Connecting Soft Skill Development in CTE Programs to Meaningful Employment in Nevada

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Introduction

I.   Employer Needs

As the global economy continues to evolve, it is essential for the education system to prepare students with the necessary skills and attributes to succeed in the workforce. The education system has a critical role in shaping the future workforce, and it must adapt to meet the changing demands of the labor market.

One of the essential aspects of preparing students for the workforce is developing both technical and soft skills (Gray, 2022). Technical skills are specific skills required in a particular field or industry, such as coding or accounting. Soft skills, on the other hand, are general skills that are transferable across industries, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. In a survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 91% of employers said that they valued critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills more than a candidate's undergraduate degree (Gray, 2022). Thus, it is crucial for the education system to prioritize both technical and soft skill development.

The education system should also incorporate experiential learning opportunities into the curriculum (Kong, 2021). Experiential learning involves hands-on experiences, such as internships, apprenticeships, and service-learning projects (Kong, 2021). Experiential learning provides students with real-world experience and allows them to apply what they have learned in the classroom to a practical setting (Kong, 2021). According to a report by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, "employers want graduates who can apply their knowledge and skills to real-world settings" (Flaherty, 2021). Therefore, the education system should provide more experiential learning opportunities to prepare students for the workforce. By

adopting a comprehensive approach to education, the education system can better prepare students to succeed in their chosen careers and contribute to the future of the global economy.

II.   CTE Programs in Nevada

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in Nevada are designed to prepare students for success in their chosen career paths. These programs offer students the opportunity to develop technical skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for successful employment in a variety of fields. CTE programs are available at both the secondary and post-secondary levels in Nevada, and they are designed to meet the workforce needs of the state.

At the secondary level, CTE programs are offered through the Nevada Department of Education. These programs are available in a variety of fields, including agriculture, business, finance, health sciences, hospitality and tourism, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). Students can choose to take CTE courses in high school, which provide them with technical skills and knowledge that can be applied in the workforce or further education.

CTE programs in Nevada focus on developing not only technical skills but also employability skills that are essential for success in the workplace. Employability skills refer to a set of attributes, behaviors, and competencies that enable individuals to perform effectively in the workplace. These skills include communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, and professionalism. In Nevada, CTE programs are designed to ensure that students are equipped with the employability skills that employers are seeking in their workforce. For example, CTE programs teach students how to communicate effectively with colleagues, supervisors, and customers. They also emphasize the importance of teamwork and collaboration in achieving organizational goals. Additionally, CTE programs provide students with

opportunities to develop their problem-solving and critical-thinking skills by working on real-world projects and scenarios.

Literature Review

I.   Soft Skills for Employment

In the contemporary job market, employers increasingly prioritize soft skills as essential qualities in prospective employees (Casner- Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Among the most important soft skills sought by employers are communication skills, including effective verbal and written communication, as well as active listening (Robles, 2012). Strong interpersonal skills, such as teamwork and collaboration, are highly valued as they contribute to a harmonious and productive work environment (Robles, 2012). Adaptability and resilience are also crucial attributes, enabling employees to navigate through dynamic challenges and changes in the workplace (Robles, 2012). Problem-solving and critical thinking skills are seen as valuable assets for employees who can analyze complex situations and devise innovative solutions (Robles, 2012). Additionally, time management and organizational skills are highly sought after, as they demonstrate an individual's ability to prioritize tasks and meet deadlines effectively Robles, 2012). Lastly, possessing emotional intelligence, including self-awareness and empathy, allows employees to understand their own emotions and those of others, fostering better relationships with colleagues and clients alike (Robles, 2012). Employers recognize that employees equipped with a well-rounded set of these soft skills contribute to enhanced teamwork, increased productivity, and improved overall organizational performance.

II.   CTE Programs and Career Readiness

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs have gained significant attention in recent years as these programs have a crucial role in preparing students for successful careers.

CTE programs have evolved over time to address the growing need for a skilled and adaptable workforce. Several studies have assessed the impact of CTE programs on students' career readiness (NCES, 2017). These studies generally find that participation in CTE programs positively influences career exploration, technical skills development, and professional attitudes (US Department of Education, 2019). Students engaged in CTE tend to demonstrate greater confidence in their career choices, higher levels of motivation, and improved problem-solving abilities (Dougherty & Lomarbardi, 2018). The research findings suggest that students who enroll in significant numbers of Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses tend to achieve higher incomes in their later lives, even when accounting for their test scores and educational attainment (US Department of Education, 2019). A recent study by Michael Gottfried and Jay Plasman from the University of California, Santa Barbara, indicated that high school students who took more CTE courses, particularly in the latter part of their secondary education, were more likely to graduate on time, even after controlling for test scores (Gotfried & Plasman, 2018).

The success of CTE programs is contingent on their alignment with industry demands (Moyer, Snodgrass, Klein, & Tebben, 2017). This requires that CTE programs are under continual re-evaluation to ensure the programs offered align with industry needs and trends. Findings suggest that effective CTE programs continually update their offerings to match emerging industry trends, ensuring that graduates possess relevant and up-to-date skills (Moyer, Snodgrass, Klein, & Tebben, 2017). This is demonstrated by the expansion of CTE program offerings over the years to allow students to explore programs that interest them.

The primary aim of Career and Technical Education (CTE) is to equip students with skills that hold value in the job market. To achieve this, researchers have drawn on the expertise

of personality psychologists, who have extensively studied the role of personality traits in workplace performance (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001). Over time, the influence of personality psychology in education policy, particularly in early childhood education, has significantly grown, with a focus on noncognitive skills or social-emotional learning (Almund et al., n.d.). Recent studies have highlighted that measures of personality and attitudes, such as grit and self-efficacy, can predict educational outcomes later in life (Deming, 2017). Consequently, education programs have begun emphasizing noncognitive skills as they observe that some interventions produce substantial short-term test-score improvements without resulting in long-term benefits, while others lead to long-term benefits with little impact on test scores (McShane, Wolf, & Hitt, 2018). This paradox is evident in CTE literature and other areas of education policy.

Similarly, the early childhood education literature reflects a similar pattern to vocational-technical high schools (Wollf et al., 2013). Many programs show long-term positive effects on students' lives while having no significant measurable impact on test scores (McShane, Wolf, & Hitt, 2018). Although various hypotheses exist regarding which skills were influenced by influential preschool programs, one certainty is that noncognitive skills affected by these programs often went unmeasured in past evaluations. Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman draws a parallel between noncognitive skills and dark matter – both unobserved but potentially explaining observed phenomena (Heckman, 2006). The changes in noncognitive skills resulting from these programs could account for the significant improvements in life outcomes without affecting test scores (Heckman, 2006). In addition to studies focusing on schoolchildren, extensive literature in psychology, economics, and human resource management consistently highlights the significance of certain skills, such as self-regulatory skills and social skills, as

reliable predictors of success in the workplace. Employers value these skills highly, making them essential qualities sought in prospective employees.

III.   Nevada Application

In Nevada, CTE (Career and Technical Education) employability skill standards have been established to ensure that students are equipped with the essential skills needed for success in the workplace. These standards provide a framework for CTE programs to develop and assess students' employability skills. The CTE employability skill standards in Nevada are based on industry research and input from employers, educators, and other stakeholders. These standards outline the following critical employability skills: Communication, collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking, professionalism.

In Nevada, as in many other states, the need for soft skills in the employment sector is becoming increasingly evident (Lamarre, 2016). While technical expertise and academic qualifications are undoubtedly crucial, employers are placing equal importance on soft skills to ensure a productive and harmonious workforce. Soft skills encompass a broad range of interpersonal abilities, including communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and time management. Employers in Nevada recognize that employees possessing strong soft skills not only contribute to a positive work environment but also enhance overall efficiency and customer satisfaction (Lamarre, 2016). Soft skills are especially vital in industries where direct interaction with clients or customers is frequent, such as hospitality, healthcare, and customer service (Sisson & Adams, 2013). As the job market continues to evolve, individuals who demonstrate a well-rounded skill set, combining technical expertise with excellent soft skills, will undoubtedly gain a competitive edge in Nevada's increasingly competitive employment landscape.

Standardized tests are used in Nevada to assess the competence of students in these skills. There is very little research on the methods used to evaluate these skills, however it is established that it is evaluated through standardized assessments at the end of the program (NV CTE Assessments, n.d.). There are two assessments for students: a program-specific assessment and an employability skills assessment. These are both used for certification following the completion of a CTE program.

Integrating soft skills into curricula and standards in education requires a deliberate and comprehensive approach that recognizes the significance of these skills in students' personal and professional development. There are many ways in which soft skills can be developed in an educational setting. Firstly, educators can design interdisciplinary projects and activities that promote collaboration, communication, and problem-solving, encouraging students to work in teams to tackle real-world challenges. Incorporating role-playing exercises, debates, and discussions within the curriculum can foster effective communication and critical thinking skills. Secondly, embedding reflective practices in coursework can help students develop self-awareness and emotional intelligence, enabling them to better understand their strengths and areas for growth. Thirdly, schools can offer workshops, seminars, or special classes specifically dedicated to soft skill development, addressing topics like time management, leadership, and adaptability. Furthermore, incorporating real-world experiences, such as internships, community service, or industry partnerships, allows students to apply and refine their soft skills in authentic settings. Lastly, ongoing assessment and feedback on soft skills can provide students with personalized guidance for improvement. By integrating soft skills into curricula and standards, education systems can better prepare students for future success in their careers and personal lives.

IV.   Research Question:

This research aimed to address the following research question: What soft skills should

be emphasized in CTE curricula to promote competence in the Nevada workforce? Specifically,

this research will analyze trends in employment over the past five years which can be compared

to the CTE programs with the greatest enrollment and certification in order to identify which soft

skills should be integrated into the CTE curricula to prepare the students for the most prominent

careers in Nevada.

Methodology

The methodology for this research was two-fold: first it involved a content analysis of the

CTE Employability Skills Standards to ascertain which soft skills were integrated into the

standards and then involved a statistical analysis of Nevada Department of Employment,

Training, and Rehabilitation and CTE data.

I.   Content Analysis of Standards

Content analysis, as a method, involves analyzing the informational content present in

written or verbal texts (Mayring, 2000). The underlying principle of content analysis is that texts

serve as rich data sources capable of providing valuable insights into the research problem at

hand (Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002). In the field of education, content analyses can

manifest in either qualitative or quantitative forms, tailored to the specific research objectives

(Krippendorff, 2012). This technique enables researchers to systematically examine and interpret

textual information to gain a deeper understanding of educational phenomena.

Employability skills, often referred to as soft skills, have long been an integral part of

standards and curriculum in career and technical education (CTE) programs. In 2001, during the

development of standards by the Nevada Department of Education, a Master List of Core

Competencies for employability skills was established. These competencies were integrated into all technical standards, encompassing nine performance standards and approximately sixty performance indicators. However, as the state embarked on the redesign and redevelopment of standards in 2011, a decision was made to adopt a new, updated set of employability skill standards that would be universally applicable to all CTE programs, rather than customizing them for each set of standards.

Through a comprehensive review process to ensure alignment with current employability skill standards in the Nevada Administrative Code and national standards, such as those outlined in the 21st Century Skills, the Department of Education, with the input of key stakeholders, embraced the implementation of the twenty-one Workplace Readiness Standards recommended by the Career and Technical Education Consortium of States (CTECS) and used by the Commonwealth of Virginia. These standards underwent validation through extensive research conducted by the Weldon Cooper Center of the University of Virginia and an industry review involving over three hundred employers. In Nevada, the Workplace Readiness Standards were presented to focus groups and the State Career and Technical Education Advisory Council, garnering endorsement by a significant majority of both.

Here, the CTE Employability Skills Standards are divided into three categories and indirectly state the skills they aim to address. Therefore, the content analysis consisted of identifying the skills addressed in each of the twenty one standards by relying on the literature above that established key soft skills for employment. The three categories were: Personal Qualities and People Skills, Professional Knowledge and Skills, and Technology Knowledge and Skills. Each had distinct skills it aimed to address through the standards. Using the literature on soft skills, these standards were coded and analyzed according to their integration of soft skill

development. As previously mentioned, these are the Employability Skills Standards used for every CTE program, but there are also program-specific standards that are less directed at soft skill development and increasingly directed at vocational skills for the program.

II.   Statistical Analysis

The research aims to conduct a descriptive statistical analysis of data obtained from Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and the Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation (DETR). This study utilizes a retrospective and cross-sectional research design to analyze existing data. The primary data sources for this research are the records and databases maintained by CTE programs in Nevada educational institutions and the DETR. The CTE program data includes information on student enrollment, graduation rates, course completion, and employability skill assessments. On the other hand, the DETR provides data on employment outcomes, including job placement, industry demand, and wages for various careers. Data for this research was collected using the NPWR system and was specifically narrowed through the use of the data dictionary. All of this data was anonymized to ensure confidentiality and data integrity.

The key variables of interest for the CTE data were CTE program enrollment, completion, and certification. The DETR data was used in an attempt to evaluate which jobs were most occupied in Nevada over the span of 5 years. Identifying the trends in jobs will help identify which programs may lead to gainful employment in those fields and identify the specific skills necessary for successful employment in those realms.

