

Advance CTE Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act

As Congress considers the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (P.L. 110-315), the challenges facing our nation's economy, most notably the skills shortage, must be central to these debates. Our nation's higher education system must become more responsive to the evolving demands of an ever more competitive global economy. Too many employers report a shortage of qualified workers, while university and college graduates burdened with tremendous debt are unable to find work related to their fields of study. This calls for a major realignment of our nation's higher education policies. The forthcoming reauthorization process will provide Congress a critically important opportunity to achieve this vision for investing in America's workforce by ensuring affordable and accessible postsecondary opportunities for every learner.

Advance CTE, representing the state leadership for secondary, postsecondary and adult Career Technical Education (CTE) in all 50 states and U.S. territories, offers the following recommendations for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA):

Higher Education Is Workforce Development:

- **Strengthen Connections to the Labor Market:** While there are many important purposes for higher education, we must acknowledge and bring to the forefront the system's responsibility and role in preparing the nation's future workforce. The U.S. higher education's system is one of the nation's largest investments in its workforce. Acknowledging this, Advance CTE recommends that future HEA legislation prioritize support for education and training programs that lead to high-growth and in-demand occupations and industry sectors and respond to local, regional or state needs.
- **Foster Job-Driven Postsecondary Partnerships:** Community and Technical Colleges have a long history of working with employers of all sizes to meet the talent pipeline needs of the American economy. However, more can be done to ensure that these employer-education partnerships are more common. The Trade Adjustment and Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCT) grant program most recently supported such partnerships with targeted investments for several years. Unfortunately funding for this initiative has run out, reducing these institutions' ability to effectively engage with the employer community. Advance CTE therefore recommends that new HEA legislation include annual funding over the law's authorization period for new investments comparable to the TAACCT grant program focusing on local, regional or state high-growth, in-demand occupations and industry sectors provided at community and technical colleges. Such funding should be provided above and beyond existing investments the law makes into the postsecondary education system.

Eliminate Barriers to Financial Aid Program Access

- **Affirm the Importance of All Postsecondary Credentials:** A large and rapidly increasing portion of all postsecondary learners enroll in "noncredit" courses, and this figure is expected to continue to

grow. These programs typically lead to a postsecondary credential that often has a more immediate connection to an occupational skill or competency than most associate or baccalaureate degree programs and are frequently offered at a substantially lower cost to learners. Despite this, postsecondary learners enrolled in many short-term education and training programs are ineligible to access federal financial aid under current law due to overly burdensome program length requirements. Advance CTE recommends reducing current program length requirements for learner financial aid eligibility under Title IV of HEA for programs that lead to a recognized postsecondary credential, as defined by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and demonstrate a connection to an in-demand or high-growth occupational sector that aligns with local, regional or state needs. This includes expanding Pell Grant eligibility to include short-term programs that can lead to a recognized postsecondary certificate, license or credential. Advance CTE supports the JOBS Act, which promotes Pell eligibility for high-quality job training programs that are at least eight weeks and result in industry-recognized credentials and certificates.

- **Increase Support for Non-traditional Learners to Succeed in Postsecondary Education:** Through the implementation of career pathways and CTE programs of study, an increasing number of nontraditional learners (those over the age of 24) are enrolling in postsecondary education to acquire additional skills to stay competitive in the labor market. These learners often face barriers to postsecondary completion and federal higher education policy has not kept pace with the additional needs of these learners. Where possible, HEA should support efforts that afford greater opportunities to earn credit for prior learning — either from experiences on the job, through military service or in the classroom. Moreover, to effectively support these nontraditional learners, Advance CTE recommends that HEA legislation support equitable access to federal financial aid and other wrap-around institution-based support services such as child care, tutoring and job search assistance.
- **Reinstate Pell Grant Eligibility in Prisons:** Since 1994, those incarcerated who would otherwise be eligible, have been denied access to Pell Grants. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education began the Second Chance Pell pilot, renewed in 2019, that opened Pell Grants to prisoners in the experimental sites included in this program. Eliminating the ban on Pell in all prisons would give hundreds of thousands access to postsecondary education, and allow these learners to pursue meaningful employment when released from prison. Advance CTE recommends reinstating Pell Grants in Prisons to allow all learners the opportunity for postsecondary attainment, and set them up for career success.

Streamline Data Collection and Ensure Cross-systems Alignment

- **Adopt Common Performance Metrics:** Programs supported through federal legislation such as HEA, WIOA, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), have unique purposes but oftentimes serve overlapping populations. Each law maintains distinctive accountability and performance metrics that, taken together, create a reporting burden for states and institutions while decreasing the value and integrity of the data collected. Advance CTE recommends the creation of common measures, where practical, to align workforce and education programs as well as the adoption of related common terminology and measurement methods.
- **Promote Cross-systems Collaboration:** State education systems should support seamless transitions between the secondary and postsecondary education levels to ensure that they work together collaboratively rather than in isolation. To build upon existing state efforts, Advance CTE recommends that future HEA legislation promote a smooth transition to postsecondary education,

and ultimately the workforce, by incentivizing program models such as dual or concurrent enrollment, programs of study and career pathways wherever practical.

- **Develop and Expand Statewide Data System Capacity:** The ultimate role of postsecondary education is to prepare learners for rewarding careers that promote economic self-sufficiency and align the nation's talent pipeline needs. To achieve this, a newly reauthorized HEA must be able to hold programs and institutions accountable for the employment outcomes of their learners. However, current law restricts the collection of the information necessary to do this and prevents adequate program evaluation of other critical learner outcomes. To that end, Advance CTE recommends repealing the law's ban on the creation of a student unit record system. Relatedly, future legislation should incentivize the development of state longitudinal data systems that enable sharing of data within and among states.
- **Expand the Scope of Data Collection:** Postsecondary programs must continuously evolve to support the needs of learners and guide them to academic achievement and success in the workforce. This can only happen if appropriate data is collected and shared across systems. Advance CTE recommends expanding the scope of data collected to track short and long-term outcomes of learners in terms of academic attainment and experience in the workforce. In addition, Advance CTE recommends disaggregation of data collected to at a minimum reflect race, ethnicity, gender and age. This is pivotal to understand the composition of learners and ensure high-quality postsecondary opportunities for all.

Increase Flexibility for Innovative Educational Models

- **Promote Competency-Based Learning:** Postsecondary CTE programs have been on the forefront of one of the most important innovations in education delivery— competency-based education. Such an approach emphasizes the importance of attaining specific skills and knowledge in a postsecondary educational setting, tailored to each learner's unique pace for learning, rather than on units of time to measure coursework. The Experimental Sites Initiative, contained in current HEA law, supports such programs in limited instances and should be expanded to further demonstrate the efficacy of competency-based postsecondary education programs. To build on these efforts, Advance CTE recommends greater flexibility be given to states and postsecondary institutions to implement high-quality and innovative programs and strategies that use a competency-based learning approach.
- **Expand Career Guidance:** Given the changing nature of the workplace, learners need greater opportunities to explore various career pathways to familiarize themselves with the career options available — and their related educational and skill requirements — before and during their postsecondary education program of choice. Supplemented with robust guidance, these activities help learners make more informed choices regarding which postsecondary education program will best prepare them to successfully transition into a rewarding career. Advance CTE therefore recommends that future HEA legislation support and encourage career exploration, guidance and advisement throughout the entire educational spectrum.
- **Increase Opportunities for Experiential Learning:** More than ever before, employers are valuing real-world work experiences as a core component of a student's qualifications for employment. Experiential learning opportunities provide learners the opportunity to apply what they have learned in the classroom to the real world and foster the development of employability skills that enhance their ability to successfully transition into the modern workplace. Advance CTE recommends that future HEA legislation encourage and support opportunities for learners to participate in experiential learning activities such as internships, mentorships and other forms of real-world work

experiences. Additionally, Advance CTE recommends incorporating work based learning opportunities, such as registered apprenticeships programs, as recognized academic experience.

Develop and Nurture the CTE Teacher Workforce

- **Prepare and Support Quality CTE Educators:** Across the country, State CTE Directors consistently report a persistent shortage of CTE instructors. To address this shortage and to develop the CTE instructor workforce needed to meet the growing demand for CTE programs, teacher preparation activities authorized in current law should afford prospective teachers the opportunity to gain relevant technical training in the industry area where they intend to teach. Moreover, greater flexibility should be given to teacher preparation programs to recruit and support mid-career professionals seeking to transition into the classroom through alternative pathways to certification, while continuing to maintain high-quality standards for recruitment. To effectively support these efforts, Advance CTE recommends that future HEA legislation include funding and support services for CTE teacher preparation and related professional development.

Advance CTE represents state and territory leaders of CTE through leadership and advocacy that supports an innovative and rigorous CTE system that prepares learners for both college and careers. State CTE Directors lead the planning and implementation of CTE in their respective states and these recommendations reflect their priorities.

For more information, please contact:

Advance CTE

8484 Georgia Avenue Suite 620, Silver Spring, MD 20910 | 301-588-9630

www.careertech.org