

## Key Tenets for Perkins VI Reauthorization

As the fifth iteration of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins V) enters its first uninterrupted four-year implementation cycle, Advance CTE, the nation's longest-standing not-for-profit representing State leaders responsible for secondary, postsecondary, and adult Career and Technical Education (CTE) across all 50 states and U.S. territories, and the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), the nation's largest not-for-profit association committed to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for career success, see both validation of its design as well as opportunities for strategic enhancement.

Perkins V and the CTE programs it supports serve approximately 12 million secondary, postsecondary, and adult learners through CTE coursework, work-based learning experiences, and other career readiness opportunities that prepare learners for further education, career, and lifelong success. As the primary federal policy dedicated specifically to CTE program delivery and improvement, the legislation's success is evident – since Perkins was last reauthorized in 2018, interest in CTE has intensified dramatically across the policy landscape, with bipartisan support continuing to grow at the federal, state, and local levels. The legislation's fundamental architecture – balancing state and local flexibility with strong federal accountability and program quality standards – has proven sound.

The path forward is therefore clear: preserve what works while making targeted and strategic refinements where our members' collective experience with the law's implementation has revealed areas to further strengthen and improve upon.

CTE has become the backbone of pathways systems that connect learning with opportunity – whether those pathways are branded as early college, work-based learning, apprenticeship, or other forms of career preparation. Despite slight increases to better support CTE over the course of Perkins V, persistent resource constraints are now the biggest barrier to meeting learner and employer demands for these experiences.

As Congress approaches the reauthorization of Perkins, the question is not whether CTE is an effective strategy for both educational achievement and career advancement, but whether federal policy can evolve to match CTE's expanding role in the broader ecosystem of education and workforce pathways.

With this in mind, our organizations recommend the following key tenets that should guide Congress' consideration of the reauthorization of the Perkins Act. Advance CTE and ACTE plan to expand on these tenets as reauthorization efforts take shape in the future.

## Preserve State and Local Flexibility

The most recent iteration of the law continued much that had been established in prior versions, including programs of study; a rigorous accountability system; and alignment across secondary, postsecondary, and workforce systems. It also introduced the comprehensive local needs assessment (CLNA) to ensure that programs are delivering on what employers, learners and families, and the wider community most need. Perkins V continued the legislation's historical commitment to striking a balance between federal oversight to ensure quality learning experiences for students and flexibility for states and local grantees to structure and deliver CTE programs in ways that make sense for their unique communities and contexts.

Perkins VI should seek to preserve these aspects of the law and related flexibilities by continuing to allow states to determine aspects of program delivery such as which state agency is eligible to receive and administer Perkins funds; how funding is split between secondary and postsecondary recipients; whether to submit a combined state plan with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA); and the establishment of ambitious performance targets for the law's accountability framework. In addition, Perkins VI should maintain provisions that allow for the flexible use of funds at the state level and for local recipients, in concert with the CLNA, to ensure communities can maximize the impact of federal resources in ways that best meet their needs.

## Expand State and Local Capacity

The current Perkins Act remains the smallest federal investment of the four major education and workforce programs regularly updated by Congress across K-12, higher education, and workforce development. Resource constraints are now the largest impediment to expanding access to high-quality CTE nationwide.

Simply put, in too many states and communities, the CTE system lacks the capacity to meet surging learner demand. Perkins VI should seek to increase capacity by authorizing federal investments that at least match the inflation-adjusted value of 1980 funding levels, when CTE represented a much greater share of overall federal education investments.

One specific example of capacity issues is around middle grades CTE. Our respective memberships recognize the incredible value of middle grades CTE programming, which was expanded under Perkins V reauthorization. Yet, this promising aspect of current Perkins legislation has not yet been fully realized in many states and local communities due to persistent resource constraints. Strengthening the federal commitment to and related investments for the full range of CTE programs will help to address this ongoing challenge.

Congress should also support states and locals in expanding capacity in other ways, such as by making it easier for providers to form consortia and regional partnerships. This should include additional flexibility and incentives to encourage greater collaboration among Perkins grantees to more effectively align with regional community and labor market needs while helping to realize economies of scale for resource-intensive CTE programming. The U.S. Department of Education is

also uniquely positioned to further expand state and local capacity through the provision of technical assistance, research, and support for innovation, which we believe should continue through the National Programs section of the law under the next iteration of Perkins legislation.

