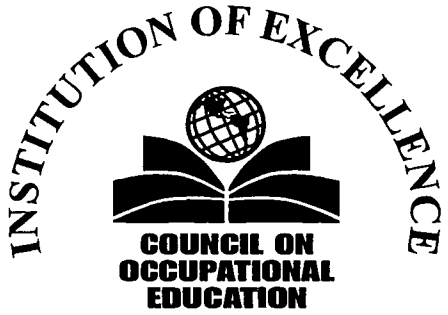
DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 569 TM 035 395

AUTHOR	Coulton, Bill
TITLE	A National Report Card for Technical Education Institutions: An Interim Report.
SPONS AGENCY	Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2003-11-00
NOTE	16p.; Produced by the Council on Occupational Education.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Benchmarking; Comparative Analysis; Elementary Secondary Education; Models; *Report Cards; *Technical Education; Technical Institutes

ABSTRACT

In 2002, five state agencies overseeing technology centers and technical colleges formed a consortium with the Council on Occupational Education, a national accreditor of workforce education institutions. The purpose was to develop common benchmarks and a common report card. Subsequently, the consortium received a 3-year grant in 2001 from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to supplement major funding by the participating states. The model project is built on four premises: (1) a valid and reliable report card must compare like institutions having common missions and common goals; (2) the report card should emphasize excellence and best practices; (3) the benchmark must be based on consistently applied and nationally recognized standards, such as those validated by a recognized authority in the field; and (4) every aspect of data collection, processing, and verification must be consistent to ensure accuracy and a "level playing field" among the participating institutions and states. The project is in its third year. This interim report presents several outcomes from the first 2 years and expresses opinions about what would occur in the third year and beyond. So far, the yield of positive and unexpected results has proved invaluable to all. (Author/SLD)



A National Report Card
for
Technical Education Institutions
An Interim Report

by

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presented at the

Annual Meeting
of the
Mid-South Educational Research Association
(MSERA)

Biloxi, Mississippi - November 6, 2003 - Bayview Hotel

The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessary represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

This publication was produced by the Council on Occupational Education, 41 Perimeter Center East, NE, Suite 640, Atlanta, GA 30346. Copies may be obtained by contacting the Report Card of Excellence FIPSE Project Director, Bill Coulton, at 800/917-2081, Ext. 12 or by e-mail at coultonb@council.org.

Abstract

The difficulties involved in measuring the quality of educational performance among postsecondary public institutions in this age of accountability are well documented. An oft-heard lament is that there are no common benchmarks that will allow meaningful institution-to-institution and state-to-state comparisons (Ewell, 2000). And as budget uncertainties continue, postsecondary educators fear that any such data comparisons might be misused by legislators and governors.

In 2000 five state agencies overseeing technology centers and technical colleges formed a consortium with the Council on Occupational Education (COE), a national accreditor of workforce education institutions. The purpose was to develop common benchmarks and a common report card. Subsequently, the consortium received a three-year grant in 2001 from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) to supplement major funding by the participating states.

The model project is built upon four premises:

- A valid and reliable report card must compare like-institutions having common missions and common goals,
- The report card should emphasize excellence and best practices,
- The benchmarks must be based upon consistently applied and nationally recognized standards such as those validated by COE, a recognized authority in the field, and
- Every aspect of data collection, processing, and verification must be consistent to ensure accuracy and a "level playing field" among the participating institutions and states.

The project is in its third year. This interim report presents several outcomes from the first two years and opines what will occur during the third year and beyond. Thus far, the yield of positive and unexpected results has proved invaluable to all.

The Problem

The lack of common benchmarks and the absence of consistent report cards for postsecondary institutions make it difficult to reliably compare education quality. Oversight agencies of postsecondary workforce education institutions, in particular, need a viable process by which institutional performance can be measured.

A Collaborative Solution

Five state workforce education agencies (the Florida Department of Education's Office of Workforce Education, the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education, the Kentucky Technical Colleges, the Louisiana Technical College, and the Tennessee Board of Regents) agreed to work with the Council on Occupational Education (COE) to develop a common report card. The purpose is to provide a national model and invite other states having technical schools and colleges to participate.

