

A Brief History of CTE

By Catherine Imperatore

On February 23, 1917, the Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act was signed into law, launching the federal investment in career and technical education (CTE). Since then, federal CTE policy has evolved in response to changing U.S. economic and social conditions. Follow along as we highlight major legislation and other activities throughout the past century.

1926

The **American Vocational Association** was created from the National Society for Vocational Education and the Vocational Education Association of the Middle West.

1946

Federal dollars for vocational education were more than doubled to \$29 million per year in the **George-Barden Act of 1946**, which added funding for two student agriculture-related organizations (Future Farmers of America and the New Farmers of America) and set limits on equipment spending.

1963

Vocational education was expanded to “persons of all ages in all communities” in the **Vocational Education Act of 1963**. Funding for states was now authorized by student population rather than by field of study, including money for academically and economically disadvantaged and disabled students.

1976

Equal opportunities for women and girls were promoted in the **Vocational Education Amendments of 1976**.

1990

Contemporary vocational education began to take shape with the **Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act Amendments of 1990**, which embraced accountability, as well as secondary-postsecondary alignment, academic integration and business partnerships.

1998

The **Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998** continued the 1990 Act’s focus on alignment and integration. It created the reserve fund in states and modified state authorizations so that 85 percent of funding would reach local agencies.

In the same year, the American Vocational Association was renamed the **Association for Career and Technical Education**, reflecting a change from job-specific vocationalism to skill-based, rigorous career education.

2011

While still written into legislation, federal funding for **Tech Prep** was terminated.

2016

The U.S. House of Representatives passed the **Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act**, a reauthorization of the Perkins Act, by a vote of 405 to 5. The proposed bill would afford states and local recipients flexibility while promoting innovation and program alignment within a framework of streamlined administrative requirements and a more intentional focus on local needs. Senate negotiations on Perkins reauthorization have stalled.

1917

The federal role in CTE began 100 years ago with the **Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act of 1917**. This legislation marked the first federal investment in secondary vocational education, providing funding to the states for agriculture, home-making, and trade and industrial education.

1936

The **George-Deen Act of 1936** appropriated \$14 million per year in federal funds and broadened their use to include teacher education and training for marketing occupations.

1956

The **George-Barden Amendments of 1956** included funding for area vocational centers and added practical nursing and fishery occupations to the list of eligible education programs.

1968

The **Vocational Education Amendments of 1968** was the first vocational legislation to officially reference postsecondary students. It extended set-aside funding for students from specific populations.

1984

Vocational legislation was renamed after Carl D. Perkins, a representative from Kentucky and education advocate, with the **Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984**.

1994

The **School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994** linked work-based and school-based learning, supported by partnerships with industry. It expired in 2001.

2006

The term “vocational education” was also retired in the most recent version of federal CTE legislation, the **Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006**. Perkins IV introduced programs of study as a new unifying concept for CTE, with \$1.3 billion supporting two funding streams—the Basic State Grant and Tech Prep.

2015

Congress released its appropriations bill for **Fiscal Year 2016**, funding Perkins at \$1.117 billion for the third year in a row. Federal funding for Perkins has been successfully maintained in recent years, as other education programs have been cut.

SOURCES

Congress.gov

The History and Growth of Career and Technical Education in America by Howard R. D. Gordon

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