



## LEVERAGING PERKINS V TO SUPPORT COLLEGE AND CAREER PATHWAYS

On July 31, 2018, President Trump signed into law a bipartisan bill that supports the work of states to prepare students of all ages for career success through career and technical education (CTE) programs. The new law, known as the [Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act](#)<sup>1</sup>, is the long-awaited update of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. The law goes into effect on July 1, 2019, and boosts the nation's commitment to CTE programs.

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) offers states and local education agencies increased opportunities to create strong systems of college and career pathways for their students. The law updates funding streams and emphasizes system alignment, programs of study, work-based learning, and college in high school. This allows education leaders to implement CTE programs that better support student success from secondary through postsecondary education and into the workforce.

The new law doesn't include many new mandates or prescribe a "one size fits all" approach. Instead, it encourages states to develop, implement, and expand innovative education strategies and initiatives. Through this law, states now have a tremendous opportunity to boldly reimagine how CTE can be a lever for college and career pathways that meet state and regional talent needs and prepare young people for the future.

**Recognizing this opportunity, JFF is sharing a vision for how CTE can directly advance the goals of its Pathways to Prosperity initiative and the broader national college and career pathways movement:**

- Students earn college credits before they graduate from high school
- Students engage in meaningful work-based learning experiences before graduating from high school
- Students transition seamlessly into clear pathways to postsecondary programs of study that are aligned with labor market needs
- Students earn postsecondary credentials that hold value in the labor market, allowing them to launch careers in high-growth, high-demand, high-wage industry sectors, advance in those careers, earn family-supporting wages, and pursue further education
- State leaders align education and workforce systems to ensure students are able to identify and enter clear pathways

## SYSTEM ALIGNMENT

Building college and career pathways requires an all-hands-on-deck approach. Education (K-12 and postsecondary), workforce development, economic development, industry, and other key stakeholders must all work together to design and deliver systems that support students' transitions from high school to college and into the workforce. The following provisions in the new CTE law encourage this level of collaboration.

### STATE PLANS

As in the current law, for states to receive funding, the agency responsible for Perkins is required to submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education. The new law reduces the period of time that state plans must cover from six to four years to align with state plan timelines under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Agencies may submit a “single plan” or a “combined state plan” for Perkins and WIOA.

The new law changes some state plan content requirements, particularly related to coordination and alignment with workforce systems. As part of the planning process, states must consult with an expanded list of key stakeholders to gather feedback and ensure that programs are inclusive of all students and responsive to local labor market needs.

## SINGLE AND COMBINED STATE PLANS

A **single state plan** refers to a single program's agreement between the state and federal government that describes how state leaders will administer and monitor that specific program. It gives assurance that a state will abide by federal rules for its program's activities.

A **combined state plan** refers to a state's coordinating effort to create one plan that encompasses activities and requirements across multiple programs. This opportunity was created under WIOA. As states are developing their CTE plans, they should build on this momentum to incorporate CTE into the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Higher Education Act, WIOA, and potentially poverty programs as well. Combined plans require more effort from state program leads; however, combined plans promote better coordination between state systems and ensure alignment across programs.

## PERFORMANCE METRICS

The new law seeks to align performance metrics across federal programs. State and local CTE programs are now required to use performance metrics from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for high school programs, including: graduation rate, academic proficiency, and student placement after high school in postsecondary education, advanced training, military service, a service program, the Peace Corps, or employment. In addition, CTE postsecondary performance metrics now include two indicators that were inspired by WIOA measures, as well as a third measure pertaining to nontraditional fields, namely: CTE concentrator program and job retention rates, the percentage of CTE students who receive a recognized postsecondary credential within one year of program completion, and the percentage of students in CTE programs that lead to nontraditional fields.

The law also changes the responsibility of the U.S. secretary of education from negotiating performance measures to approving or disapproving state-determined performance measures in state plans.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ▶ Create a combined state plan

States should create a combined state plan, which better aligns Perkins with WIOA and ESSA and helps the state create a unified vision for its education and workforce development systems. When drafting the plan, it is important that state leads identify essential stakeholders who are key in developing and implementing career pathway systems—and ensure that all have a seat at the table. States need to bring partners together in support of a shared vision, mission, and goals for developing or enhancing college and career pathways. [Delaware](#)<sup>2</sup>, a member of JFF’s Pathways to Prosperity Network, offers a strong example of state plan coordination in its combined ESSA, WIOA, and Perkins IV plans.

### ▶ Better align performance metrics across programs

Language and definitions introduced in ESSA and WIOA were intended to force better coordination of performance metrics across programs. Perkins V reinforces this. Alignment of performance metrics is a key element of successful college and career pathways, as it helps states define outcomes and measure student progress across systems. States should use the new requirements as an opportunity to better align performance measures across state data systems.

#### IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS IN THE NEW LAW

The **CTE concentrator** is the primary unit of analysis for Perkins V’s accountability framework. At the secondary level, a concentrator is a student who completes at least two courses in a single program or program of study. At the postsecondary level, a concentrator is a student who earns 12 credits in a single CTE program or program of study—or completes a CTE program that requires fewer than 12 credits.

**Nontraditional fields in CTE** refers to occupations or fields of work in which individuals of one gender represent fewer than 25 percent of all those employed. This includes careers in health care, computer science, information technology, and other emerging high-skill occupations.

# FUNDING

Funding opportunities are vital for the development of innovative pathway programs. The Perkins reauthorization and newly approved appropriation levels provide states with a small increase in funding and more flexibility in deciding where and how to allocate funds. The new law encourages expansion of pathway strategies and these funding updates can provide critical incentives for system reform.

## STATE LEADERSHIP

Under the new law, states can still spend up to 10 percent of their funding allotments for state leadership activities, but there are two major changes from the previous law. First, of that 10 percent, states must spend 0.1 percent or \$50,000 (whichever amount is less) on the recruitment of special populations to enroll in CTE programs. This includes individuals who are: from economically disadvantaged families, preparing for nontraditional fields, single parents, unemployed, English language learners, or experiencing homelessness, as well as those who have disabilities, have aged out of foster care, or have a parent in military service. The second change increases the allowable state set-aside for serving individuals in state institutions from one percent to two percent; for the first time, it also allows states to use these funds in juvenile justice facilities.

States now have five required uses of state leadership funding: CTE in nontraditional fields, programs for special populations, recruitment and preparation of CTE instructors, technical assistance, and analysis and reporting on the effectiveness of the state leadership funds in achieving the state's strategic vision. The law also includes a total of 25 permissible uses of these funds that include a wide range of activities, many of which closely align to college and career pathway development.

### REQUIRED USES OF STATE LEADERSHIP FUNDING

- CTE in nontraditional fields
- Programs for special populations
- Recruitment and preparation of CTE instructors
- Technical assistance
- Analysis and reporting on the effectiveness of state leadership funds in achieving the state's strategic vision

## THE RESERVE FUND

The new law increases the reserve fund from 10 percent to 15 percent and provides more flexibility for states. Previously, use of the reserve fund was limited to serving either rural communities or local areas with a high concentration of CTE students. Now it can also be used to fund areas that have disparities in enrollment and performance among population groups—it seeks to close achievement gaps and open opportunities for students who have been traditionally underserved in CTE. The new law allows this funding to be used to foster innovation through the identification and promotion of promising and proven CTE programs.

## LOCAL USES OF FUNDS

Under the new law, local uses of funds must be linked to the results of a local needs assessment that determines how CTE programs are performing against state and local performance measures. The state provides a recommended assessment approach and guidelines for regions. Specifically, the assessment identifies how programs: align to in-demand industry sectors, meet local education and economic needs, implement high-quality CTE courses, and recruit and retain students. These funds support the development, coordination, implementation, or improvement of CTE programs based on the regions' demographic and labor market landscapes. This addition is quite notable—it forces stronger alignment and engagement than ever before, which is important in the development and sustainability of college and career pathways in states.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Take advantage of flexible state funding**

To be successful in developing high-quality pathway programs in CTE, states should take advantage of the new flexibility provided in state leadership funding to support activities that align with college and career pathway development and implementation. In addition, the increased reserve fund allows states to be more intentional about using resources to increase access to CTE and better support pathways. States can use their reserve funds to invest in historically underserved communities that have not been able to implement strong CTE initiatives in the past due to lack of resources. This can open the door to stronger statewide

pathway systems that more young people can access, regardless of geography and socioeconomic status.

▷ **Represent priorities through allocation of local funds**

With the new requirement that local allocation of resources must be aligned with the results of the local needs assessment, states have the ability to reinforce the distribution of resources at the local level based on state priorities. Since regional funding depends on how local programs match up against state performance requirements, states can set standards they want to see implemented at a local level.

States need to make these requirements clear in their state plans so that eligible recipients know what is expected. They must also be diligent in evaluating programs to ensure that equitable and high-quality programs—as defined by Perkins V—receive funding. For example, Tennessee’s Department of Education reviews programs of study annually to ensure that they align with regional labor market needs and adjust programs when necessary. The state also conducts reviews of postsecondary CTE programs to determine which should be continued, expanded, or added.

## **BRIDGING K-12, HIGHER EDUCATION, AND CAREER** with Increased Emphasis on Work Experience

College and career pathways bridge high school, postsecondary education, and career while also integrating work-based learning opportunities that expose secondary students to the world of work and provide them with the skills needed for postsecondary success. The new law better supports this seamless transition, integration of services, and inclusion of industry-valued certifications.

