

BRIEF

Maximizing
Access &
Success
for Special
Populations

Supporting LGBTQ+ Learners in Career Technical Education

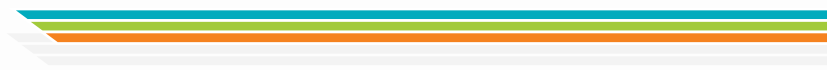
Career Technical Education (CTE) policies and programs have increasingly focused on supporting the needs of historically marginalized learners and closing access and performance gaps among learner groups. Perkins V, the latest iteration of federal CTE legislation known as the [Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act](#), is part of this trend. The law defines nine learner groups as special populations and includes a number of provisions that address expanding access to and supporting success within CTE programs for special populations. This brief will describe strategies for another learner group that, while not named as a special population in the legislation, may benefit from strategies to close gaps: LGBTQ+ learners.

SPECIAL POPULATIONS IN PERKINS V

LEARNER GROUPS DEFINED AS SPECIAL POPULATIONS IN PERKINS V:

- Out-of-workforce individuals
- English learners
- Individuals experiencing homelessness
- Individuals with disabilities
- Single parents, including single pregnant women
- Youth who are in/have aged out of the foster care system
- Individuals preparing for careers that are non-traditional for their gender
- Youth with a parent who is a member of the armed forces and is on active duty
- Individuals from economically disadvantaged families, ex. low-income youth and adults

*CTE educators are developing strategies to support learner groups who, while not special populations under the law, may need additional supports, including **migrant and undocumented, LGBTQ+, justice-involved and Tribal learners.***

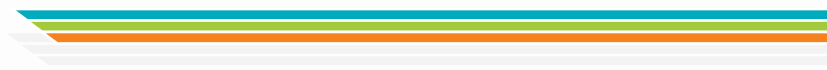


DEFINING LGBTQ+ LEARNERS

Perkins V does not define LGBTQ+ individuals as a special population. However, it is well established that this population encounters discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, requiring states to consider unique approaches to support LGBTQ+ learners.¹ LGBTQ+ individuals have been identified as high risk for health disparities, homelessness and housing instability and increased risk of being victims of violent crimes, especially transgender individuals.² These barriers are often exacerbated by racism and intersecting oppressions.

There is no universally accepted acronym for communities that are not heterosexual and/or express their gender in diverse ways. However, “LGBTQ+” is often used as an inclusive umbrella term to represent distinct populations with unique experiences that do not identify as heterosexual or cisgender.³ This term includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, gender non-conforming, non-binary persons, and more.⁴

The coronavirus pandemic has disproportionately affected LGBTQ+ individuals and exacerbated existing inequities, leaving many LGBTQ+ workers in low-wage, low-quality jobs.⁵ CTE policies and programs support LGBTQ+ learners because these learners face higher rates of poverty and unemployment.⁶



STRATEGIES FOR LGBTQ+ LEARNERS

Despite LGBTQ+ learners not being a formal special population in Perkins, states and local CTE leaders can leverage a number of potential strategies to support these learners. Potential state (🏛️) and local (📍) approaches include:

LGBTQ+ inclusive training for staff 🏛️ 📍

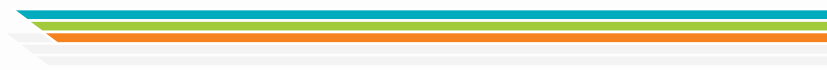
State and local leaders can equip educators and administrators with the skills to ensure equitable and supportive classrooms for all learners, including LGBTQ+ learners. Comprehensive professional development can empower educators to embrace diverse identities and families, understand the unique challenges faced by families with LGBTQ+ members, and provide tailored resources and support.

Intentional integration into information systems 📍

Local leaders can create documented policies and procedures for collecting gender and names in student information systems and ensure that registrar staff are trained to support LGBTQ+ learners in program enrollment. Including an option for nicknames or preferred name in management software can prevent loan blockages and other administrative bottlenecks for learners who do not go by their legal name. Clearly communicating when learners can utilize their preferred name (e.g., on student ID cards, diplomas) versus their legal name (e.g., transcripts, loan information) and communicating the availability of these options with administrative staff can ensure that learners are provided with inclusive options.

