



## KANSAS BOARD OF REGENTS

### **Preparing Today's Students for Tomorrow's Jobs: Improving the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act**

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Thank you Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Miller and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to discuss how to better prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow, and how the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act can support this critical endeavor.

My name is Blake Flanders and I serve as the Vice President of Workforce Development for the Kansas Board of Regents, State Director for Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education, and Executive leadership for the Kansas Postsecondary Technical Education Authority. The Kansas Board of Regents (Board) is the governing board of the state's six universities and coordinating board for the state's 32 public higher education institutions (seven public universities, nineteen community colleges, and six technical colleges.) The Board is the sole eligible agency for the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical funds awarded to the state which are split with our secondary partners through the Kansas State Department of Education. The Kansas Postsecondary Technical Education Authority operates under the auspices of the Board and has led the transformation of the career technical education system in Kansas.

Strong connections to business and industry are the key to successful career technical education programs that produce positive outcomes for students and assist business in staying competitive. All career and technical education programs, where possible, must include industry credentials. Industry credentials provide a clear and direct connection between education and work and ensure graduates have the skills employers require in the new economy. In Kansas, two national partnerships have led efforts to better connect our programs with industry. We have aligned many of our career technical programs to industry using the National Association of Manufacturers-Endorsed Manufacturing Skills Certification system. This system aligns traditional education pathways with the requirements of industry-based certifications. Students earn not only education certification, but also industry-validated,

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nationally-portable industry credentials with real value in the marketplace. Additionally, our Kansas partnership with the National Coalition of Certification Centers has allowed us access to a network of industry partnerships that not only give students access to validated industry credentials in the transportation, aviation, and energy sectors, but provide a valuable professional development network for program faculty. To realize the maximum benefit of industry credentials, Kansas, and other states, will need access to credential completion data. It would be helpful to have a centralized clearinghouse where credential data could be stored and matched to individuals identifying industry credentials attained.

The Carl D. Perkins legislation relies on local advisory committees as the tie to business and industry. Local connections to businesses are important, and we do have some examples of successful local advisory committees; however, advisory committees typically function with limited or no committee staff support, which restricts sustained employer engagement. In Kansas, we are exploring sector advisory committees operating at the regional level. These industry committees would advise both secondary and postsecondary career technical education programs and be staffed by workforce partners from the local workforce system. Encouraging regional industry advisory committees supported by workforce investment act funded staff, where possible, provides a structural connection to programs funded with both Carl D. Perkins and Workforce Investment Act funds and maximizes the use of industry partnerships.

A regional model of industry engagement informed by nationally recognized industry partnerships will tighten the focus of our efforts across federal programs and leverage state and local funding to produce the highest quality outcomes. Rather than thinly spreading funds across all institutions, funding consortia consisting of secondary and postsecondary institutions is recommended. Where possible, consortia should partner with the local workforce investment board. Funding consortia would better connect the workforce and education systems, create more effective industry engagement, and provide a structural connection between secondary and postsecondary career technical education programs.

Our career technical education system must perform and be a conduit to high wage, high demand careers for program graduates. The current core indicators of performance required for Perkins programs measure valuable outcomes such as program completion, student retention and transfer, technical skill attainment, and employment. However, the gender nontraditional core indicators provide little value, especially to postsecondary programs where many times students choose a major prior to admittance to the institution. To close the current skills gap and maximize prosperity for all students, our career and technical education system should be sensitive to the needs of nontraditional students. I would, however, suggest the gender, nontraditional indicator be tracked similar to the special populations categories, but not included as a core indicator of performance.

Accountability drives performance improvement. It is important that Kansas has the mechanism to reward high performing technical education programs and highlight promising practices. I recommend allowing states the flexibility to move a portion of the funding

distributed by formula to local institutions, instead into a competitive pool designed to incentivize improvements and reward actual outcomes. As an example, Kansas could continue with a base level of formula driven support for local institutions, but allow up to 50% of these formula grant funds to be awarded competitively based on outcomes.

In summary, to improve the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, I recommend:

1. Requiring the alignment of all career and technical programs, where possible, to industry-recognized credentials;
2. Creating a centralized clearinghouse for data related to industry credential attainment;
3. Encouraging regional industry advisory committees supported by workforce investment act funded staff, where possible;
4. Funding consortia consisting of secondary and postsecondary institutions;
5. Retaining only the core indicators of performance measuring program completion, student retention, technical skill attainment, and employment;
6. Allowing states to reward high performing technical education through a competitive funding process.

Thank you for the opportunity for input on this important topic. I appreciate your leadership and look forward to questions.