

# Opportunities to Advance Statewide Industry Collaboration and Engagement in Career Technical Education

## Introduction

Business and industry leaders have an essential role to play in the design and delivery of high-quality Career Technical Education (CTE) programs. They bring unique perspectives on the foundational competencies and qualifications for entry-level work in their respective industries and can provide input into the design of programs of study, learning standards and classroom-based curriculum.

But business and industry leaders should be more than just “customers” of CTE, waiting at the finish line to hire program completers. Instead, they should play an active role in supporting and guiding learners along their career pathways. State leaders should create the infrastructure to foster collaboration and engagement so that industry engagement can happen at scale. To put it more simply, business and industry leaders should be invited in for meaningful and ongoing collaboration.

While some states have made good progress in recent years in engaging business and industry, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) formalized a structure for statewide and local industry engagement through sector strategies. Sector strategies bring together local employers, education, training, labor and community-based organizations to address local skills gaps and scale up high-quality career pathways to help learners develop the competencies they need for high-skill, high-wage, in-demand employment. Through WIOA, local workforce boards are required to set aside a certain amount of funding to support the establishment and implementation of sector strategies.<sup>1</sup> States also play a role in facilitating these partnerships through the use of state discretionary funds.

The success of sector strategies has varied from state to state. Quite often, education has not played as strong a role as it could in these partnerships. The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) provides the perfect opportunity for leveraging ongoing sector strategies and scaling up engagement with business and industry leaders in CTE. Many states established statewide advisory councils with representatives from critical state industries to inform the design of their Perkins V plans. Additionally, Perkins V emphasizes ongoing business and industry engagement in a number of ways, including:

- Required engagement with representatives of business and industry in the development of the four-year plan;
- The requirement to align the state’s WIOA and Perkins V visions and the opportunity to submit a combined WIOA/Perkins V plan;
- The opportunity to use state leadership funds to establish statewide industry or sector partnerships that build on WIOA-required sector partnerships;
- The requirement that all local recipients complete and update a Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA) every two years that draws on regional labor market information to inform program offerings and seeks employer input “on an ongoing basis”;
- A new statutory definition of work-based learning and incentives to encourage work-based learning opportunities through accountability and funding; and
- An emphasis on business and industry engagement in the local application.

This report explores state strategies to systematically engage business and industry leaders in support of CTE. The information draws on research from Advance CTE's report *The State of Career Technical Education: An Analysis of States' Perkins V Priorities* as well as key informant interviews with CTE leaders in **Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Ohio** and **South Carolina**.<sup>2</sup>

While each state takes a slightly different approach to engaging business and industry leaders, their efforts draw attention to common strategies and lessons:

- **First, it is important to be aware of the risk and cost of duplicating effort.** In many cases, state industry councils already exist in some form, and state leaders can save time and effort by identifying existing influencers and networks. Cross-agency collaboration at the state level — and collaboration between the agencies that administer CTE and workforce development in particular — can help minimize duplication and ensure sustainability.
- **Second, the most effective approaches are often those that balance structure and flexibility,** laying a foundation that fosters and encourages collaboration and leadership. Clarifying goals and developing a theory of action can give direction and purpose to business and industry engagement efforts across the state while allowing for flexible implementation at the local level.
- **Finally, one of the strongest keys to success is leveraging leadership** and getting the highest levels of government involved to convene key business and industry leaders and coalesce state agencies around a shared strategy and approach.

## State Approaches to Business and Industry Engagement

### Delaware: Leveraging Existing Industry Engagement Infrastructure

Over the past several years, the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) has been engaged in an effort to dramatically transform the quality of CTE program offerings and increase the number of learners, particularly learners in under-represented groups, participating in CTE. Through its involvement in JFF's Pathways to Prosperity initiative and the New Skills for Youth project — which was funded by JPMorgan Chase & Co. and led by Advance CTE, Education Strategy Group and the Council of Chief State School Officers — Delaware adopted new statewide model CTE programs of study aligned to critical career pathways in the state. The implementation of high-quality career pathways is also supported through the state's combined WIOA/Perkins V plan.