Affinity groups 🏛️ 📍

Research shows that affinity spaces positively influence the development and resilience of LGBTQ+ youth. To address their vulnerability to isolation, suicide risk and lack of leadership opportunities, middle and high schools can establish Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) or other inclusive spaces. The Equal Access Act guarantees that learners have the right to form GSAs in public schools as long as the school offers other organizations on campus.⁷ Ensuring that GSAs and other affinity groups welcome all learners, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, allows members to freely engage with the community without fear of potentially identifying or outing themselves. These groups benefit significantly from the guidance of a dedicated faculty adviser and strong support from the school administration.



Welcoming culture 📍

Educators can provide a welcoming and inclusive environment by allowing learners to note their preferred name and/or pronouns in the classroom to encourage authentic engagement. Local leaders can consider moving away from gendered practices, such as separating learners during health courses or enforcing gendered dress codes. In addition, CTE educators can ensure that LGBTQ+ learners feel welcome in Career Technical Student Organizations by encouraging them to participate and run for office.

Systematic collection and use of data 🏛️ 📍

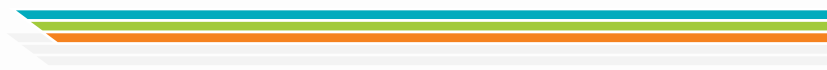
Collecting sexual orientation and gender identity data is crucial for understanding the needs of LGBTQ+ learners and promoting campus inclusivity.⁸ Postsecondary institutions nationwide have increasingly incorporated these demographic questions into their admissions process, while others provide optional opportunities after enrollment.⁹ This data allows institutions to provide direct outreach to self-identified LGBTQ learners, track their progress, offer support services and ensure an inclusive environment. Framing data collection to center LGBTQ+ learners' voices and needs can overcome reluctance to self-disclose. Formal policies for collecting and using data on preferred gender, developed in accordance with state law or guidance, can also assist with appropriately representing these learners in non-traditional learner calculations for Perkins V data reporting.

Wraparound supports 📍

Local leaders can ensure that LGBTQ+ learners have access to wraparound supports such as mental health services and crisis outreach. In addition, institutions can consider providing gender-neutral restrooms, and residential facilities can consider providing gender-neutral floors to create a safer, more inclusive space for these learners.¹⁰ The U.S. Department of Education offers funding to public schools specifically for this purpose, enabling schools to invest in services supporting all learners' well-being, including LGBTQ+ youth.¹¹

Legal non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ individuals 🏛️

Establishing a legal framework for LGBTQ+ identities explicitly protects them from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, education, housing, and public accommodations. For LGBTQ+ learners, state anti-bullying laws in public schools are crucial for safe participation and inclusivity in education. Examining what state law and/or policies requires and working within those guidelines to keep learners safe, especially regarding data collection and gender-related lodging/changing spaces, can begin to move the needle forward.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The strategies described in the previous section are not mutually exclusive, and not all will be appropriate based on the needs of your LGBTQ+ learner population. Before enacting new strategies, assess the current state of LGBTQ+ learners in your CTE programs and dig into root causes of barriers and challenges:

- What do LGBTQ+ learners tell you about their needs, challenges and successes?
- Are you collecting data on LGBTQ+ learners? If so, what does your data show about the CTE participation and concentration of LGBTQ+ learners? If not, are there other sources of information on this population that could be used to inform your approach to supporting these learners?
- What does your data show about the CTE performance of LGBTQ+ learners?
- What state laws affect your ability to address learners in preferred ways and to encourage LGBTQ+ individuals to self-disclose their status so they can be eligible for services?
- Which agencies or community organizations could you connect with to support LGBTQ+ learners?
- Are any policies and procedures in place to identify issues or patterns that may create barriers to safe and successful learning experiences for LGBTQ+ learners?
- How knowledgeable are your staff on equitable and supportive LGBTQ+ treatment to make your programs inclusive for all learners?
- How are you signaling a safe space for LGBTQ+ learners to engage as their authentic selves?
- What support services are available for LGBTQ+ learners? How are they made aware of these services?

CASE STUDY

In the 2021-22 academic year, Oregon had more than 22 percent of its secondary CTE concentrators enrolled in Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resource programs, making it the state's highest enrolled Career Cluster.¹² Forestry and Forest Products is one of Oregon's eight agriculture career pathways, leading to careers within Oregon's robust forest sector.¹³ The Forestry and Forest Products career pathway has a rich history of Career Technical Student Organization events designed for learners to demonstrate their skills and network with industry professionals. One of these highly anticipated activities includes Timber Festivals, during which learners compete in multiple logging and forestry events and participate as either lumberjacks or lumberjills, siloing men and women within events.



