BRIEF

Maximizing
Access &
Success
for Special
Populations

Supporting English Learners
in Career Technical Education

Career Technical Education (CTE) policies and programs have increasingly focused on supporting the needs of historically marginalized learners and closing access and performance gaps among learner groups. Perkins V, the latest iteration of federal CTE legislation known as the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, is part of this trend. The law defines nine learner groups as special populations and includes a number of provisions that address expanding access to and supporting success within CTE programs for special populations. This brief will describe strategies for supporting one of these special populations: English learners.

SPECIAL POPULATIONS IN PERKINS V

LEARNER GROUPS DEFINED AS SPECIAL POPULATIONS IN PERKINS V:

- Out-of-workforce individuals
- English learners
- Individuals experiencing homelessness
- Individuals with disabilities
- Single parents, including single pregnant women
- Youth who are in/have aged out of the foster care system
- Individuals preparing for careers that are non-traditional for their gender
- Youth with a parent who is a member of the armed forces and is on active duty
- Individuals from economically disadvantaged families, ex. low-income youth and adults

*CTE educators are developing strategies to support learner groups who, while not special populations under the law, may need additional supports, including **migrant and undocumented, LGBTQ+, justice-involved and Tribal learners**.*

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DEFINING ENGLISH LEARNERS

Perkins V uses the following definition from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) for a secondary English learner. It includes any individual:

- Who is no older than 21;
- Whose native language is not English or who is a Native American, Alaska Native or native resident of the outlying areas and who comes from an environment in which a language other than English has significantly impacted their English language proficiency; and
- Whose language difficulties may create a barrier to meeting academic standards, achieving in the classroom or participating fully in society.

On the postsecondary level, Perkins V defines the term as an adult or out-of-school youth with limited ability to speak, read, write or understand the English language and whose native language is not English or who lives in an environment in which another language predominates.

Perkins V is an important investment in support of English learners achieving education and career success because the graduation rate for this population was 71 percent in 2019-20, compared to the overall national graduation rate of 86 percent.[1] In addition, English learners are less likely to enroll in and complete postsecondary education.[2]

[1] U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2023, June). *High school graduation rates for English learners.* https://ncela.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/ELGradRates-FS-20230602-508.pdf

[2] Núñez, A., Rios-Aguilar, C., Kanno, Y., & Flores, S. M. (2016). *English learners and their transition to postsecondary education.* In M. B. Paulsen (Ed.), Higher education: Handbook of theory and research (pp. 41-90). Springer International Publishing Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-26829-3_2

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STRATEGIES FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

English learners have been defined as a population of interest in Perkins legislation since the Vocational Education Amendments of 1976, so states and local recipients have developed strategies to support this learner group. Potential approaches include the following state (🏛) and local (📍) strategies:

Cross-agency coordination and partnerships 🏛 📍

On the state and local levels, leaders can collaborate with agencies, community organizations and chambers of commerce that support non-English speaking and multilingual communities to understand the needs of this learner group.

Professional development 🏛 📍

States and local CTE leaders can provide instructors with professional development on techniques for working with English learners such as reading aloud, visual cues and longer wait times when asking for feedback as well as on the principles of Universal Design for Learning. Professional development provided by the state and locally should also address cultural competency, creating an inclusive environment and mitigating biases against English learners and other marginalized populations.

Translations 🏛 📍

The state CTE agency and local CTE providers can have print and virtual resources professionally translated into languages commonly used by English learner communities. In addition, educators can use translation apps such as TalkingPoints to communicate in different languages with families and learners. Newcomer websites, guides or portals designed to help families navigate their new local education system can also support this population.

Federal policy braiding 🏛

In addition to Perkins, state leaders can leverage federal funding streams such as the Language Instruction for English Learner and Immigrant Students Act (Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act) and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act).

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Scheduling and co-teaching 🏛 📍

State policy and local scheduling decisions can help ensure that English learners have access to CTE programs while also completing required courses in English language development. On the postsecondary level, institutions can offer integrated education and training models such as I-BEST that pair English language instruction with CTE instruction to help English learners develop basic and technical skills.

Coordination of supports across special populations 🏛 📍

Many learners qualify under multiple special population designations. As many as 37 percent of all English learners in the United States are from households with low income,[3] and approximately 14 percent are learners with disabilities.[4] Connecting with special education coordinators on the state and local levels and providing learners with information on economic assistance and financial aid can help CTE programs support this population.

Counseling for learners and families 📍

The language barrier can prevent English learners and their families from being aware of opportunities such as CTE programs, dual enrollment, Career Technical Student Organizations and work-based learning and from knowing their options for further education and careers. To address this challenge, schools, districts and colleges can also engage multilingual school counselors and career development professionals and provide qualified interpreters for parent-teacher conferences and other events.

[3] Quintero, D., & Hansen, M. (2021, January 14). *As we tackle school segregation, don't forget about English Learner students.* The Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/as-we-tackle-school-segregation-dont-forget-about-english-learner-students

[4] Council for Exceptional Children. (n.d.). English language learners. https://exceptionalchildren.org/topics/english-language-learners

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The strategies described in the previous section are not mutually exclusive and not all will be appropriate based on the needs of your English learner population. Before enacting new strategies, assess the current state of English learners in your CTE programs and dig into root causes of barriers and challenges:

- What do current English learners or alumni tell you about their needs, challenges and successes?

- What does your data show about the CTE participation and concentration of English learners?

- What does your data show about the performance of English learners?

- What resources have you translated or could you translate into relevant languages? Do you provide interpretation for English learners and, if applicable, families?

- What professional development do you provide to help CTE educators support English learners in the classroom?

- What policies and practices affect English learners' access to CTE courses?

- How many multilingual instructors, career development professionals and other staff do you have who can support this population?

- What support services are available for English learners and their caregivers? How are they made aware of these services?

- Which agencies or community organizations could you connect with to support English learners?

For additional resources, visit Advance CTE's Perkins V Section, the Maximizing Access and Success for Special Populations in Career Technical Education series page in the Learning that Works Resource Center and ACTE's Perkins Implementation page.

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CASE STUDY

Aldine Independent School District in Harris County, Texas, has launched multiple initiatives to better serve and support its growing population of English learners through collaboration between the district's multilingual services department and CTE educators. As described in *EducationWeek*, CTE representatives regularly interact with members of the public at community events, describing program offerings and correcting misapprehensions about the impact of immigration status on CTE participation.

In addition, the district prepares new CTE teachers to teach English learners through strategies like scaffolding instruction and supports educators on how to promote CTE opportunities to English learners. Aldine staff also assess transcripts of new migrant learners to determine the credits they have earned and how they could fit CTE into their schedules.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT ENGLISH LEARNERS

- **Unlocking Opportunities: Supporting English Learners' Equitable Access to Career and Technical Education** (Migration Policy Institute, 2023)
- **Making Good on the Promise: Improving Equity and Access to Quality CTE Programs for English Learners** (Advance CTE, 2022)
- **Supporting Integrated English Learner Student Instruction: A Guide to Assess Professional Learning Needs Based on the Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School Practice Guide** (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021)
- **A Guide for Engaging ELL Families: Twenty Strategies for School Leaders** (Colorín Colorado, 2011)
- **English Language Learners Resources** (Technical Assistance Center of NY)
- **Tips for Supporting English Learners (ELs) in CTE** (Houston Independent School District)
- **Working With English Language Learners — Best Practices for CTE Teachers** (Texas CTE Resource Center)

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