During the 2001-2002, participating institutions included 36 technical education centers in Florida, 27 Georgia technical colleges, 15 Kentucky technical colleges, 42 campuses of the Louisiana Technical College, and 26 Tennessee technology centers. These represented a full-time equivalent enrollment of 115,000 students. All institutions were accredited by the COE. Due to financial constraints, the Kentucky Technical Colleges dropped out of the project during the second year.

Identifying Common Benchmarks

Utilizing COE's annual report and data processing system, data on three benchmarks have been collected and reported during the past two years. These include percentages of Graduates, percentages of Placements, and percentages of Licensure Examination Pass Rates, where licenses are a requirement for employment. "Completer"

data is also collected and identifies those students who did not graduate but who obtained sufficient training to obtain employment in the field of specialization.

The first report card was shared among agency administrators in 2002. The data were unverified. The results were found to be flawed in several respects. Nevertheless, the format and presentation of the report card were found to be generally acceptable and contained sections describing each participating agency, an explanation about how the data are obtained and processed, a listing of participating institutions, and the names of individuals and committees that assisted in the production of the first prototype. It was suggested that only Graduates and Placements percentages be compared to identify "Best Overall Performance" of schools and colleges and not include Licensure Pass Rate percentages because not all institutions offered programs requiring licenses.

Discovering Data Flaws

What were some of the flaws? The reliability and validity of data used in the Report Card Project rest upon the integrity of COE's Annual Report, an electronic collection, processing, and reporting system, and those people at the institution level who provide the data. This activity has been in operation over many years. Member institutions are requested to furnish data to COE using a reporting matrix that collects numbers of Graduates, Completers, Placements, and Licensure Pass Rates. Over the past several years, it was assumed that the data furnished by member institutions would be accurate, since those responsible for preparing the reports receive training and are given specific instructions. Surprisingly, this assumption was not true.

Audits during 2001 and 2002 showed institutions were not reporting certain licensure programs while others were reporting certification programs (non-licensure

programs). Some reported short-term training that does not qualify as reportable programs in accordance with COE requirements. In one state, institutions were not using the same reporting period consistently, thereby creating larger or smaller performance totals than other institutions. Moreover, there were glitches in COE's computer processing system. All of these outcomes could not have been predicted.

Not surprisingly, the oversight agencies in each state were suddenly made aware that their institutions might be reporting performance data to COE that differed significantly from those data reported to the agency. For the first time, perhaps, they examined why this was occurring. And for the first time, in some instances, state agency personnel understood the differences in formats of their own information management system (IMS) requirements and those of COE. Moreover, audits by the agencies identified the extent to which their institutions' data were accurate and made adjustments as necessary. The fact that oversight agencies would take a proactive part in ensuring that future COE Annual Reports would contain accurate data was certainly an unexpected outcome.

Major Recommendations for the Report Card and COE

In May 2003, the FIPSE Internal Evaluation Committee (composed of data processing gurus from each state agency) met for the purpose of recommending basic changes in how the Report Card Project would gather, process, and report data. The committee recommended:

- adopting new definitions for Graduate, Placement, and Licensure Examination Program,

- providing more detailed training for individuals at the institution level who are responsible for furnishing COE Annual Report data,
- providing additional instructions each year for completing COE's Annual Report,
- creating a list of all licensure examination programs required for employment so as to verify that the program data reported by each institution and state are consistent and inclusive,
- providing a data verification checklist to on-site COE evaluation teams so data reported by the institutions can be randomly verified on-site,
- performing an audit of institutions identified as "top performers" and "most improved" on a random basis, and,
- encouraging state and federal agencies to continue their own independent audits of data.

