

Connecticut Technical High School System

By: Marybeth Sullivan, Associate Analyst
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Issue

Describe the (1) history of the Connecticut Technical High School System (“the system”) and (2) interface between traditional high school programs and technical high school programs that allows students to transfer from the traditional into the technical system.

Summary

The legislative history of the state law authorizing the State Board of Education (SBE) to establish the career-technical schools shows that the schools were gradually transformed from local control (with state oversight) to state control in the early 20th century ([CGS § 10-95](#)). This trend appears to have been cemented by a 1917 federal law that gave federal funds to states for vocational education programs.

The current technical high school system model does permit students to transfer from traditional high schools to technical schools mid-year in grade nine and at the beginning of grade 10. Transfer students must meet specific mathematics requirements prior to admission. These students are not required to complete the freshman year program exploring various career and technical career paths.

System History

In Connecticut, the first law regarding the vocational-technical (“vo-tech”) schools was a 1907 act that authorized towns and local school districts to establish and maintain free public schools to provide instruction in whatever trades they saw fit. School buildings, equipment, courses of study,

and teacher qualifications were subject to SBE's approval. The law required the state to pay for half the costs of two such schools, up to a specified amount (Ch. 250). In 1909, that law was repealed, and instead, the General Assembly authorized SBE to establish two free public trade schools in two towns of the board's choosing to instruct students in the trades, to be paid for by state funds (1909 Acts, Ch. 85).

In 1913, the General Assembly allowed SBE and local school boards to jointly establish and maintain free public trade schools. The 1913 act provided that the state would fund 50% of the cost of the schools, with local districts funding the other 50% (1913 Acts, Ch. 212). Finally, in 1915, the legislature gave the authority for establishing vo-tech schools solely to SBE, allowing it to both maintain the existing schools and establish additional ones. The 1915 act also repealed the 1909 and 1913 laws (1915 Acts, Ch. 263).

State control of the vo-tech schools received a boost from passage of the federal Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 that allocated federal funds to assist state vocational education activities. As a condition of receiving the federal funds, states had to designate a state board as the sole state agency for vocational education. All subsequent federal legislation concerning vocational education has maintained this requirement. In Connecticut, the law designates SBE as the state board for purposes of cooperating with the federal government in promoting and administering vocational education ([CGS § 10-12](#)).

A 2012 law created a separate board to govern the state's technical high school system ([PA 12-116](#)). The chairperson of the technical high school system board serves as a nonvoting, ex-officio member of SBE. This separate 11-member board oversees the operation of the system. Its members are appointed by the governor, SBE, and the economic and community development and labor commissioners. The governor appoints the board's chairperson, who serves as a nonvoting ex-officio member of SBE ([CGS § 10-95](#)).

Since there are no transcripts of Connecticut House or Senate proceedings dating from before 1945, we cannot be sure of the legislature's rationale for finally deciding that the vo-tech schools should be state schools. But it appears that one goal of the federal Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 was to encourage states to coordinate employer needs and worker training on a statewide rather than a local basis.

The state renamed the vo-tech schools "technical high schools" in 2012 ([PA 12-116](#)).

The [Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006](#) is the current federal law governing funding for career and technical education.

Interface with Traditional High School Model

There are opportunities for students enrolled in traditional high schools to transfer into the technical high school system, but the opportunity is limited to the early semesters of a student's high school career. Students may enroll in the technical high school system in the beginning of their grade nine academic year, and they may also transfer into the system in the middle of their grade nine year or at the beginning of their grade 10 year.

According to the system's 2016-2017 [Program of Studies](#), page two, students who enter into the system at the beginning of ninth grade participate in an "exploratory" program that allows them to investigate all technical programs offered by their school. Upon completion of the exploratory stage, students then choose core career and technical programs that "provide the framework for their technical and academic coursework in grades 10 through 12."

The Program of Studies explains that the exploratory process assesses students' technical aptitudes and is divided into three phases. Phase I gives students career information on each career and technical program offered; Phase II gives students hands-on experience in three trade and technology areas; Phase III gives students a permanent placement to begin the study of a career and technical program to concentrate on for the next three years.

Transfer students are waived from completing all or a portion of the grade nine exploratory program, as well as the Heath Education credit requirement. Transfer students in grade nine mid-year must be currently enrolled in Algebra I classes for admission. Transfer students in the beginning of grade 10 must have successfully completed Algebra I.

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