



The Education Trust

Closing the gaps in opportunity and achievement, pre-k through college.

June 20, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan, Leader Pelosi, and Members of the U.S. House of Representatives:

The Education Trust, an organization dedicated to closing long-standing gaps in opportunity and achievement separating low-income students and students of color from their peers, applauds the House Committee on Education and the Workforce for advancing a bipartisan bill — the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act — to reauthorize the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

In today's economy, high-quality career preparation is more important than ever to ensuring all students are equipped with the right knowledge and skills for success after high school. Yet the history, and in some cases still the reality, of career and technical education (CTE) is one of diverting students of color and students with disabilities away from college preparatory courses and into low-level "career" courses that aren't actually aligned with the job market. Moreover, there is a lack of accurate and usable outcome data to measure CTE program quality, and too little coordination across education and workforce systems.

As a result, policymakers, educators, business leaders, and advocates don't have enough information on how all students are faring in CTE. And where that information does exist, our research has shown that for far too many students, the CTE experience is a low-quality, disjointed one.

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act is an improvement over current law and does address some of these issues. The bill represents a step forward in addressing data quality, focusing on actual workforce needs, better integrating the employer community, and providing opportunity for innovation.

But there's more to do to promote a quality CTE experience for all students.

Notably, the bill should include a greater focus on equity in CTE access and outcomes. Grantees should have to take more proactive steps to ensure low-income students and students of color aren't disproportionately represented in low-quality programs unaligned with current workforce needs. And beyond the bill's current attention to gaps in performance between groups of students, grantees should be required to take more active measures when any group of students is falling below 90 percent of the adjusted levels of performance.

When it comes to quality information, we support the push for a consistent definition of "CTE Concentrator" but are concerned about the specific definition included in the bill. The current definition includes two very different populations of students: secondary students who take two or more courses in

one program of study and secondary students who take three or more of any CTE courses. These groups are substantively different and should be treated as such in the data.

Finally, while the bill does include opportunities for innovation, we believe a greater investment is necessary to build an evidence base of CTE models that work, particularly for historically underserved students.

Reimagining our CTE system is absolutely necessary given our changing economy. This bill is an important step forward, but there is still work to be done to make it a tool to truly transform CTE to meet workforce demands for all students. We look forward to working with you on further improving this bill in conference.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John B. King Jr.", written in a cursive style.

John B. King Jr.
President and CEO
The Education Trust