



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

BRIAN J. WHISTON
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 18, 2018

TO: Local and Intermediate School District Superintendents
Public School Academy Directors
Local School District Principals

FROM: Brian J. Whiston, State Superintendent 

-and-

Roger Curtis, Director 
Michigan Department of Talent & Economic Development

SUBJECT: Career Pathways Alliance

We spent a great deal of the last year touring the state, meeting with many of you, and visiting your schools. We have been extremely excited by many of the excellent programs and people in your districts, especially in the career and technical education programs that we've toured.

We also heard you when you shared your challenges and ways you think we can help you with improving education for all our students and preparing them with the lifelong learning skills they will need to succeed in a 21st Century economy – many skills that are learned through career and technical education programs.

Last spring, we convened discussions with a number of your peers, classroom instructors, post-secondary education providers, business leaders and others with a passion for seeing our students succeed. That input from you led to the development of the Michigan Career Pathways Alliance and several initiatives to support improvements in schools for all our students.

We signed many of these initiatives into policy last summer and now we are working with our partners in the Legislature on a series of bills that support those policies to strengthen career and technical education, as well as opportunities for all students -- many of which have been met with bipartisan support.

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One of the most urgent areas identified by the Alliance was the frustration at not being able to offer more classes teaching in-demand skills because you are unable to find instructors. An informal survey revealed that at least 50 classes were unable to be offered just this year, affecting about 1,000 students, because schools were unable to find an instructor.

Schools should not have to be in such a position and we want to help you obtain people with specialized skills and an interest in giving back to our next generation of Michiganders.

One bill, which codifies a newly-executed MDE policy, would ensure local districts have the choice to hire industry experts to teach career-tech courses in their respective professions. Bills recently approved by the state House allow a noncertified teacher to lead a career-tech course, with the decisions left in the hands of local principals and districts.

These instructors would be well-trained subject matter experts who stand ready to teach students the skills needed to take their place in the workforce and continue to grow the state's economy.

A non-certified teacher could be in the classroom only if the person has a high school diploma and three consecutive years of professional experience in the subject matter. They also would have to hold – or have recently held – a professional license in the field or have attained journey-worker status by completing an apprentice program registered by the U.S. Department of Labor.

We recognize that specialized industry skills aren't necessarily linked to managing a classroom. Pedagogy is incredibly important if the expert is to be successful in sharing what he or she has learned in the field. That's why we have worked with educators to identify existing professional development programs for new, incoming CTE teachers and ensured that the legislation directs the new career-tech teacher to engage in this customized training prior to teaching and then participate in same ongoing professional development as other teachers.

These entry training modules already exist and include intensive training in lesson planning, classroom management, and other fundamentals of teaching -- all while being paired with a master mentor teacher.

If the career-tech teacher completes this professional development and is rated as effective or highly effective, he or she may continue teaching indefinitely. This legislation also would make law several administrative rules regarding career-tech teachers, reducing paperwork for you and adding stability for instructors and districts.

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We're reaching out because we want you, our state's principals and superintendents, to know that these bills are intended to make our schools stronger and give you the tools to develop forward thinking career and technical education programs for your students. We want you to have options. Just as we are challenging the stereotypes about career and technical education, we are changing the way we look at all pathways to the classrooms.

As always, please continue to reach out directly to us with feedback or questions. We value your input and look forward to continuing to closely work with you and all stakeholders in education and business to improve education for all of our students. Please contact Wendy Larvick at larvickw@michigan.gov for more information.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance