

POLICY BRIEF

Guinn
CENTER

WORKFORCE READY

Aligning academic standards with workforce
needs.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With changing trends in employability standards and the skills required for so-called “in-demand” jobs, Nevada’s education system has an opportunity to adapt by further integrating soft skills into academic curricula. Employers now prioritize soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving just as much as traditional academic qualifications, yet soft skills are currently integrated into curricula at a decreased rate. Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in Nevada aim to meet this demand by focusing on technical skills and essential employability soft skills, which provide an opportunity for expansion to all academic programs.

When analyzing the highest-enrolled CTE programs and the highest-employed industries in Nevada, there is one common link: working with people. Research suggests employers across



Policy Considerations:

1. Add emotional intelligence metrics to Employability Skills Standards to enhance workforce readiness.
2. Use the *Portrait of a Nevada Learner* to further integrate soft skill competencies in all academic standards.
3. If soft skills standards will exist within the Nevada framework, further research on the measurement of these competencies is critical.

all industries prioritize the following skills when hiring: communication, interpersonal skills, adaptability, resilience, problem-solving, critical thinking, time management, organizational skills, and emotional intelligence. All of these attributes are considered soft skills.

For CTE programs to be effective, they must continuously align with industry needs. Nevada’s CTE programs assess both technical knowledge and employability skills, though there is a need for greater transparency in certification assessments. CTE programs in Nevada have Employability Skills Standards that incorporate five out of the six skills

mentioned above. To match employers’ skill needs with CTE programs, emotional intelligence, which is currently underrepresented in CTE standards, should be integrated into Employability Skills Standards.

Additionally, these skills should be incorporated into general education curricula, not just CTE programs. Effective policy implementation could embed emotional intelligence metrics into existing standards, with continuous research and psychometric evaluation of soft skills assessments. Expanding employability standards to all students could be beneficial for creating a workforce-ready population.

To effectively prepare students for the workforce, Nevada’s education system should integrate both technical and soft skills. Aligning educational standards with industry needs and broadening employability skills across all curricula will equip Nevada’s future workforce with the essential tools for success in an ever-changing job market.

INTRODUCTION

EMPLOYER NEEDS

As the global economy continues to evolve, employers consistently note the need for our education system to better prepare students with the necessary skills and attributes to succeed in the workforce. Education plays a critical role in shaping the future workforce, and it must, employers explain, adapt to meet the changing demands of the labor market. Developing hard and soft skills is essential to preparing students for the workforce.¹ **Technical skills** are abilities required in a particular field or industry, such as coding or accounting. **Soft Skills** are transferable across industries and sectors, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. In a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 91 percent of employers said they valued critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills more than a candidate's undergraduate degree.² Thus, employers claim it is crucial to prioritize soft skill development, in addition to the hard skills engrained in curricula.

Research on student motivation and classroom engagement concludes that the education system should incorporate experiential learning opportunities into the curriculum.³ **Experiential learning** involves hands-on experiences like internships, apprenticeships, and service-learning projects. It provides students with real-world experience and allows them to apply what has been learned in the classroom to a practical setting, all to prepare students for the workforce. By adopting a more 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.



Career and Technical Education programs in Nevada focus on developing not only technical skills but also employability skills that are essential for success in the workplace.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN NEVADA

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in Nevada are designed to prepare students for success in their chosen career paths. Nevada's CTE programs are available at both the secondary and post-secondary levels and are designed to meet the state's workforce needs. At the secondary level, CTE programs are offered through the Nevada Department of Education. They are available in various fields, including agriculture, business, finance, health sciences, hospitality and tourism, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).

¹ Kevin Gray, "The Key Attributes Employers Are Looking for on Graduates' Resumes," Default, 2022, <https://www.nacweb.org/talent-acquisition/candidate-selection/as-their-focus-on-gpa-fades-employers-look-for-key-skills-on-college-grads-resumes/>.

² Ibid.

³ Yangtao Kong, "The Role of Experiential Learning on Students' Motivation and Classroom Engagement," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (October 22, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.771272>.

