

**Statement Before the House Committee on Education and Workforce
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education**

**Hearing on “From Classroom to Career: Strengthening Skills Pathways Through CTE”
November 19, 2025**

Braden Goetz, Senior Policy Advisor, Center on Education and Labor, New America

Good afternoon, Chairman Kiley, Ranking Member Bonamici, and esteemed members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about innovations in career and technical education (CTE) and the role of the U.S. Department of Education in promoting them.

I am a senior policy advisor in the Center on Education & Labor at the nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank New America. The Center on Education & Labor is dedicated to building more pathways into the middle class and good jobs by better aligning education, employment, and economic development systems.

Before I joined New America, until December 2024, I worked for 26 years for the U.S. Department of Education, spending most of that time working on policy and research in the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) and reporting to the Assistant Secretary for Career, Technical, and Adult Education. OCTAE has been fortunate to have some smart, dynamic Assistant Secretaries from both parties and I am grateful that I had the opportunity to help them execute their ideas and advance the CTE policy goals of Presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden. One reason I have enjoyed working on CTE policy is that it has always been bipartisan—or, at least, it has been until very recently.

I am excited to participate in a hearing about innovations in CTE because providing young people opportunities for career-connected learning is an important part of American public education.

A “Dying Field” Transforms

CTE has not always been as well-regarded and valued as it is today. In 1998, shortly after I joined the Department, I arrived too early for a meeting and found myself alone with a senior Department budget official. I introduced myself and told him how happy I was to be working in OCTAE. He promptly burst my bubble, and told me I should keep an eye out for other opportunities because CTE was a “dying field.” He recounted how the Department had to scramble every year to try to preserve funding for the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education (Perkins Act) in the budget formulation process because it was typically targeted by

both Democratic and Republican administrations for budget cuts. He predicted it would be zeroed out in the next few years.

That budget official was correct that CTE, then known as vocational education, was on the margins of public education and considered a less demanding alternative to a rigorous academic education. In too many schools, vocational education taught certain students a narrow set of skills for specific jobs, many of them low-wage, in the expectation that they would immediately enter the workforce after high school. The “certain” students tracked into vocational education were disproportionately from low-income families and students of color. A few years before, the 1994 National Assessment of Vocational Education Interim Report to Congress had noted that the top concern identified by a majority of vocational teachers in a survey was the perception that “problem students” were being “dumped” in vocational education. It also reported evidence that vocational education programs with large numbers of students who were members of special populations were stigmatized and avoided by other students.¹

But the budget official was wrong that vocational education or CTE was a “dying field.”

It was a field that was modernizing, transforming, and becoming more rigorous so that it could offer all young people opportunities to explore careers of all kinds and to build employability and technical skills that would be useful to them wherever they landed after high school. The era of rote learning for dead-end jobs ended as CTE administrators aligned CTE programs with in-demand career pathways, many of which require further learning after high school, whether it is a Registered Apprenticeship, postsecondary certificate, associate degree, or a bachelor’s degree. Today, 80 percent of students who concentrate their studies in CTE in high school go on to enroll in postsecondary education at some point following high school graduation.²

I admire the hard work and vision of CTE leaders at the national, state, and local levels who were responsible for that transformation. I also appreciate the contributions made by Congress through amendments made to the Perkins Act. In 2006, Congress amended Perkins to require that CTE programs be aligned with the academic standards adopted by states under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It also made the performance of CTE concentrators on state academic assessments a core indicator in the program’s accountability system. That was an important milestone in CTE’s transformation. CTE leaders were welcomed to the table as partners in schoolwide efforts to ensure young people graduate with solid academic knowledge and skills, as well as the employability and technical skills that are the

¹ Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, *National Assessment of Vocational Education Interim Report to Congress*, 1994. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED369929.pdf>

² National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 326.60, 2023. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_326.60.asp

hallmark of CTE. CTE was no longer on the margins of public education. School administrators and academic teachers began to recognize the powerful contribution high-quality CTE can make to student success in high school.

Ramp Up the Federal Investment in CTE

Despite the persistent advocacy of CTE teachers and administrators and the organizations that represent them, as well as by Representatives Thompson and Bonamici as co-chairs of the House CTE Caucus, CTE's transformation has not been accompanied by a significant new federal investment. The Bipartisan Policy Center has noted that, since 2010, inflation has eroded the real value of the annual appropriation for Perkins by nearly \$250 million.³

At the current \$1.4 billion annual funding level for Perkins, we are spending about \$315 per CTE concentrator.⁴ This amount is adequate to support modest improvements in the quality and labor market responsiveness of CTE programs, but insufficient for many school districts and community colleges to keep pace with innovations in business and industry, particularly if that requires introducing new programs and purchasing costly equipment. Diagnostic medical sonographer, for example, is a fast-growing,⁵ high-wage⁶ occupation, but the costs of just one mid-range ultrasound machine can run from \$40,000 to \$100,000.⁷ The resource needs are especially acute in rural districts that receive less than the minimum grant size of \$15,000 and must participate in consortia with other small districts.

In reauthorization, we recommend that the Subcommittee signal its strong support for ramping up the federal investment in Perkins by \$1 billion over four years. With an annual appropriation of \$2.4 billion, which would be about \$532 per CTE concentrator, more school districts and community colleges will have the equipment and resources required to stay current with the needs of employers and provide the counseling and wraparound services and supports that are important to student success in CTE. A funding increase of this magnitude would benefit all schools and community colleges, but it would be particularly important for those in rural

³ Jack Malde, *Enhancing Career and Technical Education: State Insights for Perkins Reauthorization* (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2024). <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/enhancing-career-and-technical-education-state-insights-for-perkins-reauthorization/>

⁴ In FY 2023, there were 2,836,162 secondary CTE concentrators and 1,772,516 postsecondary CTE concentrators.

⁵ The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the number of jobs for diagnostic medical sonographers will increase 13.1 percent between 2024 and 2034. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment Projections. <https://data.bls.gov/projections/occupationProj>

⁶ In May 2024, the median annual wage for diagnostic medical sonographers was \$89,340, \$39,840 more than the median wage for all occupations. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2024. <https://data.bls.gov/oes/#/industry/000000>

⁷ Jennifer Ott, *How Much Does an Ultrasound Machine Cost?* (Cassling, November 15, 2024). <https://www.cassling.com/blog/how-much-does-an-ultrasound-machine-cost?>

communities, giving them the funding boost they need to be able to purchase major equipment to modernize their CTE programs, an impossibility with the tiny allocations they receive today.

Leverage the Federal Investment to Promote Quality Improvements in CTE

Congress should leverage this increased federal investment to promote quality improvements in CTE in Perkins reauthorization. As you begin the process of reauthorizing Perkins, we encourage the Subcommittee to consider how to:

- Better focus the federal investment in CTE on preparing students for high-quality jobs with wages that can support a family. While the law emphasizes preparation for “high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand occupations,” Perkins funds can now be spent on preparation for any occupation, including those that fail to provide economic security or advancement opportunities.
- Provide clearer expectations for how funds are to be used in the middle grades. In 2018, Congress amended the law to permit funds to be used to serve students in the middle grades, but did not specify the kinds of activities that would be appropriate for students in this age group. We encourage you to learn from the states who have been pioneers in creating middle grades career development activities and provide more detailed specifications for how you expect students in the middle grades to be served.
- Create strong incentives for states, school districts, and community colleges to increase the number of sustained and intensive work-based learning experiences like paid internships, co-op, and youth apprenticeships that are available to students in secondary and postsecondary CTE programs.
- Promote the submission of Perkins State Plans as part of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plans. New America published a report this summer⁸ that noted that WIOA Combined State Plans have the potential to promote creative and sustained collaborations between state education and workforce development agencies. To realize that promise, we recommended that Congress make some changes to the nature of the plans themselves, as well as offer some incentives to do this useful but time-consuming work.
- Promote the replication of degree apprenticeships that combine postsecondary degrees with Registered Apprenticeships. Not only can degree apprenticeship make higher education more affordable for learners, it may provide more effective career preparation than a traditional standalone degree program because it typically provides more hours of supervised, individualized experience learning the competencies of an occupation.

⁸ Lancy Downs and Morgan Polk, *Does Combined Planning Help States Align Workforce Initiatives? Survey Shows Mixed Results* (New America, 2025).

<https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/briefs/does-combined-planning-help-states-align-workforce-initiatives/>

However, these opportunities are relatively rare today, in part because of the cost and complexity of creating them.

