

Reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act:
Education for the 21st Century Workforce

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Testimony

Good morning Chairman Enzi, Senator Kennedy and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on the federal investment in career technical education or as we call it in Idaho: Professional-Technical Education. As State Administrator for Professional-Technical Education, I am responsible for funding Idaho's 760 high school programs and six technical colleges, serving almost every high school student in the state and over 42,000 post secondary students, including adults. Our agency provides technical assistance, curricula, assistance with accountability, and leadership for innovation.

I am also the President of the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium. Established in 1920, the Consortium serves as the professional society of state and territory agency heads responsible for public career technical education at the secondary, postsecondary and adult levels in all fifty states, eight U.S. Territories, and the District of Columbia. I request that the association's recommendations for Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (Perkins) reauthorization be included in the record.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, the work you do really does make a difference in the lives of students across the country. The decisions you make, and even the speed at which they are made, significantly affect our ability to create opportunities for students. One such student is Chelsie Lea Marler. Chelsie took professional-technical classes in welding, auto technology, mechanics and power technology in her home high school, Meridian High. As a high school senior, she enrolled in an automotive collision repair program at the Dehryl Dennis Technology Center. During this time, Chelsie took advanced placement academic classes and was President of her Skills-USA chapter. She is now enrolled in the auto body program at the College of Southern Idaho, and intends to continue her education to become an auto collision forensics investigator.

Chelsie's experience reflects the characteristics of modern career technical education: 1) solid technical skills development that provides opportunities for employment and advancement; 2) the integration of high-level academics and technical preparation that prepares students for the future; 3) the articulation of career technical education, from comprehensive high school programs to technical centers to two-year colleges and beyond; and 4) the development of leadership and other workplace skills critical to success in life.

Building on What Works

At every level of Chelsie's educational experience, Perkins dollars were used to provide opportunities that would not have otherwise existed. As you begin deliberations on what the federal investment in career technical education will look like in the future, I offer the following observations and recommendations, which, share at their foundation legislative, programmatic, and fiscal support for states.

Recommendation: Maintain a focus on the improvement and acquisition of technical skills.

Representing only about three percent of the federal education budget, Perkins' funding for career technical education is limited. Nonetheless, this investment is critical to assuring a national focus on technical skills development and improvement. While Perkins has promoted the integration of academic and technical education — which I wholeheartedly support — we cannot afford to dilute its focus. It has been suggested that Perkins dollars should be used to fund general high school reform. Any attempts to finance high school reform with Perkins dollars would only serve to severely limit the operation of the country's technical education programs, they would not — indeed they could not — significantly impact academic performance.

It is also important to remember that although career technical students are increasingly likely to pursue postsecondary education, the vast majority of all American students do not graduate from high school and immediately enroll in college. This majority of students should have access to quality career technical education programs that support their decisions on when to enter the workforce. Students should not and do not have to make a choice: education or work. Quality secondary career technical education programs prepare students for both. Research has found that quality career technical education programs help ensure better alignment to career goals (shortening those years of finding oneself before beginning a career), prevent dropouts, and improve both academic and technical achievement.

Recommendation: Ensure coordination of funding streams.

One of the real success stories in Idaho has been the coordination of the Basic Grant with Tech Prep. Although it has taken some time to build the infrastructure, every school district and technical college in Idaho is in a tech prep consortium. The principles of academic integration and articulation between secondary and postsecondary education have been used to improve all of the technical programs. In addition, basic grant dollars are used to support tech prep activities at the local level. This year, Idaho experienced a 54% growth in professional technical students who signed up for the tech prep sequence; and in 2003, students earned nearly a million dollars worth of academic credit while still in high school through tech prep. Making sure that the programs within Perkins are coordinated and contribute in a non-duplicative way is critical to making the most out of

the legislation.

Recommendation: Promote the collection and dissemination of information about the world of work and the preparation necessary to successfully enter it.

