

## Public Policy Update

### Career and Technical Education: Perkins Act Reauthorization

Career and Technical Education (CTE), most often referred to as vocational education, is authorized under The Perkins Act and was last authorized in 1998. Vocational education is organized educational programs that offer a sequence of courses directly related to preparing individuals for paid or unpaid employment in current or emerging occupations that require an education other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree. Programs include competency-based applied learning, which contributes to an individual's academic knowledge, higher-order reasoning, problem solving skills, and the occupational-specific skills necessary for economic independence as a productive and contributing member of society.

On March 10, 2005, the Senate unanimously passed S. 250, "Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2005", legislation to reauthorize the Perkins vocation education program. On May 10, the House passed H.R. 366, the "Vocational and Technical Education for the Future Act."

CTE is an important component in the U.S. educational system and is critical to the country's ability to compete in the global economy. Career technical education has an impact in almost every community across the country. Over 11,000 secondary schools and 2,600 sub-baccalaureate, postsecondary institutions, such as community and technical colleges, technical institutes, skill centers, area vocational schools, etc., currently offer career technical education courses. Nationally, over 14 million individuals at the secondary, postsecondary, and adult education levels are enrolled in career technical education. Nearly all secondary school students take at least one career technical education course, and almost 45 percent of them concentrate in career technical education by taking three or more courses. Approximately one-third of college students are involved in career technical education as a major part of their studies.

The Department of Education administers the Perkins Act through the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). Under the Perkins Act, federal funds are made available to help provide vocational-technical education programs and services to youth and adults. The majority of funds appropriated under the Perkins Act are awarded as grants to state education agencies. These State Basic Grants are allotted to states according to a formula based on states' populations in certain age groups and their per capita income.

## **Summary of Legislation**

### **Highlights of H.R. 366, the Vocational and Technical Education for the Future Act**

H.R. 366 is nearly identical to H.R. 4496, the Perkins Act reauthorization bill that the House Education and the Workforce Committee passed in 2004 but was not considered by the full House. H.R. 366 would authorize the Perkins Act through fiscal year 2011, for a total of six years instead of the usual reauthorization cycle of five years. The most significant change in H.R. 366 is the repeal of Title II of the 1998 law, the Tech Prep program. This would eliminate the separate funding stream for Tech Prep programs and combine the funding into the Basic State Grant. This is an issue of concern for CEC and its members, because it could mean the potential of a loss of funding over time and the innovation that the separate program has created. Some changes H.R. 366 would make to current law that CEC is pleased with are the inclusion of a section on local accountability and the separation of performance indicators for secondary and post-secondary programs.

Some positive general themes that are referenced throughout the bill include ensuring that students participate in “rigorous and challenging” academic and technical education and that states develop model sequences of courses to facilitate student progression from secondary to post-secondary education and careers. In addition, there are several references related to ensuring that students have the necessary math and science skills for successful participation in technology programs. The bill also clarifies that both academic and technical teachers should be involved in program planning related to vocational and technical programs to reinforce the integration of academic skills.

In terms of funding, H.R. 366 makes only minor changes to the reservations and federal-to-state distribution allotment. The bill would slightly reduce the percentages of funds going to outlying areas (Guam, American Samoa, etc); update the transition provisions that existed in the 1998 law; and revise the “hold harmless” provision. Under the revised hold harmless provision, no state can receive an allotment less than the allotment received under Basic State Grants and Tech Prep in FY 2005, unless the total federal allocation is reduced, then each state will lose a proportionate amount of funding. Another change to this section is a reference to the restructuring of incentive grant funding. While 0.54 percent of the total funding is maintained for incentive grants, this funding is to be used only for career and technical education and its allocation is now provided for within Perkins.

H.R. 366 increases funds distributed from the state to local eligible recipients from 85 percent of the state allocation to 88 percent, while at the same time it decreases the amount allowed for state administrative costs from 5 percent of the total state allocation to 2 percent, which would result in a 60 percent funding reduction for administrative activities at the state level. CEC is concerned that this reduction in allowable state administrative spending will also reduce the quality and quantity of services that states provide.

Before allocating local funds (88 percent of the total state allocation), states must first make available at least the same amount of funding for Tech Prep activities as was allotted in fiscal year 2005. If the Basic State Grant funding a state receives is reduced, then proportionate reduction of Tech Prep funding is also allowed.

The reserve fund is maintained at the current law's allowable 10 percent of funds and can be used in rural areas or areas with high numbers or high percentages of vocational students. The remainder of the 88 percent would then be allocated by formula to local recipients. There is also a hold harmless on state leadership funds in the bill.

