

IRCs

We have two end-of-program assessment types in career and technical education. The first, Technical Skills Attainment assessments or TSAs are for Perkins accountability reporting only. Perkins is the federal grant that funds much of CTE across the country. TSAs are administered to students who are identified as concentrators, that is, they have completed three credits in a CTE program sequence. These are not end of course assessments; they are end of program assessment.

In 2011, DESE began identifying Industry Recognized Credentials for accountability purposes. The CTE community was very pleased about this as this is really the only true CTE accountability measure in MSIP5. Industry Recognized Credentials (IRCs) affect secondary education as schools can count IRCs, along with Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual credit courses under the same standard for MSIP5.

DESE, with input from CTE Directors at both career centers and comprehensive high schools, has developed a process for identifying IRCs. It is a fairly lengthy and comprehensive application system that is open between March and June 30 of each year. An outside panel reviews the applications and makes the determination on whether or not an assessment is truly an IRC.

Three things drive the selection of an IRC:

1. It must be a credential with currency. That is, employers must recognize the credential. Most NOCTI, Precision Exams, and SkillsUSA assessments, as stand-alone tests, are not considered IRCs as these are not recognized by industry—they are considered nice certificates and not credentials. Many of these types of assessments are used as TSAs for Perkins reporting.
2. All IRCs must also be TSAs. In other words, IRCs must also fill the requirements for the Perkins law so that students are not double-tested.
3. The rigor required to earn an IRC must be comparable to the rigor required for a student to earn AP, IB, or dual credit.

Some examples of IRCs: the CNA or Certified Nurse Assistant is a credential—actually a license—to practice. Those students who are not interested in becoming a CNA could take a NOCTI Nursing Assistant exam or the National Health Care Foundation Skill Standards Assessment as their end-of-program assessment to meet the Perkins TSA requirement.

I mentioned earlier that NOCTI, SkillsUSA, and Precision Exams, for example, are not recognized by industry as stand-alone assessments. However, in welding, we permit students to take a written SkillsUSA, NOCTI Welding, Precision Welding Exam or SENSE assessment, but the student must also have an American Welding Society or AWS-certified teacher or inspector inspect at least one weld that the student did. The then, gives the student an entry-level AWS credential.

Another example of an IRC would be in auto collision. Students must pass all for Automotive Technician Examination or ASE core assessments: brakes, steering and suspension, engine performance and

electrical to earn the IRC. In contrast, the student would need to have an average cumulative score on all four areas meet or exceed the average cut score to have earned the TSA. In other words, the student may fail one of the four core assessments and still pass the TSA; they would not earn the IRC.

In other words, the IRC is usually a little more rigorous of an assessment than the TSA. Both are important and most schools push their students to earn the IRC if one is available in that content area. It has been our expectation that our IRCs are actually pushing more rigor and relevance in our CTE programs.

Concentrator: A student who has earned three or more sequential credits in any state-approved CTE program grades 9-12. Sequential credits can consist of courses that crossover into different program areas. (Note: It is a local decision to determine the sequence; therefore, it is a local decision to determine when a student becomes a concentrator and completes a program).

Industry Recognized Credential (IRC): A portable, recognized credential that validates an individual has successfully demonstrated skill competencies in a core set of content and performance standards in a specific set of work-related tasks, single occupational area, or a cluster of related occupational areas. A student does not have to be a concentrator to take an IRC.

Technical Skill Attainment (TSA): A technical skill assessment measures skill proficiency of Career and Technical Education (CTE) students who are concentrators (a student who has earned three or more sequential credits in any