The U.S. economy and workforce are rapidly changing. “These [demographic] developments pose potential problems for employers and the economy generally, as the possible loss of many key experienced workers could create shortages ... with adverse effects on productivity and economic growth.” It is essential that we encourage the realization of the full workforce potential of all Americans. Not only do we need to engage and prepare more Americans for participation in the labor market, we need to be sure that they are prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary for careers that exist. Many occupations that once dominated our economy are practically non-existent now. As technology continues to change, the skills necessary for work are constantly altered. For example, a major employer in Idaho went from having no servers and less than 100 personal computers to having 1,300 servers and over 15,000 laptops in only ten years. Students who started in first grade at the beginning of this trend were just getting started in high school at the end of those 10 years. Critical to making the connection between what is happening in the workplace and what needs to be learned in the classroom is ensuring that parents and students have access to quality information about career and education options. In Idaho, our Career Information System produces quality Idaho information that is shared among schools, job service, and virtually all other entities that need to provide career information. A national, generic web program can simply not meet this need.

Recommendation: Support Career Clusters as means to:

- Enhance the integration of academic and technical education,
- Support effective transitions from one level of education to the next without penalizing entry into the workforce at all levels, and
- Promote the development of solid technical skills.

In addition to being prepared for careers that exist today, students must also have the skills and knowledge necessary for the changing workforce of the future. Career technical education must therefore prepare students with transferable skills that enhance success in a wide variety of educational and work environments. To achieve this goal, programs must: incorporate high quality and up-to-date curricula; involve business and industry; align standards, assessments, and accountability measures; and promote leadership development through student organizations.

Programs that deliver high-level skills while integrating academic concepts have grown significantly in Idaho. The Computer Aided Manufacturing program at the Riverbend Technical Academy in Post Falls is one good example. For each of the past few years, the students in this program have competed in the national autonomous underwater vehicle competition in San Diego. The bad news is that two years ago these high school and

community college students — with help from a local engineering firm — lost out to MIT and Cornell. The good news is that they beat the U.S. Naval Academy and the University of Colorado. This year they moved up to 7th place. Other programs such as the Shelley High School Ecology and Environmental Science Program further demonstrate the scope and depth of career technical programs. Live research projects in conjunction with the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Lab and the Idaho Fish and Game strengthen both the technical and academic content. Idaho has also begun to experiment with career academies. For some time, most of our high schools have used career pathways as the organizing construct for their course catalogs. A number of schools have also implemented one or two academies in areas such as Finance, Travel and Tourism, Information Technology, and Health. A new stand-alone medical arts academy and a new high school being organized completely around five academies are the latest efforts to implement this educational reform tool.

Nationally, the level and types of math courses taken by career technical concentrators have shifted over the past 20 years — the number of concentrators taking low level math classes has dropped drastically, while the number taking high level courses has risen dramatically. This past year, our office has worked to align all of the career technical competencies with Idaho's academic achievement standards. This has provided the tool for career technical teachers and academic teachers to work together to improve academic performance.

Although Idaho is making significant progress in improving the quality of its career technical education system, supporting the continued development and implementation of Career Clusters in federal legislation can help us achieve even more. States and locals would be better positioned to meet local labor market needs and achieve the goals of better integration and improved transition if support for Career Clusters was incorporated in the new law.

Career Clusters are an organizing framework for all of the careers in our economy. A Career Cluster: links secondary- and postsecondary-level coursework; integrates academic, technical, and employability skills; and aligns curricula to industry standards, certifications, and assessments. By aligning with the current needs of the economy, the implementation of Career Clusters also helps schools expand their vision for career technical education. Career Clusters extend beyond the traditional program areas commonly associated with career technical education, representing professions in all industry sectors, such as education, law, public safety, and health. This broadened focus ensures that students have the opportunity to learn, at many different levels, about the countless career opportunities available to them.

Career Clusters can also help link economic development to the educational delivery system. Idaho is just about to begin an initiative to create a set of career clusters with the cooperation of the Department of Commerce and Labor thus connecting education and business.

