

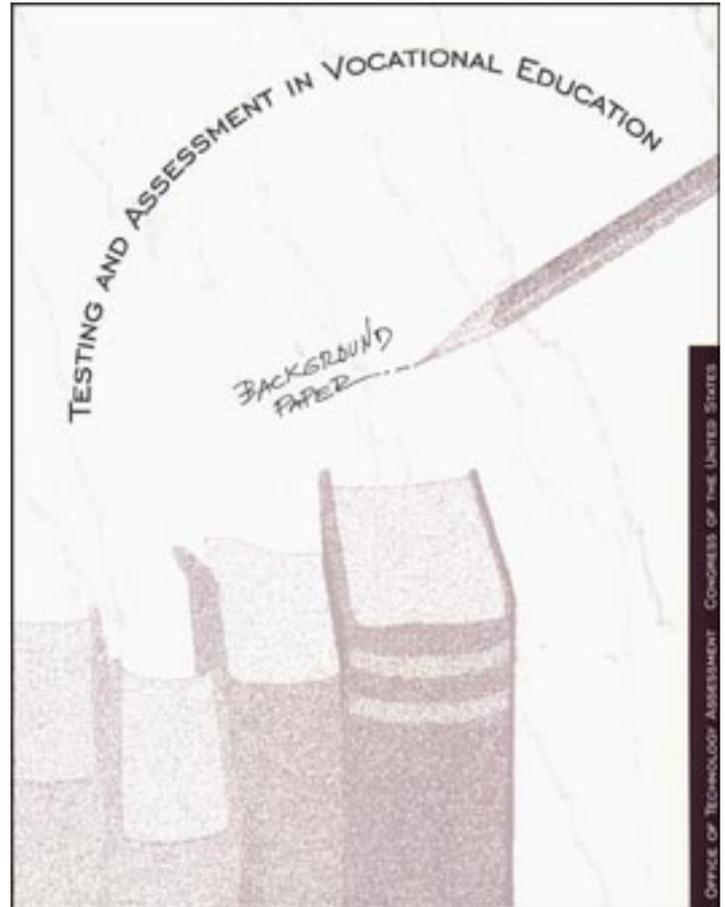
*Testing and Assessment in Vocational
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Foreword

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.



Roger C. Herdman
Director

Project Staff

John Andelin¹
Assistant Director
Science, Information, and Natural
Resources Division

Peter Blair²
Assistant Director
Industry, Commerce, and
International Security Division
Division

Nancy Carson
Program Manager
Science, Education, and
Transportation

CONTRACTORS

Richard Kimbell
Goldsmiths' College
University of London

Nancy Kober
Charlottesville, VA

PRINCIPAL STAFF

JOHN WIRT
Project Director

OTHER CONTRIBUTING STAFF

Elizabeth Eisner
Detailed, U.S. Department of
Education

C. Maxine Williams
In-house contractor

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Marsha Fenn
Technical Editor

Tamara Kowalski
Research Secretary

Gay Jackson
PC Specialist

¹Through August 1993.

²After August 1993.

Workshop Participants and Reviewers

WORKSHOP ON CAPABILITY FOR USING TECHNOLOGY, MARCH 9, 1993

Sherrie Gott, Chairperson
Air Force Human Resources Institute

Henry Braun
Educational Testing Service

Larry Hirschorn
Center for Applied Science

Richard Kim bell
University of London

Roger Shank
Northwestern University

Joyce Shields
Hay Systems, Inc.

Ronald Todd
Drexel University

Shoshana Zuboff
Harvard Business School

REVIEWERS

Barbara Border
Educational Leadership Consultants

Neal B. Carey
Center for Naval Analysis

Cheryl Fields Tyler
American Electronics Association

Brenda Hattaway
Vocational-Technical Education Consortium
of the States

Gary Hoachlander
MPR Associates

Richard Jones
New York State Department of Education

Darrell Parks
Ohio State Department of Education

Evelyn Wells
National Occupational Testing Institute

Joel West
American College Testing

Laress Wise
Manpower Data Systems Center

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