Career and Technical Education programs in Nevada focus on developing not only technical skills, but also employability skills that are essential for the workplace. **Employability skills** align with soft skills and refer to attributes, behaviors, and competencies that enable individuals to perform effectively in the workplace. For example, CTE programs in Nevada teach students how to communicate effectively with colleagues, supervisors, and customers and emphasize the importance of teamwork and collaboration in achieving organizational goals. Additionally,

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



What soft skills should be emphasized in CTE curricula to promote competence in Nevada's workforce?

SOFT SKILLS AND CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION CURRICULA

This research addresses the following question: What soft skills should be emphasized in CTE curricula to promote competence in Nevada's workforce? To identify which soft skills should be prioritized in CTE curricula, this research analyzed trends in employment over the past five years, which were compared to the CTE programs with the highest enrollment.

PART I: LITERATURE REVIEW

SOFT SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT

In the contemporary job market, employers increasingly prioritize soft skills as essential qualities in prospective employees.⁴ Among the most essential soft skills sought by employers are:

- **Communication skills:** Communicating effectively using verbal and written communication and active listening.⁵
- **Interpersonal skills:** Collaborating and contributing to a harmonious and productive team environment.
- **Adaptability and resilience:** Successfully navigating dynamic challenges and changes in the workplace.
- **Problem-solving and critical thinking skills:** Analyzing complex situations and devising innovative solutions.
- **Time management and organizational skills:** Prioritizing tasks and meeting deadlines effectively.
- **Emotional intelligence:** Self-awareness and empathy, understanding one's own emotions and those of others, and fostering better relationships with colleagues and clients.

Employers recognize that employees equipped with these soft skills contribute to enhanced teamwork, increased productivity, and improved overall organizational performance.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND CAREER READINESS

Several studies have assessed the impact of CTE programs on students' career readiness.⁶ These studies generally find that participation in CTE programs positively influences career exploration, technical skills development, and professional attitudes.⁷ Students engaged in CTE also tend to demonstrate greater confidence in their career choices, higher levels of motivation, and improved problem-solving abilities.⁸ 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.

⁴ Kevin Gray, "The Key Attributes Employers Are Looking for on Graduates' Resumes," Default, 2022, <https://www.nacweb.org/talent-acquisition/candidate-selection/as-their-focus-on-gpa-fades-employers-seek-key-skills-on-college-grads-resumes/>.

⁵ Robles, M. M. (2012). Executive perceptions of the top 10 soft skills needed in today's workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(4), 453–465.

⁶ National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). *Career and Technical Education Programs in public school districts: 2016–17*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018028.pdf>.

⁷ US Department of Education. (2019). *Bridging the Skills Gap: Career and Technical Education in High School*. CTE Data Story. <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/cte/index.html>.

⁸ Dougherty, S. M., & Lombardi, A. R. (2016). From vocational education to career readiness: The ongoing work of linking education and the labor market. *Review of Research in Education*, 40, 326–355.

Research suggests the success of CTE programs is contingent on their alignment with industry demands.⁹ This requires CTE programs to re-evaluate continually to ensure the programs offered align with industry needs and trends. The primary aim of CTE is to equip students with skills that hold value in the job market. To achieve this, researchers have drawn on the expertise of psychologists who have extensively studied the role of personality traits in workplace performance.¹⁰ Over time, the influence of personality psychology in education policy, particularly in early childhood education, has grown, with a focus on noncognitive, soft skills.¹¹ A recent study from the *Oxford Quarterly Journal of Economics* highlighted that measures of attributes such as grit and self-efficacy, can predict educational outcomes later in life. Consequently, education programs have begun emphasizing noncognitive skills.

NEVADA APPLICATION – EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

In Nevada, CTE employability skill standards have been established to ensure that students are equipped with the essential skills needed for success in the workplace. Nevada's CTE employability skill standards are based on industry research and input from employers, educators, and other stakeholders.¹² They include critical employability skills: communication, collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking, and professionalism. Soft skills are especially vital in industries where direct interaction with clients or customers is frequent, such as hospitality, healthcare, and customer service.¹³ As the job market evolves, 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.

In Nevada, students' competence is assessed using standardized exams at the end of a CTE program by the [Nevada Department of Education](#). These exams include a *program-specific assessment* and an *employability skills assessment*, both required for certification. Research on the evaluation methodology for these skills is limited.