Before conducting the statistical analysis, data preprocessing will be performed to clean and transform the data as required. This step involves handling missing data, addressing outliers, and standardizing variables for consistency. There was significant missing data for the DETR

database, and therefore missing data was removed. Descriptive statistical techniques will be applied to summarize and present the data. Measures such as frequencies and percentages will be used to describe the characteristics and distributions of the variables. Graphical representations, such as bar charts, histograms, and scatter plots, will be utilized to visualize the data. The statistical analysis will be performed using appropriate software, SPSS. This software will facilitate data manipulation and calculation.

<div align="center">Results</div>

I.   Content Analysis of Standards

As discussed, there are three categories of standards for the CTE Employability Standards. The first category was Personal Qualities and People Skills which aimed to address skills related to timeliness, teamwork, self-representation, creativity, and conflict resolution. The second category was Professional Knowledge and Skills which aimed to address speaking and listening, critical thinking, lifelong learning, time management, and customer service skills. Finally, the third category was Technology Knowledge and Skills which addressed standards aimed at appropriate internet use, proficiency with information, and technological productivity. All of the employability standards have corresponding definitions and instructional strategies to assist the development of these skills.

In the first performance standard category, Demonstrate Personal Qualities and People Skills, the standards represented professionalism (see Appendix A). For example, Standard 1.1.2 states: "Demonstrate integrity by abiding by workplace policies and laws and demonstrating honesty and reliability," which is further supported by the instructional strategies that suggest "Identifying and abiding by laws and workplace policies (e.g., using personal and sick leave only when necessary, understanding harassment and discrimination policies)." This standard

demonstrates the development of soft skills such as: understanding workplace structures, identifying workplace policies, upholding integrity, and encouraging reliability. These all fit within the umbrella of professionalism. The other standards in this category all contribute to developing teamwork skills, personal responsibility, reliability, self-representation, creativity, and similar skills that help set an individual up for success in a professional setting.

The second performance standard category, Demonstrate Professional Knowledge and Skills, contained standards that involve the workplace structure and competence in completing the work (see Appendix A). For example, Standard 1.2.5 stated "Demonstrate understanding of workplace organizations, systems, and climates by identifying "big picture" issues and fulfilling the mission of the workplace," and is followed by an instructional strategy of, "Develop a business concept and its vision and mission statements." This standard is closely related to the soft skills of professionalism, teamwork, understanding organizational cultures, and working towards a common goal. The other standards within this category promote the development of various similar skills.

Finally, the third performance standard category, Demonstrate Technology Knowledge and Skills, was aimed at technological competence (see Appendix A). This is a soft skill critical for any field, especially as the workforce moves in a technology-driven direction. For example, Standard 1.3.1 stated, "Demonstrate proficiency with job-specific technologies by selecting and safely using technological resources to accomplish work responsibilities in a productive manner," which can be demonstrated by "selecting and safely using technological resources (e.g., equipment, machines, tools, electronics) to accomplish work efficiently and productively, while considering environmental impacts of such technologies." This standard, and the others

within this category all support the development of the soft skills involved in technological competence, internet safety, technological productivity, and time management.

CTE Employability Standards encompassed three vital categories that focused on developing essential soft skills for success in the workplace. The first category, Personal Qualities and People Skills, emphasized attributes such as timeliness, teamwork, self-representation, creativity, and conflict resolution, all crucial for fostering a professional and cooperative work environment. The second category, Professional Knowledge and Skills, centered on skills like speaking and listening, critical thinking, lifelong learning, time management, and customer service, which were integral to workplace efficiency and effectiveness. Lastly, the third category, Technology Knowledge and Skills, highlighted the importance of technological competence, appropriate internet use, and technological productivity, given the increasing reliance on technology in the modern workforce. Together, these employability standards provided guidance for students to acquire and apply the soft skills needed to excel in their careers.

II.   CTE Statistics

Out of the 53,230 students who have enrolled in CTE programs, 34,909 students have completed the program. Therefore, 65.6% of students who participated in CTE programs completed them in Nevada. Further, of those 53,230 students who participated, 33,558 gained their CTE certification after taking and passing the two assessments required for certification in Nevada. Therefore, 63% of the students who participated in CTE programs gained their certificate.

The CTE program areas are divided into more specific programs. The program areas contain broader categories such as STEM, health sciences, information technology, and more.