To facilitate the implementation of statewide career pathways, Delaware convened a cross-sector leadership team with representatives from:

- DDOE;
- Delaware Technical Community College (DelTech);
- The Delaware Department of Labor;
- The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation;
- The United Way of Delaware;
- The Rodel Foundation (a non-profit organization that partners with Delawareans and educational innovators from around the world to transform public education in the First State); and
- The Delaware Workforce Development Board.

This team is also involved in implementing components of the state's combined WIOA/Perkins V state plan, as organizations on the leadership team serve as core partners for that plan. In addition, as outlined in the Delaware Pathways strategic plan, each organization is tasked not only with supporting and guiding the overall strategy but also with leading one of the five core priority areas within the strategic plan.<sup>3</sup>

To strengthen engagement with business and industry leaders in support of its Delaware Pathways initiative, DDOE devised a plan in 2018 to convene statewide industry councils. The aim of the councils was to foster a better understanding of employer needs among the public and local educational institutions and provide clear information on industry expectations and talent needs. The first group, the State Council for Energy, Engineering and Manufacturing, held its first meeting in April 2018, followed closely by a State Council for Healthcare.

Delaware had planned to start up five statewide industry councils related to the state's combined WIOA/Perkins V plan but later found that this specialized convening was most helpful in industries that did not have traditional employer or trade associations. As a result, the state made a course correction to (1) focus industry council development in occupational groupings that do not have traditional employer convening models and (2) strategically engage existing employer groups and associations to achieve the desired results.

Additionally, the state determined that it would not be practical, particularly in such a small state, for each agency to establish its own relationships and conduct its own engagement with business and industry associations. As such, the state leadership team designated DelTech (the statewide community and technical college system) as the convener for all business and industry associations.

As a result of the shift, DelTech worked collaboratively with the Delaware Manufacturing Association to integrate the work of the State Council for Energy, Engineering and Manufacturing into the association, providing funding for the association and identifying specific deliverables aligned to the state's vision for CTE. Through this partnership, the association has helped run professional learning programs for CTE teachers, organize student work-based learning experiences with employers, support employers to expand their work-based learning programs, place teachers into externships, and support student leadership experiences through activities such as job shadowing events and competitions.

Where industry associations did not already exist, the Delaware leadership team took on the responsibility of filling the gaps by creating a new industry council. This step was necessary for the information technology (IT) sector. Employer representation and talent needs in this sector span the banking and finance industries as well as health care, with emerging fintech and biopharmaceutical markets. This approach has resulted in (1) JPMorgan Chase investing \$205,000 to create a plan for a more inclusive tech talent pipeline;<sup>4</sup> (2) Delaware launching its first registered apprenticeship program in IT;<sup>5</sup> and (3) the Delaware Department of Labor receiving a \$9.2 million grant issued by the U.S. Department of Labor from the H1B Grant program.<sup>6</sup>

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Both models have helped to create new opportunities for CTE students and have helped the state to respond to the economic impacts of COVID-19. For example, employer associations and the state IT Industry Council are core partners in a \$2.5 million grant issued to DDOE by the U.S. Department of Labor to expand youth apprenticeship programs.<sup>7</sup> These partners have been instrumental in the implementation of Executive Order 43, issued by Governor John Carney, to apply \$15 million in federal funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to create a rapid training program for residents affected by the recession to reskill and re-engage in the labor market in five areas that have a high number of vacancies, including IT, hospitality, health care, transportation and logistics and construction.<sup>8</sup>

### **Georgia: Building Local Capacity for Sustained Industry Engagement**

Georgia took a more regional approach to employer engagement by leveraging WIOA sector strategies efforts to support industry engagement in CTE through the WorkSource Sector Partnership initiative.<sup>9</sup> The initiative started in 2016 to equip the state's 12 workforce development regions to better serve the needs of their regional industries. These partnerships, which are led by the local workforce development boards, are composed of a diverse group of stakeholders representing business, economic development, workforce development, education (including K-12), social service and community-based organizations within each region. The partnerships are designed to better understand and act on the needs of key regional industries by developing an integrated strategy to

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inform and direct the region's education (at all levels) and workforce development efforts based on employer feedback and guidance. They further build an infrastructure of communication and collaboration between the public and private sectors throughout the state.

To get the WorkSource Sector Partnerships off the ground, the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) — Georgia's official employment and training system — issued two rounds of startup grants for local workforce development boards. Each grant was worth up to \$250,000 over two years and was designed to lay the groundwork for ongoing regional industry engagement. The funding was made available through the governor's reserve fund under WIOA.

Grant recipients were required to meet certain conditions to start sector partnerships. They were required to involve five standing members from industry, the steering committee was required to meet quarterly, and they were required to establish workgroups to achieve agreed-upon goals. Beyond these initial conditions, however, TCSG gave local workforce development boards the flexibility to design and coordinate their sector partnerships in a way that would be most effective and organic. For example, the grant did not mandate whether the local K-12 agency, chamber of commerce, technical college or other entity should be the lead convener.

Georgia's approach has largely been to give local workforce development boards the authority to lead their own sector partnerships, but the state has provided some structure in a few key ways. For one, the state developed a sector partnership guide that provides communities with the tools, resources and processes needed to build effective partnerships across industry, workforce development and

education.<sup>10</sup> The guide is based on lessons learned from the first two years of the High Demand Career Initiative — an effort led by TCSG to engage business and industry leaders across the state to identify skills gaps and talent needs — and case studies from around Georgia and across the United States.<sup>11</sup> Second, the state provides trainings, including webinars and conferences, to build local capacity to lead sector partnerships. The state also creates networking opportunities so different regions can learn best practices from one another. Finally, the state has invested in three full-time staff at TCSG to help coordinate sector partnerships statewide.

### **Maryland: Engaging a Critical Partner to Inform Perkins V Planning**

Prior to 2019, Maryland did not have a formal, statewide structure to engage business and industry in support of CTE. As the state prepared to write its Perkins V plan, leaders in the Maryland Department of Education (MDE) decided to convene a group to guide the state’s vision for CTE. While there were program advisory committees for each program of study, composed of industry leaders who provided input into learning standards and program design, these committees were very program specific and not focused on the state’s strategic priorities for CTE or Perkins V implementation.

To avoid duplicating effort, the MDE reached out to the Maryland Business Roundtable for Education, which already had influence with business and industry leaders, to organize a statewide advisory group.<sup>12</sup> The Maryland Business Roundtable for Education serves as one of the three core partners tasked with supporting the state’s education strategic initiative through WIOA, which incorporates efforts to expand work-based learning, mentoring, coaching, apprenticeships and similar activities.<sup>13</sup> Together, MDE and the Business Roundtable for Education selected diverse individuals representing workforce development boards, the chamber of commerce, economic development, the Department of Labor, local school systems, institutions of higher education, special population groups and parents as advisory committee members, who work to develop an aligned and cohesive approach to workforce development through CTE.

The statewide advisory group is coordinated jointly by MDE and the Business Roundtable for Education. They work together to develop agendas for meetings, which are led by the Business Roundtable for Education’s chief strategic officer. The group’s inaugural meeting was in 2019, and participants met to focus on challenges and opportunities for CTE that could be addressed through the state’s Perkins V plan. One of the primary topics of discussion was the public perception of CTE and how to change the narrative around CTE programs.

Even though Maryland’s Perkins V plan has been submitted and approved, the statewide advisory group continues to meet quarterly. The Business Roundtable for Education still serves as the lead convener, but MDE provides funding to support committee meetings and activities.

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### **Ohio: Developing a Tiered Structure for Engaging Key Influencers**

Ohio, like Delaware, was a New Skills for Youth state and aimed to establish statewide industry councils as part of its three-year New Skills for Youth action plan to inform and guide the newly branded SuccessBound career pathways initiative. To minimize duplication of effort and streamline

asks for busy employer partners, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) looked at existing structures it could leverage to implement its goals and vision.

ODE chose to use an existing structure of six key business and industry groups to convene a high-level, overarching advocacy and advising group. These statewide industry organizations and associations were already collaborating with the Governor’s Office of Workforce Transformation — which was created to engage communities, state agencies and stakeholders in Ohio to identify ways to prepare Ohioans with the skills needed for in-demand jobs — and were considered the key influencers and business leaders across the state of Ohio. Ohio calls this group the “Big Six”:

- Ohio Business Roundtable;
- Ohio Chamber of Commerce;
- Ohio National Federation of Independent Businesses (Small Business Association);
- Ohio Farm Bureau;
- Ohio Council of Retail Merchants; and
- Ohio Manufacturer’s Association.

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The state superintendent of education convenes this group to discuss critical policy issues related to career pathways design and delivery in the state. The Governor’s Office of Workforce Transformation is part of every meeting, which helps ensure that the workforce system is also integral to the discussions and plans at these meetings.

While ODE’s initial focus for engaging business and industry leaders was to support its CTE and career pathways initiatives, the Big Six committee has tackled even broader education policy issues beyond CTE curriculum, standards and credentials. For example, the group recently discussed the design of the state’s new high school report card. The input from the lens of the business community has been invaluable.

To encourage stronger collaboration across organizations and to engage the appropriate level of expertise, Ohio has established additional groups that meet on a variety of topics that stem from the Big Six. The infrastructure of these groups includes two major areas:

- The Tier 1 group includes the principals, chief executive officers and other leaders with the most influence from the collaborating organizations. This group meets quarterly to discuss big-picture issues. The state superintendent of education convenes the group and addresses major policy and advocacy issues. This group identifies other appropriate individuals within their organizations or within a specific sector to assist the state on specific topics or action items.
- Tier 2 groups are composed of the deputies, or seconds in command, at each organization. They meet monthly to discuss “boots on the ground” issues. These groups tend to deal with issues related to curriculum, standards and industry credentials within their respective industry sectors along with advancing the work of local business advisory councils.

As part of this structure, Ohio requires each school district to have at least one business advisory council to advise and support schools to align programs with the needs of local industry. To support the development of local councils, ODE and the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation created a business advisory council guide for local leaders.<sup>14</sup>

### **South Carolina: Codifying Inter-Agency Industry Engagement**

In 2019, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) saw an opportunity to firm up coordination and alignment with the workforce sector through the development of its Perkins V plan. While the state did not formally pursue a combined plan with WIOA, state leaders worked to bring the two plans in alignment with each other.

One approach the state took was to formalize an inter-agency memorandum of understanding (MOU) across education and workforce agencies and institutions to advance industry engagement throughout South Carolina. Named partners in the MOU include the Commission on Higher Education, Department of Commerce, SCDE, Department of Employment and Workforce, Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, and South Carolina Technical College System. Each of the partners agreed to support regional industry engagement efforts in a number of ways, such as providing technical assistance and coaching, using discretionary funds to support the needs of sector partnerships and more.

Through this inter-agency agreement, the state retained the services of a third-party contractor to provide coaching and assistance for two years to the 12 local workforce development boards to support sector partnerships. Sector partnerships serve as regional coordinating bodies for education, workforce development and economic development partners to align their programs and services with the needs of industry. Each sector partnership in South Carolina must meet quarterly and include 10-20 members, including:

- Local technical college representatives;
- Regional Department of Commerce representatives;
- The regional SCDE career specialist;
- Business and industry representatives; and
- Representatives from the Department of Employment and Workforce.

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While the core state partners are invested in building local capacity for implementing sector partnerships, they focus more on coaching than on prescribing how to do the work. Local sector partnerships have a great deal of flexibility in setting goals and priorities, electing a lead convener, etc. Consultants initially set up meetings and establish rules of engagement, but then local leaders take over the management of the partnership.

The SCDE also hired a full-time business industry liaison to help local school districts sustain business-education alignment, industry engagement and career pathways. This position is responsible for coordinating activity related to data analysis, planning sessions, training and technical assistance for needs assessments on both the

local and regional levels for schools and districts. Additionally, this position will work with the 12 regions each year on the Perkins V CLNA.

One outcome of this structure is that it enables education and industry to be nimble and respond to changing needs in the labor market. For example, one region had an urgent need to strengthen the local talent pool and close a critical skills gap, and partners rallied together to establish a new credential-based pathway to fill that workforce need.

Another outcome of the sector partnership structure is the statewide Be Pro Be Proud initiative, made possible through the Associated Industries of South Carolina Foundation.<sup>15</sup> The campaign aims to combat negative perceptions of blue-collar jobs through a traveling semi-truck trailer outfitted with hands-on simulators that help learners explore different skilled trades, including welding, truck driving, heavy equipment operation, diesel technician, lineman and more.

## Key Takeaways

Each state's approach is unique, taking into account existing policy, industry needs and leadership buy-in. However, there are a few common takeaways to draw from these states in how they engage business and industry stakeholders at the state level.

- **Leverage Existing Infrastructure**

For one, industry engagement is a critical component of a high-quality CTE system, but CTE does not need to be the main driver. In many of the case studies, state leaders identified existing structures for convening business and industry leaders. Instead of replicating these structures — to the detriment of operational efficiency and employer fatigue — they aligned their priorities with work that was already underway.

- **Establish the Building Blocks**

These states also demonstrate that effective and sustainable industry engagement requires some structure. States play an important role in establishing the building blocks through policy, technical assistance, funding, etc. so that organic relationships and collaboration can materialize. In some of the examples in this report, states took a statewide approach, starting up advisory councils of major employers in the state. Others took a regional approach by building capacity for local leaders to conduct their own industry engagement activities. This choice depends on the existing structure of sector strategies and workforce development activities and the presence of statewide or regional industry associations.

- **Do Everything with Intention**

Additionally, establishing explicit goals can help focus statewide efforts and maximize partners' time. State leaders should ensure that all meetings have a set agenda with clear objectives and should make sure employers understand *why* they are being engaged and how participating in an industry advisory council is worth their time.

- **Get Leadership Buy In**

Having support from the highest levels of government as well as business and industry can accelerate industry engagement efforts. Having the blessing of leadership can signal that engagement across industry, workforce development and education is a priority and encourage agencies to coordinate their efforts with one another. State leaders also carry a lot of influence with the employer community and can help bring business and industry leaders to the table. And they can operationalize ongoing industry engagement by creating space for collaboration and assigning roles and responsibilities for carrying out the work.



- **Be Flexible**

Another important takeaway is the importance of flexibility in developing the infrastructure for statewide business and industry engagement. In some of the examples profiled in this report, state leaders reimaged their approach to industry engagement after learning about ongoing efforts. It is important to be nimble and flexible in pursuing an industry engagement model that maximizes existing structures and is as efficient as possible.

- **Build Strong Relationships**

Finally, relationships are critical to the success of a statewide industry engagement strategy. Identifying key influencers in the public and private sector and engaging them early and often can help build trust and allow for better collaboration and cooperation. Some states even formalized these relationships through MOUs or similar agreements to clarify roles and expectations for different partners.

Effective business and industry engagement is critical to Perkins V implementation, not only to inform and advise the priorities of a state's CTE system but also to support delivery through work-based learning, guest teaching, program design and much more. Many states have existing statewide networks of business leaders who regularly support and inform workforce development initiatives. These states can work within existing frameworks to ensure that CTE is being supported. Others may need to develop new structures, with coordination from state labor and workforce agencies. Whatever the approach, state leaders should ensure that business and industry leaders can play an active role in the design and delivery of CTE.

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