



PERKINS REAUTHORIZATION GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Association of Career and Technical Education (ACTE) is the nation's largest not-for-profit education association dedicated to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for successful careers. With that goal in mind, we offer the following initial principles to Congress as conversations begin on the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins Act). These principles will form the foundation of our work on more specific recommendations in the future.

Cutting across all of these guiding principles must be a clear goal of building the capacity of secondary and postsecondary educational institutions to prepare all students for success in current and emerging in-demand career pathways, which lead to self-sufficiency and provide opportunities for advancement. At its core, career and technical education (CTE) is about preparing a competitive workforce to participate successfully in a global economy—meeting the needs of individuals and employers.

1. Redefine the Federal Role in CTE

Since its original authorization as the Vocational Education Act of 1963, the goals of the federal investment in CTE have changed dramatically. While much of this change has been warranted due to evolving education and economic environments, over time the purpose of the legislation has become blurred. With more and more requirements and ideas added to the Perkins Act in each successive reauthorization, it now lacks a clear, consistent focus. As Congress reauthorizes the Perkins Act in the coming years, a close examination of the exact purpose of this legislation should occur.

ACTE believes that the purpose of the federal investment in CTE should be clearly focused on ensuring all students have access to high-quality CTE programs in high schools and postsecondary institutions, and that this purpose should drive the Perkins legislation. The legislation should be about building a strong system of CTE around the country, beginning early in a student's education with career awareness and broad knowledge and building pathways to more specific career-readiness skills through connections among secondary and postsecondary education and the labor market.

2. Target Expenditures

As the purpose is redefined and narrowed, so too should funding be more targeted to ensure the most impact on students. Funds should be clearly focused on ensuring programs meet high standards of quality and address areas in need of improvement in order to sustain and enhance

student success. Uses of funds within the legislation should be clearer, more exact and fewer in number than in current law. While flexibility for local implementation is critical, funding must be linked to the purposes of the legislation and the intended outcomes. At the same time, however, it is critical that the Perkins Act remain primarily a formula grant program designed to support all CTE programs around the country that are willing to make a commitment to high levels of quality and continuous program improvement. The Basic State Grant state-to-local formula should be maintained as a driver of efforts to ensure all students are ready for careers. While mechanisms for innovation (described below) should be included, without this baseline funding no real, sustained innovation will be able to occur.

3. Define Program Quality Elements

In order to ensure that Perkins funding really is targeted to improve CTE programs across the entire education system, a more defined set of quality program elements should be included in the legislation. These program quality elements should focus on essential components that have been shown through prior research to lead to improved student outcomes. Examples of elements that may be included are: academic and CTE integration, work-based learning, pathways or linkages between educational levels, technical skills development aligned with labor market needs, knowledgeable instructors, career development, and business and industry partnerships. Programs should be required to include identified elements in order to receive Perkins funding, and funding should be targeted to continuous quality improvement of these key areas based on local needs. Enhanced oversight, monitoring and program evaluation efforts should also be included in the legislation to ensure that all programs receiving funding adhere to the quality elements.

4. Ensure Relevant & Consistent Data

During reauthorization, the Perkins accountability system should be overhauled to ensure fewer and more meaningful measures that are more consistent across states and across federal programs. The system should rely on data that is

already available or that can be easily incorporated into state longitudinal data systems to minimize the data burden on educational institutions. Provisions must be included to improve and incentivize connections between secondary and postsecondary education and workforce data systems to track students' education and employment outcomes, the most important measures of CTE success.

5. Offer Incentives for Innovation

In addition to the foundational Basic State Grant, the Perkins Act should be a driver of innovation around the country. ACTE proposes a new Innovation Fund, administered at the federal level and modeled after the recent i3 program, to identify and replicate new promising practices within CTE or new and emerging career areas. These funds should be over and above current funding levels and should focus on new ideas that cannot be implemented solely with Basic State Grant funds. Funding should be offered on a short-term basis to launch, but not sustain, programs, and there must be recognition that some innovative programs may not be successful. Scalability and replicability should be key considerations, with provisions included for the sharing of program results. As an alternative or additional source of innovation, the current reserve fund could be reworked to ensure a stronger focus on new ideas.

6. Provide the Infrastructure to Support the System

In addition to direct program support, there are a number of system elements that must be addressed by the federal CTE law in order to ensure high-quality CTE programs around the country. The next Perkins Act should continue a focus on research, evaluation and dissemination targeted toward improving practice. A strong state leadership role should be emphasized to ensure adequate coordination and technical assistance for local systems, including strong professional development, leadership development, and program and curriculum development components, and strong support for career and technical student organizations. Support for data and assessment systems to ensure appropriate program measurement approaches and data linkages, and provisions to address teacher education and recruitment needs are also areas that should be addressed.

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