

July 6, 2016

Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Scott:

On behalf of the Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA), I write to express our support for committee passage of the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, a bill to reauthorize the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. SIIA is the principal trade association for the software and digital content industry, representing approximately 700 member companies worldwide that develop software and digital information content. Our members depend on the nation's schools to provide a skilled, high-tech workforce with both academic proficiency in the core subject areas and 21st century skills.

Career and technical education (CTE) support by the Perkins Act is a vital component of preparing the workforce for today's and tomorrow's jobs. As technology has improved drastically over the past decades, the need for more highly skilled employees in the workforce has increased just as rapidly. It is critical that our nation's education and workforce programs support a pipeline of employees with the necessary skills to fill technical positions. Perkins is the principal source of federal funding for CTE and is one of only a few programs that span secondary and postsecondary education while aligning with the needs of business and industry.

A reauthorized Perkins CTE Act begins with prioritizing and focusing on student outcomes rather than program inputs. SIIA commends the committee for doing just that by building on the framework of 'programs of study' – non-duplicative sequences of courses culminating in education or work-based credentials. CTE programs built on the programs of study framework as formally defined in this bill create a bridge for students between secondary and postsecondary education while offering multiple entry and exit points that allow students flexibility and choice and culminating in a recognized postsecondary credential.

In focusing on programs of study, it is also critical that the Perkins reauthorization include a strong emphasis on partnerships between CTE programs and business and industry. Such partnerships in guiding the development and implementation of programming will ensure that skills are aligned to current industry standards and create greater opportunities for work-based learning. In turn, employers will be assured a strong pipeline of highly-qualified employees. The bill proposed by the committee provides these necessary opportunities for employer engagement on a regular basis, including in development and implementation of programs and the identification of current standards and credentials.

The new biennial needs assessment will further the goals of shifting to the programs of study framework and greater business and industry engagement. By asking districts to regularly examine how their programs are serving students and meeting local economic needs, CTE programs can more rapidly adapt to the needs of the workforce. Without a regular needs assessment, local programming can stagnate – producing graduates for industries no longer needed in the community or with outdated skills in an in-demand career field.



Even with a focused approach on programs of study, recognized postsecondary credentials, and employer engagement, the Perkins Act would not be able to attain its goals without adequate funding and fair distribution of such funds. SIIA commends the bill sponsors for maintaining the formula-based distribution method to ensure every school district and every student has the opportunity to access high-quality CTE programs. Paired with new opportunities for innovative programming, this bill provides a significant increase in flexibility while not losing sight of access for all students. SIIA also commends the sponsors for including funding authorization levels above current appropriations and that increase annually. Funding for CTE programs today has been stagnant and is still more than \$5 million below FY2007. A serious policy for providing students with skills and employers with a pipeline of qualified employees must provide adequate funding for education and workforce programs such as CTE. SIIA will urge that Congress follow the authorization levels included in this legislation during the appropriations process.

Data is a critical tool for schools as well as state and federal policymakers. An important piece of reauthorization should ensure accountability systems collect meaningful information that is used to regularly evaluate and improve programs. New, formal definitions of “CTE concentrator” and other terms will align data measures across states to allow better comparison of outcomes, recognition of effectiveness, and higher-quality research. The bill’s streamlining of performance measures will appropriately place a higher emphasis on credential attainment as a measure of student success.

SIIA is concerned that the bill greatly diminishes the role of federal research related to CTE practices. For any education or workforce program, evidence-based research is imperative for administrators and educators to improve pedagogy or to make advancements in learning materials and technologies. Research related to education is the cornerstone of understanding best practices. Without such research opportunities, we risk missing critical opportunities to understand how students learn and to improve outcomes.

Thank you for your continued work in reauthorizing the Perkins CTE Act in a bipartisan manner. SIIA and our member companies look forward to further working with the committee. Please don’t hesitate to contact me or Brendan Desetti, SIIA’s Director of Education Policy, at bdesetti@siaa.net or (202) 789-4448 with any further questions or requests for further information.

Sincerely,

Mark MacCarthy
Vice President, Public Policy

CC: Representative Glenn Thompson
Representative Katherine Clark