

2026 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

1. Increase Federal Investments in CTE

The Perkins Basic State Grant program is the principal source of dedicated federal funding for CTE programs, which helps build the capacity of secondary and postsecondary institutions to serve millions of students nationwide. In FY 2026, Perkins was funded at approximately \$1.4 billion, which remains hundreds of millions below the inflation-adjusted level from over 20 years ago. We urge Congress to provide a meaningful increase to the Perkins Basic State Grant as future appropriations bills are considered. Increasing Perkins funding will help provide critical programs and support to students in every congressional district, ensuring students can complete CTE programs; participate in work-based learning; earn industry-recognized credentials; and pursue high-skill, high-wage and in-demand careers.

2. Maintain Strong Support for Public Education and Educators

CTE programs are an integral part of the public education system across the United States, both at the secondary and postsecondary levels, and rely on this system to be successful. To ensure all learners have access to high-quality CTE programs as part of their broader education pathway, the federal government must continue to play a key role in supporting the entire public education system, including educators. Specifically, Congress should:

- Ensure the Department of Education is maintained as outlined in current law and is organized and staffed in a robust way to continue to administer all congressionally appropriated programs.
- Provide meaningful oversight to ensure that all congressionally appropriated programs are carried out with fidelity and in a maximally efficient and effective manner.
- Sustain robust funding across the entire education and workforce development continuum to ensure CTE programs and learners have all the support, tools and resources they need to complete their educational journey.
- Improve educator recruitment and retention by making teaching a more financially attractive career and increasing access to high-quality teacher preparation and professional development programs.
- Prioritize the importance of the federal role in education data and research through robust funding and support, and continue to emphasize data collections that assess student longitudinal outcomes across education and workforce pipelines.

3. Strengthen Workforce Pathways Through CTE

As discussions on the reauthorizations of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the National Apprenticeship Act (NAA) move forward, we ask that policymakers think strategically about the unique role CTE programs can play in strengthening these programs and building strong pathways. By connecting the education provided through CTE programs to the broader workforce development efforts, we can ensure increased access to high-quality training for both youth and adults. To accomplish this, policymakers should:

- Include CTE stakeholders in WIOA governing bodies and provides dedicated funding for WIOA infrastructure costs to remove the burden from partner programs.
- Increase the availability of workforce services and supports for in-school youth.
- Improve data system capacity and transparency so workforce outcomes of education programs can be measured clearly.
- Balance requirements placed on WIOA eligible training providers that offer high-quality CTE programs to ensure robust participation in the workforce system.
- Formalize definitions and quality expectations for all apprenticeship activities, including pre-apprenticeship and youth apprenticeship programs, to provide clarity to education providers.
- Promote CTE programs serving as related technical instruction providers for apprenticeship programs and emphasize strong linkages between youth and pre-apprenticeships and CTE programs.

4. Thoughtfully Consider How AI Can Support Educators and Learners

As policymakers consider the role of artificial intelligence in education and workforce systems, it is essential that any AI-related legislation be grounded in strong core components to support educators and learners. This includes ensuring learners can gain a foundational understanding of how AI systems work, promoting ethical and responsible use, safeguarding student and workforce data privacy, and allowing for flexibility and adaptability as systems and needs change. Policymakers should:

- Invest in AI literacy initiatives and workforce-aligned skill development to ensure learners are prepared to work with and alongside AI technologies.
- Prioritize professional development opportunities that equip educators with the knowledge and tools needed to effectively integrate AI into the classroom.
- Protect student data privacy and promote the responsible and ethical use of AI technologies in education and workforce systems.
- Ensure any new policies are flexible and adaptable so that educators can design instruction that is most appropriate to learners' needs, even as technology and education systems change.

About ACE

The Association for Career and Technical Education® (ACTE®) is the nation's largest not-for-profit association committed to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for successful careers. ACTE represents the community of CTE professionals, including educators, administrators, researchers, school counselors, guidance and career development professionals and others at all levels of education. ACTE is committed to excellence in providing advocacy, public awareness and access to resources, professional development and leadership opportunities.

ACTE Public Policy Staff Contacts

- Alisha Hyslop, Chief Policy, Research and Content Officer, ahyslop@acteonline.org, 727-642-0491
- Jimmy Koch, Government Relations Manager, jkoch@acteonline.org, 443-834-3421
- Abigail Owen, Media and Advocacy Coordinator, aowen@acteonline.org, 940-447-6031

Updated: March 2026