In general, CEC is concerned with three main areas of H.R. 366: 1) the elimination of Tech Prep as a separate funding item, although CEC supports continuation of Tech Prep activities that would be required in this section; 2) the reduction from 5 percent to 2 percent in the allowable use of funds for state administration; 3) and the continued use of the phrase "vocational and technical" instead of "career and technical" throughout the bill because it does not reflect the language currently being used in almost all state and local programs around the country. The name "Perkins" was also eliminated from the title, which could reduce name recognition for the program.

### **Highlights of S. 250, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2005**

S. 250 is nearly identical to S. 2686, a bill passed by the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee last summer during the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress. S. 250 proposes many of the same positive changes to the Perkins Act that are included in the House bill, including separate secondary and post-secondary performance measures and enhanced local accountability provisions. But unlike the House bill, the Senate bill maintains Tech Prep as a separate program, maintains state administration funding, and updates the terminology throughout the bill from "vocational and technical" to "career and technical."

The Senate bill increases the coordination among required and permissible local uses of funds, Tech Prep, and the Basic State Grant by offering states the option of a unified plan. The legislation also increases the focus on career guidance and academic counseling and includes new provisions allowing for more attention to the recruitment and retention of career and technical education professionals. Throughout the bill, there are numerous references to coordination with the workforce investment system and to aligning technical skills with industry standards.

S. 250 revises state funding allocations to allow for more flexibility at the state level. The legislation would combine state leadership and administration funds and allow 15 percent (or \$750,000, whichever is greater) of the total state allocation to be split between leadership and administration activities at the state's discretion. The caps on funding for individuals at state institutions and for services that prepare individuals for non-traditional fields have been eliminated to add additional flexibility. The reserve fund is also modified from current law. In S. 250 states would have two options for using the 10 percent they are allowed to reserve from local funding. First, they could operate the reserve as it exists presently, awarding grants to rural areas or areas with high percentages or high numbers of career and technical education students. Second, states

could use the funds, with the approval of eligible recipients, to implement innovative statewide initiatives benefiting local programs or to develop and implement career pathways or career clusters.

The Senate bill proposes that the purpose of the accountability section is to support and determine the effectiveness of states and local programs, and it adds a specific section on local accountability that is not in current law. Eligible recipients must now agree to accept the state levels of performance as their own or negotiate performance measures with the state the same way that states negotiate with the federal government and report progress in achieving these performance levels on an annual basis. Under the six-year authorization recommended by the bill, states and local entities would negotiate adjusted levels of performance three times: for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years, for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years, and for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> years. Through the accountability system, states and local entities must make continuous and significant improvement in the career and technical achievement of CTE students, including special populations.

CEC is generally pleased with the provisions contained in S. 250.

### **CEC's Position**

CEC is a member of the Career and Technical Education Coalition. In the summer of 2004, the CTE Coalition developed a set of principles that it provided to Congress when it drafted legislation to reauthorize the Perkins Act. Below is the document that lists those principles. CEC and the CTE Coalition will continue to monitor the progress of Perkins Act and advocate for the inclusion of these principals in any final Perkins Act reauthorization.

#### Career and Technical Education Coalition Principles for Reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act

The Career and Technical Education Coalition is a diverse group of organizations — representing students, parents, teachers, special educators, counselors, principals, school administrators, school board members, state education officials, career information providers, adult learners, technical assistance providers, gender equity advocates, and jobseekers — concerned with the future and quality of secondary and postsecondary career and technical education in the United States. We are unified in our support for a continued federal investment in career and technical education through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (Perkins).

The Career and Technical Education Coalition believes that the Perkins reauthorization is an opportunity to strengthen, build on, and expand successes in career and technical education. We recommend the following legislative principles for Perkins reauthorization:

**Defining Quality Career and Technical Education:** Career and technical education prepares youth and adults with the technical competencies, academic knowledge, and employability skills essential to keep our country safe, our economy strong, and our national information infrastructure sound. As the connection between America's education and workforce systems, career and technical education plays a vital role in the

growth and strength of our economy. For these reasons, Perkins is as vital to American businesses as it is to our students. Perkins is a critical investment in secondary and post secondary public educational institutions that ensures their career and technical education programs are current, rigorous, and relevant.