Each of those program areas is divided into specific programs for students to select. These programs are specifically tailored to employment industries. When analyzing those that participated in CTE programs, the programs with the most significant enrollment fell within five program areas: culinary arts, graphic design, video production, photography, and sports medicine. These three programs alone consist of approximately 15,829 students and account for almost 30% of those in a CTE program. There are over 80 different programs offered to students in Nevada, but these five are significantly more populated than any other program.

The CTE programs with the highest enrollment are: culinary arts, graphic design, video production, photography, and sports medicine. Culinary arts had 4,284 students enrolled and accounted for 8.0% of the students enrolled in CTE programs. The graphic design program had 3,052 students in the program which amounted to 5.7% of the CTE students. Video Production followed with 2,967 students which was 5.6% of CTE students. The photography program had 2,865 students (5.4% of the CTE student population). Finally, sports medicine had 2,661 students in the program which accounted for 5.0% of the CTE students. Although individually these percentages do not account for a majority of the CTE student population, these values were significantly higher than those of the other programs.

Table 1: Amount of Students in the Five Most Populated CTE Programs

CTE PROGRAM	NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN PROGRAM	PERCENT OF CTE STUDENTS IN PROGRAM
CULINARY ARTS	4284	8.0
GRAPHIC DESIGN	3052	5.7
VIDEO PRODUCTION	2967	5.6
PHOTOGRAPHY	2865	5.4

SPORTS MEDICINE	2661	5.0

Chart 1: Percent of Students that Participate in Each CTE Program Area
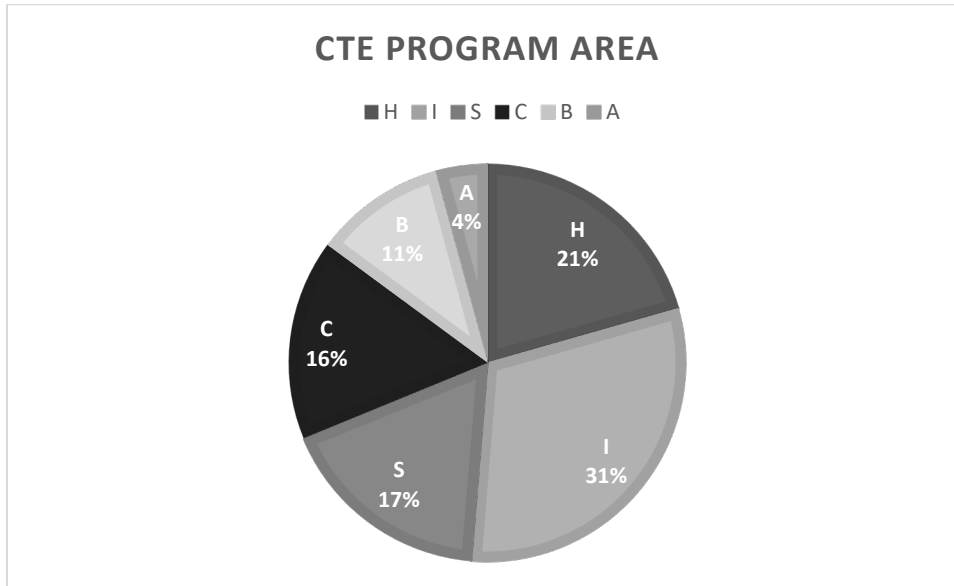
III. DETR Statistics

Table 2 presents the percentage of Nevada employment in the highest employed industries for the years 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2022. The data highlights the proportion of employment within each industry, represented by the NAICS code, over the specified years. Although there are thousands of industries in the workforce in Nevada, only those with more than 2% of the workforce were reported for this purpose. Several other industries accounted for less than 2% of the workforce, but those were excluded from the calculations here as this research seeks to identify the most populated employment industries in Nevada.

In 2017, Limited-Service Restaurants emerged as the highest employed industry, accounting for 18.7% of employment in Nevada. Full-Service Restaurants followed with 7.1% of the workforce, and Casino Hotels represented 4.5% of the employment in the state. Other General

Government Support accounted for 2.0% of the workforce in Nevada and Supermarkets and Other Grocery Stores accounted for 2.8% of employment.

The data for 2018 showed a slight decrease in employment for Limited-Service Restaurants, with 15.8% of the workforce. Full-Service Restaurants maintained a steady employment rate of 7.0%, while Casino Hotels increased slightly to 4.6%. Family Clothing Stores entered the dataset in 2018 with 3.4% of employment, and Supermarkets and Other Grocery Stores slightly decreased to 2.6%.