## Establish Dedicated Support for Broader Career Readiness Infrastructure

Title I of Perkins serves as the foundational source of support for CTE programs and primarily supports learners who concentrate their efforts on CTE at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. However, states are increasingly leveraging CTE infrastructure and expertise to meet broader career readiness needs for all learners, not just CTE concentrators. Work-based learning opportunities, meaningful engagement with employers, aligned pathways models such as early college and youth apprenticeships, connected advising systems, and other critical activities are creating new points of intersection across education and workforce development systems, which are simultaneously expanding the stakeholders and partners engaged in career pathways work. With Perkins currently serving nearly 12 million CTE learners annually, as mentioned above, existing resources in Title I of the law are already spread too thinly to support a wider array of initiatives. At the same time, there is a growing population of learners that also need access to these wider career readiness experiences.

In addition to increasing resources directly to CTE programs through Title I, future legislation should address the gap by creating a new and separate Title II that provides support and guidance specifically designed to expand high-quality career readiness opportunities for all learners. This new title would support the development of statewide pathways systems, with a priority given to scaling work-based learning experiences. In doing so, a new Title II would facilitate stronger connections between CTE programs funded under Title I and other complementary systems, including programs and initiatives authorized by the National Apprenticeship Act (NAA), WIOA, and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), while supporting new articulation opportunities into nontraditional postsecondary pathways. By creating a dedicated source of support for broader career readiness infrastructure, Congress can ensure that states and local communities have the capacity to serve all learners pursuing career-focused experiences, not just those who concentrate in CTE programs.

## Continue to Promote CTE Program Quality

The Perkins Act has evolved to include a strong focus on quality and accountability to ensure learners are developing academic, technical, and employability skills and preparing for success in further education and careers. These prior innovations include the establishment of sequenced, non-duplicative programs of study across secondary and postsecondary levels; a rigorous accountability system that recognizes learner outcomes across education and careers as well as opportunities for work-based learning, early postsecondary credits, and recognized postsecondary credentials; and the option to use funds to support early career exploration and development down to grade 5 to help students identify goals and plan for the future.

Perkins VI should seek to continue and refine this focus on quality in the following ways:

- Requiring greater percentages of federal Perkins funding to be directed toward programs of study;
- Maintaining states' and local grantees' ability to support early career exploration and development experiences;
- Clarifying and strengthening key definitions and terminology utilized throughout the legislation to ensure common expectations for quality;
- Streamlining the accountability system to focus on the education and labor market outcomes that matter most and can be reasonably expected to reside within the control of state or local CTE leaders; and
- Leveraging the law to ensure that non-degree credentials embedded within CTE programs have value for students and employers.

## Deepen Reciprocal Alignment Across Systems

The current Perkins Act facilitates the alignment of CTE programs with other educational programs, workforce development programs, career pathways, and employer needs in a multitude of ways, including shared terms, definitions, expectations for stakeholder engagement and consultation, and accountability indicators aligned with WIOA and ESSA. States must also describe a shared vision for education and workforce alignment in their state plans. On the local level, CLNAs that evaluate program alignment to local and regional labor market needs must be used to guide funding decisions. The creation of a new Title II program under future Perkins legislation would also serve as a useful legislative mechanism to ensure greater cohesion across wider state pathways infrastructure.

While this existing alignment is critical to CTE's effectiveness, an even greater level of alignment between CTE and other education and workforce development programs could be achieved with stronger reciprocity between these systems and related investments. While current Perkins legislation requires CTE systems to articulate alignment with workforce partners and across secondary and postsecondary education, there are few comparable requirements in other related legislation. Reauthorization provides Congress a critical opportunity to establish a more mutually beneficial approach to cultivating this alignment and coordination, by similarly requiring these other systems and federal investments to articulate how they align with and support CTE. Enhanced bidirectional coordination and alignment efforts would strengthen system cohesion and reflect CTE's central role in the wider career pathways ecosystem.

