

Career and technical education is essential for a brighter future for Arizona

A strong education system's core function is to prepare students for success in their post-graduation lives. That system provides the foundation for a well-trained workforce, which is essential if businesses are going to thrive. In turn, healthy businesses produce a growing economy that benefits everyone.

We all can agree on the goal of economic growth. The real debate is over the most effective steps educators and policy makers can take toward raising our state's growth rate.

The real answer to that question is to offer students multiple pathways to success. The idea that there is just one road – attending and graduating from a four-year college – has not and will not equip most of Arizona's students to achieve economic independence.

One of the most promising of these multiple pathways is career and technical education, or CTE, which provides students instruction for a variety of well-paying careers Arizona employers are hiring for now.

Data show these programs, which initially are taught through traditional high schools and joint technical education districts and later in community colleges, are extremely successful. Students in CTE programs score higher on standardized tests, have a much lower drop-out rate and often earn industry-recognized certifications, which open the door to employment.

The highly skilled workforce produced by the best CTE programs makes Arizona more attractive to companies considering relocating or expanding here. That's a reality that already has been recognized by elected officials in other states with which we compete for jobs.

Fortunately, Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey just signed a



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bill reversing a nearly \$30 million cut to funding for our state's JTEDs, which offer career and technical education programs. These cuts would have crippled CTE in Arizona.

Arizonans have been losing ground compared to other states in terms of individual economic success. In 2006, individual Arizonans' per capita income was 91 percent of the national average. That figure has fallen by almost 10 percentage, which places Arizona among the bottom 10 states. If we want to reverse this, we need to increase our commitment to high-quality CTE.

A stronger CTE system will help make Arizona an even more attractive place to work, play and raise a family. Because CTE equips students with knowledge about careers they can explore and the career skills they need to succeed, it provides a solid pathway to achieving the American dream.

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