With well over [one hundred bills](https://www.ednc.org/legislation-tracker/) focused on education currently before our Legislature, many North Carolinians are likely unaware of HB377. Simply titled “[Reduce Testing](https://www.ncleg.gov/BillLookUp/2019/H377),” this bill doesn’t necessarily sound like a bad idea. Education professionals are well suited to debate the merits of the various proposals in this bill regarding academic testing, and I would look to them for guidance on those options. As a workforce professional, my concern lies with the elimination of ACT WorkKeys ([Section 3.(b)](https://www.ncleg.gov/Sessions/2019/Bills/House/PDF/H377v3.pdf)).

I was first introduced to the ACT WorkKeys [National Career Readiness Certification](http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/workkeys-for-job-seekers/ncrc.html) nearly 10 years ago. Since that time, I have come to appreciate the ability of this certification to not only measure workplace readiness but also as a “foot in the door” with many local employers. In the Northeast, we have more than 600 companies who support the NCRC credential for new employees. These companies find value in this assessment-based credential which measures and certifies essential work skills and use it to help make determinations regarding hiring and promotion.

HB377 calls for the elimination of administration for this assessment. Currently, the NCRC is offered to CTE (Career and Technical Education) “concentrators” in their senior year through NCDPI. In the 20 northeastern counties which make up the NENC Career Pathways partnership, around [2500](http://nencpathways.org/metrics/) students have earned this credential each year since we began collecting this data in 2014-2015. These students were able to utilize this credential, along with other industry credentials, to step directly into the workforce after graduation.

Providing opportunities for students to leave high-school with a credential that allows for direct placement in industry only helps to reinforce our workforce initiative. The Governor’s [NC Job Ready](https://ncjobready.nc.gov/) focuses on skills and education attainment, employer leadership and local innovation as the three key elements. Not only does the NCRC offer this credential for job seekers (skill/education attainment), it also provides employers with a baseline measure of skills that can be utilized to create training. Lastly, the NCRC is required for [ACT Work Ready Community](https://www.workreadycommunities.org/NC) status, which is a tool used by many economic developers when recruiting companies to our area.

Whether students in North Carolina would benefit from reduced testing remains to be seen, but there is no doubt that the elimination of NCDPI administered WorkKeys assessments would only hinder the opportunities for students and industry. While these assessments are available at NC Community Colleges and other local partners, the ability to earn this credential in high school allows for a quicker and smoother transition into the workforce. Removing the option from schools only passes off the cost to other agencies. With thousands of positions unfilled throughout the state, it is more important than ever to use every resource available to meet the needs of our industries and our communities.

The [Northeast NC Career Pathways partnership](http://www.nencpathways.org) invites you to stand with us against the elimination of WorkKeys assessment as called for in HB377. We encourage you to reach out to your legislators and others in your community to help them understand the importance of this credential. Finally, we ask that you consider the significance of expanding this opportunity to all high school seniors, not just those designated at CTE “concentrators,” to provide greater opportunities for school-to-work transition for students throughout North Carolina.