three years of acquiring the general education certificate, so, for most postsecondary students, college will be free. These professional and technical degree programs will be designed to link to programs leading to the baccalaureate degree and higher degrees. There will be no dead ends in this system. Everyone who meets the general education standard will be able to go to some college, being able to borrow all the money they need to do so, beyond the first free year.

This idea of post-secondary professional and technical certificates captures all of the essentials of the apprenticeship idea, while offering no drawbacks (see below).

But it also makes it clear that those engaged in apprentice-style programs are getting more than narrow training; they are continuing on for career purposes as well, and building a base for more education later. Clearly, this idea redefines college. Proprietary schools, employers and community-based organizations will want to offer these programs, as well as community colleges and four-year institutions, but these new entrants will have to be accredited if they are to qualify to offer the programs.

Employers are not required to provide slots for the structured on-the-job training contemplated in this program, but many are now doing so because they get first access to the most accomplished graduates of these programs, and they can use these programs to introduce the trainees to their own values and way of doing things.

The system of skill standards for technical and professional degrees is the same for students just coming out of high school as for adults in the workforce. It is progressive, in the sense that certificates and degrees for entry level jobs lead to further professional and technical programs as clerical and clerical level jobs. Just as in the case of the system for the schools, though the standards are the same everywhere (leading to maximum mobility for students), the curricula can vary widely and programs can be custom designed to fit the needs of full-time and part-time students with very different requirements. Government grant and loan programs are available on the same terms to full-time and part-time students, as long as the programs and procedures which they are following are defined at the local level in ways that lead to clear standards and degrees defined by the system of professional and technical standards.

The national system of professional and technical standards is designed much like the interstate compact, which provides a national core around which the states can specify additional standards that meet their unique needs. There are national standards and exams for no more than 20 broad occupational areas, each of which can lead to many occupations in a number of related industries. Students who qualify in any one of these areas have the broad skills required by a whole family of occupations, and most are sufficient to enter the labor market immediately, with further occupation-specific skills provided by their union or employer. Industry and occupational groups can voluntarily provide credentials that build on these broad standards for their own needs, as can the states. Students entering the system are first introduced to very broad occupations by which they are clear to acquire the skills needed for a cluster of occupations. This modular system provides for the initiative of particular states, while at the same time it facilitates providing for mobility across states and occupations by reducing the time and cost entailed in moving from one occupation to another. In some cases, there is an emphasis on acquiring the skills needed to function effectively in high performance work organizations and the skills needed to continue learning quickly and well through a lifetime of work, on the one hand, and the specific skills needed to perform at a high level in a particular occupation on the other. Institutions receiving grant and loan funds under this system are required to provide information to the public and to government officials on outcomes, such as the number of students who graduate and are employed, the nature of their work, and the average salaries and wages as they are earned.

The national system of skills standards establishes the basis for the development of a coherent, unified training system. That system can be accessed by students coming out of high school, employed adults who want to improve their skills or to change careers, and displaced workers who are looking for work, as well as those who lack the basic skills required to get out of poverty. But it is all the same system. There are no internal barriers to entry or advancement, particularly for the disadvantaged, though special measures are taken to make sure that the disadvantaged are served. It is a system for everyone, just as all the parts of the system already described are for everyone. So the people who take advantage of this system are not marked by it as "damaged goods." The skills and knowledge they are offered and defined in part by the employers who will make decisions about hiring and advancement.

The new general education standard becomes the target for all basic education programs, both for school dropouts and adults. Achieving that standard is the prerequisite for enrollment in all professional and technical degree programs. A wide range of agencies and institutions offer programs offering general education degrees. High schools, dropout centers, adult education centers, community colleges, prisons, and employers. These programs are staffed by people who enroll in them. All the programs receiving government grant or loans funds that come with dropouts and adults for enrollment must meet the general education standard. As people meet the general education standard must release the same kind of data required of the postsecondary institutions on enrollment, graduation and success rates. Reports are produced for each institution and for the system as a whole showing differential success rates for each major demographic group.

The system is funded in four different ways, all providing access to the same or a similar set of services. School dropouts below the age of 21 are entitled to the same amount of funding from the same sources that they would have been entitled to had they stayed in school. Dislocated workers are provided federal programs that are included in the federal programs for that purpose and by state unemployment insurance funds. The chronically unemployed are funded by the Unemployment Compensation Fund for that purpose. Employed people can access the system through the requirement that their employers spend an amount equal to the amount they have paid into the system for that purpose. The employers can access the system through the requirement that their employers spend an amount equal to the amount they have paid into the system for that purpose. Employed people can access the system through the requirement that their employers spend an amount equal to the amount they have paid into the system for that purpose. Employed people can access the system through the requirement that their employers spend an amount equal to the amount they have paid into the system for that purpose. Employed people can access the system through the requirement that their employers spend an amount equal to the amount they have paid into the system for that purpose.