

HILL VISIT TALKING POINTS

Keeping It Local

ACTE hopes that most of your time in meetings with your policymakers is focused on demonstrating how CTE works back home. While ACTE can provide a snapshot of what CTE looks like nationally, you are the expert and can share exactly how CTE works in your community and state. When you meet with your Members of Congress, focus on these items:

- How does CTE meet the business community's needs, particularly considering the current economic environment? Discuss any effective industry partnerships you have within your program.
- How are you working with employers to provide work-based learning opportunities to students?
- How does CTE provide pathways for students into further education? Discuss secondary-postsecondary connections, programs of study, career pathways, or initiatives at the postsecondary level like stackable credentials.
- Share any stand-out stories about innovative courses you have offered or inspiring student achievements.
- Paint a picture of how CTE works with specific populations in your community and share data and success stories. How does CTE work for nontraditional or underrepresented students, adults, opportunity youth and others in your program(s)?
- How could you expand or strengthen your CTE programs with more resources? Share about gaps in current programs that could be addressed, waiting lists for enrollment or new programs that you would like to offer but aren't able to due to resource constraints.
- Invite your policymakers to tour your program and see firsthand how your CTE program is working to meet the needs of your students.

Building our Investment in CTE

While funding for CTE had increased since 2017, current funding levels are still insufficient for CTE to be able to provide its maximum benefit to students, workers and the economy. Accounting for inflation, the Perkins Basic State Grant program is still **several hundred million dollars below its funding level from twenty years ago**. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, Perkins funding constituted just **1.7% of the total budget of the U.S. Department of Education**.

Congress just passed a continuing resolution for FY 2025 appropriations, which should keep funding at current levels for another year. This means no funding increases across the board for Perkins or other education programs for the 2025-26 school year. Now work begins on FY 2026 funding, which is likely to be extremely contentious. We are asking Congress for a meaningful increase to the Perkins Basic State Grant for this fiscal year and beyond. Here are some helpful points related to Perkins funding to use during your meetings:

- Perkins funding serves over 11 million secondary, postsecondary and adult CTE students nationwide.
- Perkins funding provides a strong return on investment, as students involved in CTE programs are more engaged, perform better academically and graduate at higher rates.
- CTE prepares students for careers in high-wage emerging fields such as drone piloting and manufacturing, cybersecurity and engineering.
- CTE is critical to preparing construction and infrastructure workers. According to the Brookings Institution, at least 17 million new workers will be needed over the next decade to rebuild the nation's infrastructure.
- CTE is also critical to the manufacturing industry. It is projected that the semiconductor industry will grow by nearly 115,000 jobs by 2030, from approximately 345,000 jobs today to approximately 460,000 jobs by the end of the decade, representing 33% growth. Of these new jobs, approximately 67,000 or 58% risk going [unfilled](#).
- In the FY 2024 appropriations omnibus package, Congress provided Perkins with only a \$10 million increase for the Perkins Basic State Grant, and the FY 2025 continuing resolution provided no increase. These levels of funding do not go nearly far enough to address community and employer needs that CTE can fill. As Congress begins work on FY 2026, it is important that Congress continues to provide meaningful increases to continue making a significant impact on workforce needs.

Maintain Strong Support for Public Education

CTE programs are an integral part of the public education system across the United States, both at the secondary and postsecondary levels. To ensure all learners have access to high-quality CTE programs as part of their broader education pathway, the federal government must continue to play a key role in supporting public education. In particular, Congress should:

- Ensure the Department of Education is maintained as outlined in current law and is organized and staffed in a robust way to ensure it can continue to administer the congressionally appropriated programs that serve millions of public school students.
- Provide meaningful oversight to ensure that all congressionally appropriated programs are carried out with fidelity and in a maximally efficient and effective manner.
- Oppose all legislation and executive actions that divert funds away from public schools and into non-public efforts that do not afford students the same access to programs and services.
- Prioritize the importance of the federal role in education data and research and reverse the cancellation of projects and contracts at the Institute for Education Sciences (IES), including the congressionally mandated National Evaluation of Career and Technical Education under Perkins (NECTEP) and other key data collection activities.

If the Department of Education were eliminated, there would be significant consequences for students across the country. Funds appropriated by Congress in a bipartisan manner might not reach the students and schools that rely on them in an efficient and effective manner. There would be minimal oversight of programs leading to potentially fewer high quality CTE programs, and it would be challenging for states and local areas to share best practices and benchmark for improvement. In addition, we are very concerned about the elimination of research functions at the Department of Education, with key statistics and data on student outcomes already lost. Halting critical research and data collection limits our ability to assess K-12 and postsecondary education quality and direct resources appropriately.

Expand Pell Grant Access for Short-Term Training Programs

Established under the Higher Education Act of 1965, the Pell Grant was designed to make four-year college education more accessible to students with financial need. Over time, its reach has expanded to include associate degrees and certain certificate programs. However, short-term programs under 600 clock hours remain ineligible for Pell funding. These programs provide valuable certifications, skills, and credentials that enhance career prospects and earning potential. Furthermore, they play a vital role in bridging the nation's skills gap, ensuring that employers have access to a workforce equipped with the specialized training needed for high-demand jobs.

