

September 20, 2016

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert Casey, Jr.
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Michael B. Enzi
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, Senator Casey, and Senator Enzi:

We, the undersigned organizations, a diverse collection of stakeholders in the CTE community, write to draw your attention to an issue of critical importance as you move forward on the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

Each of our organizations has a strong belief in CTE program accountability, and wants to ensure that the federal CTE accountability system produces valid and reliable data with which to evaluate program performance, and more importantly, that can be used to target local program improvement efforts and ensure students are prepared for future education and workforce success. The crux of such a strong accountability system is a clear definition of a “CTE program concentrator,” which will help to standardize data collection and ensure that outcome information is linked to CTE program students.

However, we have concerns about the definition of a secondary CTE concentrator included in the House bill, and hope to see these concerns addressed in the Senate. The current House definition includes students who have chosen to focus on a specific CTE program (traditional “concentrators”), but also “explorers,” those students that enrolled in a number of courses across various CTE programs. While exploring careers is a critical function of secondary CTE programs, there are distinct differences between these two student populations that must be taken into account in the accountability system. Combining the populations into one definition of “concentrator” will diminish data quality and make it difficult to truly determine the impact of CTE programs.

Incorporating two separate student subpopulations into a single definition creates inconsistencies with prior research, where both concentrators and explorers are separate populations; limits the ability of the field to conduct longitudinal analyses of CTE student

performance; reduces the ability of the field to speak a common language; and undermines the comparability of Perkins data and outcomes. The use of the term “concentrator” to mean something different than current research and practice is very confusing to educators on the ground.

In addition, the explorer concept does not lend itself to evaluating individual CTE program performance. Students who have only enrolled in one course within a program area cannot be reasonably expected to have mastered the skills of that industry – as would be required for industry certification, sustained work-based learning experiences, job placement or any other program-specific outcome. As a consequence, the “explorer” component for the secondary concentrator definition is problematic for any measures of program quality, where students would be included in the denominator but would have little or no opportunity to be counted in the numerator of the measure. This is also the case for measures surrounding non-traditional concentration, as it is unclear statistically how students sampling different programs could be considered in that measure.

The shift in focus away from actual CTE concentrators will also undermine stakeholders’ ability to build coherent pathways and meet employer needs by reducing the focus on and importance of this population, setting back current improvement efforts that use a sequence of rigorous CTE courses as a framework for CTE delivery.

We hope you will consider these concerns as you craft a definition in any Senate Perkins reauthorization bill, and focus on students who are invested in CTE programs.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
Advance CTE
American Federation of Teachers
Association for Career and Technical Education
Association for Career and Technical Education Research
Family, Career and Community Leaders of America
Future Business Leaders of America - Phi Beta Lambda
Jobs for the Future
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Education Association
National FFA Organization
National Research Center for Career & Technical Education
National Skills Coalition
New America
Opportunity America

ProLiteracy

SkillsUSA

Southern Regional Education Board

Technology Student Association

Workforce Data Quality Campaign

Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, Washington State

Cc: Members of the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee