

**The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
Third International Congress on Technical and Vocational
Education and Training (TVET)**

Session 2: Improving governance and widening stakeholders' engagement in TVET

**Delivered by Dr. Brenda Dann-Messier, U.S. Assistant Secretary for
Vocational & Adult Education**

Monday, May 14, 2012 | Shanghai, China

Duration of Remarks: 12 minutes

Acknowledgements and Opening

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

It is an honor to stand in such distinguished company and to address this notable assembly of global leaders, experts and practitioners – in education, workforce development and related fields.

On behalf of our U.S. delegation, I wish to thank our generous host, the Government of the People's Republic of China, for hospitality with which we've been welcomed to this remarkable city.

In addition, my colleagues and I are grateful to UNESCO and its international partners and sponsors, for working to strengthen vocational and technical education and training over the past 25 years. UNESCO plays an important role in strengthening TVET. As an advisor, UNESCO helps countries identify solutions to meet the skill development needs of their citizens. Its resourceful staff and publications help serve as a clearinghouse and mechanism to share the best ideas and innovations. Finally as a convener, it creates gatherings, like this Congress, that allow us to share ideas with and learn from our counterparts around the globe.

All the nations represented here are pioneers, exploring uncharted territory of the 21st Century's hyper-connected, deeply interdependent, global knowledge economy. We have many common questions and share common goals – and we all have the highest possible stakes in each other's success.

I should note that, in America, we refer to this field as career and technical education, or CTE, and I'll use this designation in describing our national efforts.

The United States' education reform agenda acknowledges, to an unprecedented degree, the importance of high-quality CTE systems. And, it focuses heavily on international cooperation and collaboration.

I'll devote my remarks to a few steps we're taking in partnership with stakeholders at the state and local level – to link CTE, and the learners and workers it serves, to the dynamic 21st Century labor market.

The Cradle-to-Career Agenda and the 2020 Goal

The United States' work on education is focused on achieving a goal President Obama set soon after taking office: to increase our nation's proportion of postsecondary graduates from 40% to 60% by the year 2020 – and ensure that every American attains at least one year of higher education or career training, whether through a two-year or four-year college, vocational training, apprenticeship, or some other means of skill development. To that end, we're working closely with stakeholders at the national, state and local levels, to implement a comprehensive cradle-to-college-and-career agenda.

Our country has a strong tradition of state and local control in education, yet there is a role for the federal government: bringing together stakeholders to shape common definitions of success, aligning laws and policies to support common goals, and providing resources for reform.

The Blueprint for Career and Technical Education – Responding to the Three Themes of This Congress

The 2013 reauthorization of federal legislation governing secondary and postsecondary career and technical education presents a historic opportunity for transformation. Last month, I joined Secretary Duncan in releasing the Obama Administration's new Blueprint for Career and Technical Education. This proposal will deliver a more relevant and results-driven CTE, shaped by four core principles: more effective alignment; stronger collaborations among partners; more meaningful accountability; and greater innovation. This proposal was also developed after my team and I met with hundreds of stakeholders to discuss the current state of practice and hear from the field how the law might be improved.

I would submit that all three themes of this Congress – economic, equity, and transformative – are addressed in our Blueprint. From the **economic perspective**, our government, and our plan, aims to promote skills development – for youth employment *and* for adults seeking access to better wages and more fulfilling careers, by focusing on aligning federal laws, policies and programs to ensure greater quality, consistency, and responsiveness to employer needs and market trends. And, we're encouraging deeper partnerships between educators and employers across secondary to postsecondary education, and placing a greater emphasis on collecting data to demonstrate value, focus resources, and enhance the effectiveness of these systems.

Regarding **equity**, our proposal is committed to ensuring access to high quality programs for all students, regardless of race, gender, income, geographic location, disability, or age and with closing the achievement gaps that now exist between different demographic groups.

And, as for **transformations**, our plan recognizes the role CTE can play in shifting the paradigm in the U.S., from a view of education as a one-time, linear exercise, plagued by disconnected programs and institutions – to education as lifelong learning, offering clear and customizable paths to attaining the skills and credentials learners need to achieve, over the course of their careers and lifetimes.

Along these same lines, we're working to determine the best forms of state and local governance, and to broaden and deepen stakeholder engagement through more comprehensive partnerships. We want to fuel innovation; foster sustainability; promote more uniformly rigorous and relevant programs; elevate the quality of teaching and learning; and develop stronger ways to certify the acquisition of skills in a variety of settings, including the growing menu of virtual tools for instruction and assessment.

Our Nation's Community Colleges

To that end, let me discuss our community college system, which is one of the United States' greatest assets for equipping learners with the necessary skills, degrees and credentials they need for high-demand, high-wage fields; for responding to changing market demands; for partnering closely with employers; and for addressing local, State, regional and sector-based workforce needs..

Right now, some 12 million students are enrolled in more than 1,000 community colleges across the country – and enrollments are growing. The mission of these agile institutions encompasses general education, basic-skills programs, and CTE. For some students, community college is a place to get a certificate or a two-year associate degree in a technical field; for others, it is the first step toward a bachelor's degree from a four-year university.

This Administration recognizes how important community colleges are to addressing U.S. workforce development challenges and helping the American people reach their college aspirations – we're building purposefully on this strong foundation.

The U.S. Departments of Education and Labor jointly administer the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training initiative, which funds competitive grants to help community colleges increase their capacity and enhance their partnerships with industry and local Workforce Investment Boards. The funds also help build programs that meet industry needs, including career pathways for high wage, high skill industries, like those in STEM fields. This program aims to improve student retention and achievement rates; reduce time to completion; accelerate progress for low-skilled workers; and expand online and technology-enabled learning.

In 2010, President Obama convened the first-ever Community College Summit at the White House, demonstrating strengthened alliance to deliver high-quality CTE. The Summit brought together a diverse group of higher education, industry, research, military and workforce and economic

development leaders – and thereafter, my agency launched regional, topical Summits to encourage further collaboration and progress.

We're now providing large-scale professional development and technical assistance to community college leaders, in order to: strengthen employer partnerships; ensure academic alignment with high schools; build career pathway programs that address the needs of adult learners; improve developmental education; and use evidence-based strategies to increase retention, persistence, graduation and employment rates.

And, through a partnership between the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services, we've issued joint guidance to help State and local partnerships develop stronger college-and-career pathways and coordinate resources from multiple funding streams, for more coherent service delivery. We believe the example of three Federal agencies working closely together will stimulate collaboration at the State and local levels.

And, on the horizon, President Obama's budget for fiscal year 2013 includes a Community College-to-Career Fund, again to be jointly administered by the Departments of Education and Labor. This Fund would further our goal of building a high-skilled national workforce, through State and community college partnerships with business, including targeted assistance for small business owners and entrepreneurs. We view this program as an opportunity to address the skills mismatches that result in millions of unfilled jobs impeding our full economic recovery. This investment would equip roughly 2 million more workers to secure good jobs in high-demand industries like manufacturing, healthcare, information technology and biotechnology.

The Fund would also support on-the-job training, like registered apprenticeships and paid student internships, and provide students with postsecondary credit for work-based learning. It would test promising incentive-based strategies, or "Pay-for-Performance", for training providers like community colleges, as well as community-based and local workforce organizations. And, the fund would support efforts by regional or national industry groups to craft worker certification standards, promote wide-scale adoption of proven training technologies, and shore up industry-education collaboration around career pathways.

Closing

In his remarks at UNESCO in 2010, Secretary Duncan noted that "education is the key to eliminating gender inequities, to reducing poverty, to creating a sustainable planet, and to fostering peace," adding that "[e]xpanding educational attainment everywhere is the best way to grow the [economic] pie for all." This is especially true for the rapidly-evolving field of technical and vocational education and training.

In closing, let me say again how much my colleagues and I appreciate the opportunity to share some of our strategies and efforts with you – and to learn from your experiences and insights throughout this Congress.

I'm convinced that by doing our best as individual nations, and by collaborating together through organizations like UNESCO, we *can* create these systems for our people. If we do this, their talents, in turn, will power our economies, elevate our societies, and ensure a bright future for the world.

Thank you.