- Assure that there is consistent annual funding for rigorous research on CTE carried out by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), such as by earmarking a small percentage of the annual state grant appropriation for these activities, as Congress has done with research on elementary and secondary education and higher education.

Outsourcing CTE to the Department of Labor Undermines Its Effectiveness

Unfortunately, the remarkable transformation of CTE that educators and policymakers worked so hard to achieve is now being undermined by the Administration's recent decision to outsource CTE to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). On May 21, 2025, DOL and the U.S. Department of Education signed an interagency agreement in which ED transferred to DOL the administration of the Perkins Act and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.⁹ According to the ED press release, "These actions position DOL as the centralized hub for federal workforce programs."¹⁰

Job training is not CTE and CTE is not job training. DOL's Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) training programs serve an important function: they are intended to help individuals who are out of work get back quickly into a job. According to the Harvard Project on the Workforce, the most common training programs are in ground transportation, such as commercial truck driving, and nursing occupations that require less than an associate's degree.¹¹ Many of the occupations for which WIOA participants are trained do not pay wages that can support a family. In fact, the median participant exiting a WIOA training program earns less than the median worker who has not completed high school.¹²

That's not the orientation or the result we want for our high school CTE programs. We need to build long-term pathways that will create a prosperous future for every student, not steer them into the first available job regardless of its quality.

⁹ Interagency Agreement between the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Labor, June 10, 2025, Exhibit B, Declaration of Rachel Oglesby, *State of New York v. Linda McMahon*, Case No. 1:25-cv-10601-MJJ. https://careertech.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/FILE_6497.pdf

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education, "U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Labor Take Next Steps in Implementing Their Workforce Development Partnership" (September 8, 2025). <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-and-us-department-of-labor-take-next-steps-implementing-their-workforce-development-partnership>

¹¹ David Deming, Alexis Gable, Rachel Lipson, and Arkādijs Zvaigzne, *Navigating Public Job Training* (Harvard Project on the Workforce), March 8, 2023. <https://pw.hks.harvard.edu/post/publicjobtraining>

¹² Ibid.

DOL also has important programs to connect out-of-school youth, justice-involved individuals, veterans, and senior citizens to jobs and training. But DOL's involvement in and knowledge of public schools is very limited.

This is not to say that CTE should be siloed off from DOL programs—and it hasn't been. Under the five presidents for whom I have worked, including President Trump in his first term, ED and DOL leaders have met frequently and collaborated closely where their interests intersect. Registered Apprenticeship is an example. In President Trump's first term, OCTAE published a guide to aligning CTE programs with apprenticeship and consulted with DOL in its preparation. Under President Biden, OCTAE and DOL leaders and staff worked together on guidance that outlined how Perkins funds could be used to support Registered Apprenticeship programs. Work-based learning is another example of a topic of mutual interest on which DOL and OCTAE staff have collaborated historically.

Even if the interagency agreement outsourcing Perkins administration to DOL is legal—and I am not confident that it is—I don't understand how it works operationally. The Perkins Act makes clear that policy decisions can only be made by the Secretary of Education, and she cannot delegate that authority to DOL. Instead, per the interagency agreement, what she has transferred to DOL is the implementation of her decisions.¹³ To accomplish that, ED is detailing to DOL those OCTAE employees who remain after the reductions in force. The OCTAE employees are supervised by a DOL official, probably a career employee, who reports to a DOL policy-making official, who reports to the Secretary of Labor.

There are more questions than answers about how this works. When Secretary McMahon makes a decision, does she call Secretary Chavez-DeRemer and ask her to convey the decision down the chain to the OCTAE staff in DOL? What happens if the OCTAE staff have questions? Or if they run into a new issue that needs a policy decision? Do they transmit that information up the chain for Secretary Chavez-DeRemer to share with Secretary McMahon? Or does Secretary McMahon call the OCTAE staff and tell them to brief up the chain? It is all very confusing and inefficient.

