

October 27, 2015

The Honorable Michael Enzi
379A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Casey
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Enzi and Senator Casey,

On behalf of the nation's middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and other school leaders, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) would like to offer recommendations on the upcoming reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

NASSP is a national leader in secondary school reform and has created a framework upon which to improve our nation's K–12 schools called *Breaking Ranks: The Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement*. The framework does not prescribe a specific model that a school must follow, but rather builds upon the individual school's data to assess strengths and identify needs so that a customized plan for school success can be developed. Regardless of grade level, all schools must address the three core areas of collaborative leadership, personalizing the school environment, and curriculum, instruction, and assessment to improve student performance.

As schools work to implement college and career ready standards for all students, we feel that a reauthorized Perkins law has great potential to promote a personalized learning environment for each student through strong curriculum and instruction; increase student achievement through integrated academic and career and technical education (CTE) programs; and further engage students in their learning. According to the Association for Career and Technical Education, students participating in CTE programs have graduation rates of over 90 percent, and we should ensure that more students across the country have access to quality CTE programs.

NASSP was very pleased to be represented at a 2013 House Education and the Workforce subcommittee hearing by the 2014 MetLife/NASSP National High School Principal of the Year, Dr. Sheila Harrity, who was the principal of Worcester Technical High School in Worcester, MA. Worcester Tech, which was also named a MetLife Foundation-NASSP Breakthrough School in 2011, has 1,400 students in 24 technical programs within four small learning communities. Once the lowest-performing high school in the city and the poorest performing vocational school in the state, Worcester Tech's students are graduating at high levels and performing well on state assessments, and the achievement gap has decreased significantly for all student subgroups.

Students are graduating college and career ready at Worcester Tech, taking AP courses and earning a high school diploma in addition to receiving college credits and an industry credential in some fields. Dr. Harrity was able to leverage partnerships with businesses and four-year colleges and universities, which help support a full-service restaurant, day spa and salon, 16-bay auto service center, and veterinary clinic at the school. The school's success and the city's

success are intertwined because students are leaving Worcester Tech with the skills to secure good-paying and rewarding jobs in the community.

NASSP strongly supports your proposed principles for reauthorization. However, there are five additional issues that must be addressed as part of the reauthorization of CTE:

Educator Quality

State leadership activities should be focused on leadership development and technical assistance for districts and schools. States should be allowed to use Perkins funds to provide professional development opportunities for current CTE leaders that will help them develop the appropriate skills to lead CTE programs. States should also be allowed to use their funds for leadership training programs that would help current principals, assistant principals, and other school leaders to manage CTE programs in their schools.

High-quality CTE programs require teachers who are knowledgeable and proficient in both effective teaching methods and technical skills. States should set a high bar for entry into the profession by requiring rigorous qualifications for CTE teachers, but they should also offer some flexibility in providing alternate routes into the teaching profession. For example, Virginia offers a technical professional license to individuals who are recommended by an employing district; are licensed or certified in their respective CTE areas, if applicable (or can demonstrate competency); provide evidence of at least two years or 4,000 clock hours of satisfactory occupational experience; and have completed nine semester hours of specified pedagogy courses. CTE teacher candidates should have additional training and support in instructional practices, classroom management, and the use of data and assessments to ensure they're effective in the classroom.

Professional development must strengthen the capacity of CTE teachers to collaborate and establish meaningful partnerships with content area teachers and integrate academic and CTE curricula and coursework. Professional development activities should focus on making numeracy and literacy relevant in the coursework through effectively linking critical thought processes in CTE courses to the core content areas where many students struggle. CTE personnel must learn how to teach, support, and reinforce learning for all students as well as apply new basic skills in their classroom. NASSP would also encourage CTE teachers to receive regular mentoring or coaching to support them in providing high-quality instruction for diverse learners such as students with disabilities and English language learners.

As states transition and implement higher standards in English/language arts, students will be expected to possess the reading, writing, thinking, listening, and speaking skills necessary for success in college and careers. Thus, cross-content literacy instruction has moved from an option to a necessity in our middle level and high schools. CTE textbooks already require a high level of literacy comprehension—higher than all other content area courses, and CTE teachers will be expected to integrate literacy throughout their instruction on top of the more rigorous course content. While all content-area teachers will need professional development in order to implement a successful schoolwide literacy initiative, CTE teachers who do not come from a traditional education background may require even greater assistance in this area.

CTE teachers also need content-based professional development and additional training to ensure they're knowledgeable about the latest equipment and certification requirements of their industries, especially in rapidly changing fields and STEM courses.

Personalization

Quality CTE programs should be part of a schoolwide effort to personalize the learning environment for each student and ease students as they transition from middle to high school and from high school to college or the workforce. Students should have the support of individualized guidance on various academic and career requirements, as well as alternative settings for learning and applying the necessary competencies. A range of catch-up and second-chance options should be readily available for students who have fallen behind in elementary or middle school or need extra help and instructional time. Districts should be allowed to use Perkins funding for the creation of personal plans for progress for students participating in CTE programs that would address the academic, social, and developmental needs of each student to help them achieve their education and career goals.

Middle Level

School leaders know that the middle grades are a crucial time to engage students in a rigorous curriculum that will help them transition into high school and be successful in postsecondary education or careers. According to ACT, the level of academic achievement that students attain by eighth grade actually has a larger impact on their college and career readiness upon graduation from high school than anything that happens academically in high school. NASSP has long encouraged a federal focus on middle level reform, including support for the Success in the Middle Act (S. 581) to ensure that students are taught an academically rigorous curriculum with effective supports so that students complete the middle grades prepared for success in high school and postsecondary endeavors.

NASSP also supports the Middle School Technical Education Program (STEP) Act, which was introduced by Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA) in June. The bill would authorize the establishment of a pilot grant program to develop middle school CTE exploration programs. Districts could use the grant for experiential activities such as apprenticeships or other work-based learning activities, to develop individualized graduation and career plans, and to implement a plan for students' transition to high school CTE programs of study.

Accountability and Data Collection

Federally supported CTE programs should increase student achievement in academic subjects as well as enhance technical literacy, career orientation, and college and career readiness. Programs should be regularly evaluated to determine their effectiveness and data should be reported on factors such as performance of students on end-of-course assessments; student participation in and completion of dual academic and CTE pathways to graduation; increased graduation rates of CTE students earning a regular high school diploma; student procurement of industry certifications and college credit; and successful student participation in postsecondary study, internships, and employment.

Funding

Adequate federal support for expanding and replicating high-quality CTE programs is imperative. At a minimum, state basic grants should be more than doubled in size, to \$2.5 billion, over the five-year authorization period. We also feel strongly that the reauthorized Perkins should continue to support equipment purchases necessary for up-to-date, high-quality CTE study, as well as train the instructional staff members to use the technology to complement sound curricula and teaching.

Should you have any questions about our recommendations, please feel free to contact David Chodak, NASSP Associate Director of Advocacy, at chodakd@nassp.org or 703-860-7338. We look forward to working with you during the reauthorization process to ensure that more students have access to rigorous CTE programs that will help them graduate from high school with the skills they need to be successful in college and careers.

Sincerely,



JoAnn D. Bartoletti
Executive Director
NASSP