- Of all the proposals for short-term Pell, the JOBS Act (S.383) is the most widely supported and bipartisan bill in Congress, receiving over a decade of negotiation, stakeholder engagement and technical assistance.
- The JOBS Act includes carefully negotiated quality assurance provisions to ensure that Pell grants are being used on high-quality programs that are proven to be worth the investment.
- The House Education and the Workforce Committee passed another short-term Pell bill last year, the Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act. We appreciate Congress prioritizing short-term Pell this Congress, and we are grateful for them working in a bipartisan manner.
- Short-term programs can quickly give students and workers certificates, licenses and industry certifications in high-skill, high-wage and high-demand fields like IT, welding, manufacturing, nursing and industrial maintenance.
- Expanding the Pell grant program to cover short-term programs would help employers address longstanding labor and skills shortages by hiring candidates with required industry certifications.
- Pell grants are predicted to increase short-term postsecondary program enrollment rates by 15 percentage points and completion rates by more than nine percentage points.
- Short-term programs offer “stackable” credentials to allow students to flexibly build upon their education over time.
- Two states piloted programs similar to what is being proposed in the JOBS Act:
 - The **Virginia New Economy Workforce Credentials Grant** program had a completion rate of 92%. On average, graduates increased their take-home pay between 25% and 50%.
 - **Iowa's Gap Tuition Assistance Program** completers experienced a 41% increase in quarterly wages. 24% of graduates pursued additional education in credit-bearing programs.
- The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) [estimated](#) in 2024 that implementation of this policy would only increase the total cost of Pell by 0.5%.
- Within any short-term Pell bill, quality assurance requirements should be constructed to ensure a reasonable balance with administrative burden, to the extent possible, on the postsecondary education institutions that will ultimately be tasked with administering and implementing this legislation. Any measures should prioritize assessing increases in individuals' earnings following successful program completion rather than provisions similar to the high school earnings metric included in the most recent iteration of gainful employment regulations.

Strengthening Alignment Between CTE and Workforce Development Programs

Congress has an important opportunity in the 119th Congress to reauthorize and thoughtfully reform two major pieces of federal workforce development legislation—the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the National Apprenticeship Act (NAA). The current NAA authorizes a system of Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs), but it has not been updated in nearly a century. WIOA was last reauthorized in 2014. In the previous Congress, a bipartisan agreement was reached to reauthorize WIOA (The Stronger Workforce for America Act). As lawmakers resume work on these reauthorizations, we should continue to

advocate for a workforce system that ensures more learners of all ages can access the education, training and support services necessary to secure family-sustaining employment.

- WIOA and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins) should be strategically aligned to develop a education and workforce development ecosystem that provides pathways to opportunity for all learners. This should include alignment of state and local planning processes as well as CTE representation within workforce boards.
- WIOA should have dedicated funding for the maintenance and upkeep of the workforce system's infrastructure costs, rather than pulling from other resource-strapped programs like Perkins.
- The education and training needs of in-school and out-of-school youth populations should be determined by states and localities, rather than a federal mandate.
- Reporting requirements and quality assurance provisions placed on training providers are necessary to ensure programs truly lead to opportunity, but they should not create administrative burdens that limit providers' willingness to engage with the federally funded workforce system.
- Congress must significantly improve data system capacity, transparency and usage both to improve systems themselves and to provide learners and workers with the information they need to make informed decisions regarding their futures.
- Programs across education and workforce should maintain common performance measures to ensure that all federally funded activities are working toward shared goals.
- Congress should increase the resources available to Area Technical Centers and Community and Technical Colleges to provide more opportunities for learners and workers.
- The definitions and expectations for all apprenticeship activities need to be formalized, including pre- and youth-apprenticeship programs, to provide clearer points of connection between systems of education and workforce development and a strong focus on program quality.
- Apprenticeship programs in nontraditional sectors of the economy can and should be expanded or created, especially for populations of learners and workers that are currently underrepresented within these sectors.

Recruiting and Retaining More High-quality Educators

Like many areas throughout the education system, CTE is experiencing critical shortages of qualified educators across the country. While systemically low pay and difficult working conditions are not unique to CTE teachers, the CTE teaching profession has the added challenge of recruiting and retaining individuals with industry experience and credentials in high-paying, in-demand fields outside of education. Only a small percentage of CTE educators are prepared through traditional CTE teacher preparation programs at universities; instead, CTE systems have had to develop high-quality alternative licensure pathways that allow industry professionals to receive pedagogical training necessary for success as teachers. Further, CTE uniquely experiences faculty shortages at the postsecondary level, with community colleges and area technical centers reporting difficulty attracting qualified professionals to administer and teach programs in high-demand fields such as nursing and cybersecurity.

- Different from most academic teachers, CTE teachers often come from industry to bring their talents and experience to the classroom, and do not typically enroll in a standard four-year educator preparation program.
- Funding for educator preparation programs, such as registered teacher apprenticeships, must be inclusive of the unique models CTE utilizes to provide pedagogical training to industry professionals.

- If we want to recruit and retain high-quality CTE teachers, we must make teaching a more financially attractive career to industry professionals:
 - The average base salary of full-time public school CTE teachers is lower than almost all other teachers (often due to experience, education credentials or salary scale structure), yet many CTE teachers could make substantially more money working directly in their industry.
 - Congress should provide direct financial support to teachers through federal tax incentives and student loan forgiveness for CTE teachers.
- CTE teachers need more access to high-quality CTE teacher preparation and professional development.
- Congress should make common-sense laws to incentivize interstate teacher licensure reciprocity.
- Postsecondary CTE faculty shortages are as critical as teacher shortages throughout K-12 but have not received enough attention from Congress.
 - Postsecondary CTE faculty shortages can lead to program closures that are devastating for learners and eliminate critical talent pipelines for small businesses.
 - The federal government should begin collecting data on the postsecondary educator workforce, especially CTE teachers at community colleges and technical centers.
- Federal data collection efforts on the CTE teacher workforce should be enhanced by creating nationwide standards for reporting CTE teacher shortages.