

POLICY PLATFORM

CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION



2018
EDITION

career & technical

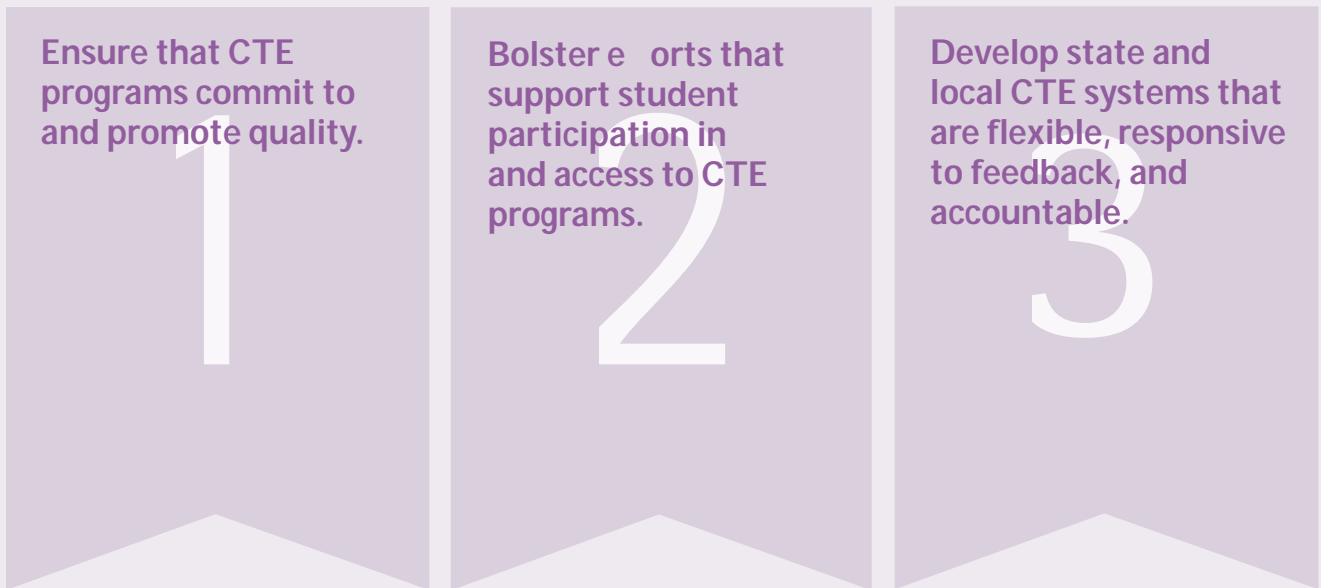
This Career and Technical
Education Policy Platform
offers ACT's unique experience

In December 2014, ACT released three policy platforms that identified opportunities to improve the K–12, postsecondary, and workforce development sectors. Three years later, along with three updated platforms in those areas, ACT has also developed a new platform for Career and Technical Education (CTE) to acknowledge its powerful ability to positively impact an individual’s education and workplace success.

While the federal investment in CTE, most recently through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, marked its 100th anniversary in 2017, it has undergone a dramatic series of transformations over those years and is especially relevant in today’s economic and educational climates. Previously known (sometimes derisively) as “vocational” education, CTE programs no longer focus exclusively on developing entry-level occupational skills training to prepare students for a single job. Today, they provide students in high schools, community colleges, and technical centers across the country with a broad spectrum of rigorous academic and technical content designed to prepare them for a career. From career exploration to advanced technical training, CTE programs are also exceedingly flexible, spanning the nation’s K–12, postsecondary, and workforce development systems and allowing students to choose their own educational and career pathways and change course as their interests and competencies evolve.

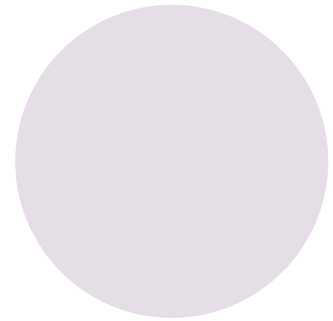
But even given its evolution and long history of strong bipartisan support, there are greater systemic changes needed to ensure that CTE fully meets the needs of both students and employers in the twenty-first-century economy.

The 2018 edition of the Career and Technical Education Policy Platform is organized around three themes:



The following sections present detailed recommendations for each of the themes.

