

## [Assembly subcommittee pledges to fight for career technical education](#)

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By [Michelle Maitre](#)

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Raising alarm about the future of programs that help prepare students for jobs after high school, a key Assembly budget subcommittee signaled Tuesday it intends to fight to restore dedicated funding for career technical education programs that give students work experience.

“The reality is that everyone likes to pay lip service to how great career technical education is, but they’re not putting their dollars behind their support for CTE,” said Assemblyman Al Muratsuchi, D-Torrance, chair of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance.

At a [hearing](#) Tuesday, the committee unanimously approved two motions – both forwarded by Muratsuchi – calling on the state to maintain funding for career technical education.

The programs had previously received a dedicated, or categorical, funding stream from the state, but the state’s new [Local Control Funding Formula](#) relaxes most categorical funding and allows districts to use money as they wish.

More than three dozen speakers – many of them career tech students or former students – told legislators that, without a specific funding stream, the programs are a risk.

State officials countered that career programs remain a priority under the new funding formula, which gives schools broad leeway to fund programs they value.

“We believe CTE has been elevated to a status not seen before,” Department of Finance official Chris Ferguson told the committee, noting that the effectiveness of career and college preparation programs are now among the key measures districts must evaluate under the new formula.

“We believe localities will continue to address CTE in the fashion that best meets their particular district’s needs,” he said.

In separate motions, however, the committee voted to reject a [proposal](#) in Gov. Brown’s 2014-15 budget that would eliminate categorical funding for two specialized career-tech programs, [Agricultural Career Technical Education \(CTE\) Incentive Program](#) and [Specialized Secondary Programs](#).

The second motion establishes career tech programs as a “state priority” and calls on schools to continue funding the programs – which a spokeswoman for Muratsuchi called “placeholder” language that sets the stage for budget discussions to come.

“The first task right now for the Assemblymember is to save CTE through the budget process,” said spokeswoman Melissa Uribe.

**More than 100 apply for Career Pathways Trust**

At least 123 applications were filed last month for a piece of a one-time state grant program to bolster programs that prepare students for college and careers, according to an update on the program presented Tuesday to the Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance.

The \$250 million fund, called the Career Pathways Trust, was included in last year's budget to enhance partnerships between school districts, county offices of education and community colleges.

The program offers will offer grants of \$15 million to 10 regional partnerships; \$6 million grants to another 15 partnerships; and smaller grants of \$600,000 to up to another 15 partnerships.

March 28 was the official deadline to apply, but a computer glitch prevented at least 10 applicants from filing, said Monique Ramos, senior legislative adviser with the California Department of Education. The department will reopen applications for one day Wednesday so those affected can submit their applications, she said.

The department expects to award the grants June 1, and money can be spent starting July 1.

– Michelle Maitre

Career tech encompasses a range of programs, from automotive shop or other courses that prepare students to enter the work force directly after high school, to linked learning programs that combine rigorous academics with internships and other real-world work experiences to set students on a college or career path.

But Muratuschi and others at the hearing voiced the most concern over [regional occupational programs](#). The programs offer career classes, from carpentry to dental hygienist training, as part of the high school curriculum, often in regional centers that act as a training hub.

Many programs are already suffering from years of budget cuts. Before 2007-2008, the 74 regional occupational programs in California received dedicated funding of \$486 million. But after the recession hit, the state cut the funding by 20 percent and said districts could use the money any way they wished. A budget deal reached last year requires districts to maintain funding for regional occupational programs at current levels until 2014-15, but after that, districts are able to use the money freely.

Enrollment in career technical programs has dropped by 215,000 students since 2007-08, said Fred Jones, who represents the California Business Education Association and advocates for career tech programs. He urged preserving a dedicated funding stream beyond 2014-15.

Supporters said the programs play a vital role in keeping students engaged in school and preparing them for life after graduation. Christine Hoffman, superintendent of the [Southern California Regional Occupational Center](#), or SoCal ROC, in Torrance, one of the largest and oldest programs in the state, said her center trains about 9,000 students a year for careers in the Southern California area and is in danger of closing because of the budgetary changes.

"We shouldn't be looking at closing SoCal Roc," she said. "We should be looking at cloning SoCal Roc."

Students who participated in the programs also urged the committee to maintain funding for programs that keep them engaged in school.

“Math courses and science courses are sometimes kind of dull,” said one student who participates in the career technical program [California DECA](#), which trains students for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality and entrepreneurship. He said career tech programs keep many students involved and active on their campuses.

“I’m a better student and my peers are definitely better students because of CTE,” he said.

Muratuschi, a former Torrance school board member and a former SoCal Roc board member, is also sponsoring [Assembly Bill 2216](#), which would protect funding for regional occupational centers. Uribe said that bill is “Plan B” if other efforts to protect dedicated funding fail.

But H.D. Palmer, a Department of Finance spokesman, said that relaxing categorical funding was a key tenet of the Local Control Funding Formula, which is intended to give schools more power to fund the programs as they see fit.

“If local districts believe career tech is an important program, nothing would preclude them from continuing to fund the program,” Palmer said.

*Michelle Maitre covers career and college readiness. [Contact her](#) and follow her on Twitter [@michelle\\_maitre](#). Sign up [here](#) for a no-cost online subscription to EdSource Today for reports from the largest education reporting team in California*