



Temporary Assistance for Needy Families



Career and technical education (CTE) is a well-established system within the United States that provides individuals with the education and training needed for sustained employment in positions with family-supporting wages. These programs are of critical importance in federal efforts to support and empower individuals living in poverty, whose long-term well-being hinges on their ability to acquire and maintain occupations in fields that will offer them the opportunity to improve their lives and those of their families.

To tap into CTE programs' enormous potential to improve the lives of those struggling in poverty, the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) presents the following recommendations for the reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. We urge Congress to incorporate these priorities into the reauthorized legislation in order to strengthen the ability of CTE programs to empower those struggling for economic self-sufficiency.

Priority 1: Extend Lifetime Limits for Education and Training Opportunities

TANF recipients should be encouraged to invest their time and effort into longer-term CTE programs that will increase their eligibility for careers in high wage, in-demand sectors. However, the current 12-month limit on counting CTE programs as a work activity reduces the ability of states to promote longer-term training. Increasing TANF's focus on education and training will reduce reliance on low-paying job activities that are unlikely to contribute to participants' long-term independence from public assistance.

- Extend the lifetime limit on "vocational educational training" as a work activity to 24 months, which will allow TANF recipients to pursue a long-term certificate or associate degree that can increase their earnings potential and long-term career opportunities.

Priority 2: Eliminate the Work Participation Rate Measure's Barriers to Education and Training

As education and training have become increasingly crucial in providing ladders to desired careers, it is critical that the work

participation rate described in current law is modernized to remove barriers that prevent TANF recipients from obtaining such opportunities.

- Eliminate the current "non-core" work activity designation for certain education and training programs, which places an excessive burden on TANF participants seeking to build their skills by requiring that they be coupled with an additional 20 hours of "core" work activities to satisfy states' work participation rates.
- Remove the existing statutory cap on the share of states' work participation rates that can be satisfied by participation in education activities. This current cap arbitrarily bars individual recipients from seeking to advance their employment potential and states from placing emphasis on addressing the skills needs of participants.

Priority 3: Ensure Meaningful and Coordinated Reporting and Accountability Systems

It is crucial that states are able to serve individuals living in poverty through a variety of federally administered education and skills training programs, which should be complementary and adaptable to states' unique economic climate and stakeholder involvement.

- Include effective reporting requirements and measures related to work and education that are aligned with other federally administered programs, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.
- Structure accountability systems to focus on outcomes while affording states flexibility in developing individual approaches to ensuring TANF recipients have access to education and training programs and ultimately achieve employment leading to self-sufficiency.