



# VIEW*S*&VISIONS

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## Career Technical Education Integral to Preparing Students for Success

Dr. James B. Phares, State Superintendent  
West Virginia Board of Education

Dr. James B. Phares is West Virginia's 28th state superintendent of schools, assuming the role January 2, 2013. He has nearly 40 years of experience as a classroom teacher, university instructor, principal, assistant principal and county superintendent.

As superintendent, Dr. Phares oversees West Virginia's public school system, which includes 55 individual school districts, serving about 282,000 students in pre-school through 12th grade, with an operating budget in excess of \$2.5 billion.

In 2006, Dr. Phares was named the West Virginia Music Educator Superintendent of the Year. A year later, he was named the West Virginia Association of School Administrators Superintendent of the Year, the Marion County Chamber of Commerce Educator of the Year and a West Virginia Distinguished Mountaineer. He has been a national finalist for the American Association of School Administrators Superintendent of the Year award and was inducted, in 2009, to the WVU Department of Education and Human Resources Hall of Fame. He also was named the 2011 Educator of the Year by the Randolph County Chamber of Commerce.

Dr. Phares received his doctorate in education administration from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He earned his bachelor's degree in elementary education at West Virginia University and a master's in school administration from Lynchburg College in Virginia.

Carol Wilson, human resources director for Centerpoint Energy, tells a tale shared by many in hiring positions across the country today, "It's getting tougher to find people for technical skills-related positions. The demand is greater than the supply of the people who possess these skills."

Career technical education has long been a solid choice for preparing students for good jobs or career training. Yet, today, there is a disconnect between the available workers looking for a job and the employers searching for qualified candidates to hire. We must make the most of what career technical education can do to provide our employers, with qualified job applicants, and our students, the best chance for success.

The Manufacturing Industry Employment Projections study, released by the Community and Technical College System, illustrates the need for improvements. The study found more than two-thirds of West Virginia's manufacturing



*A student at South Branch Career and Technical Center in Grant County learns about hydraulics and other industrial equipment*

employers reported a shortage of qualified job candidates in a state where the jobless rate is about seven percent. They say too few job applicants have the basic math and other skills to read a blueprint, operate computerized equipment or successfully tackle tasks involved in today's high-tech manufacturing environment.

Nationally, in the midst of an economy struggling to grow, there are approximately 3.6 million open jobs in America, indicating a skills gap between what is being taught in our schools and what employers require to fill a position. That's why, in West Virginia, the state's Department of Education is working with business and industry to transform our career technical programs to reflect real-world processes by integrating academics with practical skills.

The results of our collaboration indicated we must increase the rigor and relevancy of our curriculum to meet the needs of industry, and we have. The West Virginia Board of Education, in March, revised state policy to incorporate Next Generation Content Standards and Objectives for career technical education. The update puts into place the content skills defined for all state-approved career and technical concentrations and courses taught in West Virginia schools.

Schools now have a comprehensive guide for delivering a relevant career technical curriculum. The recent policy changes enhance the content taught in career technical education programs to provide skills necessary for employment in today's economy. The updated guidelines allow students in the majority of career technical education pathways to earn an industry-recognized credential.

In addition, we are revitalizing the Southern Regional Education Board's High Schools that Work program and expanding its Technology



*Students in the culinary arts program at Carver Career and Technical Center test their skills*



*Students in the automotive technology career technical education class at Tucker County High School practice their skills*



*A career and technical student at John Marshall High School in Marshall County practices her welding technique*

Centers that Work program. These projects are nationally recognized for their effectiveness in improving college- and career-readiness. Beginning this fall, we will expand participation in SREB's Preparation for Tomorrow initiative from three to seven sites. The project blends literacy, math, science and technical knowledge and skills with desired behavior for success.

While we now have a curriculum that better matches employer needs, we also are working to impress upon students how their behavior affects their ability to get a job. Sadly, businesses struggle to find employees who are drug-free and who value attendance and timely project completion. Business owners tell us they long to hire employees who can work effectively, solve problems, and have strong interpersonal and communications skills but struggle to find enough of them, so this fall we will launch Simulated Workplaces.

This pilot, which will begin with 16 sites and expand statewide over three years, turns classrooms into work environments that emulate expectations students will face when they find employment. This project infuses business and industry involvement in our CTE programs and provides industry validation of our programs and our delivery processes. Workforce and industry representatives will participate in both developing and evaluating programs. Those programs that reach industry standards will offer successful students a state certification.

For industry, having more students trained in fields where there is the greatest demand promises to boost business and help efficiency. Consequently, turning out students who have the academic and technical skills, plus the knowledge of how employees affect a business' bottom line, will benefit the state's economy.

In the end, we not only want our students to achieve high standards of academic achievement, but also to seek out and learn the job skills of their future and ours, as a state. To do that, our education system and business worlds need to come together. The only way to do that is to embrace change and commit to growth. An ancient Chinese proverb says, "A man must sit in his chair with his mouth open for a very long time before a roast duck will fly in." During nearly 40 years in education, I've yet to have a roast duck fly into my open mouth. You want duck?; You have to put in the work to actually prepare it before you can enjoy it. The same holds true for our schools and career technical centers. If we are to prepare students who are ready for college and careers, we must put in the time and effort. And when we do, we all will benefit. ▽