



Policy Priorities

Advancing Opportunity through CTE



SkillsUSA is the #1 workforce development organization for students.

Our mission is to empower students to become skilled professionals, career-ready leaders and responsible community members.

Career and technical education (CTE) equips students with the skills, confidence and real-world experiences they need to succeed in today's rapidly changing economy and in life. Whether they are just beginning their educational journey or returning to the classroom to re-skill or upskill, CTE learners are preparing for the careers that power our communities and strengthen our future. These policy priorities reflect SkillsUSA's commitment to expanding CTE access, modernizing systems and ensuring every student can thrive through high-quality CTE programming that not only prepares them for the future of work, but helps to shape it.

1 Invest in the Nation's CTE Infrastructure

CTE equips students with the skills they need to power America's industries. The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act's (Perkins V) Basic State Grant program is the cornerstone of federal support for CTE, yet current funding levels remain well below what is needed to meet current needs and growing demand. Additional public investment in CTE is needed to support students in realizing their full potential, especially as the economy continues to undergo rapid transformation.

SKILLSUSA URGES POLICYMAKERS TO:

- Strengthen funding for Perkins V's Basic State Grant program and other public CTE investments to support hands-on training, work-based learning and credential attainment.
- Strengthen public investments to support CTE systems and programs that help connect learners with opportunities in dynamic and growing sectors of the American economy, especially efforts that intentionally support diverse geographic areas throughout the nation.
- Invest in innovative CTE programs, strategies and approaches that supplement foundational investments in CTE, particularly efforts that equip students with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in an economy rapidly changing.

2 Protect and Support the Role of CTE in Public Education

CTE is a core component of the public education experience. High school and postsecondary students across the country rely on access to high-quality CTE programs and pathways to gain real-world skills and career direction. Too often, however, public schools and institutions are the only locations where CTE programs are offered at scale to meet current and future workforce needs.

SKILLSUSA URGES POLICYMAKERS TO:

- Maintain a strong commitment to public education systems that offer CTE as a central part of the student experience.
- Oppose efforts to divert funds away from the schools and institutions that deliver high-quality, skill-based education to American students.
- Ensure that dedicated federal CTE investments — like Perkins V state grant funding — remain targeted to public education systems and are not diluted by competing priorities or redirected to non-public entities.



3 Improve Postsecondary CTE Access

The value proposition for higher education is changing. Today's students are more likely to pursue postsecondary education not just for a degree, but to gain specific skills and credentials that lead to good jobs and higher wages — often in a shorter time frame. Many of today's postsecondary learners are older or may already be working, meaning they increasingly need access to shorter-term, high-quality CTE programs to advance their careers.

SKILLSUSA URGES POLICYMAKERS TO:

- Ensure robust implementation of Workforce Pell grant programs through adequate administrative capacity alongside clear guidance and supports for learners and institutions that enable access to these opportunities.
- Establish strong quality assurance mechanisms and related processes for Workforce Pell grant programs that ensure these experiences culminate in the attainment of credentials of value and lead to meaningful employment and further educational opportunities.
- Provide dedicated funding for open access postsecondary institutions — such as community and technical colleges and area technical centers — to offer CTE programming aligned with the needs of the economy.

4 Strengthen CTE's Connection to Workforce Development Systems

As policymakers consider updates to education, workforce development, and apprenticeship programs and related pathways, public policy must recognize the critical role CTE has in these wider career preparation ecosystems. Moving forward, CTE and existing public investment in these programs at the secondary and postsecondary level must be recognized as a key partner in building America's talent pipeline.

SKILLSUSA URGES POLICYMAKERS TO:

- Promote legislation that supports alignment and coordination between CTE, education, workforce development and apprenticeship, including policies that ensure CTE representation within these systems and opportunities to meaningfully share related infrastructure responsibilities.
- Improve access to supportive services that help students and workers succeed and provide flexibility to braid funding streams in ways that help to coordinate efforts across education, workforce and human development service systems.
- Expand access to work-based learning across the full spectrum of career preparation experiences, from career awareness activities in middle school through internships, apprenticeships and industry-validated competitive events in high school and beyond. Future policy should provide dedicated support for scaling these opportunities and developing pathways systems that connect CTE programs with complementary workforce initiatives, while establishing consistent standards and definitions that clarify relationships between CTE and other work-based learning experiences, like apprenticeships.

5 Grow the Pipeline of Skilled CTE Instructors

Knowledgeable instructors with real-world experience are an essential ingredient for high-quality CTE programs. Yet, many schools struggle to recruit and retain qualified educators and instructional staff due to a variety of structural challenges and barriers.

SKILLSUSA URGES POLICYMAKERS TO:

- Support policies that make CTE teaching a competitive and attractive option for industry professionals, including alternative certification pathways, aid assistance programs and compensation structures that recognize both teaching credentials and industry experience.
- Expand access to CTE-specific teacher training and professional development through all forms of public investment in CTE, including externship opportunities that keep educators current with evolving industry practices and technologies.
- Promote state licensure reciprocity and flexible credentialing policies that increase instructor mobility across state lines, enable part-time teaching by working professionals and recognize industry certifications as valid pathways to CTE instruction and classrooms.

WHY IT MATTERS: *A SkillsUSA Commitment*

These policy priorities reflect our commitment to preparing students for the careers that keep America running. Whether they're learning to weld, code, repair engines or lead teams — our students are building the future. Federal policy helps open doors for every learner so that they are ready to lead, create and contribute through CTE. Our future is in **good hands** because it's in **skilled hands**. Learn more at www.skillsusa.org.