
The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act

BACKGROUND

Young adults face a job market vastly different than the one that existed a generation ago. Technological advances and the growth of a global economy have dramatically changed the kinds of jobs available, making quality education and training vital to competing in today's workplaces. That's why Congress has enacted reforms in recent years to improve K-12 education and modernize the workforce development system. But more can be done to help equip all Americans with the tools they need to succeed in the 21st century workforce.

Since 1984, the *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act* has provided federal support to state and local career and technical education, or CTE, programs. These programs—created and operated by state and local leaders—offer students the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to compete for jobs in a broad range of fields, such as health care and technology. One CTE graduate, Paul Tse, testified that CTE helped him advance from a struggling high school student to a project manager at a mechanical contracting company, saying: "I am the American Dream." Unfortunately, not all students have had the same success, particularly in the wake of the recent recession.

Because federal law has not been updated in more than a decade, it no longer reflects the realities and challenges facing students and workers. Current policies restrict the ability of state leaders to invest federal resources in efforts that prioritize economic growth and local needs. This occurs at a time when critical industries have vacant jobs but not enough qualified workers to fill them. To make matters worse, the Department of Education continues to meddle with education and workforce development decisions that are best left to state and local leaders.

THE STRENGTHENING CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY ACT

Building on recent reforms to K-12 education and the workforce development system, Reps. Glenn Thompson (R-PA) and Katherine Clark (D-MA)—along with Reps. Bradley Byrne (R-AL), Carlos Curbelo (R-FL), Jim Langevin (D-RI), and Rick Nolan (D-MN)—introduced the *Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act*. The legislation contains reforms that will help more Americans—especially young Americans—enter the workforce with the tools and knowledge they need to compete for high-skilled, in-demand jobs. The bill:

- ✓ **Empowers state and local community leaders** by simplifying the application process for receiving federal funds and providing more flexibility to use federal resources to respond to changing education and economic needs.
- ✓ **Improves alignment with in-demand jobs** by supporting innovative learning opportunities, building better community partnerships, and encouraging stronger engagement with employers.
- ✓ **Increases transparency and accountability** by streamlining performance measures to ensure CTE programs deliver results and empowering parents, students, and stakeholders with a voice in setting performance goals and evaluating the effectiveness of local programs.
- ✓ **Ensures a limited federal role** by reining in the secretary of education's authority, limiting federal intervention, and preventing political favoritism.