

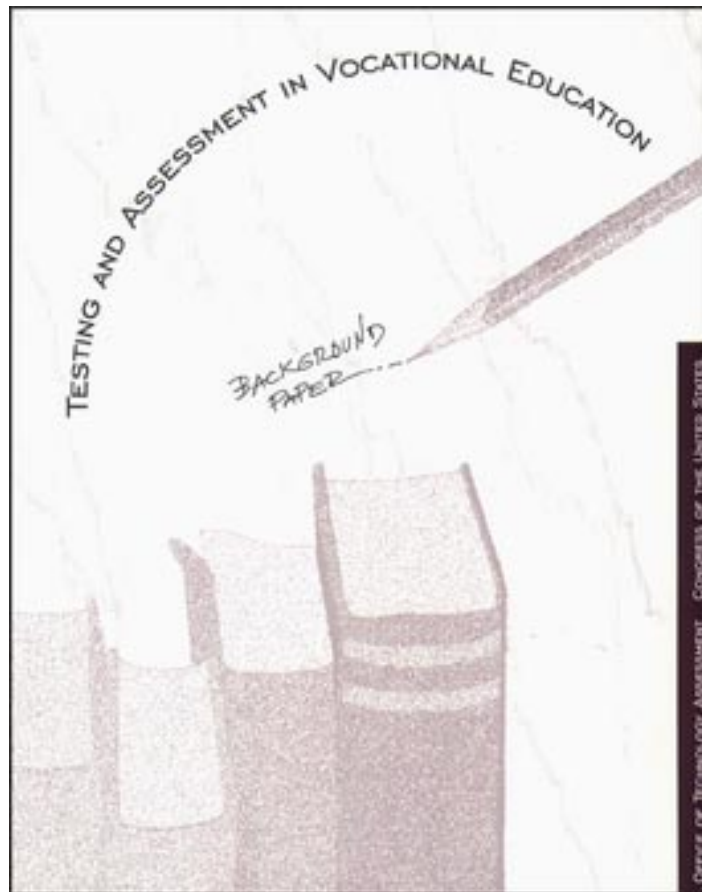
Testing and Assessment in Vocational Education

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Foreword

The world of work is changing. As this occurs, educators must rethink how to prepare young people for employment. For young people who do not plan to obtain a college degree, it is no longer clear what type of employment will provide satisfying work that can lead to financial independence. And it is perhaps even less clear how students can be prepared for a work environment characterized by change.

As part of its growing concern for noncollege bound youth, Congress has begun to revisit and revise legislation that supports vocational education. In the 1992 revision of the Perkins Act, the House Committee on Education and Labor asked that OTA provide information on the types of tests and assessment instruments used to define the outcomes and effectiveness of these programs. By looking at these instruments, Congress can obtain insight. What we test is what we teach.

Accordingly, OTA has compiled this background paper on tests and assessments for secondary vocational education. It includes a state-by-state survey of assessment instruments, as well as information on new instruments under development by test vendors. Additionally, OTA has reviewed the emerging theories attempting to define “broad technical skills.”

The survey data suggest some shifting away from the traditional, performance-based measurements of vocational education. This is occurring at a time when performance-based instruments are being introduced in other school subjects, in order to give a more useful and accurate indication of student achievement. OTA also found that there is no consensus on the meaning of “broad technical skills,” and that a number of approaches are being used to try and prepare vocational education students for a changing workplace.

This background paper should help to inform the debate on vocational education and the school to work transition. These topics will be of substantial importance to Congress and the nation in the coming years, and OTA is glad to contribute to this discussion.



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