⁹ Moyer, R., Snodgrass, J., Klein, S., & Tebben, C. (2017). *Simulated work-based learning: Instructional approaches and noteworthy practices*. National Center for Innovation in Career and Technical Education, U.S. Department of Education.

¹⁰ Heckman, J., & Rubinstein, Y. (2001). The Importance of Noncognitive Skills: Lessons from the GED Testing Program. *American Economic Review*, 91(2), 145–149. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2677749>.

¹¹ Almlund, M., Duckworth, A. L., Heckman, J., & Kautz, T. (2011). Personality, psychology, and economics. In E. A. Hanushek, S. J. Machin, & L. Woessmann (Eds.), *Handbook of the Economics of Education* (Vol. 4, pp. 1–181). North-Holland.

¹² The Nevada Department of Education implemented the 21 Workplace Readiness Standards recommended by the Career and Technical Education Consortium of States (CTECS), validated by the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center, and reviewed by over 300 employers. These standards were endorsed by focus groups and the State Career and Technical Education Advisory Council.

¹³ Sisson, L. G., & Adams, A. R. (2013). Essential Hospitality Management Competencies: The Importance of Soft Skills. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 25(3), 131–145. doi: 10.1080/10963758.2013.826975.

PART II: 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 them. Second, statistical analyses were conducted using the Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation (DETR) and CTE data (2021-2022).

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF STANDARDS

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 redeveloping 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.

The CTE Employability Skills Standards in Nevada are divided into three categories: *Personal Qualities and People Skills*, *Professional Knowledge and Skills*, and *Technology Knowledge and Skills*. Each category highlights distinct skills it intends to address through the Employability Skills Standards. Using the literature on soft skills most desired by employers, these standards were coded and analyzed based on their integration of those six skills.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Our research conducts a descriptive statistical analysis of data obtained from Career and Technical Education programs and the Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation. This study uses a retrospective and cross-sectional research design to analyze existing data. Data for this research was collected using the Nevada P-20 to Workforce Research



CTE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS STANDARDS IN NEVADA

Personal Qualities & People Skills

- Timeliness & motivation
- Integrity
- Teamwork
- Appropriate workplace dress & behavior
- Diversity awareness
- Conflict resolution
- Creativity & Resourcefulness

Professional Knowledge & Skills

- Speaking & listening
- Reading & writing
- Critical thinking
- Attention to safety
- Understanding complex systems
- Lifelong learning
- Job advancement
- Time & resource management
- Math skills
- Customer service

Technology Knowledge & Skills

- Technology proficiency
- Computer and IT proficiency
- Proper internet use
- Telecommunications proficiency

Data System (NPWR) and was explicitly narrowed through NPWR's 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 for the 2021-2022 school year. The DETR data was used to evaluate the highest employed industries in Nevada over five years.

Before conducting the statistical analysis, data preprocessing was performed to clean and transform the data as required. This step involved handling missing data, addressing outliers, and standardizing variables for consistency. Significant data was missing from the DETR database, so the missing data was removed. Descriptive statistical techniques were applied to summarize and present the data.

PART III: RESULTS

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF STANDARDS

The first category, *Personal Qualities, and People Skills* addresses timeliness, teamwork, self-representation, creativity, and conflict resolution skills. The second category, *Professional Knowledge and Skills*, highlights speaking and listening, critical thinking, lifelong learning, time management, and customer service skills. Finally, the third category, *Technology Knowledge and Skills*, sets forth standards for appropriate internet use, proficiency with information, and technological productivity. All employability standards have corresponding definitions and instructional strategies to assist the development of these skills.

Performance Standard – Demonstrate Personal Qualities and People Skills

The standards represent professionalism in the first performance standard category, *Demonstrate Personal Qualities and People Skills* (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),” (see Appendix B). This standard demonstrates the development of the following soft skills most desired by employers: **communication and interpersonal skills**.

Performance Standard – Demonstrate Professional Knowledge and Skills

The second performance standard category—*Demonstrate Professional Knowledge and Skills*—contains standards involving workplace structure and competence in completing the work (see Appendix A). For example, Standard 1.2.5 states, “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,” (see Appendix B). This standard demonstrates the development of the following soft skills most desired by employers: **communication, adaptability and resilience, problem-solving and critical thinking, and time management and organizational skills**.

Performance Standard – Demonstrate Technology Knowledge and Skills

Finally, the third performance standard category, *Demonstrate Technology Knowledge and Skills*, relates to technological competence (see Appendix A). This soft skill is critical for any field, especially as the workforce moves in a technology-driven direction. For example, Standard 1.3.1 states, “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,” (see Appendix B). This

standard demonstrates the development of the following soft skills most desired by employers: **communication and problem-solving and critical thinking.**

CTE STATISTICS

There were 73,591 high school students were enrolled in CTE programs in Nevada in the 2021-2022 school year. Just over half of the students complete the CTE program and most of those who do finish the certification assessments and graduate with a CTE certificate. According to the Nevada Department of Education, 12,960 students took the Workplace Readiness Skills Exam. This is one of two required assessments to gain a CTE certification.

The CTE clusters are divided into more specific programs containing broader categories such as *STEM, health sciences, information technology*, and more. When analyzing those who participated in CTE programs, the programs with the most significant enrollment fell within five areas outlined in Table 1 below: *culinary arts, video production, sports medicine, photography, and graphic design*. More than 80 different programs are offered to students in Nevada. Still, these five program areas account for more than 30 percent of CTE program enrollment in 2022 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Percent of Students in the Five Most Populated CTE Programs in Nevada (2021-2022)

CTE PROGRAM	CORRESPONDING CLUSTER	PERCENT OF CTE STUDENTS IN PROGRAM
CULINARY ARTS	Hospitality & Tourism	8.4
VIDEO PRODUCTION	Arts, A/V Technology & Communications	7.1
SPORTS MEDICINE	Health Science	6.2
PHOTOGRAPHY	Arts, A/V Technology & Communications	6.1
GRAPHIC DESIGN	Arts, A/V Technology & Communications	5.9

DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT TRAINING AND REHABILITATION STATISTICS

Table 2 presents the percentage of Nevada employment in the highest employed industries for 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2022. The data highlights the proportion of jobs within each sector, represented by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code, over the specified years. Although there are thousands of industries in Nevada's workforce, only those with at least 2 percent of the workforce were reported here. Additionally, some industries comprised at least 2 percent of the workforce in some years but not others, and that is visible through the gaps in the table.

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

The data in Table 2 provide an overview of the trends in the highest-employed industries in Nevada over the specified years. A significant drop in employment in the “Limited-Service Restaurants” category was observed between 2017 and 2022. The “Full-Service Restaurants” category dropped slightly during this period, while employment in the “Supermarkets and Other Grocery Stores” remained generally flat. This data is valuable for policymakers and researchers who want to understand 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 employment industries so that the skills can be reflected in the standards/curriculum for the most populous CTE programs.

PART IV: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

EMPLOYMENT INDUSTRIES AND CTE ALIGNMENT



Although the industries that are most employed do not all align directly with the highest enrolled CTE programs, there are overlapping similarities. The most populated CTE program, Culinary Arts, draws parallels to the highest-employed industry in Nevada for every year examined in our research: 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 the highest-employed industries: the connection with people. Most of the industries are service-based and, therefore, directly engage in customer service and hospitality. Similarly,

the top CTE programs implicate interacting with others, serving their needs, and executing their vision. Increasing one's interpersonal skills is critical for success in any of these industries.

SOFT SKILLS RELATED TO HIGHEST-EMPLOYED INDUSTRIES

The industries included in Table 2 represent the highest-employed sectors in Nevada across five years. One obvious similarity among these jobs is their people-centered nature. Even though these sectors are not necessarily considered part of the "hospitality industry" in Nevada, they can be grouped under this umbrella given that they all require a level of human interaction similar to the ideals of the hospitality industry.

The dynamic nature of the hospitality industry demands employees who can adapt swiftly to changing circumstances and handle diverse situations with poise. Research from the *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering (IJRTE)* indicates that customers are more likely to return to establishments where they feel valued and heard and meet their needs with genuine care and understanding. Soft skills like communication, adaptability, resilience, and emotional intelligence are essential in navigating high-pressure environments and addressing unexpected challenges that may arise in hospitality-type careers.