Recently, in an attempt to become more gender-expansive in school practices, Oregon agriculture programs have chosen to host lumberjack and lumberjill events no longer and have introduced a new, inclusive approach to the games. These events now have all learners competing against each other, regardless of gender, and separate competitors by skill level. Learners can level up to compete against more challenging competition rather than limiting participant pools by binary gender expression. This structure welcomes all learners to participate and eliminates pressure to categorize themselves by gender while encouraging learners to distinguish themselves by effort instead.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT LGBTQ+ LEARNERS

- **2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People** (The Trevor Project, 2023)
- **Supporting Gender Expansive Students: Guidance for Schools** (Oregon Department of Education, 2023)
- **Supporting LGBTQ+ Students** (California Department of Education, 2023)
- **U.S. Department of Education Toolkit: Creating Inclusive and Nondiscriminatory School Environments for LGBTQI+ Students** (U.S. Department of Education, 2023)
- **5 Ways Educators Can Help Support LGBTQ+ Students** (Teachers College, 2022)
- **Homelessness and Housing Instability Among LGBTQ Youth** (The Trevor Project, 2022)

For additional resources, visit [Advance CTE's Perkins V Section](#), the [Maximizing Access and Success for Special Populations in Career Technical Education series page](#) in the [Learning that Works Resource Center](#) and [ACTE's Perkins Implementation page](#).

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¹ The Trevor Project. (2022). Homelessness and housing instability among LGBTQ youth. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Trevor-Project-Homelessness-Report.pdf>. Dawson, R., & Leong, T. (2020). Not up for debate: LGBTQ people need and deserve tailored sexual and reproductive health care. Guttmacher Institute. <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2020/11/not-debate-lgbtq-people-need-and-deserve-tailored-sexual-and-reproductive-health>.

² Salerno, J. P., Williams, N. D., & Gattamorta, K. A. (2020). LGBTQ populations: Psychologically vulnerable communities in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychol Trauma*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8093609/>; Flores, A. R., Langton, L., Meyer, I. H., & Romero, A. P. (2020, October 2). Victimization rates and traits of sexual and gender minorities in the United States: Results from the National Crime Victimization Survey, 2017. *Science Advances* 6(40). <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.aba69102>. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aba69102>

³ Youth.gov. (n.d.). Key terms and concepts. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth/key-terms-and-concepts>

⁴ Youth Engaged 4 Change. (n.d.). What does LGBT mean? Know the basics. <https://engage.youth.gov/resources/what-does-lgbt-mean-know-basics>

⁵ Medina, C., Mahowald, L., & Khattar, R. (2022, June 1). Fact sheet: LGBT workers in the labor market. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/fact-sheet-lgbt-workers-in-the-labor-market/>

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ The Equal Access Act, 20 U.S.C. §§ 4071 – 4073 (2010). 20 U.S.C. § 4071(a) (2010). <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title20/chapter52/subchapter8&edition=prelim>

⁸ Human Rights Campaign Foundation. (2019). LGBTQ-inclusive data collection: A lifesaving imperative. https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/HRC-LGBTQ-DataCollection-Report.pdf?_ga=2.21279419.10180219.1701787694.341125048.1701787694

⁹ Renn, K. (2017, April 10). LGBTQ students on campus: Issues and opportunities for higher education leaders. *Higher Education Today*. <https://www.higheredtoday.org/2017/04/10/lgbtq-students-higher-education/>

¹⁰ Mowreader, A. (2023, June 21). 5 ways colleges are promoting LGBTQ+ student belonging, inclusion. *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/student-success/college-experience/2023/06/21/five-programs-support-lgbtq-student-success>

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education. (2023). U.S. Department of Education toolkit: Creating inclusive and nondiscriminatory school environments for LGBTQI+ students. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/lgbtqi-student-resources-toolkit-062023.pdf>

¹² Perkins Collaborative Resource Network. (n.d.). Oregon state enrollment data. <https://cte.ed.gov/pcrn/profile/state/enrollment/2022/OR/concentrator/secondary/clusters/allstudents>

¹³ Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). Approved CTE programs (detail). <https://www.ode.state.or.us/apps/CTEReports/ApprovedPrograms/Details>