

March 2015

Dear Colleague,

The U.S. economy shows increasingly strong evidence of a “skills gap” in which many young adults lack the skills required for jobs that pay a middle class wage. Building a clear and accessible pathway to middle-class adulthood for youth is one of the greatest challenges we face. It’s a challenge that we feel in red states and blue states, in small towns and in large cities. Career and technical education (CTE) is one of the best tools we have to meet this challenge.

The President of the IBM International Foundation testified before Congress in November 2013 that federal funding authorized by the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act has historically lacked a strategy that shapes and reshapes curriculum according to workforce demands, “*with little serious thinking about curriculum change or alignment first to college and then to career.*” He noted that IBM had 1,800 pending job openings at the time, unfilled because the company lacked skilled workers to fill the positions, and argued that a reauthorized Perkins Act should include **efforts to align state and locally developed CTE curriculum with skills demanded by local employers.**

This legislation aims to accomplish just that—to improve outcomes for students and to **improve the return on federal investment by using workforce data and labor market information to align what schools teach with what employers value.** The Perkins Modernization Act of 2015 would incorporate the data-driven definition of “*in-demand industry sectors or occupations*” from the bipartisan Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) into the Perkins Act and the federal investment in CTE. WIOA passed the House overwhelmingly in 2014 and was signed into law by President Obama, reflecting a broadly shared bipartisan consensus that preparing today’s students for tomorrow’s jobs matters to all of us.

Federal investment in CTE must target the skills demanded by employers in strong and growing industries. By leveraging workforce data and labor market information to clearly identify which sectors and occupations are “in-demand,” this bill would ensure that CTE curriculum accurately reflects the skills and credentials sought by employers in the labor markets where students plan to work. In doing so, this bill reaffirms and strengthens the important bipartisan purpose of the Perkins Act—preparing CTE students to succeed in the modern workforce.

If you would like to cosponsor or have any questions, please contact Caroline Darmody in Congressman Kennedy’s office at Caroline.Darmody@mail.house.gov or JT Mackey in Congressman Kinzinger’s office at JT.Mackey@mail.house.gov

Sincerely,

Joseph P. Kennedy
Member of Congress

Adam Kinzinger
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