Quality career and technical education programs meet the needs of all students—regardless of gender, race, age, national origin, ethnicity, and special population status—and our nation’s economy by:

- ensuring student skills and knowledge competency through the meaningful integration of academic and technical education;
- providing students with pathways to postsecondary education and/or careers and promoting strong linkages between secondary education and postsecondary opportunities through models such as Tech Prep;
- promoting economic development by aligning our nation’s education and workforce systems;
- preparing individuals for high-demand careers and providing them with the necessary support, including preparation for nontraditional employment;
- aligning career and technical education to industry and labor-market needs;
- delivering information to students, workers, teachers, parents and administrators about careers and the education and training required to succeed in careers;
- promoting leadership and employability skills of career technical education students through the career and technical student organizations;
- utilizing and supporting up-to-date technology and equipment; and
- providing special populations with innovative programs and supportive services.

**Accountability:** States have only recently been able to benefit from the data produced from the wholesale changes to accountability provisions enacted in the 1998 Perkins. The current accountability system continues to evolve as a meaningful program improvement tool and should be maintained. This data is useful in determining Perkins’ effectiveness, as well as providing states and local school districts with valuable information for program improvement. Additionally, Perkins’ performance measures need to ensure that the range of populations, including special populations, who are served by the program are provided access to and success in career and technical education, and recognize the diverse goals within the secondary and postsecondary systems.

**Technical skill attainment:** Perkins is the only federal education law focused on technical skill attainment; this focus must not be diffused. A reauthorized Perkins should ensure that students are prepared for careers in today’s and tomorrow’s economy. To do so, Perkins must ensure students are prepared with the appropriate technical and employability skills, complimented by a solid academic core, necessary for postsecondary education and/or employment. Perkins should also promote alignment of career and technical education courses to labor market needs and ensure that technical competencies meet industry standards.

**Career Guidance and Counseling, and Career and Academic Information:** A reauthorized Perkins should strengthen support for unbiased career guidance and

counseling, access to career and academic information and planning resources, outreach to students pursuing nontraditional training in programs that educate individuals for high-skill, high-demand fields, and support for local and statewide initiatives that increase student awareness of careers. Counselors, teachers, parents, and students value career information as a key tool in making decisions such as: determining labor market demands and the future of potential career paths, identifying financial aid information, comparing postsecondary options, and aligning the education of students with their future career goals and economic needs in relation to self-sufficiency.

**Leadership and professional development:** Perkins should support activities at the state and local levels that ensure that career and technical educators are able to keep pace with industry needs and technological innovations, and gain critical skills in instructional practice. These professional development experiences for career and technical teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators must promote leadership development, appropriate pedagogy, and expertise in and current knowledge of relevant industry and academic standards. Leadership and technical skill development are also critical for students; therefore, we recommend continued support for the career technical student organizations.

**Research, Evaluation, Innovation, and Dissemination:** We support the continuation of the National Assessment of Vocational Education as a means of providing important long-term trend data on the impact of career and technical education. To compliment this evaluation, additional research should be conducted by an independent National Center for Career and Technical Education. The National Center should evaluate the effectiveness of promising and innovative models and practices and support the implementation of best practices by states and localities through the widespread dissemination of information.

**Funding:** While the costs of operating quality career and technical education programs have increased dramatically over the last decade, federal funding has failed to keep pace with a growing student population and inflation. The new law should concentrate on facilitating federal funding increases while maintaining the safeguards that ensure that Perkins funds are spent only in support of career technical education. A reauthorized Perkins should: guarantee the continued use of a formula to distribute funds, while preventing a negative impact on rural, urban, or high-need areas; support the continuation of a single state eligible agency and its authority in determining the allocation of funds between the secondary and postsecondary levels; support the continuation of state maintenance of effort, and administrative match provisions; and increase the minimum allocation for states.

**Do No Harm:** In order to achieve these goals, the CTE coalition opposes: any attempt to block grant Perkins; the use of Perkins funds for purposes other than career and technical education; expanding the list of eligible recipients of funds; imposing rigid constraints that would dictate or change the existing fiscal agency requirements of local programs; and, any efforts to incorporate a voucher system into Perkins.

The House is scheduled to vote on H.R. 366 in early April 2005. CEC will post a letter on its Legislative Action Center after the House vote so CEC members can write their

legislators encouraging them to include CEC/CTE coalition recommendations in the final conference report on the Perkins Act.

If you have any questions regarding Perkins Act reauthorization, or you are in need of additional resource information from the Council for Exceptional Children, please contact Deborah A. Ziegler, Associate Executive Director for Policy and Communication Services at [debz@cec.sped.org](mailto:debz@cec.sped.org), 1-800-224-6830 ext. 406. You may also contact Dan Blair, Senior Director for Public Policy at [danb@cec.sped.org](mailto:danb@cec.sped.org), 1-800-224-6830 ext. 403.

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