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The Effect of Passing a CTE Technical Assessment on College Enrollment

Authors	Kreisman, Daniel;Figge, Béla;Villero, Jesús
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Students who pass a CTE technical assessment are not more likely to enroll in college

Many students who are enrolled in a career and technical education (CTE) program of study take an industry-recognized technical assessment. To date, little evidence exists as to whether employers value technical assessments or how well the assessments measure skill attainment. This project used data from four metro-Atlanta school districts to understand whether passing a CTE technical assessment affected the likelihood of attending college. We also analyzed whether technical assessment scores were correlated with standardized math and ELA scores.

What did we learn?

Barely passing a CTE technical assessment has no impact on the likelihood of attending college. We studied technical assessments from NOCTI, a provider of industry credentials.

Students who take a technical assessment enroll in more CTE courses on average than students who take CTE coursework but no assessment, likely because assessments are normally given at the end of a sequence of coursework.

There is wide variation in correlations between the 25 most popular technical assessments and standardized math and ELA scores. Technical assessments are more strongly correlated on average with ELA than math.

What are the policy implications?

Our data lead to two conclusions. First, we find little impact of passing a NOCTI technical assessment on college-going. This suggests that students likely place little weight, if any, on the result of the test in terms of future schooling and potentially career plans.

Second, the wide variation in passing rates and test scores suggests that results can and should be better utilized as measures of learning in CTE courses.

Researchers

Daniel Kreisman
Béla Figge
Jesús Villero

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What questions did we answer?

1. Which students take NOCTI technical assessments and which assessments do they take?
2. Are technical assessment scores correlated with standardized math and ELA scores?
3. Does passing a technical assessment affect students' likelihood of attending college?

What data did we use?

We used data covering over 13,000 students from four metro-Atlanta school districts. The students took at least one of 52 unique NOCTI technical assessments in twelfth grade between 2011 and 2018. We observed college enrollment in two-year or four-year degrees using data from the National Student Clearinghouse.

Why is this issue important?

One of the core performance indicators included in the federal Perkins Act measures student attainment of an industry-recognized credential, a certificate, or a degree. States typically measure the share of CTE concentrators who passed a technical assessment for this indicator.

This project sheds light on whether students and college administrators value the signal demonstrated by passing an industry-recognized technical assessment. It informs the question of whether technical assessments serve as a valid measure of student and program quality.

What will we study next?

We hope to extend these analyses to include other tests not covered here, some of which are industry recognized credentials. We also wish to add data on employment and earnings to observe correlations between scores and labor market outcomes.

Want to learn more?

A report is available at
gpl.gsu.edu/gpl-publications

The **Metro Atlanta Policy Lab for Education (MAPLE)** and the **Career & Technical Education Policy Exchange (CTEx)** are components of the **Georgia Policy Labs (GPL)**, a research collaboration between Georgia State University and a variety of government agencies committed to leveraging the power of data to drive policy and programmatic decisions that lift children, students, and families—especially those experiencing vulnerabilities.

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