



Strengthening Career and Technical Education to Meet the Needs of Today's Workforce

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June 2018

After several years of Senate inaction, the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Chairman Lamar Alexander announced the markup of a bill to reauthorize the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins Act). Enacted in 1984 to improve the academic and technical quality of vocational education, the Perkins Act provides federal funding for career and technical education (CTE) programs offered at the secondary or postsecondary level. Perkins Act programs receive roughly \$1.1 billion through annual federal appropriations and provides CTE opportunities for an average of 7.5 million secondary education students and 4.2 million postsecondary students.

The Senate has a couple of opportunities to reform the Perkins Act, including:

- Expanding CTE Programs to non-traditional students, and
- Requiring that states incorporate CTE data into their state longitudinal data systems (SLDS).

Perkins Act and CTE Background

Last reauthorized in 2006 and originally due for reauthorization in 2012, the Perkins Act has twice advanced through the House of Representatives for reauthorization, in 2016 and 2017, first on a 405-5 vote and then on a voice vote with no objection. The Senate has taken no action to reauthorize it.

The courses offered through CTE programs integrate rigorous academic and technical instruction, generally beginning in high school, and link secondary education and postsecondary education for participating students. These programs ideally culminate in an industry recognized certificate, credential, or degree. CTE programs prepare students seeking high-skill, high-wage, or high-demand occupations in industries such as health care, information technology, agriculture, manufacturing, and construction.

The Perkins Act provides for a federal investment in CTE through two formula grant programs for states: basic state grants under Title I, and “Tech Prep” grants under Title II. The federal government provides the basic state grants to state CTE boards, which then distribute the grants to local educational agencies and postsecondary institutions to support secondary and postsecondary CTE activities. Tech Prep



grants—which have not been funded since 2010—support consortia of local agencies and postsecondary institutions that coordinate educational activities into a coherent sequence of courses that lead to an associate degree or a two-year certificate. States are authorized to consolidate all, or a portion of the grant funds received. The table below details funding levels since [200X].

Table 1. Funding Levels for the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act

Funding Year	Title I Allocation - State Grants	Title II Allocation - Tech Prep Grants	Total
2008	\$ 1,141,988,415	\$ 102,922,965	\$ 1,244,911,380
2009	\$ 1,141,988,150	\$ 102,923,000	\$ 1,244,911,150
2010	\$ 1,141,988,150	\$ 102,923,000	\$ 1,244,911,150
2011	\$ 1,093,648,589	\$ -	\$ 1,093,648,589
2012	\$ 1,104,724,881	\$ -	\$ 1,104,724,881
2013	\$ 1,047,095,068	\$ -	\$ 1,047,095,068
2014	\$ 1,099,381,153	\$ -	\$ 1,099,381,153
2015	\$ 1,099,381,153	\$ -	\$ 1,099,381,153
2016	\$ 1,099,381,153	\$ -	\$ 1,099,381,153
2017	\$ 1,094,097,030	\$ -	\$ 1,094,097,030
2018*	\$ 1,173,158,653	\$ -	\$ 1,173,158,653
10 Yr Federal Investment			\$ 12,545,601,360

