

Contact: Tom Holdsworth, Director Communications/Government Relations
Phone: (703) 737-0607, THoldsworth@skillsusa.org

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Supports Youth and Career Preparation by Grant to SkillsUSA

LEESBURG, Va., July 25, 2006—Because a career focus often gives students a sense of direction—and motivates them to achieve and to stay in school—a new nationwide program called “Champions for Change: Models for Youth Employability” is being developed to build nationally-recognized credentials for youth that will give them a decided advantage among employers when they begin their careers.

With a \$3.4 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, SkillsUSA will create a “SkillsUSA Proficiency Certificate” to validate entry-level workplace readiness in a variety of trade, technical and skilled service professions. These certificates will be based on qualifying scores achieved in the annual national SkillsUSA Championships competitions. For out-of-school youth, and students who are not SkillsUSA members, “authentic assessment” tests will be developed to allow young job seekers to prove that they possess the skills and competencies that qualify them to receive a proficiency certificate. The four-year grant—effective through 2010—also includes six pilot projects to help communities of at-risk youth engage local businesses, education and social service resources in their preparation, with emphasis on acquiring employability skills.

The association’s national SkillsUSA Championships “technical committees” (groups of subject matter experts from business, industry and labor in more than 60 occupational specialties), will create entry-level industry credentials based on the standards written for occupational contests by the technical committees. From Automotive Service Technology through Carpentry and Culinary Arts, to Internetworking, Nurse Assisting and Welding, the skills of career and technical education students will be assessed against the expectations of industry for entry-level workplace skills. SkillsUSA will align certificates with industry certification and assessments where they already exist. An important part of the project will be to translate industry-written competencies into language and formatting common to state department of education standards for academic subjects.

“Both education and industry respect SkillsUSA as a change agent,” said Tim Lawrence, executive director of SkillsUSA. “Our relationships with nearly 1,200 business, industry and labor partners on the national level—and with thousands more at state and local levels—testifies to SkillsUSA’s ability to improve the lives of people, particularly young people. That’s one reason why we have a role in taking industry standards to public school classrooms. Establishing industry-based credentials across multiple industries is a daunting challenge, but one for which SkillsUSA is uniquely positioned, given its many partners in nearly every industry that hires skilled workers.”

SkillsUSA is a partnership of students, teachers and industry working together to ensure America has a skilled work force. SkillsUSA serves more than 285,000 students and instructors annually and has served more than nine million members since its founding in 1965. The organization has 15,000 member classrooms in 54 state and territorial associations. More than 14,500 instructors and administrators are professional members of SkillsUSA.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation was established in 1930 “to help people help themselves through the practical application of knowledge and resources to improve their quality of life and that of future generations.” Its programming activities center around the common vision of a world in which each person has a sense of worth; accepts responsibility for self, family, community, and societal well-being; and has the capacity to be productive, and to help create nurturing families, responsive institutions, and healthy communities.

To achieve its greatest impact, the Foundation targets grants toward specific areas. These include health; food systems and rural development; youth and education; and philanthropy and voluntarism. Within these areas, attention is given to exploring learning opportunities in leadership; information and communication technology; capitalizing on diversity; and social and economic community development. Grants are concentrated in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the southern African countries Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe.