OCTOBER 21, 2026

DC COUNCIL'S COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE PUBLIC HEARING: CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND THE ADVANCED TECHNICAL CENTERS

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Greetings, Members and Staff of the DC Council's Committee of the Whole. My name is Jessica Giles. I am a Ward 7 resident and the Executive Director of the Washington, DC Office of the Center for Strong Public Schools Action Fund (CSPS Action Fund DC). CSPS Action Fund DC is committed to ensuring that every student—especially Black, Brown, and low-income students—attends a high-quality public school regardless of their zip code.

DC's affordability crisis is a career readiness crisis. DC is becoming increasingly unaffordable for working families. Yet we're not doing enough to ensure that students graduating from DC's public schools have the skills, credentials, and connections to build a life in the city where they grew up.

That's why at CSPS Action Fund DC, we want all students prepared for good jobs and a changing world.[1] On Monday, our nonpartisan affiliate, CSPS, launched the Strong for Students campaign.[2] Strong for Students is a movement of students, educators, parents, and advocates committed to ensuring better results, balanced funding, and bolder futures for our students. Our community has already identified career exposure for middle schoolers and career exploration opportunities for high schoolers as key priorities, so every student has a pathway to a good job.

But we're a long way from that vision. Right now, too many students are leaving school without a clear path forward. While research is still fairly limited, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) shows that only 16% of DC students are meeting the SAT College and Career Ready Benchmark,[3] and only 18% of 2011-2012 ninth-graders completed a degree by 2022.[4] We can and must do more to prepare students for life after high school.

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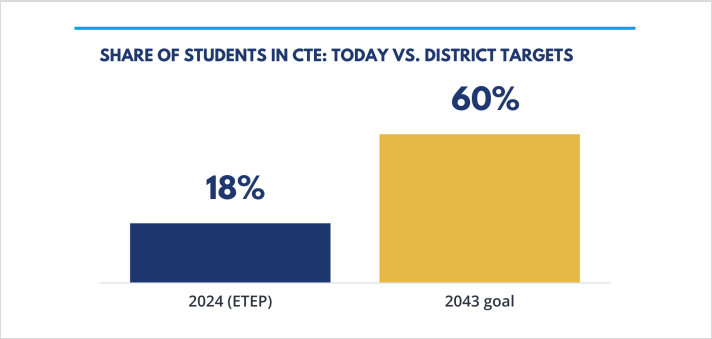
[1] A full-time job in a high-demand, high-growth field that provides opportunities to build skills and advance in a career, and pays a living wage that provides family-sustaining income and benefits.
[2] Strong for Students: Every DC student is ours to fight for. strongforstudents.org
[3] DC School Report Card Website. SAT College and Career Ready Benchmark.
[4] Office of the State Superintendent of Education (2023). High School College Milestones: A Cohort-Based Illustration of DC's Trends.

Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Beyond improving academic outcomes throughout the K-12 continuum—a critically important priority for this DC Council—research also shows that investing in high school career experiences can boost earnings for students at every degree level. A 2026 brief from the Office of Education Through Employment Pathways (ETEP) found that, among DC students in the classes of 2017-2019, alumni who participated in career-oriented experiences in high school were significantly more likely to feel well-prepared for their careers.[5] Additionally, a 2026 ETEP brief found that "CTE concentrators out-earn their non-CTE peers, and the advantage widens over time — with some career clusters pulling further ahead than others."[6]

Despite these compelling outcomes, we don't offer enough of these opportunities to DC students. While CTE enrollment has doubled since 2019, only 7,056 students enrolled in school year 2024-25.[7] In 2024, only 18% of students were taking CTE courses,[8] in spite of a 2043 goal of 60%.[9]



Sources: ETEP, April 2024; DME, Compact 2043.

While CTE enrollment has grown significantly, funding must keep pace. Schools rely on a combination of the federal Perkins grant, local funding, and existing school budgets to support these programs. This limits access as demand grows. Sustained, dedicated local investments are needed to expand access to high-quality CTE pathways. Other states are funding CTE in many different ways, including through a per-pupil weight.[10]

Advanced Technical Centers (ATC)

Advanced Technical Centers (ATCs) are one model to address this need, operating as centralized hubs that let students earn college credit through college-level coursework and hands-on professional training no matter their school. By offering pathways into areas like cybersecurity, nursing, clinical medical assisting, and emergency technician roles, the ATC program integrates hands-on coursework with curated work-based learning and internships.

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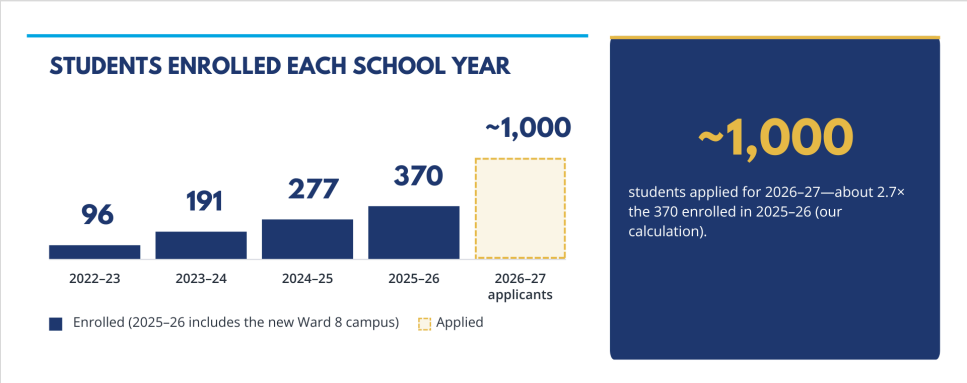
[5] ETEP (2024). DC Alumni Early Career Outcomes Survey.
[6] ETEP (2026). CTE Concentrator Outcomes.
[7] Office of the Superintendent of Education's Career and Technical Education Report.
[8] Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (2024). 18% of DC Students in High School, Alternative, and Adult Programs Are Taking CTE Courses.
[9] Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. DC's Compact: 2024///Supplemental Deck Draft.
[10] Education Commission of the States. 4 Models States Use to Fund Secondary CTE.

Although the enrollment figures have nearly quadrupled since the program's inception in SY 2022-23, the demand is still far outpacing the available seats.



Sources: Mayor's Office, 2024 (2022–24); OSSE 2024 Annual Report (2024–25); OSSE, 2026 (2025–27); OSSE, Record Demand for ATCs.

Preliminary data have quickly shown how well ATCs can work for students: During the 2023–24 school year, ATC students collectively earned 1,576 college credits through dual enrollment partnerships, delivering roughly $1.1 million in tuition value.[11] We are particularly excited that the Ward 8 ATC opened, focusing on healthcare careers. Students east of the river have repeatedly said they want jobs year-round, and that information about available opportunities is still lacking.

Scaling ATC will require permanent funding for in-demand, high-wage industries and emerging areas of growth (based on industry input). It should also continue to serve both sectors and award credit. Flexible schedules, transportation support, enhanced program marketing, and annual tracking of outcomes are all improvements that would support even more effective implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Scale CTE and Advance Technical Centers (ATCs) with sustained funding, ensure program quality, remove barriers to access, increase awareness of available opportunities, and track student outcomes yearly.

Thank you for holding this hearing. We look forward to working collaboratively to ensure all students have strong public schools.

Contact: jessica@strongschoolsaction.org.
Learn more about the Center for Strong Public Schools Action Fund at www.strongschoolsaction.org/dc.

[11] Office of the State Superintendent (2024). 2024 OSSE Annual Report: Build Futures.