The expertise in ED regulations and ED programs that the OCTAE staff need to do their jobs has been left behind at ED. The Perkins Act and the CTE programs it authorizes continue to be governed by the Education Department General Administrative Regulations. North Dakota just enacted a charter school law. What will DOL do when the state's Department of CTE needs help understanding ED regulations on charter school funding? And when Congress wrote the Perkins Act, it included 58 cross-references to provisions in other education statutes like ESEA and the

¹³ Interagency Agreement between the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Labor, June 10, 2025, Exhibit B, Declaration of Rachel Oglesby, *State of New York v. Linda McMahon*, Case No. 1:25-cv-10601-MJJ. https://careertech.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/FILE_6497.pdf

Higher Education Act. What will DOL do the next time a state calls to discuss how a change made in its ESEA accountability system impacts its performance under Perkins?

We also should be concerned about the implications of outsourcing Perkins for efforts to ensure that all students, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, or disability, have equal access and opportunities to succeed in CTE programs. Since 1979, state agencies that administer Perkins have been responsible for carrying out certain responsibilities for ensuring that CTE programs are free from discrimination under the “Guidelines for Eliminating Discrimination and Denial of Services on the Basis of Race, Color, National Origin, Sex, and Handicap in Vocational Education Programs” issued by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), which are commonly referred to as the Methods of Administration (MOA) Guidelines.¹⁴ In 2020, during President Trump’s first term, OCTAE and OCR jointly asked states to submit revised MOA plans that harmonized their civil rights compliance activities under the MOA Guidelines with their implementation of the equity and civil rights provisions of the Perkins Act.¹⁵ States were encouraged to reduce duplication and tightly link their activities under Perkins with their responsibilities to OCR under the MOA Guidelines.

The interagency agreement does not reference the MOA Guidelines. Nor has there been any communication with states about how, if at all, the outsourcing impacts state MOA responsibilities and civil rights compliance activities. Civil rights seem to have been forgotten in the rush to outsource Perkins.

The cost of outsourcing Perkins is also a concern. DOL is not administering Perkins for free. The Economy Act (31 U.S.C. § 1535), one of the authorities used for the IAA, requires the agency procuring services from another to pay the actual cost of those services. Moreover, if DOL were to provide services at no cost to ED, it would be illegally augmenting ED’s salaries and expenses appropriation, violating the Antideficiency Act (31 U.S.C. § 1341).¹⁶ So, ED is paying the salaries of the OCTAE employees that it detailed to DOL and also paying DOL to supervise them, plus paying the costs of its use of DOL’s grant management system and other services. At a time of scarce resources, it’s hard to understand why ED is paying DOL to do work that it can do itself.

Of course, Congress could address some of these operational problems by amending Perkins to relocate the program to DOL, making an interagency agreement unnecessary. But removing

¹⁴ See 34 C.F.R. Part 100, Appendix B.

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-I/part-100/appendix-Appendix%20B%20to%20Part%20100>

¹⁵ See U.S. Department of Education, *Updated Procedures for Preparing the Methods of Administration (MOA) Described in the Vocational/Career and Technical Education Guidelines*, February 6, 2020.

<https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/memo-20200206-moa.pdf>

¹⁶ General Accountability Office, *Principles of Federal Appropriations Law* (Third Edition). 2008.

<https://www.gao.gov/assets/2019-11/203470.pdf>

Perkins from ED would reverse the great strides forward that the CTE field has made over the past several decades.

CTE Is Fundamentally an Education Program

In 1986, when vocational education was focused almost exclusively on preparing students for low-end, entry-level jobs, researchers David Stern and Gary Hoachlander published an eye-opening study that found that the unemployment rate of recent high school graduates in California who had concentrated their studies in vocational education was about the same as that of high school dropouts—more than one-quarter of both groups were jobless. They recommended that high schools abandon the rote entry-level job training they did so poorly and instead reform vocational education to integrate academics, teach teamwork and critical thinking skills, and “prepare young people for a working life of continual learning, problem solving, and communicating.”¹⁷

Thanks to bipartisan Congressional and Presidential leadership, thanks to the work of CTE leaders and educators, we’ve made those reforms. We’re there. Let’s not go backwards.

Relocating CTE to DOL would also put the federal government out of step with states. CTE is almost universally viewed by states as an education program. Perkins is administered in 47 states and the District of Columbia by a state education agency, with 39 states and the District of Columbia locating Perkins in their K-12 agencies and nine within a higher education agency. Perkins is administered by a separate, dedicated CTE agency in two states and by the state workforce board in one state. States appreciate having consistent and aligned federal education policies and requirements. Isolating CTE at DOL puts that consistency at risk and could result, for example, in DOL interpreting statutory provisions on charter, private, and home schools differently than ED.