The implications for COE to modify its accreditation procedures relative to its Annual Report data collecting, processing, verifying, and reporting were clear. The Committee's recommendations were reviewed by COE officials. Dr. Harry Bowman, President of the Council, acknowledged that verification of data would become a priority, since verification had never been done systematically by COE. In the past, on-site evaluation teams were encouraged to randomly verify Graduates, Placements, and Licensed Graduates whenever possible, but it was not a mandatory requirement. Now, it would be.

A Far-Reaching Outcome

In making his announcement, Dr. Bowman indicated data verification would be applied not only to the Report Card Project institutions, but to all postsecondary private career schools and public technical schools and technical colleges accredited by COE. (Military and national defense schools as well as Job Corps Centers will be excluded from the new data verification requirement because their Federal oversight agencies already address this issue.) Thus, as a result of report card activities, the decision to verify data will affect some 742 campuses. It will indirectly affect 300,000 students each year in 26 states. This is a major albeit another unexpected outcome of the project.

During the past several months, the computer glitches have been remedied. New materials and training strategies have been implemented for instructing those persons who are responsible for producing COE Annual Reports at the institutional level. Check sheets to verify data have been developed for use by on-site evaluation teams beginning in January, 2004. These changes in COE policy and operation would likely not have happened in the foreseeable future without the Report Card Project.

How Data Appear in the Report Card

What does the current report card look like? The emphasis is upon excellence and "best practices." The purpose is to demonstrate to less successful institutions that however large or small a technology center or technical college might be, it can carry out its mission at a very high level. Cut-off percentages in ranking the institutions have been arbitrary, but there are identifiable divisions between "best performing" institutions and all the others when they are ranked by category. Following are examples, keeping in

mind that the data used for this presentation are at this time only partially verified. In Florida, eight of 36 institutions met the 75% criterion for percentage of graduates.

Figure 1. **Florida: Percent of Graduates – Criterion: 75% or More**

Withlacoochee Technical Institute	**100%**
1201 W. Main St., Inverness, FL	
FTE: 577 Steven Hand, Director	
Washington-Holmes Technical Center	**99.2%**
757 Hoyt St., Chipley, FL	
FTE: 682 Paul Parker, Director	
Lee County High Tech Center Central	**87.7%**
3800 Michigan Avenue, Ft. Meyers, FL	
FTE: 1673 Ronald E. Pentiuk, Director	
D.G. Erwin Technical Center	**86.9%**
2010 E. Hillsborough Ave., Tampa, FL	
FTE: 1253 Michael Donohue, Director	
Ridge Vocational-Technical Center	**85.4%**
7700 State Road, 544, Winter Haven, FL	
FTE: 699 Alfred C. Ryder, III, Director	
Manatee Technical Institute	**78.2%**
5603 34th Street, West, Bradenton, FL	
FTE: 829 Mary Cantrell, Director	
Orange Technical Education Center – Westside Tech.	**76.4%**
955 E. Story Road, Winter Garden, FL	
FTE: 1643 Joseph McCoy, Director	
Sarasota County Technical Institute	**74.9%**
4748 Beneva Road, Sarasota, FL	
FTE: 1340 Gene Witt, Director	

Notice in the above ranking that small and large institutions are represented, i.e., the fulltime equivalent (FTE) is given. The location of the institution is also shown so one can tell whether it is located in an urban or rural setting. Persons familiar with the area would also be able to draw conclusions about special demographics that may exist. Administrators from institutions that are low-performers can visit these institutions of excellence to find out why they excel on this specific performance criterion.

Liberties have been taken when institutions of one state excel significantly above others. Below, Georgia Technical Colleges were held to a Placement Percentage rate of 95% compared with other states' institutions being held to a 90% criterion. Otherwise, all

but three of the colleges would have been represented. Nevertheless, 14 of the colleges are recognized out of 27.

Figure 2. **Georgia: Percent of Placements – Criterion: 95% or More**

South Georgia Technical College 1583 Southerfield Road, Americus, GA FTE: 1589 Jon Johnson, President	**99.6%**
Moultrie Technical College 361 Industrial Drive, Moultrie, GA FTE: 1627 Robert Craft, President	**98.8%**
Okefenokee Technical College 1701 Carswell Avenue, Waycross, GA FTE: 414 John Pike, President	**98.6%**
North Georgia Technical College 1500 Hwy. 197, North, Clarkesville, GA FTE: 1455 Ruth R. Nichols, President	**97.7%**
West Georgia Technical College 303 Fort Drive, LaGrange, GA FTE: 1088 Daryl Gilley, President	**97.6%**
Albany Technical College 1704 S. Slappey Blvd., Albany, GA FTE: 1295 Anthony O. Parker, Pres.	**96.9%**
Altamaha Technical College 1777 W. Cherry St., Jesup, GA FTE: 1173 C. Paul Scott, President	**96.3%**
Middle Georgia Technical College 80 Cohen Walker Dr., Warner Robbins, GA FTE: 2213 Billy G. Edenfield, Pres.	**96.2%**
North Metro Technical College 5198 Ross Road, Acworth, GA FTE: 700 Stephen Dougherty, Pres.	**96.2%**
West Central Technical College 176 Murphy Campus Blvd., Waco, GA FTE: 1666 Janet B. Ayers, President	**95.9%**
Lanier Technical College 2990 Landrum Education Dr., Oakwood, GA FTE: 885 Michael Moye, President	**95.7%**
Coosa Valley Technical College One Maurice Culberson Dr., Rome, GA FTE: 2535 Craig McDaniel	**95.6%**
Georgia Aviation and Technical College 71 Airport Rd., Eastman, GA FTE: 226 Andy Lundell, President	**95.2%**
Swainsboro Technical College 346 Kite Rd., Swainsboro, GA FTE: 1002 Glenn Deibert, President	**95.0%**

Louisiana Technical College is well represented in Percent of Placements at the 90% criterion by having seven campuses represented out of 40, as shown below.

Figure 3. **Louisiana Technical College: Percent of Placements – Criterion: 90% or More**

LTC – West Jefferson Campus 475 Manhattan Blvd., Harvey, LA FTE: 253 Donna Higgins-Wilson, Dir.	**97.8%**
LTC – Young Memorial Campus 900 Youngs Road, Morgan City, LA FTE: 759 Gregory Garett, Director	**96.9%**
LTC – Morgan Smith Campus 1230 N. Main Street, Jennings, LA FTE: 161 Barry L. Zerangue, Dir.	**95.8%**
LTC – Mansfield Campus 943 Oxford Road, Mansfield, LA FTE: 170 Jill H. Heard, Director	**92.7%**
LTC – Teche Area Campus 609 Ember Drive, New Iberia, LA FTE: 486 Paul Fair, Director	**91.3%**
LTC – Acadian Campus 1933 W. Hutchinson Ave., Crowley, LA FTE: 273 Darryl P. Bouillion, Director	**90.8%**
LTC – L. E. Fletcher Campus 310 St. Charles Street, Houma, LA FTE: 381 Travis Lavigne, Jr., Director	**90.2%**

The Tennessee Technology Centers are another example of institutions with exceptional performance on percentage of Graduates. The selected 75% criterion does not apply, since 15 Centers are recognized out of 26 with 100% of students graduating from programs during 2002.

As one can see by the FTE counts, most of the Tennessee Technology Centers have small enrollments, suggesting fewer programs, and also suggesting that the students attending them are highly motivated. Or are there other factors? Certainly, these Centers ought to attract many visitors who will want to know how the faculties keep students in their programs through to graduation.