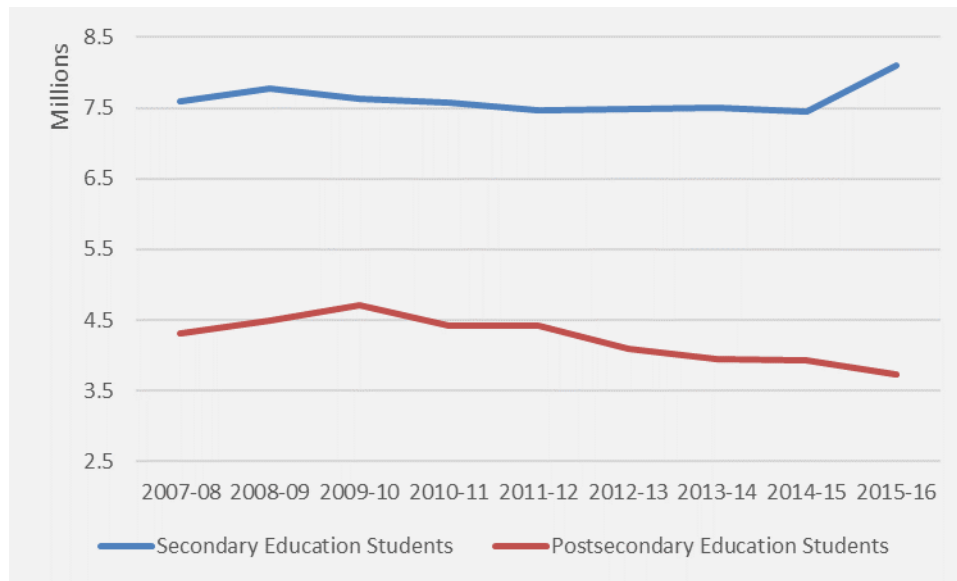
* Estimate

Source: U.S. Department of Education; Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education

In most instances, states designate the state education agency as the eligible entity to administer the funding for Perkins CTE programs. In some states, however, the eligible entity is a standalone CTE agency, a Workforce Development Board, or a system of higher education.

Since the 2006 reauthorization, federal investment has supported opportunities for an average of 7.5 million secondary education students and 4.2 million postsecondary students.

Chart 1. CTE Participant Enrollment



Source: U.S. Department of Education; Perkins Data Explorer

While the Perkins Act supports millions of workers, American employers still require a broader pool of skilled workers.ⁱ The next version of the Perkins Act should ensure that any federal investment spurs greater enrollment.

Updating Perkins

The authors of the House version of Perkins reauthorization argue that their bill offers a host of CTE reforms that will empower state and local community leaders, improve alignment with in-demand jobs, increase transparency and accountability, and ensure a limited federal role.ⁱⁱ All of these are expected to be included in Senator Alexander's version (which as of writing this has yet to be made public), but the HELP committee may alter them significantly to achieve bipartisan support.

There are two specific reforms that the Senate version should include.

Expand CTE programs to non-traditional students

Federal CTE programs should enable non-traditional students to access these programs of study. These students include adult learners who may not have attained a high school diploma or equivalent, out-of-school youth, dislocated workers, and low-skilled adults. Currently, CTE programs supported by the Perkins Act focus on models of career and technical education that begin in high school and transition to postsecondary settings. This model effectively excludes many individuals in desperate need of obtaining the necessary skills to participate in today's workforce.



To achieve this goal of broadening participation by non-traditional CTE students, Congress should consider permitting the integration of postsecondary adult literacy programs that segue to challenging academic and technical instruction, eventually leading to industry recognized certificates, credentials, or degrees.

Require states to incorporate CTE data into their state longitudinal data systems (SLDS)

The Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program offered by the U.S. Department of Education helps states establish and maintain student data systems so policymakers can make data-driven decisions that may improve learning and outcomes. Authorized by the Education Technical Assistance Act of 2002, the program has awarded more than \$700 million in six rounds of competitive grants. State education agencies in 51 states and territories have accessed SLDS grants.ⁱⁱⁱ This change would allow states to capture additional data on students that make use of alternative pathways to complete their education.

Congress should also consider removing the student unit record ban that was added to the 2008 Higher Education Act reauthorization. The ban prevents the federal government from connecting the individual-level data that different agencies collect. So, for instance, SLDS data collected by the Department of Education may not be connected to individual income history collected by the Internal Revenue Service.

Conclusion

Today's labor force does not have the skills needed to participate in today's workforce.^{iv} Federal policymakers have recognized this concern and sought to address it in multiple legislative efforts, such as the Every Student Succeeds Act, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and the Higher Education Act. The Career and Technical Education programs supported by the Perkins Act are a key component of linking education, workforce development, and economic development. The Senate should ensure that this important federal investment is modernized and calibrated to make the biggest impact on workforce participation.

ⁱ Ben Gitis, Douglas Holtz-Eakin; American Action Forum. How Changes in Immigration Can Impact Future Worker Shortages in the United States and Silicon Valley; October 2015

<https://www.americanactionforum.org/research/how-changes-in-immigration-can-impact-future-worker-shortages-in-the-united/#ixzz5InHPSgKD>

ⁱⁱ <https://edworkforce.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=401633>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/History_of_the_SLDS_Grant_Program_May2018.pdf

^{iv} Kevin McGowan. The Bureau of National Affairs. Skills Gap Hinders Access to Promising Jobs; April 2017. <https://www.bna.com/skills-gap-hinders-n57982086431/>