CTE’s location in ED and the alignment of Perkins with other federal education programs established by Congress have yielded many benefits for the field. For example:

- When Trump and Biden Administration officials sat down to write guidance on how funding under the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act and the American Rescue Plan Act could be used in schools, OCTAE leaders and staff were there to ensure it highlighted how the funds could be used for CTE and explained how CTE could be part of a schoolwide strategy to reengage young people who were missing school and at risk of disconnection. Secretary Cardona followed up on that guidance by sending a Dear

¹⁷ David Stern, E. Gareth Hoachlander, Susan Choy, and Charles Benson, *One Million Hours A Day: Vocational Education in California Public Secondary Schools* (Policy Analysis for California Education, University of California School of Education), 1986. https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/r_stern-mar1986.pdf

Colleague letter to Chief State School Officers emphasizing the value of using COVID-19 relief dollars to support career-connected learning that included industry-recognized credentials, dual enrollment, work-based learning, and college and career navigation.

- When Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) officials and staff were writing guidance on how 21st Century Community Learning Center funds could be used, OCTAE leaders were there to ensure the guidance highlighted CTE as an allowable use of those funds, prompting new conversations between after-school coordinators and CTE administrators who may never have worked together before.
- When state and local CTE administrators were looking for help in understanding whether and how best Perkins funds could be used to support teacher cadet programs and other Grow Your Own teacher educator strategies, OCTAE had ready access to ED experts on educator preparation to help address those questions and offer ideas on how to use Perkins funds most effectively. Those ED experts and allies also helped OCTAE by issuing guidance that noted the severe shortage of CTE teachers and described how states and districts could use funds from ESEA and HEA programs to address it.

Cross-program collaboration has been frequent under previous Administrations. Additional examples include OCTAE and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services staff co-presenting at meetings about work-based learning for students with disabilities and OCTAE and OESE staff jointly addressing meetings about how Perkins funds could be used to benefit youth experiencing homelessness identified under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Several publications produced by the ESEA-funded Comprehensive Centers have been of keen interest to CTE administrators, such as a compilation of state licensure requirements for CTE teachers and an analysis of ESEA, Perkins, and WIOA that identified opportunities for state collaboration across those three laws.

Probably the most meaningful result of the placement of Perkins within ED is the rigorous research on CTE that the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) has funded in recent years. The dour budget official I mentioned earlier, who had insisted that CTE was dying, was also quick to point out that CTE lacked rigorous research that demonstrated its benefits for young people. And he was right: apart from an MDRC study on career academies released in the early 2000s, we didn't have much to work with when we touted the benefits of CTE.

That began to change in 2016 when IES first began to mention CTE in its solicitations for competitive research grants. While IES does not select projects for funding based on the topic, instead using panels of independent peer reviewers to assess the quality of proposals' methodology and the significance of the research questions that they will address, it does signal the topics that are of greatest interest in its solicitations. IES included CTE because it recognized

that ED's leadership considered CTE to be an important part of public education that merited greater study.

The result of highlighting CTE in these solicitations was almost immediate. IES soon began funding projects that used "gold standard" causal methods to assess the impact of participating in CTE in high school in different contexts. To build on this work, in 2018, during President Trump's first term, OCTAE provided IES with Perkins national activity funds to create a CTE Research Network to promote collaboration among IES-funded research teams and support activities to strengthen and expand CTE research.

This IES and OCTAE collaboration accelerated CTE's evolution as an evidence-based field. Last year, the CTE Research Network published the results of a systematic review of rigorous, causal research on the impacts of participating in CTE in high school, using the same standards employed by IES's What Works Clearinghouse. The majority of the studies included in the review were published in the last seven years. Among other impacts, the review found that participating in CTE in high school increases academic achievement and the likelihood of graduating high school, and enhances employability skills and college readiness.

Had CTE been housed in DOL, had middle and high school CTE been considered part of the "public workforce system" rather than a vital part of public education, none of that research would have been funded. We still would not have an answer to skeptical budget officials who question the value of CTE.

CTE is fundamentally an education program. Moving Perkins to DOL, whether through the current, legally dubious interagency agreement or through an amendment to the law, threatens to re-marginalize CTE and put at risk the wonderful work you are hearing about today.