Recommendation: Support the historical federal role in education — increasing access

and equity.

Since students are exposed to numerous professions in broad career areas and not just specific jobs, Career Clusters can also be a valuable tool in breaking down the gender stereotypes associated with certain careers. For example, in traditional career technical education, a student might enroll in a licensed practical nurse program and take courses that would lead to the degree or credentials needed in that state to be a licensed practical nurse. A student who enrolls in the health occupations clusters, however, will be exposed to all of the careers in the broad health field, including nurses, physicians, surgeons, surgical technicians, radiologists, and medical lab technologists. Every student enrolled in a health career cluster program will be exposed to all of the careers in the field, thus supporting enrollment and completion in non-traditional programs of study. Idaho just started its first Medical Arts Academy this past year.

Recommendation: Support the development of technical assessments.

One key to ensuring quality career technical education programs is the alignment of curriculum, instruction, professional development, standards and assessments. Measuring technical competency is one of the biggest challenges in career technical education, as not all programs or career areas have standards, certifications, or assessments. The variety of careers makes it difficult to synthesize the critical knowledge of all professions into a single test, as we do in academics.

Collectively, State Directors have taken a first step in achieving the alignment of curriculum, instruction, professional development, standards and assessments. We worked with employers and secondary and post secondary educators to identify what people need to know and be able to do to be successful in broad career areas, and then had these competencies nationally validated. Schools and states are now using them to benchmark and update their curricula, enhance career guidance and counseling strategies, more effectively integrate academic, technical and employability skills, and promote better transitions between education and the workforce. This is a good foundation on which to build quality curriculum and instruction, but assessments are the missing component. The development of technical assessments to support the Career Clusters would do much to ensure quality assessment of technical competence. The assessments would also provide better support for the more mobile and global workforce and economy of today. A special national project on assessments could be a great help to states.

Recommendation: Continue to support professional development - including leadership development - and research.

As a nation, we place great value in leadership. We know strong education leaders are critical to effective organizations and the delivery of quality programs. The development of leaders is often overlooked. This is unfortunate, as it is the national, state, and local level leaders who will create and implement the future career-technical education. There is no question that with the graying of the career technical education community, a leadership crisis looms in the future.

“Some suggest we are experiencing a crisis in education leadership of both quality and

quantity. At the local level, few districts have made it a priority to identify and groom potential leaders, despite a wave of impending retirements and chronic difficulties in finding candidates.”

“Nearly half of current community college presidents indicate they will be retiring in next six years. That figure jumps to nearly 80 percent in the next 10 years. Thirty-three percent of presidents believe that one-fifth of their chief administration will retire in the next five years.”

“Today, state education agencies are now almost too lean. Reduced budgets starting in the 1980s stripped them of their capacity to fill many vacancies, much less expand to meet new demands. Too, salary levels have stayed low when compared to those of employees holding comparable positions in federal and many municipal agencies, including school district headquarters. Even when SEA jobs are available, qualified experts and managers customarily find the prospects elsewhere to be more appealing.” In Idaho, our agency has 37% fewer staff than in 1980, yet we have increased our administrative responsibility by five times. We have moved to close the gap by developing a Leadership Institute. We have also worked closely with teacher education programs. Nationally, however, the picture is grim. The case for developing educational leadership capacity is clear. It is in our national interest to invest in the support and development of leaders in career technical education.

Conducting and translating research into policy and professional development that influences practice is a valuable national role. The federal legislation should offer support for professional development that helps practitioners access research-based strategies, learn about effective and exemplary programs and how to replicate them, and enhance their pedagogical and content expertise. This is important to ensure rigorous, relevant, and quality career technical education.

Improving the abilities of technical and academic teachers to integrate content has been one critical area of professional development in Idaho. We have found that without professional development, curricula and other forms of assistance are simply not sufficient. We have developed workshops in a variety of settings, including our statewide summer conference and in individual school districts’ professional development days, and conducted a semester-long class to provide more in-depth development opportunities for integration. This is an area that will require continued attention and effort.

