### A Brief History of CTE

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 more than 100 years.

#### Brief History

**1917**
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**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.

**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.

**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.

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

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

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

**1994**

**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.

**2006**
The term “vocational education” was also retired in 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.

**2011**
While still written into legislation, federal funding for Tech Prep was terminated.

**2018**
The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) continued the prior law’s focus on programs of study and made important updates to afforded states and local recipients more flexibility, prioritize stakeholder engagement and data-driven decision-making through a new comprehensive local needs assessment, streamline accountability measures, reduce Secretarial authority, enhance efforts to serve special populations, and encourage innovation through a competitive grant program.

**2020**
States submitted Perkins V four-year plans and local recipients submitted four-year local applications, including the results of the first comprehensive local needs assessments. Full implementation of the legislation began in the 2020–21 school year.

In addition, CTE educators demonstrated creativity and flexibility in the face of challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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**SOURCES**

Congress.gov  
The History and Growth of Career and Technical Education in America by Howard R.D. Gordon  
Perkins V: The Official Guide by Alisha Hyslop  
U.S. Department of Education

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