MEASURING SECONDARY CTE PROGRAM QUALITY
SELECTING AN INDICATOR

When the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV) was reauthorized in July 2018 as the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), it was with an intentional push toward data-driven decisionmaking at both the state and local levels. Specifically, the law changes the way data are reported and used and expands the role of states in setting and holding themselves accountable to performance targets for Career Technical Education (CTE) students. One of the expanded responsibilities for states is identifying a measure to use for the new secondary CTE program quality indicator.

This choice — selecting a measure of secondary CTE program quality — is a consequential decision that state leaders, with input from stakeholders, will need to make in their Perkins V plans. The law gives states three options to choose from, and while most states already collect these measures in some form, there are many factors to consider. Are the quality and validity of the measures strong enough to rely on? How does this choice reflect and signal the state's priorities for career readiness? What kinds of behaviors might the indicator incentivize?

This series of briefs draws on data from a 2018 national survey of State CTE Directors to help states select and adopt robust methods for measuring secondary CTE program quality. It explores the pros and cons of each of the three options and examines different ways states are measuring and validating them. This brief is the first in the series and explores the requirements of the law and considerations for selecting a secondary CTE program quality indicator.

Unpacking Perkins V

Coming on the heels of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which heralded a new era of accountability, Perkins IV made sweeping changes to the federal CTE accountability system and introduced much of the structure that is in place today. Under Perkins IV, state and local recipients were held accountable for six indicators at the secondary level and five at the postsecondary level.

Perkins V makes a few significant modifications to this accountability structure. The law removes the technical skill assessment indicator, consolidates two measures of non-traditional learner participation and completion into one, and introduces a new measure of CTE program quality at the secondary level that will be selected and defined by each state. In the spirit of flexibility, Perkins V allows states to choose among three options for this indicator:

- The percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school **having attained a recognized postsecondary credential.**[1]
- The percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school having **attained postsecondary credits in the relevant CTE program or program of study** earned through a dual or concurrent enrollment program or another credit transfer agreement.

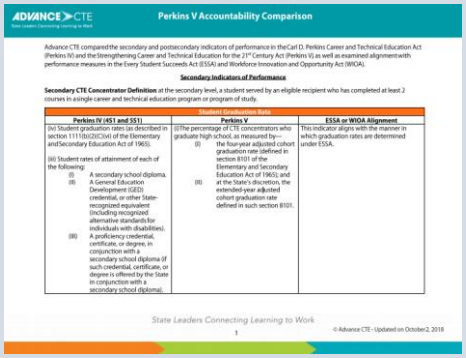
- The percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school **having participated in work-based learning.**

States can also include additional, separate measures of student success in CTE that are "statewide, valid and reliable, and comparable across the state" in addition to one of the three options listed previously. This flexibility gives states the opportunity to include other indicators — such as technical skill attainment — that are not among the three options outlined in the law. However, states cannot combine these measures into one meta-indicator; they must be discrete.

These options stress outcomes rather than inputs to emphasize the importance of real-world learning and early postsecondary opportunities in high-quality CTE. Since CTE sits at the intersection of secondary education, postsecondary education and work, an effective CTE program or program of study should set learners up to seamlessly transition to the next step in their career pathway. The secondary CTE program quality indicator can help state leaders shine a light on these transition points.

Critical Resource

Advance CTE's Perkins V Accountability Comparison includes a crosswalk of accountability requirements in Perkins IV, Perkins V, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).[2]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Perkins V Accountability Comparison

Advance CTE compared the secondary and postsecondary indicators of performance in the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins IV) and the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) as well as examined alignment with performance measures in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Secondary Indicators of Performance

Secondary CTE Concentrator Definition at the secondary level, a student served by an eligible recipient who has completed at least 2 courses in a single career and technical education program or program of study.

Student Graduation Rate		
Perkins IV (451 and 551)	Perkins V	ESSA or WIOA Alignment
(iv) Student graduation rates (as described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(vi) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965). (iii) Student rates of attainment of each of the following: (I) A secondary school diploma. (II) A General Education Development (GED) credential, or other State-recognized equivalent (including recognized alternative standards for individuals with disabilities). (III) A proficiency credential, certificate, or degree, in conjunction with a secondary school diploma (if such credential, certificate, or degree is offered by the State in conjunction with a secondary school diploma).	(i)The percentage of CTE concentrators who graduate high school, as measured by— (I) the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (defined in section 8101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965); and (II) at the State's discretion, the extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rate defined in such section 8101.	This indicator aligns with the manner in which graduation rates are determined under ESSA.

State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

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Another flexibility afforded under Perkins V is the opportunity to set annual performance targets, which were previously negotiated with the U.S. secretary of education. Once a state has selected a secondary CTE program quality indicator, it must develop goals — called state-determined performance levels — that it must meet for each of the four years of the Perkins V plan. These levels must be informed by significant stakeholder input, and states can adjust their performance levels up until the third program year.