1 ENSURE THAT CTE PROGRAMS
COMMIT TO AND PROMOTE QUALITY.



EMPHASIZE FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS, IN

OFFER AUTHENTIC WORK-BASED
LEARNING EXPERIENCES AS AN
INTE GRAL COMPONENT OF CTE
PROGRAMS.

increase the number of students attaining a postsecondary credential, promote postsecondary access and enrollment, help students accumulate postsecondary credit, encourage more students to complete high school, and promote students' overall academic achievement.

ENSURE THAT CTE PROGRAMS ALLOW MULTIPLE OPPORTUNITIES, AT ALL EDUCATIONAL LEVELS, FOR STUDENTS TO EARN A CREDENTIAL.

Ninety-six percent of the high school sophomore class of 2002 had completed high school or an equivalency by 2012, but although 84 percent of this cohort had enrolled in some form of postsecondary education, only 52 percent of those enrolling in postsecondary education had earned



PROMOTE PROCESSES THAT FACILITATE STATE AND LOCAL COMMUNITY INPUT INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CTE PROGRAMS TO REFLECT A COMMUNITY'S NEEDS.

As part of the Perkins Act, states and local communities are required to develop plans, after consulting various stakeholders, articulating how they will implement and improve CTE programs using federal funds. This process is a critical policy mechanism for oversight, but also has the potential to be something more meaningful and transformative.

One possible strategy to achieve this is to develop “needs assessments”—a policy mechanism that was incorporated in the recently enacted Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). While both Perkins and ESSA require a state and local plan in exchange for federal funding, these often simply provide a high-level overview of strategies for CTE or K–12 implementation. By comparison, a needs assessment would formalize regular check-ins with

stakeholders after the development of a plan to ensure that these strategies are successful and, when problems are identified, new strategies can be developed to overcome them. Such a process supports continual improvement and refinement of CTE programs to ensure student and stakeholder needs are effectively met on a rolling basis, allowing for adjustments and course corrections throughout the lifetime of a program.

This will empower states and localities to tailor programs in ways that ensure that their CTE programs reflect the needs of diverse groups, including the employers who look to these programs for new talent and, most importantly, the students these programs serve, especially those populations traditionally underserved by CTE. Also, given the many stigmas still associated with CTE, such consultation could have the added benefit of changing families’ historic perceptions of CTE, affording more students the opportunity to benefit from these programs.

STRENGTHEN THE CTE INSTRUCTOR
PIPELINE AND BRING SUCCESSFUL
INITIATIVES TO SCALE TO BROADEN
THEIR REACH.

3rd RECOMMENDATION**ENCOURAGE CAREER AWARENESS AND ADVISEMENT ACTIVITIES TO BEGIN EARLIER IN A STUDENT'S EDUCATIONAL PATHWAY.**

Developing a career plan is the critical first step in an individual's lifelong journey toward making their educational and career aspirations a reality. While research has demonstrated that students stand to benefit the most from career exploration activities that take place early in their education, particularly in middle school,³ two primary barriers currently prevent career awareness from occurring sooner.

First, the current student-to-school-counselor ratio in the US is an astonishing 491 to 1. In addition to lighter caseloads allowing for greater attention to assisting students along their education and career pathways, school- and institution-based counselors should be provided with professional development opportunities focused on promoting career readiness to ensure that they are able to act as a conduit of relevant and timely information for students as they seek out CTE programs and coursework that fit their needs and match their interests.

Second, support for introductory or exploratory CTE courses that seek to familiarize students with industries, careers, and available credentials are often fragmented and overshadowed by other priorities such as core academic courses, or are simply not offered at all. Students need greater exposure to CTE courses earlier on in order to capitalize on this important moment in their educational pathway. State and federal CTE policy should therefore aim to ensure that middle school students have the opportunity to enroll in introductory or exploratory CTE courses that seek to familiarize students with potential CTE pathways to keep students engaged with their learning and help them begin to formulate a plan for their future.

4th RECOMMENDATION**EFFECTIVELY LEVERAGE SUPPORT AND WRAPAROUND SERVICES TO ENSURE THAT UNDERSERVED STUDENT POPULATIONS CAN FULLY PARTICIPATE IN CTE PROGRAMS.**

CTE programs at all educational levels serve students from a wide variety of backgrounds and with unique needs. Services aimed at helping individuals complete a CTE program—including childcare, personalized counseling, dual and concurrent enrollment opportunities, flexible scheduling, and assistance with transportation—should be used to the greatest extent possible to ensure that underserved populations have the opportunity to take advantage of high-quality CTE.