In 2019, the percentage of employment in Limited-Service Restaurants further declined to 14.2%, while Full-Service Restaurants reported 6.7%. Casino Hotels experienced an increase to 5.0% of the workforce, and Family Clothing Stores decreased to 3.1%. Supermarkets and Other Grocery Stores reported a slight decrease to 2.3% and Warehouse Clubs and Supercenters consisted of 2.1% of the workforce in Nevada.

As the data progressed to 2020, Limited-Service Restaurants showed a further decrease to 13.3% of employment. Full-Service Restaurants observed a 5.9% workforce representation, while Casino Hotels experienced a decline to 4.4%. Warehouse Clubs and Supercenters accounted for 3.6% of employment in Nevada. Family Clothing Stores reported 2.8% of employment, and Supermarkets and Other Grocery Stores slightly increased to 2.8%.

The data for 2022 indicated a significant reduction in the employment percentage for Limited-Service Restaurants to 6.9% (in 2017, this was over 18% of Nevada employment). Full-Service Restaurants and Casino Hotels remained stable at 5.9% and 5.2%, respectively. Warehouse Clubs and Supercenters entered the dataset with 3.2% of employment, and All Other Miscellaneous Ambulatory Health Care Services were reported in 2022 with 2.0% of the workforce. Other General Governmental Support consisted of 2.7% of employment in Nevada.

The findings from Table 2 provide an overview of the employment trends in the highest employed industries in Nevada over the specified years. This data is valuable for policymakers and researchers in understanding the shifts in the labor market and the distribution of employment across various industries in the state. The information from this table will be further utilized to decipher which skills are pertinent to these jobs so that the skills can reflect in the standards/curriculum for the most populous CTE programs.

Table 2: Percent of Nevada Employment in Highest Employed Industries

NAICS CODE	INDUSTRY	2017	2018	Year 2019	2020	2022
921190	Other General Government Support	2				2.7
722513	Limited-Service Restaurants	18.7	15.8	14.2	13.3	6.9
722511	Full-Service Restaurants	7.1	7	6.7	5.9	5.9
721120	Casino Hotels	4.5	4.6	5	4.4	5.2
445110	Supermarkets and Other Grocery Stores	2.8	2.6	2.3	2.8	
448140	Family Clothing Stores		3.4	3.1	2.8	
452910	Warehouse Clubs and Supercenters			2.1	3.6	3.2
621999	All Other Miscellaneous Ambulatory Health Care Services					2

Discussion

I.   Employment Industries and CTE Alignment

Although the highest employed industries do not all directly align with the highest enrolled CTE programs, there are overlapping similarities. Most obviously, the most populated CTE program, Culinary Arts, draws parallels to the highest employed industry in Nevada for every year examined here: Limited-Service Restaurants and Full-Service Restaurants. Other than

the task similarities between the industries and programs, there is a broad connection between all of the top CTE programs and highest employed industries: the connection with people. Working with other people is innate in all of the top programs and all of the highest employed industries. Most of the industries are service industries and therefore directly involve customer service and hospitality. Similarly, the CTE programs involve interacting with others, serving their needs, and/or executing their vision. Therefore, being able to increase one's interpersonal skills is critical for success in any of these industries.

II.   Soft Skills Related to Highest Employed Industries

The careers included in Table 2 represent the highest employed industries in Nevada across the span of five years. One obvious similarity amongst these jobs is the people-centered nature of them. Each industry relies on interaction with other people to carry out the job. Even though these industries are not necessarily a part of the 'hospitality industry' in Nevada, they can be grouped together under this umbrella with the perspective that they all require a level of human interaction congruent with the ideals of the hospitality industry. The hospitality industry thrives on human interactions and customer satisfaction, making soft skills a critical asset for professionals pursuing careers within this sector. As the demand for personalized and memorable experiences grows, the significance of soft skills becomes even more pronounced in hospitality-type careers. These soft skills encompass effective communication, interpersonal abilities, empathy, and problem-solving, all of which play a pivotal role in enhancing guest experiences and fostering strong relationships with customers. Research indicates that customers are more likely to return to establishments where they feel valued and heard, and where their needs are met with genuine care and understanding. Therefore, a workforce equipped with a robust set of

soft skills not only contributes to customer loyalty but also positively impacts the reputation and success of hospitality businesses.

