

STATE OF MONTANA

Comments on Reauthorization of Federal Support of Career and Technical Education
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Santa Clarita, California

FOCUS: Postsecondary Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Comments based upon survey of postsecondary administrators, Perkins project directors, and consultation with state agencies. Supplementary comments reflect priorities of the National Association of State Directors of Career and Technical Education consortium

Federal Role for Postsecondary Institutions

The federal role for career and technical education at the postsecondary level should:

- Provide mechanisms/resources that would encourage innovation;
- Promote economic security and growth by assisting postsecondary institutions to close the skills gap this country's workforce faces; and
- Support the States' Career Cluster Initiative that would serve to produce a nationally validated curriculum framework in every occupational area, provide a national consistency and coordination of each cluster, and reduce costs and duplication for the states.

Administration of Perkins

The definition of "Eligible Agency" and "Eligible Recipient" should be retained as specified in Perkins III. The current practice of having a single eligible agency (instead of separate eligible agencies for secondary and postsecondary CTE) should continue as the best way to efficiently administer scarce federal resources. Additionally, states are best able to adapt to changing needs in their communities with the flexibility currently built into the CTE structure through the "Uses of Funds" provision.

Allocation of Funds

Montana is categorized as a small state and as such receives the minimum level of Perkins funds. This level is too low to support mandatory activities especially in a state that is 4th in geographic area, 48th in population, and characterized by numerous isolated school districts and fifteen two-year institutions dispersed across the state. Compounding the problem is Montana's dismal economic outlook. It ranks 50th in per capita personal income and is experiencing severe budget cuts across all agencies and continued diminishing state support for education.

Improving Accountability for Postsecondary Institutions

Federal legislation should maintain the accountability system established under Perkins III to provide states the longitudinal data necessary for modifying/maintaining practices that support continuous improvement. Also, such legislation should incorporate postsecondary performance measures that reflect what constitutes success for the adult student.

Expanding Secondary/Postsecondary Transition Models

Expanded and continued support of Tech Prep as an effective model for connecting secondary and postsecondary technical programs for the benefit of students is imperative. To provide the environment in which this transition model can realize its full potential, Tech Prep must be maintained as a separate title within Perkins.

Models for Dual/Concurrent Enrollment must be given priority as well. These programs serve to reduce college tuition costs for students and parents, accelerate student progress towards a degree, provide greater academic challenge to high school students, remove the barriers that prevent students from moving between systems, and increase opportunities for students to obtain further education.

Business and Education Partnerships: Alignment of Curriculum

As stated by Anthony Carnavale and Donna Derochers in their paper titled *The Missing Middle: Aligning Education and the Knowledge Economy (2002)*, “In order to provide ‘human capital’ needed for the new economy, there needs to be an effective alignment of K-16 curricula with labor market requirements, which requires: cognitive reasoning skills; problem solving skills; soft behavioral skills; positive cognitive skills and specific occupational skills... there needs to be a better alignment among secondary, postsecondary and employer institutions.” Development of Career Pathways through the Clusters Initiative would guide states toward this end.

Support Basic and Applied Research and Demonstration Projects

Focusing on research and development of best practices and leadership are the most efficient uses of Federal resources for postsecondary CTE. This effort may include such areas as:

- best methods for promoting student-centered instruction based on integrated high academic standards and business and industry standards
- best methods for assisting learners to become informed about career choices and educational opportunities
- identification of effective professional development strategies for educators to gain understanding of the changing needs of business and industry and to promote real world problem-solving opportunities for students

Expanded Professional Development

Federal legislation should focus on state-level professional development and leadership to address the critical shortage of CTE faculty and administrators at the postsecondary level. These efforts should focus on certifying and preparing teachers for postsecondary CTE classrooms in relation to currency of technical skill and knowledge of teaching/learning theory. Grassroots leadership development is crucial to the long-term viability of CTE. New leaders must be well-versed in the political and financial challenges, current and emerging reform processes, program planning and implementation, use of research and evaluation, and building effective learning environments for students.