In particular, reauthorization of Perkins presents a unique opportunity to further strengthen connections between CTE and apprenticeship programs, which provide clearly delineated pathways for work experience and employment for learners. Unlike WIOA and ESSA, the NAA has not been meaningfully updated in nearly a century. Future Perkins legislation presents an opportunity to explicitly allow and facilitate connections between CTE and the full spectrum of apprenticeship opportunities, including pre-, youth, and registered apprenticeship programs, such as through

expanded uses of funds, intentional planning requirements, and stronger integration into accountability indicators.

## Strengthen Data Infrastructure and Quality

The federal government is instrumental in ensuring CTE program quality through supports that develop a foundation for CTE success. High-quality, integrated data systems are essential for state and local CTE leaders to identify and close opportunity gaps, ensure alignment to the labor market and wider employer needs, improve CTE programming, evaluate learner outcomes, and hold programs accountable for learner success.

However, significant challenges remain in CTE data quality and related data infrastructure. State CTE data systems are too often not sufficiently aligned with data systems in other sectors, making it difficult to understand learners' outcomes as they progress from high school to postsecondary and into the workforce. Many states still rely on methods such as self-reported surveys with low response rates to collect critical information and data needed by CTE leaders and practitioners due to existing data system shortcomings. Perkins VI should address these persistent data challenges by supporting states in adopting innovative solutions such as more effective validation protocols, using common and transparent data schema to allow for cross-state comparability, and promoting cross-sector data linkages while incentivizing the field to move toward more reliable sources of underlying data, including through partnerships with other key stakeholders such as workforce agencies, public-private data entities, and credentialing providers.

To support these efforts and more, Perkins VI should make explicit that Perkins grantees are permitted to access wage records and data from other institutions and partners in the wider education and workforce system. This will ensure that Perkins performance indicators are informed by reliable, valid, and timely information; enable programs to make data-informed decisions about CTE program offerings and quality; and help unlock more meaningful cross-system analyses of long-term learner and program outcomes.

Perkins VI should also continue to leverage the federal role in CTE by maintaining data disaggregation across learner populations and in alignment with the modernized National Career Clusters® Framework to support the integration of these efforts within state and local CTE systems. Finally, a reauthorized Perkins should seek to encourage states to design reporting tools and dashboards that serve multiple audiences, facilitate increased data linkages and transparency across state longitudinal data systems, and support a wider research agenda that investigates the most effective elements of and delivery mechanisms for CTE.

## Reduce the Administrative Burden on States and Local Grantees

Perkins V includes key provisions that support program quality and hold CTE programs accountable, such as state plans and local applications that identify goals, uses of funds, and performance targets as well as the CLNA, which helps local recipients make funding and programmatic decisions.

Perkins VI should preserve these components as they are vital to delivering high-quality CTE programs. However, targeted changes could help reduce burden for grantees while making the most of the funding provided under Perkins. These include streamlining the CLNA's required components and providing more flexibility to states to determine timelines for conducting and updating CLNAs; streamlining state planning and the list of state authorized uses of funds; and enabling states to set multiple years of performance targets after the initial target-setting period without a full plan update.

## Moving Forward

The Perkins Act and the CTE programs it supports are critical infrastructure. Like our nation's roads and bridges, these programs and pathways help prepare Americans for educational, career, and lifelong success. It is imperative that the upcoming reauthorization of the sole federal investment in CTE builds upon longstanding bipartisan support by preserving what works and making targeted improvements to provisions that have slowed progress. Success means CTE systems that can operate at the scale needed by learners, employers, and communities – systems that seamlessly connect secondary and postsecondary education with the labor market and ensure that every learner has access to credentials of value and family-sustaining careers.

This work depends on continued and close collaboration between federal policymakers and the state and local CTE leaders who design and deliver on these promises every day. We look forward to working with Congress to thoughtfully and meaningfully reauthorize the Perkins Act in the years ahead. As these efforts get underway, our organizations intend to elaborate on these core strategic pillars and provide additional actionable recommendations that align with our vision for the future of CTE.

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### [About Advance CTE](#)

Advance CTE is the longest-standing national non-profit that represents State Directors and state leaders responsible for secondary, postsecondary, and adult Career Technical Education (CTE) across all 50 states and U.S. territories. Established in 1920, Advance CTE supports state CTE leadership to advance high-quality CTE policies, programs, and pathways that ensure career and college success for each learner.

### [About ACTE](#)

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.