

Dissenting Opinion Statement on SB45 and Funding Based on Enrollment in "Advanced" Courses

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As an advocate for equitable and effective education policies, I fully support initiatives designed to enhance career and technical education (CTE) programs and provide students with access to rigorous academic opportunities. However, I respectfully dissent from the proposed language in SB45 that ties funding exclusively to student enrollment in "advanced" courses within CTE pathways. While the intent behind this change is commendable, the current language risks creating confusion and unintended consequences that could ultimately harm students, educators, and schools.

Terminology and Implementation Concerns

The use of the term "advanced courses" in the proposed revisions is problematic for several reasons. Within Nevada's CTE Curriculum Framework (2023), the term "advanced" is specifically used to describe the third-year course in many CTE pathways, including Cybersecurity, where this course is titled "Advanced Studies." Consequently, the term "advanced" as it is currently framed in SB45 could lead to implementation challenges and confusion due to its overlap with existing curriculum language.

To address this, I recommend replacing "advanced course" with more precise terminology, such as "CTE-aligned course," which would better reflect the variety of programs that contribute to the success of CTE pathways without creating ambiguities. This adjustment would ensure clarity in implementation while aligning with existing definitions under U.S.C. § 2302(12)(a), where only the first two years of coursework are required to achieve CTE concentrator status.

Impact on Program Accessibility and Equity

Funding schools based solely on enrollment in advanced courses risks marginalizing programs that are unable to provide additional courses beyond the two required to complete a CTE pathway. This is particularly concerning for schools in rural or underserved areas that may lack the resources to offer a third-year advanced course. The exclusion of these programs from funding jeopardizes their ability to modernize classrooms, retain qualified instructors, and engage students effectively.

Students should not be penalized for exploring different career pathways during high school. High school serves as a critical time for students to experiment, learn, and, importantly, fail safely and inexpensively before committing to a postsecondary field of study. A funding model that ties resources to completion or advanced coursework discourages this exploratory process and forces students to remain in pathways that may not align with their interests or aptitudes, leading to disengagement and reduced overall effectiveness of CTE programs.

Proposed Alternative

A more balanced funding model could address the stated goals of SB45 while preserving flexibility and inclusivity in CTE programming. Specifically, I propose a dual-bucket approach:

1. **Enrollment-Based Funding:** A significant portion of funding should continue to be tied to overall enrollment in any CTE-aligned course. This ensures that schools have the resources to meet student demand and maintain modernized facilities and curricula.
2. **Performance-Based Incentives:** A secondary, smaller pool of funding could be allocated to schools that achieve a high rate of completers or offer advanced programs. This incentivizes program optimization without penalizing schools or students who do not meet advanced criteria or have students who would rather learn more about multiple areas rather than spend all 4 years of their high school experience within one CTE pathway.

Consequences of Current Proposal

The current proposal's emphasis on pathway completion creates perverse incentives for schools to retain students in CTE pathways, even when it is not in their best interest. Unlike colleges, which allow students to withdraw from courses that do not align with their goals, this policy forces students to remain in a pathway for two years, potentially leading to disengagement and resentment and contributing to our high levels of student truancy and absenteeism.

As a CTE educator, I have observed firsthand the challenges posed by policies that prioritize pathway completion over student satisfaction and engagement. When students feel trapped in a pathway, it undermines their enthusiasm for learning and diminishes the overall effectiveness of the program. Moreover, this approach disproportionately impacts students from underserved backgrounds, who may face additional barriers to completing multi-year programs..

Conclusion

SB45, as currently written, risks creating further inequities in CTE funding, limiting program accessibility, and reducing student engagement. By adopting a more inclusive and flexible funding model that prioritizes both enrollment and performance, we can better serve the diverse needs of Nevada's students and schools. I urge legislators to revise the proposed language to reflect these considerations and ensure that funding policies align with the principles of equity, opportunity, and student-centered education.