

## The Virginia Credentialing Initiative: Questions and Answers

### Q. What does the term “credentialing” mean in Career and Technical Education in Virginia?

A. Credentialing, in a general sense, can include such items as high school diplomas, Board of Education Diploma Seals, and college degrees as well as industry certifications and licensures. However, in Virginia’s credentialing initiative a “credential” is any industry certification examination, licensure, or occupational competency assessment that is passed (achieved) by a student which is eligible for the student-selected verified credit option as approved by the Virginia Board of Education.

### Q. What are examples of external credentialing used in Virginia?

A. There are various types of examinations that verify industry standard knowledge and/or skill sets that can be taught as a part of a secondary level Career and Technical Education program. These exams are normally administered in a “proctored environment” and graded externally to the school learning site. Virginia uses the following types of external credentialing:

- Full industry certification (*the complete examination program leading to a nationally recognized industry certification from a specific testing entity*)
- State licensure (*required state examination before entry into a specific occupation*)
- “Pathway” industry certification exam (*“pathway” exams constitute one or more entry level exams in a specific industry certification program leading to a full or complete certification that requires one or more advanced examinations*).

- Occupational Competency Assessment (a nationally standardized assessment that measures technical skills/knowledge in a specific career and/or technical area)

**Q. What are the major objectives of Virginia's ongoing credentialing initiative?**

A. The major objectives include the following:

- To serve as an accountability component for Career and Technical Education results and to meet requirements as related to the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (passed as Public Law 109-270) to cover the period 2008-2013.
- To provide continuing program and instructional improvement options.
- To provide opportunity for students to achieve industry certification and licensure which serve as "stepping stones" for students' progress in specific career pathways and/or post-secondary education.
- To provide students an opportunity to demonstrate competence in job-related skills and knowledge that are considered industry standard.
- To offer an option for students to achieve the CTE diploma seal upon graduation.
- To offer students an opportunity to earn student-selected verified credits for graduation.

**Q. Why is Virginia committed to multiple forms of external credentialing?**

A. In order to meet the complexity of the following credentialing factors at the secondary-level:

- *Some* industry certification programs can be completed at the secondary level and give students a significant advantage in obtaining a job.
- *Many* industry certifications are too robust to be completed at the secondary level. However, most of these programs have an “entry point” examination that is a significant “stepping stone” toward completion of the certification program, as well as being a valued accomplishment as students progress along a specific career pathway, serving as a “predictor of success” in a chosen field of endeavor.
- Occupational competency assessments are often the *only* credential available at the secondary level for certain CTE program areas.
- Some state licensures, which are usually necessary for entry into occupations such as cosmetology and certified nursing assistant, are appropriate for the secondary level.

**Q. Does industry certification and state licensure really matter to the job market for the CTE student?**

A. The value of these forms of assessment offered on the secondary level are indicated by the following:

- Several occupations available to students upon completion of secondary CTE coursework require state licensure (i.e., cosmetology, barbering, nursing assistant, emergency medical technician).
- Industry certifications have a market value related to the specific occupational area being discussed. The market value perception of a specific industry certification may vary from employer to employer.
- Industry certifications do not guarantee entry into a specific occupation; however, they should be valued as “predictors of success” and included as a part of students’ resumes, which would include a composite picture of other important accomplishments of value to the job market (i.e., academic accomplishments, related occupational coursework, demonstrations of workplace readiness, post-secondary technical certificates and/or degrees, and work experience).

**Q. Do occupational competency assessments (such as those used in Virginia from the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute—NOCTI) have “job market value” as compared to industry certifications and licensures?**

**A.** Occupational competency assessments, while not considered industry certifications as such, are useful as an *external* validation of students’ skill competencies and workplace readiness. Their value relating to job-market recognition may be determined by the following:

- Test results are shared with occupational advisory councils.
- Local employers in specific occupational areas can be introduced to this type of “nationally standardized assessment”

and come to recognize these assessments as a valued skill credential and predictor of employment success.

[Note: For student-selected verified credit eligibility, Virginia students are required to meet or exceed the national norm as established by NOCTI to be considered as having passed (cut score) a specific NOCTI occupational competency assessment.]

**Q. Does the use of external credentialing in CTE programs negatively affect program content and instruction by intruding into and diluting course framework and achievement of minimal competency requirements?**

A. All external credentialing is integrated into CTE courses as an enhancement to, or part of, existing course content requirements. This is ensured by the following:

- *All Virginia CTE programs are required to follow state-developed standard course essential competencies.*
- School divisions report to the state results of student achievement of these competencies through the use of **Student Competency Records (SCR)**. The Student Competency Records are an essential part of internal assessment in Virginia, insuring adherence to the state-developed standard course essential competencies.
- CTE programs that “target” specific credentials integrate the related skill sets and knowledge into the normal instruction of essential competencies, or teach the credential’s subject matter *in addition to* the state developed minimum competencies.

- Some of the skill sets covered by credentialing exams are already included within the minimum competencies of a specific CTE course.

**Q. Does the use of external credentialing constitute the primary assessment and program improvement component for CTE programs in Virginia?**

A. No. Virginia uses *multiple accountability components* for its CTE program assessment. Perkins IV legislative requirements will not change this approach. These components are outlined in the document, “**Measuring What Matters,**” and can be found on the Office of Career and Technical Education’s web site for Virginia’s credentialing initiative at:

<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/Instruction/CTE/certification/>.

**Q. Are there other reasons and benefits for using external credentialing in Virginia CTE programs?**

A. The following factors impact the need for a continued commitment to using and exploring forms of external credentialing:

- Perkins IV legislation highlights the fact that Career and Technical Education programs, to meet current and future job market requirements, must “raise the bar” in instructional content and student achievement so that students can be competitive in obtaining employment and/or may successfully continue post-secondary education.
- In addition, a focus of the new legislation is that Career and Technical Education target “high skill, high wage, high demand” jobs and that *all* students should achieve one or more industry

credentials, post-secondary technical certificates, and/or college degrees that relate to an increasingly complex job market. [A supporting document, "**Credentialing in Career and Technical Education in Virginia,**" can be found on the web site mentioned above.]

- It meets the requirements of the **Virginia Report Card System** which reports for each secondary school the number of industry certifications earned, occupational competency assessments passed, and state licensures achieved by its students.