Although federal investment in CTE through the Perkins Act represents only approximately 10 percent of all funding for programs in the US, this can and should be used by stakeholders as a springboard for coordinating and aligning with other state and federal programs that provide such support services for students. For example, career pathways funded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) offer a robust menu

of supportive services that can be used to better ensure access for underserved student populations. Other initiatives, such as those separately piloted by the US Departments of Education and Labor in recent years, offer free or low-cost quality childcare to parents in training programs and otherwise involve both the working parent(s) and their children. All of these initiatives should be coordinated and aligned with CTE program delivery frameworks such as CTE programs of study.

GOODWILL CENTRAL TEXAS



DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN ROBUST PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS THAT ALLOW FOR EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK.

Only 29 percent of surveyed business leaders in a recent Gallup poll reported that their firm was actively collaborating with a postsecondary institution. At the same time, only 11 percent of those same firms “strongly agreed” that the postsecondary education system was producing students with the skills and competencies needed to meet their business needs.²⁶ While these survey results were largely in the context of the ongoing debate about the value of a baccalaureate degree, they also speak to a more general disconnect between expectations of the employer community and the ability of the US educational system to equip students with applicable skills and relevant competencies needed for the workplace.

As more employers approach CTE programs and related systems as an “end consumer,” their engagement with and feedback to CTE programs and systems can be of great value to themselves, to the students, and to the system at large.²⁷ For example, employers can help reduce their future training costs by ensuring that programs are teaching the most relevant and in-demand skills;

they can recruit the most talented students before they enter the labor market; and they can raise their overall visibility in a given state or local area, which can promote a greater sense of goodwill that helps their business attract and retain talent in the long term. While engagement requires a certain degree of effort on the part of employers, the benefits vastly outweigh the potential costs.

One promising model of employer engagement is the sector or industry partnership model.²⁸ In this model, employers in a specific sector or industry partner with the state or local educational system to develop and deliver CTE programs that are tailored to the needs of the sector or industry. This model has been successful in a number of states, including California, Florida, and Texas. In California, the state has established a number of sector partnerships, including the Advanced Manufacturing Partnership, the Health Care Partnership, and the Information Technology Partnership. In Florida, the state has established a number of sector partnerships, including the Advanced Manufacturing Partnership, the Health Care Partnership, and the Information Technology Partnership. In Texas, the state has established a number of sector partnerships, including the Advanced Manufacturing Partnership, the Health Care Partnership, and the Information Technology Partnership.

DEVELOP MEANINGFUL STATE
ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS THAT
EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF CTE
OUTCOMES.

The adage “what gets measured gets done” has undergirded the idea of accountability in education and workforce development policy for some time. Increasingly, the national dialogue on education and workforce development has begun to take this to heart. At a time when the federal role has to an extent been minimized in these policy areas, attention has begun to be paid to states where there is new flexibility to develop robust accountability systems that can promote a more coherent vision for their respective CTE systems. This has existed for some time under the framework of the Perkins Act, and ESSA has further codified this. Policymakers must continue to build on this in future legislation to create a robust system of accountability that incentivizes important CTE outcomes at all learner levels.

According to a recent report, 34 states currently



The recommendations offered in this platform continue a framework that acknowledges the importance of aligning the education and workforce sectors to help fulfill ACT's mission of helping people achieve education and workplace success.

ACT's mission is to help people achieve education and workplace success.

At a time when the nation's economy is quickly changing and states are looking for ways to ensure that employers have a pool of qualified workers, this Career and Technical Education Policy Platform offers ACT's unique experience and research in education and workforce assessment to focus on the challenge of ensuring CTE is of high quality, that more students are able to access it, and that states and local systems are best equipped to deliver and monitor it. The recommendations offered in this and ACT's three other 2018 policy platforms continue a framework, established more than three years ago, that acknowledges the importance of aligning the education and workforce sectors to help fulfill ACT's mission.

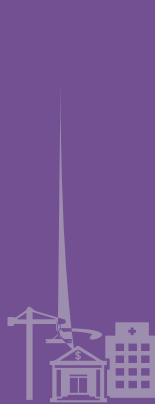
ALL OF ACT'S POLICY PLATFORMS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE:

www.act.org/policyplatforms

Notes

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4. For more information, see the US Department of Education's Employability Skills Framework at http://cte.ed.gov/employabilityskills/index.php/resources/framework_resources.
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