Selecting a Secondary CTE Program Quality Indicator

Before selecting an indicator, state leaders should take a step back and reflect on the state of their CTE system. Accountability can be a powerful lever for a state to emphasize and focus on achieving its goals for CTE; intentionally connecting accountability with a clear and common vision is important. Here are some key questions to start:

What is the statewide vision for CTE and career readiness? When selecting an indicator, it helps to start with a clear vision of what a high-quality secondary CTE program or program of study should look like and work backward from there. Are the criteria for high-quality secondary CTE programs clear? What outcomes are priorities for the state? Advance CTE's Policy Benchmark Tool: CTE Program of Study Approval provides recommendations on defining and measuring a high-quality CTE program of study, which can be a good place to start.[3]

What do stakeholders identify as priorities? States are required to get input from critical stakeholders — such as students, parents, educators and the business community — to identify educational and economic priorities and select a secondary CTE program quality indicator. If all three options are elevated as possibilities, states might consider looking at where the greatest gaps exist and using the indicator as a way to incent focus on the identified priority. They can also choose to measure and report all three as long as they are separate indicators in the accountability system.

Which experiences are equitably available to learners across the state? All too often access to opportunities such as dual enrollment or work-based learning are a function of a learner's zip code or geographic region. As state leaders move to measure and hold programs accountable for quality, they should make sure these opportunities are equitably available to each and every learner in their state. Conducting a statewide equity gap analysis can help address questions about equity and access.

Is there any evidence to demonstrate which experiences are most highly correlated with positive post-program outcomes? The decision to select a secondary CTE program quality indicator should be informed by research and evidence. If the state has access to historical learner data, this information should factor into the decision. Otherwise, state leaders can turn to research from other states to ensure that this decision is backed by evidence on what works for learners.

What information is currently available at the state level? While this decision should not be solely defined by what can easily be measured, considering what data are available is important. Does the state already have sufficient processes in place to collect and validate the indicator, or will a new data collection need to be started?

Are the data reliable, accurate and well defined? Data must be reliable if they are to be used for high-stakes decisions such as accountability, but many state leaders still do not fully trust the data they collect at the state level.[4] As state leaders develop and refine their secondary CTE program quality indicator, they should ask themselves if the data come from a reliable source, if the information is actionable, if the data are complete and accurate, and if there is a consistent understanding of how the indicator is defined and measured. And if the data are not valid and reliable, but the indicator is still a priority for the state, state leaders can focus their efforts on improving the quality of their data collection.

How can your program quality indicator align with other indicators in ESSA or WIOA? In the spirit of alignment and coordination, Perkins V encourages State Directors to work across sectors and agencies to further integrate CTE into existing academic and career pathways. One avenue for doing this integration is adopting common metrics across programs. Forty states are measuring career readiness in high school through ESSA.[5] These states, at the very least, should take their ESSA indicators into consideration. WIOA and Perkins V have some measures in common, and state leaders can work to align collection cycles, data definitions and targets to encourage greater collaboration and coordination.

Parting Thoughts

Accountability is a powerful lever that can be wielded to ensure equity and quality in a state's CTE system. When Perkins V was passed in 2018, Congress intentionally gave states the authority to identify and define certain accountability indicators and set their own performance targets, strongly informed by stakeholder input. This authority gives states the leeway to restructure their CTE system around state priorities. The resources in this series explore pros, cons and considerations for each of the three secondary CTE program quality indicators to help state leaders implement a meaningful accountability system that can drive continuous program improvement.

[1] Perkins V defines a CTE concentrator as:

- At the secondary school level, a student served by an eligible recipient who has completed at least two courses in a single CTE program or program of study; and
- At the postsecondary level, a student enrolled in an eligible recipient who has earned at least 12 credits within a career and technical education program or program of study or has completed such a program if the program encompasses fewer than 12 credits or the equivalent in total (Sec 3[12]).

[2] Advance CTE. (2018). *Perkins V accountability comparison.* Retrieved from https://cte.careertech.org/sites/default/files/AdvanceCTE_Perkins_Accountability_Comparison_October2018.pdf

[3] Advance CTE. (2017). *Policy benchmark tool: CTE program of study approval.* Retrieved from https://careertech.org/resource/program-approval-policy-benchmark-tool

[4] Advance CTE, Council of Chief State School Officers, Education Strategy Group, Data Quality Campaign & Workforce Data Quality Campaign. (2019). *The state of Career Technical Education: Improving data quality and effectiveness.* Retrieved from https://careertech.org/resource/state-cte-improving-data-quality-effectiveness

[5] Advance CTE, Education Strategy Group, Achieve & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2019). *Making career readiness count 3.0.* Retrieved from https://careertech.org/resource/making-career-readiness-count-2019