



Supporting Individuals with Disabilities in Career Technical Education

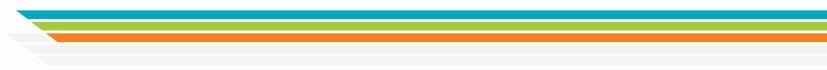
Career Technical Education (CTE) policies and programs have increasingly focused on supporting the needs of historically marginalized learners and closing access and performance gaps among learner groups. Perkins V, the latest iteration of federal CTE legislation known as the Carl D. Perkins Career and 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: individuals with disabilities.

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.



DEFINING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Perkins leverages definitions in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) to identify individuals with disabilities. IDEA is the primary source of federal law around how individuals with disabilities must be supported in educational settings and contains detailed definitions of disability categories. It defines individuals with disabilities as those who have been identified as having one of several listed conditions *and* who as a result of that condition need special education and related services.

IDEA works in concert with ADA which, among other things, outlines accessibility requirements for workplaces and other public spaces, communications, and access to state and federal programs and supportive services. Finally, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 defines an adult with a disability as a person with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits at least one major life activity. These three pieces of legislation are intended to work together to create an interconnected set of policies to identify and support individuals with disabilities in distinct contexts across the lifecycle.

CTE policies and programs support individuals with disabilities because research has shown that these learners are more likely to graduate high school than their non-CTE peers and are more likely to gain employment.¹ In fact, one of the eight stated purposes of Perkins V legislation is to increase “employment opportunities for populations who are chronically unemployed or underemployed,” including individuals with disabilities. Learn more about how individuals with disabilities are addressed in Perkins V in the first brief in this series, [Introduction: Maximizing Access and Success for Special Populations in Career Technical Education](#).



¹ Hehir, T., Dougherty, S., & Grindal, T. (2013). Students with disabilities in Massachusetts career and technical education programs. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/hehir/2013-07cte.docx>; Carruthers, C. K., Dougherty, S., McGuinness, S., Payne, S., & Theobald, R. (2022, May). Graduation, college, and employment outcomes for CTE students with an identified disability. Georgia Policy Labs. <https://gpl.gsu.edu/download/graduation-college-and-employment-outcomes-for-cte-students-with-an-identified-disability-report>; Lee, H. I., Rojewski, J. W., & Gregg, N. (2016). Causal effects of career-technical education on postsecondary work outcomes of individuals with high-incidence disabilities. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1093654>; Wagner, M., & Newman, L. (2014, October 9). Promoting successful transitions for youth with serious mental health conditions [Video]. <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/promoting-transition-youth-serious-conditions/>

STRATEGIES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Recruiting and supporting individuals with disabilities has been a focus of CTE policies and programs since the 1960s, which has resulted in a number of effective strategies to support this population. Potential state (🏛️) and local (📍) approaches include:

Coordination of service 📍

Individuals with disabilities sometimes have multiple plans in place to ensure that their needs are met, which may include an Individualized Education Program (IEP), a Section 504 plan, and/or an Individualized Health Care Plan. Local leaders can ensure that all plans are coordinated for each learner and balance objective medical diagnoses that identify the most needed accommodations with a whole-person approach that integrates accommodations, strengths and personal goals.² Connecticut developed a crosswalk to provide clarity around how each plan might be leveraged to support learner needs.³

CTE representation on IEP teams 📍

Local leaders can ensure that CTE representatives are included as part of the team of educators, service providers and guardians/family members that collaborate to develop the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each learner.

State planning coordination 🏛️

State leaders can coordinate efforts through Perkins, IDEA, the Every Student Succeeds Act, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to ensure that state-level activities, supports, and data are clearly connected, accessible and leveraged to assess and improve opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Career awareness and exploration as a self-advocacy & determination lever 📍

Local leaders can provide early career awareness and exploration to help learners with disabilities see themselves in a wide range of careers and can support self-determination of the career pathways that most interest each learner.

² Advance CTE. (2021, August). PIPEline to career success for students with disabilities: Root causes & strategies. <https://careertech.org/resource/pipeline-to-career-success-for-students-with-disabilities-root-causes-strategies/>

³ Transition Task Force. (2016, March). Student Success Plan (SSP) crosswalk with individual plans for students with disabilities or medical conditions. Connecticut State Department of Education. https://careertech.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/ssp_crosswalk_with_individual_plans_for_students_with_disabilities-1.pdf



Intentional educator preparation 🏛️📍

State and local leaders can prepare and support teachers, specialized instructional support personnel and paraprofessionals so they can provide appropriate accommodations for learners who are members of special populations (including through the use of Universal Design for Learning⁴). In addition, leaders can provide new educators with mentors experienced with providing differentiated instruction and meeting the needs of learners with disabilities.

Inclusive promotional materials 🏛️📍

States and local leaders can develop brochures, posters, websites and social media that promote CTE programs and depict an inclusive range of learners, enabling individuals with disabilities to see themselves in CTE programs, including programs that lead to high-wage, high-skill, in-demand careers.

Inclusive recruitment strategies 📍

Local leaders can evaluate application and/or entrance requirements for CTE programs to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to the full range of CTE opportunities.

Inclusive equipment 📍

On the local level, schools, districts and postsecondary institutions can ensure that CTE programs have tools, uniforms and supplies that can be used by learners with different needs.

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](#).

⁴ Universal Design for Learning is defined as a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that — (A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient. (Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008) <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-110publ315/pdf/PLAW-110publ315.pdf>

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The strategies described above are not mutually exclusive and individuals with disabilities should have their personalized needs met in accordance with the educational service plans coordinated with and across their service providers. Before enacting new strategies, assess the current state of individuals with disabilities in your CTE programs and dig into root causes of barriers and challenges:

- What do individuals with disabilities tell you about their needs, challenges and successes within and outside of the CTE system?
- What does your data show about the CTE participation and concentration of individuals with disabilities? Are you able to disaggregate CTE participation and concentration data by disability type by leveraging data collected for IDEA? If so, what do these data tell you about learner access, engagement, and persistence in CTE programs?
- What does your data show about the performance of individuals with disabilities?
- How are services coordinated for individuals with disabilities, such that their care and support feels seamless across providers?
- What flexible delivery models support individuals with disabilities to move through education at their own pace?
- How can you prepare and support teachers, paraprofessionals and other service providers to differentiate instruction and provide appropriate accommodations for individuals with disabilities? Are principles of Universal Design for Learning being leveraged to design and provide accommodations for students with disabilities?
- What paid work-based learning experiences, job placement services and transition services are available to individuals with disabilities? How are they made aware of these services, and how are they supported to access these opportunities?
- How can you work with the business community, intermediaries and other service providers to enable and support high-quality work-based learning and seamless transitions for this population?
- Which agencies or community organizations could you connect with to support individuals with disabilities? How do you build trust within and across these organizations so that individuals can be strongly supported?

CASE STUDY



Delaware annually identifies gaps in CTE enrollment, completion and post-program outcomes by analyzing Perkins special population data. The Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) looks at school-level, program-level and state-level data for each subgroup and special population. Subgroup data are compared to the general student population to ascertain whether enrollment and performance for certain learners, including learners with disabilities, deviate significantly from the expectation.

When inequities are identified, a structured protocol is set into action. DDOE uses a partnership approach to performance management, opting for a collaborative conversation with school-based staff. DDOE staff provide district leaders with data reports that illuminate specific gaps in enrollment and performance for learners with disabilities and other populations. They then co-construct a series of questions and conduct interviews with teachers, students and families to identify gaps and models of support. Once the interviews are completed, DDOE and district staff debrief about the conversation and collectively develop a report summarizing the findings of the study. The report includes commendations, recommendations, compliance issues, and next steps for closing equity gaps. The report also highlights opportunities for local leaders to co-invest with the state in trainings, tool development and other interventions to support underenrolled and underperforming students.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

- **Advancing Employment for Secondary Learners With Disabilities Through CTE Policy and Practice** (Advance CTE, 2022)
- **Unlocking Potential: A State Policy Roadmap for Equity and Quality in College in High School Programs for Students With Disabilities** (College in High School Alliance, 2021)
- **Improving Equity and Access to Quality CTE Programs for Students With Disabilities** (Advance CTE and National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020)
- **Promoting Quality Individualized Learning Plans Throughout the Lifespan: A Revised and Updated “ILP HOW TO GUIDE 2.0”** (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2018)
- **PIPEline for Career Success for Students With Disabilities: Root Causes and Strategies** (Advance CTE, 2016)
- **Student Success Plan (SSP) Crosswalk With Individual Plans for Students With Disabilities or Medical Conditions** (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2016)
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Sec. 300.8: Child with a Disability** (U.S. Department of Education)

