational plan for high school. To insure we don't create inequities it is important that a uniform career awareness experience is available to all Arizona students prior to high school. Fortunately there is a wealth of tools available to students to explore their passions, interests and aptitudes, career data on the number of positions that will be needed and the compensation for those positions and finally the educational pathways that align with their career goal.

Young people change their mind on their career goals and it is essential that they have access to the tools to create a new career plan when they do change their goal. Today, technology is available that can support the reality of the dynamic nature of young people and their career goals. Career Awareness is not about students making "forever" career decisions but, rather, making sure that our students are aware of the multitude of career options available to them improving their engagement and the efficiency of the educational experience.

The biggest obstacle to providing a career awareness experience for every Arizona student prior to high school is a lack of human resources. The counselor/student ratio in our state is the highest in the country and most counselors have not had the life experiences that would allow them to help students explore the wide variety of career options available to them. Realistically we will have to staff our middle schools with career coaches. Several efforts are under way in Arizona to make use of business retirees and others to deliver a quality career awareness experience. Lessons learned from these efforts here in Arizona and in other states can then be coalesced into quality career awareness experience for all students.

It is hard to find anyone who disagrees with this position but here in Arizona and across the country we have not had the will to make it happen. The hope is that policy makers in Arizona will see the many advantages of students having a quality career awareness experience and make Arizona the leader in America on this issue.