California Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

November 16, 2022

Ms. Tara Neilson, CCTD
California Workforce Pathways Joint Advisory Committee
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. Neilson:

The California Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (CCEPD) advances policies that promote the employment of people with disabilities in the state. With a variety of representation, the CCEPD provides a forum for state departments, the business community, and others to develop better state program coordination to increase employment goals for people with disabilities.

The CCEPD commends the efforts of the California Workforce Pathways Joint Advisory Committee (CWPJAC) and appreciates the vision for equity in the California State Plan for Career Technical Education (CTE) for all students, including students with disabilities. However, the CCEPD strongly encourages additional focus on students with disabilities and strategies to ensure these students are included in CTE programs.

CTE programs are the building blocks to skill attainment, allowing for entry into various career pathways based on a person's interest and needed skills. Inclusion of students with disabilities in CTE programs is essential to improving employment outcomes thus decreasing reliance on benefits, escaping a life of poverty, and promoting a life of independence.

In August of 2022, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities in California was 9.2%, compared to 4.9% for those without disabilities. More alarming, the labor force participation rate for people with disabilities in the state was only 21.3%, compared to 61.7% for those without disabilities.

These stark numbers illustrate why intentional and specific strategies should be included in the State Plan for CTE for students with disabilities.

Below are two recommendations to improve the existing draft of the plan.

- Within the "Effective Delivery and Support" section on page 14, the CCEPD commends references to recruitment, onboarding, and retention. These areas are often a challenge for students with disabilities. Detailed language should be added that CTE programs can use existing processes such as individual education plans and 504 plans to improve access to students with disabilities. This could also be added to the access bullet point of Appendix A (page 22).
- While the CCEPD commends numerous references to systems alignment (beginning on page 14), the CCEPD supports additional language that describes how various entities within education, such as Special Education and Disabled Student Services Programs – and entities such as Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and Independent Living Centers – can be aligned to assist students with disabilities in CTE programs, work to educate businesses, and provide professional development content for teachers related to their students with disabilities.

The CCEPD believes these recommendations, focused on awareness, access, and system alignment, will improve access for students with disabilities. Our goal within California should be to increase the employment opportunities for student with disabilities and decrease a life of poverty.

We also urge the CTE programs build their capacity to serve students with disabilities in a way that increases their ability to live independently and attain gainful employment. Education plays a critical role in preparing people with disabilities for life, lifting them out of poverty, creating the opportunity for them to live, work, and play in the community.

We look forward to ongoing collaborative efforts with the CWPJAC regarding students with disabilities. If you have questions, or would like to discuss the CCEPD's comments, please call Maria Aliferis-Gjerde, the Executive Officer of the CCEPD, at (916) 558-5698.

Sincerely,

Taylor Winchell
Chair, CCEPD

cc: Nancy Farias
        Director
        Employment Development Department

        Joe Xavier
        Director
        Department of Rehabilitation

        Department Designees to CCEPD