## PROGRAM QUALITY

Perkins V requires states to choose among three specific indicators of program quality, each of which is a critical component of a career pathway:



- Percentage of CTE concentrators who graduate from high school with a postsecondary credential



- Percentage of CTE concentrators who graduate with postsecondary credits in their chosen CTE program



- Percentage of CTE concentrators who graduate with work-based learning experience

States can (but are not required to) report on additional measures of student success in CTE that are statewide, such as measures formerly reported as technical skill attainment.

## CTE PROGRAMS OF STUDY

CTE programs of study remain consistent from previous law. The new law provides a formal definition that emphasizes the sequence of academic and technical content at the secondary and postsecondary levels, incorporates employability skills, and is aligned to the needs of industries in the state, region, and/or local area. States have the ability to develop statewide programs of study as well as approve locally developed programs of study, which is consistent with previous versions of the Perkins Act.

## WORK-BASED LEARNING

For the first time in CTE legislation, Perkins V includes a strong emphasis on the provision of [work-based learning](#)<sup>3</sup>. The new law includes a formal definition of work-based learning that emphasizes the need for students' sustained interaction with industry or community professionals in real workplace settings or simulated environments. Under the new law, work-based learning is considered a measure of CTE program quality and is an allowable use of state and local funds as a strategy to support the implementation and success of CTE programs or programs of study.

## DUAL ENROLLMENT

The new law encourages states to consider dual and concurrent enrollment as critical elements of pathways that lead to attainment of postsecondary credentials in high-value career fields. The new law includes provisions that support [college in high school programs](#)<sup>4</sup> by allowing CTE funding to be used for their development and implementation. It also requires that state plans include how states will encourage students to take college-in-high-school courses by making relevant information and opportunities available

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ▷ **Connect programs of study to career pathways**

States should develop rigorous CTE programs of study that lead to stronger pathways for students. As states create their guidelines for programs of study, they should consider the defining features of career pathways and ensure that [career pathways](#)<sup>5</sup> at the state and local levels are closely linked with CTE programs of study. For example, Florida aligned their secondary CTE programs with their postsecondary programs. The state also reviews these programs of study annually to ensure that each local program is relevant and establishes and validates the college and career pathway.

### ▷ **Implement or enhance proven methods**

Work-based learning and dual enrollment are college and career pathway strategies that help bridge systems and better prepare students for postsecondary and workforce success. The new law encourages states to provide these options for students, and states and localities should take advantage of CTE funding to further develop and deploy pathway-aligned models of work-based learning and dual enrollment.

States that already have these types of activities underway can use funding to enhance programs—investing in techniques that will increase access and boost outcomes. States should prioritize opportunities that allow secondary students to earn a postsecondary credential—accelerating their path to success. For example, Delaware has promoted accelerated learning and work experience in CTE programs

for several years. The state allows CTE pathways to include college coursework, work-based learning opportunities, and industry certifications as available and appropriate.

## CALL TO ACTION

Although Perkins V does not create many new mandates, it does promote independence for states to develop and scale successful CTE programs and programs of study. As states start to implement the new law, this brief serves as a resource to help integrate college and career pathways into their work by: promoting cross-system alignment, taking advantage of funding increases and flexibility, and utilizing new opportunities to bridge secondary and postsecondary systems.

Perkins V can allow states to go beyond compliance and be creative—finding innovative ways to better serve and prepare all students for future success.



JFF is a national nonprofit that drives transformation in the American workforce and education systems. For 35 years, JFF has led the way in designing innovative and scalable solutions that create access to economic advancement for all.

[www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org)

## PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

Pathways to Prosperity is a joint initiative of JFF and the Harvard Graduate School of Education that seeks to ensure that many more young people complete high school, attain postsecondary credentials with currency in the labor market, and launch careers while leaving open the prospect of further education. Pathways to Prosperity mobilizes K–12 and postsecondary education leaders, policymakers, and employers to develop, implement, and scale college and career pathways to expand economic opportunity for all young people and meet regional talent needs.

[www.jff.org/pathwaystoprosperity](http://www.jff.org/pathwaystoprosperity)

## END NOTES

- 1 “H.R.2353. Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act,” Congress.gov, July 31, 2018, [www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2353](http://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2353).
- 2 “State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act,” U.S. Department of Education, April 3, 2017, [www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/decsa2017.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/decsa2017.pdf).
- 3 “Center for Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning,” JFF, accessed November 27, 2018, <https://center4apprenticeship.jff.org/work-based-learning>.
- 4 “How to Scale College in High School,” College in High School Alliance, February 15, 2017, [www.jff.org/resources/how-scale-college-high-school](http://www.jff.org/resources/how-scale-college-high-school).
- 5 “State Strategies for Sustaining and Scaling Grades 9-14 Career Pathways: Toward a Policy Set for Pathways to Prosperity,” JFF, October 23, 2014, [www.jff.org/resources/state-strategies-sustaining-and-scaling-9-14-career-pathways](http://www.jff.org/resources/state-strategies-sustaining-and-scaling-9-14-career-pathways).