
The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act

Young adults face a job market vastly different from the one that existed a generation ago. Technological advances and the growth of a global economy have dramatically changed the kinds of jobs that are available, making quality education and training vital to competing in today's workplaces. That's why, in recent years, Congress has enacted reforms to improve K-12 education and modernize the nation's workforce development system. However, more must be done to help all Americans access the education and skills they need to earn a lifetime of success.

Since 1984, the *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act* has provided federal support to state and local career and technical education, or CTE, programs. These programs—created and operated by state and local leaders—are designed to prepare high school and community college students for the workforce. However, the law supporting these efforts has not been updated in more than a decade, and it no longer reflects the realities and challenges facing students and workers. The *Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act* will help more individuals gain the knowledge and skills they need to succeed by:

- Empowering State and Local Community Leaders
- Improving Alignment with In-Demand Jobs
- Increasing Transparency and Accountability
- Ensuring a Limited Federal Role

Empowering State and Local Community Leaders

- **Eases burdensome state requirements:** The bill simplifies the requirements states have to follow when applying for federal funds. It also streamlines the application process and better aligns it with the process for submitting the state workforce development plan under the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*. This allows state leaders to focus more time and resources on preparing students for successful careers—not on duplicative or overly prescriptive federal requirements.
- **Eases burdensome local requirements:** Instead of requiring local education providers to submit their own lengthy plans, the bill allows providers to fill out a simple, easy-to-complete local application. Recipients will also partner with local stakeholders to perform biennial reviews to help CTE programs meet the needs of local communities.
- **Increases flexibility:** The bill increases from 10 percent to 15 percent the amount of federal funds states can set aside to assist eligible students in rural areas or areas with a significant number of CTE students. It also gives states more flexibility to use federal funds to support CTE programs that are focused on unique and changing education and economic needs or state-based innovation.

Improving Alignment with In-Demand Jobs

- **Supports innovative learning opportunities:** The bill promotes work-based learning and evaluates CTE providers on their ability to effectively prepare students for the workforce. The bill also encourages state leaders to better integrate their career and technical education services with other state-led job training programs, helping to provide all Americans a more seamless and efficient workforce development system.

- **Builds better partnerships:** The bill encourages stronger engagement with employers by ensuring local business leaders are involved in the development of career and technical education and the performance goals set at the state and local levels. These reforms will help CTE services prove students the skills they need to compete for jobs that exist in their local communities now and in the future, rather than the jobs that existed in the past.
- **Addresses state and local needs:** The bill empowers state leaders with more flexibility to direct federal resources to CTE programs that provide students with skills to fill available jobs in their states and communities. Under the legislation, state leaders will be able to use federal funds to support programs focused on in-demand industries or occupations or on state-based innovation.

Increasing Transparency and Accountability

- **Ensures secondary programs deliver results:** At the secondary level, the bill streamlines the number of performance measures used to evaluate CTE programs and aligns these performance measures with those set by each state under the *Every Student Succeeds Act*. The bill also replaces the unreliable “technical skill proficiency” indicator with a state-determined indicator to help ensure taxpayer dollars are supporting CTE programs that prepare students to continue their education or start their careers. These reforms will help students graduate and receive an education that can lead to success in the workplace.
- **Ensures postsecondary programs deliver results:** At the postsecondary level, the bill streamlines the number of performance measures and aligns these with the performance measures in the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*. These reforms will help students graduate prepared to further their education or compete for good-paying jobs.
- **Encourages public input:** Current law requires states to negotiate their targeted levels of performance with the secretary of education. Under the legislation, states will set performance goals through an open process that includes input from local education leaders, parents and students, workforce development boards, community and business representatives, and others.
- **Protects taxpayers:** Under the legislation, states will include their targeted levels of performance in the state plan, as well as report and annually publish the results on how they perform. This will provide students, taxpayers, and state and local leaders the information necessary to hold CTE programs accountable for results.

Ensuring a Limited Federal Role

- **Reduces the secretary’s authority:** The bill repeals the requirement that states must negotiate their targeted levels of performance with the secretary of education.
- **Limits federal intervention:** The bill prevents the secretary of education from withholding funds from a state that does not meet certain performance targets. Instead, it empowers state leaders to develop an improvement plan that works best for the needs and circumstances in their states. At the local level, improvement plans will be developed in consultation with local stakeholders and overseen by state leaders, not federal bureaucrats.
- **Prevents political favoritism:** The bill requires the federal plan for research, development, dissemination, and evaluation to be carried out by an independent entity, rather than the secretary of education. The bill also requires that future demonstration projects focus on enhancing performance and student success, restricting the secretary’s ability to pick winners and losers based on politics.