

## Policy Statement 82

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### **This We Believe About the Value of Career Clusters in Business Education**

The global economy has experienced dynamic changes that have had a major impact on the workforce and the role of business education. In this complex, ever-changing economy, increased academic, technical, and employability knowledge and skills are crucial for students to be successful as employees and entrepreneurs.

Implementation of the Career Clusters Initiative is essential for preparing students to be productive in the business and economic environment. The intent of this initiative is to assist students in achieving their career goals. The Career Clusters Initiative represents a nationwide effort to help learners obtain the knowledge and skills they need for career success, mobility, and advancement by aligning instructional content to business and industry expectations and future needs.

#### **Vision**

The vision of the Career Clusters Initiative is to enable learners to transition successfully from education to careers by providing a framework connecting secondary with postsecondary education; connecting academic with career and technical education; and connecting education with business, workforce development, and economic development communities. In 2001 the U.S. Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education identified 16 career clusters representing 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. The career cluster framework is an organizing tool for 16 broad groupings of occupations that include 81 pathways comprising knowledge and skills validated by business and industry. The National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium continues to support and revise the Career Clusters Initiative through business and industry involvement.

A *career cluster* is defined as a grouping of careers with similar skills based on common themes reflecting business and industry needs. Career clusters are tools used by business educators to organize instruction and learner experiences in community and technical colleges, career academies, work-based learning programs, small learning communities, magnet schools, charter schools, and high schools—especially those restructuring around career themes. Each of the 16 career clusters includes multiple career pathways that represent a grouping of similar talents, knowledge, and skills.

A *career pathway* is a model that articulates learning and training requirements for careers. Career pathways promote partnerships among secondary schools, postsecondary institutions, and business communities. These pathways facilitate the learning process for students and lead to industry-recognized credentials, licensures, and/or degrees.

The *foundation knowledge and skills* at the heart of the Career Clusters Initiative include academics; communications; problem solving and critical thinking; information technology; systems; safety, health, and environment; leadership and teamwork; ethics and legal responsibility; employability and career development; and technical skills. This set of knowledge and skills is common to all 16 career clusters and is foundational to all business careers.

**We believe that** career clusters, career pathways, and foundation knowledge and skills provide a framework for business education. Of the 16 career clusters, 5 clusters are an integral part of business education: Business Management and Administration, Finance, Hospitality and Tourism, Information Technology, and Marketing. **We believe that** business education programs that have embraced the Career Clusters Initiative build a connection among secondary and postsecondary education and the business community. Articulated, dual-enrollment, and dual-credit courses provide a road map for students when planning and completing future coursework for career and technical education content areas. Other avenues for students may include advanced placement and honors courses.

## **Career Clusters in Business Education**

**We believe that** the Career Clusters Initiative has value to all stakeholders involved in business education. Career clusters provide value for students, parents/guardians, business/industry partners, and educators. In particular, career clusters enhance the educational experience for business education's most important stakeholder, the student.

### Value for Business Students

- Career awareness, career exploration, and individualized career planning that complement their individual talents and interests
- Enhanced understanding of the relevance of academic courses to careers
- Improved job placement and advanced career opportunities
- Increased motivation to learn and increased academic achievement
- Foundation for advanced study in business with seamless transition from one educational level to another
- A focus that leads to preparation for high wage/high skill careers
- A focus that leads to preparation to meet the demands of postsecondary education and the business world
- Increased opportunities for work-based learning that lead to business careers

### Value for Parents/Guardians

- Career preparation and planning for the student
- Improved communication with students, teachers, and counselors
- Understanding of the need for increased emphasis on academics in conjunction with students' career preparation
- Understanding of the demands of postsecondary education and expectations of the workplace

### Value for Business/Industry Partners

- Workforce prepared to meet the demands of a changing economy
- Workforce with an understanding and appreciation of business ethics
- Workforce with solid foundation knowledge and skills

### Value for Educators (Teachers, Administrators, Counselors)

- Broader understanding of the educational and employment opportunities available in the global workplace needed to counsel students
- Increased innovative programs and delivery systems that meet the demands of business and industry
- Course content built upon academic, technical and employability knowledge and skills
- Students who are better prepared to demonstrate foundation knowledge and skills within a particular career cluster
- Personalized learning plans encouraging students to take rigorous classes
- Programs of study leading to degrees, certificates, licenses, and/or credentials
- Increased graduation rates

- Reduced need for postsecondary remediation
- Partnership with colleagues, parents, students, and the business community
- Seamless transition for students moving from one level of education to the next level
- Increased opportunity for business educators to instruct all students

**We believe that** the Career Clusters Initiative provides value to business educators, students, and other stakeholders. Career clusters, career pathways, and foundation knowledge and skills provide a focus and framework for student learning in business courses.

Although business educators will prepare students for high-skill, high-wage careers, business educators will also play a major role in the delivery of the foundation knowledge and skills for all students at all educational levels, regardless of their career interests. Thus, **we believe that** implementation of career clusters will assist business education in preparing all students to become more productive members of society in the global economy.

**We believe that** business education will change as it incorporates the Career Clusters Initiative, requiring a collaborative effort by all stakeholders.