

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION CTE RECOMMENDATIONS



To: Biden Transition Team
From: LeAnn Wilson, Executive Director,
Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE)
Date: November 24, 2020
Subject: A Vision for Career Technical Education (CTE) for a New Administration

Over the past several decades, the American economy has undergone a dramatic series of transformations, most recently due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers of all sizes are increasingly seeking individuals with specialized skills and career competencies in order to thrive in a rapidly evolving job market. Moreover, this new American economy is demanding higher levels of foundational skills from its workers, including creativity and innovation, the ability to think critically and solve complex problems, and collaborative work skills. These requirements cut across every occupation and industry sector and are now a prerequisite for worker success.

Put simply, jobs in our economy are changing and our education and training systems must keep pace if America wants to recover from the current economic devastation and remain competitive on the world stage. A commitment to high-quality CTE is key to meeting this challenge, and is central to rebuilding the American economy and empowering every American worker.

ACTE is the nation's largest not-for-profit association committed to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for successful careers. We represent the entire community of CTE professionals, including educators, administrators, researchers, career development professionals and others at all levels of education, and strive to empower our community to deliver high-quality CTE programs that ensure all students are equitably positioned for career success.

The supplemental documents enclosed with this memorandum provide specific, but not exhaustive, policy recommendations that we encourage the Biden-Harris administration to adopt, background information on CTE, and also a letter outlining the qualifications and experiences we believe the next Assistant Secretary for the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) should encompass to ensure they are successful in the role starting on day one. As your Administration continues to develop its CTE policy strategy and engage the CTE community in the coming years, we stand ready to provide assistance to ensure the continued success of CTE programs nationwide.

For additional information, please contact Alisha Hyslop, Senior Director of Public Policy, at ahyslop@acteonline.org or 727-642-0491; or Michael Matthews, Government Relations Manager, at mmatthews@acteonline.org or (703) 683-9316.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "LeAnn Wilson", is positioned below the "Sincerely," text.

LeAnn Wilson
Executive Director
ACTE

CTE BACKGROUND

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What is CTE?

Fundamentally, CTE equips students of all ages with the academic and technical skills, knowledge and training needed to be successful in their careers and in life. The scope of CTE is broad and spans our nation’s K-12 and postsecondary education systems, as well as its workforce development efforts. It is delivered to students along a continuum, spanning career exploration all the way to highly specialized and advanced technical training, and allows students to choose their own pathway. Delivered via the [Career Cluster® Framework](#), CTE provides educational opportunity and preparation for all sectors and professions in the American economy.

CTE: Then and Now

The CTE community has celebrated over a century of federal investment in career education, marking it one of the longest-standing continuous education investments our nation has made. There is a reason it has withstood the test of time. Vocational education, and now CTE, has been vital to helping our nation grow and transform its economy from one focused on agriculture to a booming industrial and manufacturing economy and now to the modern, technology-driven economy of today.

CTE was originally known as “vocational education,” and federal law reflected this term until 2006. Vocational education helped supply our country with the workers vital to protect our nation during both World Wars. And it was vocational education that led the way in addressing national priorities like gender equity, public accountability and connecting secondary and postsecondary education. Simply put, CTE has been, and continues to be, critical to the history, strength and growth of our nation.

However, at its inception, vocational education was often limited to a subset of students who were deemed not bound for further postsecondary education. Tracking of students based on race, gender or other perceived capabilities was unfortunately commonplace. Originally, vocational education was offered primarily in high school, and ended in a specific job, typically in the skilled trades.

As our economy evolved, technology advanced and work became more complex, so too did vocational education. This evolution was further solidified with a new name—career and technical education (CTE). This was much more than a name change. The CTE of today provides opportunity and choice for all students rather than a just a few. It prepares learners for a broad range of careers, in areas such as healthcare, engineering, advanced manufacturing, information technology and criminal justice, in addition to the skilled trades. Today’s CTE integrates and aligns rigorous academics with technical coursework because this is what the modern economy demands. And importantly, today’s CTE goes beyond the high school experience, including a variety of postsecondary education and training options that lead to the full range of credentials valued in the labor market.

Today's High-Quality CTE

Career and technical education (CTE) prepares students to be college- and career-ready by providing core academic skills, employability skills and technical, job-specific skills. It also fulfills employer needs in high-skill, high-wage, in-demand areas. CTE is delivered flexibly through high schools, area career centers, career academies, community and technical colleges, four-year universities and more. CTE prepares students for a range of career options through the 16 Career Clusters® mentioned above and more than 79 pathways.