SOFT SKILLS ADDRESSED IN CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The Employability Skills Standards can be divided into three broad categories with unique competencies in each. These standards broadly address *applied knowledge*, *effective relationships*, and *workplace skills*. Such skills enable students to develop both personal and professional soft skills that are integral for the workforce. Out of the six key skills identified by employers, five were integrated into the Employability Skills Standards.

Emotional Intelligence and the Workplace

Despite the comprehensive nature of Employability Skills Standards, there is a noticeable absence of specific standards focused on developing emotional intelligence, noted as a vital aspect of the modern workforce.

Emotional intelligence encompasses the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions and empathize with the feelings of others. In the workplace context, 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.



Despite the comprehensive nature of Employability Skills Standards, **there is a noticeable absence of specific standards focused on developing emotional intelligence**, which is a vital aspect of the modern workforce.

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 clearly and constructively 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, constructively managing stress and conflicts. 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.

Incorporating Soft Skills into Education Curricula

Integrating soft skills into curricula and standards in education requires a deliberate 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.

First, 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. Second, 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. Third, schools can offer workshops, seminars, or special classes dedicated explicitly to soft skill development, addressing topics like time management, leadership, and adaptability. Further, 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.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION 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. Conversely, the employability skills assessment aims to gauge the student's soft skills, including communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork.

However, these assessments' exact format and evaluation criteria 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 a role in preparing the future workforce, it is essential to better understand the nature of these assessments to ensure validity and reliability and confirm their alignment with the demands of the rapidly evolving job market. Further research on the content and structure of both evaluations can improve transparency, standardization, and effectiveness in evaluating students' proficiency and employability skills in CTE programs.



Challenges of Soft Skills and Standardized Testing

The assessment of employability skills is critical to 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 may fail to capture 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.

Research suggests 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.



POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

1. *Emotional Intelligence Metrics*

Add emotional intelligence metrics to Employability Skills Standards to enhance workforce readiness.

2. *Further Standard Integration*

Use the *Portrait of a Nevada Learner* to further integrate soft skill competencies in all academic standards.

3. *Ongoing Research*

If soft skills standards will exist within the Nevada framework, further research on the measurement of these competencies is critical.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

One policy consideration to strengthen workforce readiness involves integrating emotional intelligence standards into existing frameworks. This could include adding emotional intelligence metrics to Employability Skills Standards to reflect the demands of the modern workplace better. Another option could involve further integrating the Portrait of a Nevada Learner, which addresses many aspects of emotional intelligence and workforce readiness. Additionally, incorporating these standards into academic curricula – beyond just Career and Technical Education programs – can ensure that all students are equipped with these essential skills, thus broadening the scope of workforce preparation initiatives.

If these standards will exist within the Nevada framework, ongoing research into the measurement of soft skills is critical in validating their effectiveness. This requires a rigorous psychometric alignment to maintain confidence in the assessment process.

While CTE programs undeniably play a crucial role in equipping students with the personal and professional skills necessary for success in Nevada's workforce, some contend that limiting these standards to only those students enrolled in CTE is a missed opportunity. If we want to ensure all of our Nevada graduates are college and career-ready upon graduation, Employability Skills Standards should be accessible for all students. Proponents note that by integrating these standards into the education of every student in Nevada, all young individuals can be equipped with the essential tools to excel in their future careers, regardless of their chosen path. Therefore, by expanding these standards to every student, rather than only those who opt into a CTE program, 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.

ABOUT THE GUINN CENTER

The Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy center addressing key challenges faced by policymakers in Nevada. We are affiliated with the University of Nevada, Reno, with researchers and collaborative partnerships at NSHE institutions across the state.

Founded in 2013 by a group of Nevadans who sought to advance new policy choices based on sound research, sensible and pragmatic thinking, and bold ideas, the Center is named for the late-Governor Kenny Guinn.

Our research is financially supported through grants, contracts, and generous contributions from our donors. If you would like to support our work, visit our website at Guinncenter.org.

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