



D.C. POLICY CENTER

Education Policy Initiative

PUBLIC HEARING ON
CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND THE ADVANCED
TECHNICAL CENTERS

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

October 21st, 2026 at 2:30pm

Hearing Room 412 (Track B)

John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Chelsea Coffin

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D.C. Policy Center

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Chelsea Coffin, and I am the Deputy Director of the D.C. Policy Center, an independent think tank focused on advancing policies for a growing, vibrant, and compelling District of Columbia. My testimony focuses on course flexibility to make Career and Technical Education (CTE) more accessible, and credit articulation to carry forward its impact to postsecondary.

D.C. must do more to help students translate a high school diploma into economic opportunity. An estimated 18 out of every 100 ninth graders in the District are expected to earn a postsecondary degree within six years of high school graduation.ⁱ At this same touchpoint, alumni with a bachelor's degree report median annual incomes nearly \$18,000 higher than alumni whose highest credential is a high school diploma (\$46,828 and \$29,234, respectively, according to data from the Office of Education Through Employment Pathways, or ETEP).ⁱⁱ While a four-year degree is an important pathway to economic mobility, students pursuing careers directly after high school also need opportunities to build skills and advance.

CTE and other career-building opportunities have the potential to improve early career outcomes. A survey of more than 1,000 D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter school alumni found that participation in multiple skill-building opportunities—including internships, work experience, mentorship, and career exploration—was associated with stronger early career outcomes.ⁱⁱⁱ Recent data from ETEP show that students completing at least three CTE courses earn approximately \$2,500 more than their non-CTE peers five years after graduation.^{iv}

The District should make career-building opportunities easier to access. In school year 2024-25, 7,056 students participated in CTE courses, equivalent to approximately 34 percent of high school students.^v However, limited awareness, scheduling conflicts, and competing graduation requirements can prevent students from participating. The D.C. Policy Center's *Building Career Assets for Lifelong Success* report identified being behind on graduation

requirements and having little room in schedules for career-building experiences as a major barrier to participation.^{vi}

To address this barrier, the District should encourage more schools and local education agencies (LEAs) to count appropriate CTE coursework toward high school graduation requirements using existing CTE course equivalencies (including courses in Arts,

Audio/Visual Technology, and Communications; Biomedical Sciences; Graphic Design and Illustration; and Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps, or JROTC).^{vii} Counting appropriate CTE coursework toward graduation would help students develop career skills while progressing toward a diploma.

The District should also ensure that college credits earned in high school translate into postsecondary progress. Eligible students can earn up to 26 tuition-free college credits—roughly one year of college when they are enrolled in CTE at D.C.'s two Advanced Technical Centers (ATCs) in specialized programs of cybersecurity, general nursing, emergency medical technician, and certified clinical medical assistant.^{viii} CTE students can also earn dual credit, dual enrollment, and articulated credit from passing a CTE course or sequence.

However, articulation agreements can limit where these credits from ATCs or high school CTE apply. For example, the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) only accepts credits in eight of the 14 DCPS programs identified as eligible for college credit.^{ix} The available pathways for applying credits from the General Nursing and Cybersecurity programs at the ATCs are clear at Trinity Washington University, for example—but it has not been documented how many credits are ultimately applied toward a degree at this institution or others. The District should transparently assess how many students earn these credits, how many colleges accept them, and whether they help students complete degrees or credentials. OSSE and postsecondary partners should use these findings to expand articulation agreements across institutions and programs, ensuring credits count toward meaningful qualifications.

In closing, I recommend two priorities: allow appropriate CTE coursework to count toward graduation requirements; and measure whether college credits earned in high school translate into postsecondary progress. The goal should not simply be to increase CTE participation, but to ensure students leave high school with skills, experiences, and credentials that open doors to economic opportunity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome your questions.

ⁱ Coffin, C. (2026, April 23). *Tying D.C.'s education funding to student preparedness, college and career readiness*. D.C. Policy Center. <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/tying-dc-education-funding-to-student-preparedness-college-and-career-readiness/>

ⁱⁱ Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. (2025, May). *DC alumni early career outcomes survey: Research brief 1—Understanding alumni employment, finances, and well-being*. Government of the District of Columbia.

https://dme.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dme/page_content/attachments/DC%20Alumni%20Early%20Career%20Outcomes%20Survey%20Brief%201.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ In this survey, students were considered to have acquired career assets if they had participated in multiple skill-building opportunities, including volunteer positions, work experience, apprenticeships, internships, exposure to career options, career counseling, mentorship, and postsecondary planning. See Calma, E. (2021, November 10). *D.C. high school alumni reflections on their early career outcomes*. D.C. Policy Center. <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/early-career-brief/>

^{iv} Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, Office of Education Through Employment Pathways. (2026, September 28). Brief 2: CTE concentrator outcomes. https://etep.dc.gov/sites/default/files/2026-09/2026.09.25_Brief2.pdf

^v Office of the State Superintendent of Education. (2026). OSSE's career and technical education report: 2024–2025 school year. Government of the District of Columbia. https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/service_content/attachments/CTE%20Report%20SY%202024-25.pdf

^{vi} Coffin, C., & Mason, H. (2024, November 13). Building career assets for lifelong success. D.C. Policy Center. <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/building-career-assets-for-lifelong-success/>

^{vii} Office of the State Superintendent of Education. (2023, August 24). Final LEA technical guidance: CTE course equivalency. Government of the District of Columbia. https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/Final%20LEA%20Technical%20Guidance%20-%20CTE%20Course%20Equivalency-8.24.23.pdf

^{viii} Office of the State Superintendent of Education. (n.d.). SY2026–27 UPSFF working group meeting slide presentation. Government of the District of Columbia. <https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/documents/SY2026-27%20UPSFF%20Working%20Group%20Meeting%20Slide%20Presentation.pdf>

^{ix} D.C. Public Schools, Career and Technical Education. (n.d.). Programs. <https://dcpsecte.org/programs/>