Figure 4. **Tennessee Technology Centers: Percent of Graduates – Criterion: 100%**

TTC at Jackson **100%**
2468 Technology Center Dr., Jackson, TN
FTE: 585 Bruce Blanding, Director

TTC at Knoxville **100%**
1100 Liberty St., Knoxville, TN
FTE: 573 David Esa, Director

TTC at Livingston **100%**
740 High Tech Dr., Livingston, TN
FTE: 473 Ralph Robbins, Director

TTC at Dickson **100%**
740 Hwy. 46, Dickson, TN
FTE: 454 Bobby Sullivan, Director

TTC at Shelbyville **100%**
1405 Madison St., Shelbyville, TN
FTE: 426 Ivan L. Jones, Director

TTC at Elizabethton **100%**
426 Hwy. 91, Elizabethton, TN
FTE: 391 Jerry Patton, Director

TTC at Murfreesboro **100%**
1303 Old Fort Pkwy., Murfreesboro, TN
FTE: 373 Monty Thomas, Director

TTC at Paris **100%**
312 S. Wilson St., Paris, TN
FTE: 348 Jimmie Pritchard, Director

TTC at Pulaski **100%**
1233 E. College St., Pulaski, TN
FTE: 287 James Dixon, Director

TTC at Athens **100%**
1635 Vo-Tech Drive, Athens, TN
FTE: 259 Stewart Smith, Director

TTC at Harriman **100%**
1745 Harriman Hwy., Harriman, TN
FTE: 257 Mark Powers, Director

TTC at McMinnville **100%**
241 Vo-Tech Dr., McMinnville, TN
FTE: 224 Abraham Pallas, Director

TTC at McKenzie **100%**
16940 Highland Dr., McKenzie, TN
FTE: 220 Elizabeth Check, Director

TTC at Hartsville **100%**
716 McMurray Blvd., Hartsville, TN
FTE: 205 Nancy Carman, Director

TTC at Ripley **100%**
127 Industrial Dr., N. Industrial Park, Ripley, TN
FTE: 135 Brian F. Collins, Director

The Next Report Card

In December and January, COE will be collecting what is expected to be 99.9% accurate data from approximately 450 member and candidate institutions. These annual reports will provide 2002-2003 data. A new and larger report card will be published in Spring, 2004. It will contain Licensure Pass Rates as well as percentages of Graduates and Placements. A separate section showing Completers will be included.

One may legitimately ask why Completers should be included. A Completer is defined in COE's *Handbook of Accreditation, 2003 Edition*, as

> ***a student who has demonstrated the competencies required for a program and has been awarded the appropriate credential (graduate) or has acquired sufficient competencies through a program to become employed in the field of education pursued or a related field as evidenced by such employment (non-graduate).***

In other words, suppose a male student who enrolls in the quite lengthy Automotive Technology Program comprised of several technical courses leaves after passing the course on Brake Maintenance and Replacement. He is counted as a Completer when he obtains employment at a brake shop or successfully opens his own shop. This phenomenon occurs quite frequently in the workforce education environment where the goal of the student is to obtain employment as quickly as humanly possible. The student is also fulfilling the mission of the institution: providing trained men and women for jobs in the workforce. Why shouldn't the institution get credit for job placements based upon skills taught there?

Comparative data from other institutions across the nation that are not part of the Report Card Project will be presented in the next report card. These technology schools and technical colleges are recently accredited and have been members of COE for less than five years. Many of the institutions new to COE do not show comparable high performance when compared with institutions accredited by COE for ten years or more. Why would this be so? The answer may be that although the Council on Occupational Education accredits institutions, it places major emphasis upon program success. Previous accreditors of these recent members may not have stressed the importance of student performance in terms of Graduation Rates, Placement Rates, and Licensure Pass Rates. Certainly, this is an area that bears future investigation.

Future Report Cards

What is ahead? Publication of the report card each year will provide the state oversight agencies, their governing boards and legislators, and the participating institution personnel with an annual snapshot of how well they are performing. Moreover, they will see how similar institutions in other states are doing, when applying the same performance measures.

Given that the purpose is not to penalize but to recognize, all qualifying institutions will receive "certificates of excellence" for being listed as an institution of excellence. It is hoped that institutions so recognized will be emulated, not only by other institutions within their states, but by institutions in other states. Moreover, other agencies and institutions are encouraged to join in the Report Card Project so their best institutions and practices may be recognized. Participation by technical schools and colleges across the nation will ensure that the report card becomes an annual publication.

It will tell an important story: how well men and women are being prepared for a workforce that must compete in a global environment where technology is forever changing.

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