

## Introduction

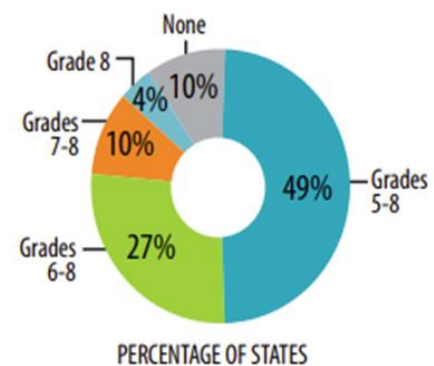
Career Technical Education (CTE) in the middle grades allows learners to gain exposure to a wide range of careers therefore becoming better prepared to make more informed educational choices. The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) positions CTE in middle grades as part of the career exploration continuum and removes the previous restriction that prohibited funding to support CTE to learners below the seventh grade. Perkins V defines “middle grades,” grades five through eight, consistent with the definition in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). As a result, states can now choose to use Perkins funds to support the expansion of CTE and career exposure opportunities as early as the fifth grade. This expansion of funding eligibility to the middle grades has the potential to broaden and diversify the pipeline of prospective learners that enter secondary CTE programs.

### A national analysis of Perkins V state plans

As part of their Perkins V state plans, 90 percent of states (or 45) allowed federal funding to be used to support middle grades CTE. Forty-nine percent of states report they are allowing funds to be used starting as early as grade five. However, simply allowing Perkins V funding to flow directly to middle grades CTE programs does not necessarily imply that all states have fully embraced these opportunities. More than a third of states (37 percent) do not include any details within their state plans regarding middle grades CTE efforts. One potential reason for this lack of specificity is a concern that without additional financial sources, expanding CTE into middle grades would dilute these finite resources, traditionally used for secondary and postsecondary systems, which [have not kept pace with inflation](#).

For the 10 percent of states (five total) that are not permitting funding to be spent on middle grades CTE programs, work is still underway to support middle grades CTE programs indirectly. For instance, **Colorado** is using a portion of its Perkins V State Leadership funds to evaluate, approve and administer middle school CTE programs throughout the state even though it is not formally allowing local Perkins V grant funding to flow directly to these programs.

*Middle Grade Levels Eligible for Perkins V Funding*



### Perkins V elevates statewide career exploration in Wyoming

While CTE in the middle grades has been a long-standing priority in **Wyoming**, there was not statewide funding for these efforts before Perkins V. Wyoming prioritizes career exploration in middle grades as a highly beneficial economic development strategy for the state. As a rural state that loses part of its population to graduating high schoolers moving to urban out of state, starting career exploration earlier exposes learners to the breadth of opportunity that exists within Wyoming so that more choose to start their careers in their home state.

Wyoming uses their Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) as one strategy for providing career exploration activities in middle grades. The state recognizes five CTSOs and through a competitive bid process, contracts state advisors to oversee these CTSOs. In order for the CTSOs to receive Perkins funding from the state they have to have a middle school component. Therefore, providing a middle grades event is one of the deliverables in the contract between the state and the CTSOs. These activities focus on career exploration, such as career fairs at the fifth and sixth grade level. Requiring CTSOs to provide a middle grades event helps to institutionalize middle grades CTE as a priority. Additionally, Wyoming has mechanisms in place to ensure quality in middle grades CTE programs. To receive Perkins funds in the state, a middle grades CTE program has to be aligned to a high school program and meet two out of three criteria for being high-skill, high-wage and in-demand.

With the expanded funding for middle grades under Perkins V, Wyoming is making sure middle grades initiatives are high quality. The state focuses on ensuring teachers are prepared to advise learners in the middle grades. The state encourages fifth and sixth grade teachers to provide information to learners about the 16 [Career Clusters®](#), covering half in grade five and half in grade six. The state has been working toward the goal of having one person in every K-12 school trained in career development facilitation. This training exposes people who may have never worked in career development to topics and skill sets they need to successfully advise young learners, including theories and histories behind career development and working with special populations.

## Looking Ahead

The expansion of middle grades CTE in Perkins V will help to build awareness of CTE opportunities, thus serving as a recruitment strategy so that more learners understand the benefits and choose CTE. Some states are able to build on existing statewide initiatives while others are building out new systems, standards and consistent procedures to [ensure quality programs](#) at this learner level. As Perkins V implementation moves ahead, and hopefully the investment in Perkins increases, states will continue to be able to expand access to middle grades CTE and comparably support ongoing local efforts.

### **State Middle Grades Subcommittee**

*During the development of [Iowa's Perkins V plan](#), a Middle Grades Career Exploration and Development Subcommittee met and provided recommendations to the state. Prior to Perkins V, Iowa required career exploration and development instruction starting in the seventh and eighth grades. Now, Iowa will provide districts that meet the middle grades minimum standards with Perkins V funding to plan, develop and deliver quality middle school career exploration and development programming for grades five through eight. One of the minimum standards required of all schools in a district is to provide all learners with awareness and exposure to the 16 Career Clusters®. The recommendations from the subcommittee also include guidance for recognizing CTSOs as an integral part of CTE programs and integrating work-based learning into middle grades.*