The dynamic nature of the hospitality industry demands employees who can adapt swiftly to changing circumstances and handle diverse situations with poise. Soft skills like adaptability, resilience, and emotional intelligence are essential in navigating high-pressure environments and addressing unexpected challenges that may arise in hospitality-type careers. Employees who possess these soft skills can effectively handle customer complaints, resolve conflicts, and manage stressful situations, ensuring smooth operations and customer satisfaction. Therefore, soft skills are fundamental in fostering a collaborative and cohesive work environment, leading to improved teamwork among staff members. With the hospitality industry's reputation hinging on the delivery of exceptional guest experiences, investing in the development of soft skills through training and educational programs is imperative for creating a skilled and customer-oriented workforce capable of thriving in the competitive hospitality landscape.

III.   Soft Skills Addressed in CTE Programs

The Employability Skills can be divided into three broad categories and then further examined. The Employability Skill Standards broadly address applied knowledge, effective relationships, and workplace skills. The applied knowledge sector addresses skills such as academic skills (reading and writing) and critical thinking. Critical thinking is a core soft skill, so it is addressed here. The next sector of skills, effective relationships, addresses interpersonal skills and personal qualities so that students develop teamwork abilities, exercise leadership, resolve conflicts, take initiative, practice integrity, take responsibility, build a desire to learn, and demonstrate professionalism. Finally, the workplace skills aspect addresses resource management, information use, communication skills, systems thinking, and technology use.

These standards explicitly guide how students use and understand technology and its systems, communicate verbally and actively listen, locate and understand information, and manage their time and resources appropriately. These skills enable students to develop both personal and professional soft skills that are integral for the workforce.

Despite the comprehensive nature of employability skills standards, there is a noticeable absence of specific standards focused on developing emotional intelligence, which is a crucial aspect of the modern workforce. Emotional intelligence encompasses the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions and empathize with the emotions of others. In the context of the workplace, emotional intelligence plays a significant role in promoting effective communication, building strong interpersonal relationships, and managing conflicts with sensitivity and empathy. Employees with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to handle stressful situations, demonstrate resilience, and exhibit a positive attitude, all of which contribute to a harmonious and productive work environment. Further, emotional intelligence is closely linked to leadership qualities, as leaders who possess high emotional intelligence are more adept at motivating and inspiring their teams. Given its relevance to workplace dynamics and overall employee well-being, standards that explicitly address the development of emotional intelligence are crucial to nurturing a workforce that thrives both professionally and personally. Incorporating emotional intelligence standards into employability skills frameworks will better prepare individuals to navigate the complexities of the modern workforce and contribute to a more empathetic, understanding, and successful work environment.

A standard that addresses the development of emotional intelligence could state: Students will demonstrate emotional intelligence by effectively recognizing, understanding, and managing their own emotions, as well as empathizing with the emotions of others. They will be able to

articulate their feelings in a clear and constructive manner and demonstrate an awareness of how their emotions can influence their behavior and decision-making. Students will apply emotional intelligence in various interpersonal contexts, demonstrating the ability to respond to others' emotions with empathy, respect, and sensitivity. They will exhibit self-regulation and emotional resilience, managing stress and conflicts in a constructive manner. Additionally, students will display social awareness and emotional perceptiveness, recognizing and appreciating diverse perspectives and experiences. This standard aims to develop students' emotional intelligence, fostering self-awareness, social competence, and emotional well-being, enabling them to build strong interpersonal relationships, collaborate effectively, and navigate challenging situations with empathy and understanding.

IV.   CTE Certification and Assessment

To obtain a CTE program certificate, students are typically required to pass two assessment tests, one focusing on content knowledge and the other on employability skills. While these assessments play a crucial role in determining a student's readiness for the workforce, limited information is available about the nature and specifics of these tests. The content-based assessment evaluates a student's proficiency in the technical knowledge and skills relevant to their chosen CTE program. On the other hand, the employability skills assessment aims to gauge the student's soft skills, including communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork. However, the exact format and evaluation criteria of these assessments are often not widely disclosed, leaving educators and stakeholders with little insight into how effectively they measure a student's readiness for the job market. As CTE programs continue to play an essential role in preparing the future workforce, it is crucial to gain a better understanding of the nature of these assessments to ensure their validity, reliability, and

alignment with the demands of the rapidly evolving job market. Comprehensive research on the content and structure of both assessments can lead to improved transparency, standardization, and overall effectiveness in evaluating students' proficiency and employability skills in CTE programs.

The assessment of employability skills is a critical aspect of gauging an individual's readiness for the workforce; however, it is essential to recognize that traditional standardized tests, such as the ACT, may not accurately measure soft skills. While the ACT is valuable for assessing academic knowledge and cognitive abilities, it falls short in capturing the nuances of soft skills like communication, teamwork, and emotional intelligence. Soft skills are inherently context-specific and heavily influenced by individual experiences and social interactions, making them challenging to assess through standardized tests. Evaluating employability skills solely through cognitive-based assessments may overlook the practical application of these skills in real-world scenarios. Therefore, there is a need to explore alternative assessment methods that incorporate performance-based evaluations, simulations, and behavioral observations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of an individual's soft skill proficiency. Emphasizing a multi-dimensional approach to assessment would enable a more accurate representation of an individual's employability skills, ensuring that future workers are adequately prepared to thrive in the diverse and dynamic modern workforce.

Conclusion

While CTE programs undeniably play a crucial role in equipping students with the personal and professional skills necessary for success in Nevada's workforce, limiting these standards to only a fraction of students is a missed opportunity for our education system. Soft skills, such as effective communication, critical thinking, adaptability, and teamwork, are

universally valued by employers across all industries. By integrating these standards into the education of every student in Nevada, we can ensure that every young individual is equipped with the essential tools to excel in their future careers, regardless of their chosen path. Soft skills are not limited to specific vocational fields but are transferable and applicable to all aspects of life. Cultivating these skills in every student will not only enhance their employability but also foster a more cohesive and collaborative society. A comprehensive approach to soft skills development in our education system will not only benefit students' professional lives but also positively impact their personal growth, leading to more well-rounded and capable citizens. In an ever-changing and globally interconnected world, it is imperative to recognize the significance of soft skills and empower all students with the ability to thrive in the diverse landscape of Nevada's workforce. By expanding these standards to every student, we are investing in the future of our state and fostering a generation of dynamic and adaptable individuals who are fully prepared to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

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CTE Employability Skills Standards

CONTENT STANDARD 1.0 : DEMONSTRATE EMPLOYABILIITY SKILLS FOR CAREER READINESS

PERFORMANCE STANDARD 1.1 : DEMONSTRATE PERSONAL QUALITIES AND PEOPLE SKILLS

1.1.1	Demonstrate a positive work ethic by coming to work every day on time, a willingness to take direction, and motivation to accomplish the task at hand
1.1.2	Demonstrate integrity by abiding by workplace policies and laws and demonstrating honesty and reliability
1.1.3	Demonstrate teamwork skills by contributing to the success of the team, assisting others, and requesting help when needed
1.1.4	Demonstrate positive self-representation skills by dressing appropriately and using language and manners suitable for the workplace
1.1.5	Demonstrate diversity awareness by working well with all customers and coworkers
1.1.6	Demonstrate conflict-resolution skills by negotiating diplomatic solutions to interpersonal and workplace issues
1.1.7	Demonstrate creativity and resourcefulness by contributing new ideas and working with initiative

PERFORMANCE STANDARD 1.2 : DEMONSTRATE PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

1.2.1	Demonstrate effective speaking and listening skills by communicating effectively with customers and employees and following directions
1.2.2	Demonstrate effective reading and writing skills by reading and interpreting workplace documents and writing clearly
1.2.3	Demonstrate critical-thinking and problem-solving skills by analyzing and resolving problems that arise in completing assigned tasks
1.2.4	Demonstrate healthy behaviors and safety skills by following safety guidelines and managing personal health
1.2.5	Demonstrate understanding of workplace organizations, systems, and climates by identifying "big picture" issues and fulfilling the mission of the workplace
1.2.6	Demonstrate lifelong-learning skills by continually acquiring new industry-related information and improving professional skills
1.2.7	Demonstrate job acquisition and advancement skills by preparing to apply for a job and seeking promotion
1.2.8	Demonstrate time, task, and resource management skills by organizing and implementing a productive plan of work
1.2.9	Demonstrate mathematics skills by using mathematical reasoning to accomplish tasks
1.2.10	Demonstrate customer service skills by identifying and addressing the needs of all customers and providing helpful, courteous, and knowledgeable service

PERFORMANCE STANDARD 1.3 : DEMONSTRATE TECHNOLOGY KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	
1.3.1	Demonstrate proficiency with job-specific technologies by selecting and safely using technological resources to accomplish work responsibilities in a productive manner
1.3.2	Demonstrate proficiency with information technology by using computers, file management techniques, and software/programs effectively
1.3.3	Demonstrate proper Internet use and security by using the Internet appropriately for work
1.3.4	Demonstrate proficiency with telecommunications by selecting and using appropriate devices, services, and applications