In 2018, ACTE released a comprehensive, research-based framework defining quality within 21st century CTE programs of study. The Framework includes 12 elements and over 90 criteria that outline the operational components of high-quality CTE, including elements featured prominently in federal policy, such as work-based learning, business and community partnerships, and strong data and program improvement systems. The framework is designed to apply to individual, local CTE programs of study spanning secondary and postsecondary education, although it may be adapted to other units of analysis. You can find more details and tools [online](#).

CTE BACKGROUND

Demand for CTE

Effectively supporting and leveraging the nation's CTE system will be of the utmost importance over the next four years, particularly as the demand for CTE continues to grow in key fields such as healthcare, information technology, energy and infrastructure. Currently, nearly two-thirds of all jobs in the American economy require some form of postsecondary education or training. Many of these jobs require education beyond high school, but not necessarily a four-year degree. Although these are commonly referred to as “middle skill” jobs, many require highly-advanced technical skills and credentials. By 2022, nearly half of all jobs will fall into this middle skill category. However, the supply of middle skilled workers often lags behind the demand for them, contributing to the often-cited skills gap and lower economic productivity.

CTE is well positioned to meet these new and changing demands. At present, the vast majority—92%—of high school students take a least one CTE course, and many make a significant investment in CTE. According to recent data at the postsecondary level, over a million learners earned an associate degree and another 665,000 earned postsecondary credentials or certificates of some kind. However, more can be done to ensure that all students have the opportunity to pursue the careers and CTE programs of their choice, particularly as the Biden Administration lays out their policy priority framework for the next four years.

CTE's Impact

One of the most enduring features of CTE is that it engages students in their learning. CTE provides the opportunity to contextualize what is taught in the classroom and grounds coursework in real-world experiences. When students see the value and relevancy of what they are learning, they are more engaged and are more likely to succeed in school and work. These observations are borne out in the research. Students concentrating in CTE:

- graduate at higher rates than their peers
- have higher rates of academic achievement
- are just as likely to go on to postsecondary education
- are more likely to persist and succeed while there.

In addition, at the postsecondary level, there is a significant payoff to students who earn credentials in CTE programs. For workers with associate degrees, the percentage of “good jobs”—jobs that pay a median annual income of \$55,000 or higher without a bachelor's degree—grew by 83% between 1991 and 2016. In addition, individuals with associate degrees in CTE fields of study can earn \$10,000 more per year than those with associate degrees in other fields, and students can attend public community and technical colleges for a fraction of the cost of tuition at other institutions: \$3,730, on average, in 2019-2020.

As for a public return on investment, many of these positive student outcomes have the potential to save taxpayers billions of dollars. For instance, secondary CTE's role in dropout reduction has an estimated \$186 billion lifetime return on investment for the U.S. economy. In addition, investments in CTE yield big returns for state economies. For example, Colorado Community College System alumni in the workforce contribute \$5.1 billion annually to the state, and in Wisconsin, taxpayers receive \$12.20 in benefits for every dollar invested in the technical college system. Oklahoma's economy reaps a net benefit of \$3.5 billion annually from graduates of the CareerTech System.

More Information

Visit the below web pages to learn more about CTE:

- [State CTE Profiles](#)
- [Perkins V Implementation](#)
- [CTE Fact Sheets](#)
- [CTE Sector Sheets](#)

POLICY PRIORITIES

The next four years will be vital in order to revive our small businesses, reinvigorate our economy, and restore the health of our nation. As the Biden Administration seeks to promote economic growth and shared prosperity for our country and we continue to battle back from the global health pandemic and subsequent recession, we encourage you to adequately support and effectively leverage our nation's CTE system to ensure the American dream becomes a reality for more people. The following policy priorities will help ensure that all Americans have equitable access to invaluable CTE opportunities that will put them on a path to a better life and a successful career.

1. Support CTE as a Critical Component in COVID-19 Response & Strategy

The COVID-19 pandemic has been taxing and testing our nation's educational, digital and technology infrastructure. The CTE community, which is the talent pipeline for many of our nation's skilled workers, has not been immune to these challenges. CTE programs are facing many of the same dire needs as the entire education system, particularly those related to broadband and technology access, digital curriculum and teacher professional development. However, many needs in CTE are exacerbated by the applied and lab-based nature of courses, the need for students to continue to meet certification requirements, and the goals of work-based learning and other experiential programs.

With millions of Americans out of work and entire industries changed forever, now more than ever, it is necessary that individuals have access to upskilling and reskilling opportunities to be part of the evolving workforce. CTE programs are exceedingly effective in providing high-quality training in in-demand career fields due to their ability to quickly adapt to the needs of business and industry in the current economic climate. In order for America to successfully build back better, CTE must play a central role.

We anticipate unprecedented demand for CTE programs once the public health crisis has passed. With many CTE programs like health care and advanced manufacturing already facing waiting lists, dedicated resources are needed to address the looming need for skilled workers in these areas, and others like transportation and logistics, energy, education and the skilled trades. Now more than ever, individuals need access to upskilling and reskilling opportunities that provide specific technical, as well as transferable, skills to be part of the evolving workforce. CTE programs stand ready to provide employers a talent pipeline, and prepare students for careers in high-skill, high-wage or in-demand careers, as our nation continues to recover from the pandemic. To support CTE programs and students during this unprecedented time:

- **Support robust funding to stabilize state and local education budgets:** CTE programs largely exist within the framework of the public education system, which has been taxed in unprecedented ways by the pandemic. K-12 school districts and postsecondary institutions have faced significantly increased costs for both remote and socially-distant, in-person instruction at the same time that state and local budgets have faced significant cuts. The combination could prove disastrous for CTE programs in particular, which are often considered "electives" or are more expensive to operate effectively and safely. We urge you to fight for significant resources for education in future COVID-19 response legislation. Importantly, this funding should not be conditioned on schools being open for in-person instruction, as those decisions should be left to local education and health officials and made in the best interests of students and communities—not as a requirement for federal funding.
- **Work to close the homework gap and narrow the digital divide:** Nationwide, as many as 16 million students—nearly one in three—and 400,000 educators do not have adequate Internet connectivity to learn/teach from home. These students and educators hail from every state, and a disproportionate number of those students are minorities, come from low-income households, or live in rural areas. If reintroduced, support the Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020 (H.R. 6563, 116th Congress), which would create a \$2 billion "Emergency Connectivity Fund" for schools and libraries to secure wi-fi hotspots, modems, routers and connected devices. It would support distance and remote learning for "millions of students without home internet access" for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency. Additionally, we request that the Biden Administration increase appropriations for the Federal Communications Commission's E-rate program in the FY 2022 budget request.

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- **Provide dedicated resources to CTE programs to aid in economic recovery:** The Relaunching America's Workforce Act provided \$1 billion in dedicated funding for CTE programs, as well as \$2 billion in funding for community and technical college partnerships to help provide the skills training necessary to drive economic recovery. We urge you to support these proposals, and to also consider agency actions that can spur innovation within the CTE space. Such national activities could include:
 - convening providers to create, pilot and scale new employer-informed curriculum that integrates augmented or virtual reality
 - providing educators with access to professional development in how to leverage new technology and curriculum
 - incentivizing innovation in the delivery of virtual work-based learning
- **Seek out flexibilities that can be provided to education and workforce development programs to meet the current needs of all learners:** While maintaining quality should be of utmost importance, there are likely to be regulatory and administrative flexibilities that may be needed as the pandemic continues, such as continuing flexibilities for postsecondary accreditors to recognize distance learning, waivers for funds carryover from one year to the next, and flexibility in reporting and adjusting previously determined state performance levels given disruptions in assessments and data collection.

2. Significantly Increase Funding for Perkins CTE State Grants in FY 2022 Budget Request

The Perkins Basic State Grant program is the principal source of dedicated federal funding for CTE, which helps build the capacity of secondary and postsecondary institutions to serve millions of students nationwide. Perkins Basic State Grant funds are allocated to all 50 states through a need-based formula and are designed to help ensure all students have the academic, technical and employability skills they will need for career success. Perkins funds support foundational curriculum development, professional development, equipment and technology, support services, experiential learning and other key elements of providing equitable access to high-quality CTE—funding that is more important than ever given current circumstances.

Increasing Perkins funding will expand access to CTE programs to a greater number of secondary, postsecondary and adult learners, which is imperative as we continue to build back from historic unemployment numbers and a pandemic that shifted entire industries. **We urge President-elect Biden to significantly increase funding for the Perkins Basic State Grant program in his FY 2022 budget request, and to work with Congress to make this funding a priority.** Our goal is to double funding for this critical federal funding stream, and securing an increase in the FY 2022 budget will be an important step in this direction.

3. Support Today's Diverse Postsecondary Education Landscape

The labor market demand for a skilled workforce increasingly requires employees to have some type of postsecondary education. CTE is a major and long-standing enterprise within the American higher education system that continually evolves to meet the needs of today's students and employers. Currently, the Higher Education Act (HEA) is more tailored to traditional students pursuing four-year degrees, and CTE students are not always able to benefit from its provisions. The Administration should look for ways to strengthen support of postsecondary CTE programs through both the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act and administrative action. Priorities should include:

- **Reducing barriers to higher education for all.**
 - Expand Pell grant eligibility for short-term training courses and programs through the bipartisan JOBS Act (S.839/H.R. 3497, 116th Congress), and support the elimination of penalties for working students.
 - Amend the Federal Work-Study (FWS) program to prioritize employment related to the students field-of-study and allow related work-study to qualify for required internship or apprenticeship credit, as appropriate, building on the experimental sites initiative already in place.

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- Promote innovative, student-centric models like competency-based education and dual enrollment.
 - Ensure area CTE centers, which are public, non-degree-granting institutions, are treated equitably in any policy proposals or proposed agency rules and are eligible recipients for federal grants related to workforce development; these institutions are often "left out" of the higher education conversation.
- **Ensure program quality and integrity while reducing data collection burden.**
 - Work with Congress to eliminate the ban on a federal student unit record data system to ease data collection and reporting burdens, by incorporating the College Transparency Act (S.800/H.R. 1766, 116th Congress) into HEA reauthorization.
 - Include program level information in data systems and enhance federal systems that can track employment outcomes, as well as information on certificates, licenses and industry-recognized certifications earned by students.
 - **Support the development and preparation of CTE educators.**
 - Incentivize CTE teacher preparation program development through HEA Title II funds, as well as discretionary funds throughout the Department of Education.
 - Protect and promote TEACH Grants, educator loan forgiveness programs and other supports for current and future teachers, streamlining application requirements for forgiveness.
 - Work with Congress to establish a scholarship program to prepare CTE teacher candidates and provide funding for the ongoing training and professional development of CTE educators by adopting the Skilled Labor Education Act (H.R. 5944, 115th Congress).

At the same time as we urge significant support for postsecondary CTE, we are concerned about recommendations to create a separate new office and Assistant Secretary role to oversee community college strategy and oversight. While we agree with the need to give more visibility and policy and fiscal support to community and technical colleges, we believe that the responsibility should be retained within the current Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education, which has played a significant role in community college policy in recent years. Now is a time for the federal government to bring together, not break apart, systems and to model the type of systems alignment we want to see at the state and local levels. A separate office for community colleges would only further remove CTE programs from the rest of the higher education system.

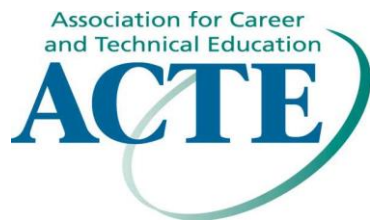
4. Strengthen Connections between Education and Workforce Development Systems

The potential reauthorizations of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the National Apprenticeship Act (NAA) provide Congress an opportunity to modernize the nation's workforce systems to ensure that job seekers can access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. Any reauthorizations of these programs should strengthen connections between education and workforce development systems, increase access to high-quality training, use relevant labor market information to ensure programs reflect local economic needs, and provide adequate resources and support services for vulnerable populations.

