



# The Bell Policy Center

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## Career & Tech Ed in Concurrent Enrollment

### House Bill 15-1275

Testimony to the House Business Affairs and Labor Committee  
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My name is Frank Waterous, and I am a senior policy analyst with the Bell Policy Center. The Bell is a non-partisan, non-profit research and policy organization founded on progressive values and dedicated to expanding opportunity for all Coloradans.

**The Bell Policy Center strongly supports House Bill 15-1275. The bill clarifies that career and technical coursework related to apprenticeship and internship programs may be included in concurrent enrollment programs. It also creates a tuition assistance program for qualified students enrolled in certain career and technical education certificate programs. The bill will help more Colorado students complete the post-secondary credentials necessary for employment in critically needed and well-paying “middle-skill” jobs, ensure that more Colorado employers can fill the skilled positions required for business productivity and growth and strengthen an expanded vision in our state of the importance of post-secondary education in all of its many forms.**

In 2009, the Bell Policy Center strongly supported HB 09-1319 and SB 09-285, which collectively expanded the mission of our state’s concurrent enrollment program to explicitly serve high school students from low-income and minority communities with historically low rates of high school graduation and college participation. Together, the two bills also ensured that concurrent enrollment credits could be earned in both academic and career & technical education coursework.

In our HB 09-1319 testimony, we noted that “in the long run, **expanding concurrent enrollment opportunities is about more than just offering broadened curricular options. It is really about creating *pathways to success***, without which many students – and especially those from low-income and minority families – would not be able to develop their talents, pursue their dreams and reach their full potential.”<sup>1</sup> The Working Poor Families Project notes that apprenticeship coursework and credentials lead to careers offering family-sustaining wages.<sup>2</sup> **HB 15-1275 is a logical and important next step in expanding Colorado’s concurrent enrollment program, and we are very enthusiastic about the outcomes that it will enable.**

**Beyond opportunities for increased student success, HB 15-1275 will also help Colorado employers close our state’s persistent skilled-worker gap. Many positions in key**

industries go unfilled every year because of the lack of potential employees with the post-secondary skills and training to fill them. This gap is most pronounced in Colorado's "middle-skill" area – that is, jobs that require some post-secondary education but less than a four-year bachelor's degree, including those requiring apprenticeship training. As the National Skills Coalition has highlighted, our state has a structural shortage of middle-skill workers. These positions account for 47 percent of Colorado's jobs, but only 36 percent of Colorado workers have the training to fill them – a gap that threatens to undermine our state's economic growth and innovation.<sup>3</sup>

**HB 15-1275 directly addresses this middle-skill gap by encouraging increased apprenticeship program enrollment and completion. Along with the curricular expansion that the bill allows, the tuition assistance program created through the bill will help in achieving this goal.** It will ensure that financial support is available for students who meet the income eligibility requirements for the federal Pell Grant, but do not qualify for the grant because the certificate programs in which they are enrolled do not meet the grant's credit-hour requirements.

**Finally, at the broadest policy level, HB 15-1275 represents an opportunity for Colorado to further embrace an expanded and transformed vision of the importance of post-secondary education in all of its many forms.** By adding apprenticeship-related coursework to concurrent enrollment programs, and by financially assisting students in their pursuit of industry-recognized credentials, we will be taking another vital step in furthering this important transformation.

**For all of these reasons, the Bell Policy Center strongly supports HB 15-1275.** We thank Rep. Winter for bringing it to you today and we urge you to support the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony with you. If you have any questions, or if I can provide further information, please call me at 303-297-0456 or email me at [waterous@bellpolicy.org](mailto:waterous@bellpolicy.org).

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Waterous, Frank, "Concerning concurrent enrollment of public high school students in courses offered by institutions of higher education, House Bill 09-1319," The Bell Policy Center, Testimony to the House Education Committee, April 2, 2009, <https://bellpolicy.org/content/hb-09-1319-concerning-concurrent-enrollment-public-high-school-students-courses-offered-inst>

<sup>2</sup> Alstadt, David, "Improving Access to Apprenticeship: Strengthening State Policies and Practices," The Working Poor Families, Policy Brief, Summer 2011, [http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/reports\\_and\\_pubs/](http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/reports_and_pubs/)

<sup>3</sup> *Colorado's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs: Meeting the Demands of a 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Economy*, National Skills Coalition, written for the Skills2Compete-Colorado campaign, Oct 2011, <http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/assets/reports-/s2c-colorado-report-2011.pdf>. The Bell Policy Center is a member of the Skills2Compete-Colorado coalition.