Recommendation: Support accountability and provide states with additional authority to encourage performance and/or re-direct or withhold funds from schools when necessary. Accountability is another state leadership responsibility critical to ensuring quality career technical education. The effective use of accountability data drives improvement and change. Idaho has worked hard to implement the existing measures and improve data quality. A new system is being implemented that will allow us to do much more, but this effort is time consuming and expensive. It is critical that states be given enough flexibility to manage the process. Separating the secondary and post secondary measures is also important in that it fosters the creation of postsecondary measures that better fit the system. In addition, using accountability data in a responsible and meaningful way will result in the identification of the strengths and weaknesses of both specific programs and the career technical education system in general. In Idaho, we work with schools that are struggling to meet performance goals by collaborating in the development of

improvement plans that include additional technical assistance and professional development. When a school is challenged by persistent low performance, our state does all it can to keep the resources in place and provide the support necessary for the school to improve. Rarely, there are instances in which local programs simply will not make the effort to improve. In these instances, states need the legislated authority to be able to re-direct or withhold funds from local programs.

Recommendation: Support strong state leadership, with a minimum of 5% or \$500,000 for administration and 10% for leadership.

State leadership leads change, facilitates partnerships, ensures economy of scale, leverages multiple resources, and focuses accountability — all of which support quality career technical education. Others agree:

States hold the key to achieving vocational education reform at a pace and scale sufficient to affect national workforce quality (page 6). [S]tate leadership is the best bet to give context, shape, and direction to the diverse local reform activities already under way, and more broadly, convert them to coherent career preparations programs.”

— National Assessment of Vocational Education, 1994

“Only state leadership at the state level can bridge the gap between national policymakers/administrators and local practitioners to energize change and drive needed reform.”

— Dan Hull, President and CEO, CORD

While I wear multiple hats — innovator, administrator, instructional leader, standards enforcer, data collector — my most important responsibility is ensuring student success. To accomplish this goal, adequate resources for strong state administration and leadership are necessary. My colleagues around the country and I strongly encourage the Congress to support states’ rights by continuing the Perkins provisions that allow states to select their sole state agency and determine the appropriate split of funds between secondary and postsecondary education. Further, we recommend the state administrative match, maintenance of effort provisions, and the level of funding reserved at the state level be maintained so innovations, such as those outlined today, can continue.

Recommendation: Allow for flexibility and innovation.

The diversity of our nation is one of its great strengths. Therefore, we cannot expect programs designed to fit Wood River Valley near Sun Valley to also meet the needs of Los Angeles or Boston. We need to maintain our focus on high standards for all states and students, while offering flexibility in how to best achieve quality results. Perkins can be a tremendous help, but only if it does not pile on too many additional requirements beyond those necessary for quality. Innovation is another distinguishing characteristic of the United States. Federal legislation should allow for a portion of funds to be used to innovate, without risk of penalty.

Conclusion

Career technical education is working. It:

- motivates and engages students in their learning;
- provides technical, employability and leadership skills that enable entry into and success in the workplace;
- reinforces and enhances academics;
- helps students find and fulfill their potential; and
- creates career and educational options.

As I began my remarks, I shared Chelsie Lea Marler's success. Career technical education really did make a difference in her life, as it has done and continues to do for many Americans. For the past 87 years, federal dollars have been an integral part of this success by ensuring that millions of youth and adults have been able to enter and succeed in the workforce. I believe that the recommendations I shared today will help ensure that future generations will have the same opportunities that Chelsie had. I would also encourage you to act rapidly. The current educational climate has created tremendous pressures and uncertainty for administrators, teachers, and students. Perkins can make a difference, but a solid direction is needed right away. I look forward to working with you to develop new legislation that builds on and expands our current successes and promotes innovation in our nation's career technical education system.

Thank you.