POLICY PRIORITIES

5. Incorporate CTE Programs and Facilities Into Infrastructure and Climate-related Proposals

- ***Provide dedicated resources to develop and expand CTE programs of study in any comprehensive infrastructure proposal:*** Addressing the deficiencies in our nation's vital infrastructure will require more than just new investments in roads, bridges, airports and waterways. It must also include a commitment to developing the skilled workforce that can design, build, upgrade and maintain that infrastructure. Jobs in infrastructure require individuals with a range of different skills, competencies, and levels of education. Local CTE programs are well positioned to equip students and incumbent workers with the educational opportunities and work-based learning they will need for career success in infrastructure fields, and ensuring educational institutions have the capacity to provide these critical programs should be a priority.
- ***Include school infrastructure funding in any comprehensive infrastructure proposal:*** The average age of America's public school's is nearly 50 years old. The condition of school buildings, including CTE labs, provides a crucial foundation for classroom learning that affects students and the American economy, which is why their prioritization is critical.
- ***Recognize and support the vital role CTE programs play in addressing climate change and renewable energy:*** The energy sector is going through a historic shift from more traditional energy sources—coal, oil, natural gas—to more environmentally sustainable and renewable sources, which is causing critical workforce shortfalls in the renewable energy fields. Many of these newly created energy jobs are middle-skill occupations, ones that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree, that provide a family sustaining wage. CTE is primed to prepare high school, postsecondary and adult students for careers in renewable and clean energy and environmental sustainability, and to incorporate these sustainable practices across career areas. Investments are needed to build these new programs and to revise and update curriculum in order to prepare students in these critical workforce areas.



November 23, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Advance CTE, representing the state and territory leaders of our nation's Career and Technical Education (CTE) system, and the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), representing America's CTE teachers, administrators and counselors, we write to provide input into the upcoming process to identify and ultimately nominate a new Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office of Career, Adult, and Technical Education (OCTAE). The selection of a new Assistant Secretary for this office will be critically important in helping the incoming Biden Administration fully realize its agenda for putting all Americans on a pathway toward a rewarding education and career as the country emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting recession.

As one of the few federal offices solely dedicated to this commendable mission, we encourage the incoming ED leadership and the Administration to emphasize the importance of OCTAE and situate the office in a position of influence over the next several years. In the face of a global pandemic that displaced millions of Americans from their jobs, the impact of high-quality CTE has never been more relevant than it is today and strong leadership at OCTAE can help affect overall Department policy, helping to put millions of Americans back on a trajectory of lifelong success.

We are opposed to the creation of a new office and Assistant Secretary role to oversee community college strategy and oversight. While we agree with the need to give more visibility and policy and fiscal support to community and technical colleges, we believe that the responsibility should be retained within OCTAE. Now is a time for the federal government to bring together, not break apart, systems and to model the type of systems alignment we want to see at the state and local levels.

It is essential that the new Assistant Secretary of OCTAE is someone who has a thorough understanding of not only CTE policy, but also how these programs operate in reality. As you know, CTE is a complex system with great variability among states, ranging from programs in middle grades to serving adults in the workforce in every sector of the economy. Therefore, having someone who has worked in the field is critical.

To this end, we recommend the nomination of someone who has managed the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education (Perkins) grant—either as a state or district CTE administrator, or through a leadership position in a community or technical college. This real-world expertise will bring invaluable insight to the challenges facing CTE today. This experience will allow someone to push for innovation, while maintaining a realistic understanding for how to build a coalition of support to navigate and lead change. Moreover, this experience will minimize the time needed to familiarize and onboard a new Assistant Secretary, so he or she can get to work on finding solutions to the most critical issues facing our community.

The benefit of direct CTE leadership and implementation experience was seen in the current assistant secretary, Mr. Scott Stump, who came to the position with an extensive CTE background and took the opportunity to be a true leader for the field. His knowledge of the CTE system was invaluable as a states set out to implement Perkins V and then navigate the pandemic, and stakeholders were receptive to his push to be “be bold” due to his standing in the community. As states moves forward in implementing Perkins V, increasing equity, and creating innovative CTE programs it is vital that the Assistant Secretary position is filled by someone with the experience and passion to drive change.

We also continue to remain pleased with OCTAE’s current career personnel who have been extremely dedicated to the implementation of the Perkins and have been willing to work constructively with the field to address challenges and concerns. We hope that a new Assistant Secretary for OCTAE will continue to encourage this type of constructive, open, two-way relationship in the future and lead by example in this regard.

As you continue the identification and nomination process for this important position, we would welcome further opportunities to work with your team to provide additional input. Should you need to get in touch regarding anything contained in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact Kimberly Green, Advance CTE’s Executive Director (kgreen@careertech.org), or Alisha Hyslop, ACTE’s Director of Public Policy (ahyslop@acteonline.org).

Sincerely,



LeAnn Wilson
Executive Director
ACTE



Kimberly A. Green
Executive Director
Advance CTE