

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Bonamici (OR-01)**

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education

*"Preparing Students for Success in the Skills-Based Economy"*

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

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Thank you, Chair Bean, and thank you the witnesses for joining us today. I'm very grateful that we are having this hearing on Career and Technical Education—an issue that has broad bipartisan support.

During the last two years, Congressional Democrats and the Biden-Harris Administration have been working hard on rebuilding the economy from the bottom up and the middle out. When we think about the *Inflation Reduction Act*, *CHIPS & Science*, and the *Bipartisan Infrastructure Law*—these are creating millions of new infrastructure, clean energy, and STEAM-related jobs. I say STEAM intentionally because integrating art and design into science, technology, engineering, and math means more creative and innovative students and workers.

So, these legislative victories that we're working on will create a sustained demand for postsecondary STEAM and construction-based pathways—particularly with an eye on those who have historically been left out of these jobs and opportunities.

Investing in CTE—Career and Technical Education—can help build a skilled pipeline for students when they get out of high school to meet this new demand. To that end, we need CTE programs that are available to all students so they can explore careers that interest them—whether or not they require a four-year degree or an industry-recognized credential. It is still beneficial.

Named after Carl D. Perkins—who chaired this very Committee, the *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act* allows students to learn about competitive careers in information technology, health science, manufacturing, and hospitality—to name a few. These opportunities are critical to helping students refine relevant skills and competencies, which frequently leads to industry-recognized credentials and increased earning potential.

Under the *Perkins Act*, funding for CTE courses is commonly offered in public and private high schools with more than 80 percent of students completing at least one CTE credit. Additional funds are also directed into local secondary institutions or specialized high schools that focus on vocational or industry-specific training. And, Chairman Bean, I really appreciate this story about your father and I'm thinking today about all of the CTE equipment, which most people are likely not to have, whether it be large 3D printers or labs or large industrial equipment.

In recent years, schools and administrators are rethinking the value of CTE and the role it can play in helping students prepare for college or the workforce and keeping students engaged in school. In past years, CTE was used as an alternative track for students less interested in college—or worse, those who are deemed, usually inappropriately, not college eligible—but it is now a valuable tool to bring much-needed career and postsecondary exposure to all students. CTE is an important part of a well-rounded education, but not a substitute for it. CTE

has become essential as students today are looking for hands-on learning opportunities and new, rewarding careers while employers are increasingly requiring some amount of postsecondary education.

Now data shows that there is a 90 percent CTE student high school graduation rate versus a 75 percent average nation-wide graduation rate. So, we know CTE is valuable to keeping students in school and, if students with a low-risk profile enroll in a CTE program, they are 8 to 10 times less likely to drop out of school in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

The Department of Education under President Biden has made career-connected learning through CTE programs a priority. Career-connected learning is centered on four evidence-based strategies that prepare students for career success: expanding work-based learning opportunities, increasing the use of dual enrollment for CTE courses, strengthening career navigation supports, and requiring that CTE programs lead to valuable, industry-recognized credentials.

For example, the Department of Education has teamed up with the Department of Labor and Department of Energy for its Raise the Bar initiative, which embeds these strategies into CTE programming and grants, so students are offered robust career exploration opportunities.

So, taken together, these strategies will help students gain career exposure and, importantly, learn soft skills. That's what we hear about when we are out talking to employers—responsibility, communication, collaboration—all of those are skills that students will gain, regardless of what path they take. It will strengthen local economies, and help employers fill vacancies.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to a productive and thoughtful discussion and I yield back the balance of my time.

Thank you.