

The following terms and acronyms are commonly used in Career and Technical Education (CTE). Familiarizing yourself with this vocabulary will help you navigate conversations, policies, and professional development in your new role as a CTE instructor.

ACTE Quality CTE Program of Study Framework

An evidence-based framework and self-evaluation developed by ACTE to define high-quality CTE. With more than 90 criteria organized under 12 elements, the Framework captures the full range of activities across a CTE program of study.

Advisory Board/Committee

A group of industry professionals providing input on CTE program quality, alignment, and relevance.

Advance CTE

A national nonprofit organization representing state CTE leaders.

Alternative Teacher Certification

A pathway to becoming a teacher other than completing a university preparation program before entering the classroom. In CTE, the alternative pathway usually has individuals with industry experience begin teaching while concurrently developing their pedagogical skills.

Area Technical Center

A CTE-focused institution that serves learners from across multiple geographies, such as schools, school districts, educational service areas, and workforce development areas or regions. These public institutions offer secondary and/or sub-baccalaureate education and training and can serve secondary learners, postsecondary learners, or both.

Articulation Agreement

A formal agreement allowing students to earn postsecondary credit for high school coursework. Similar to a credit transfer agreement.

Career Academy

A school-within-a-school that organizes technical and academic coursework around a career area such as health care or IT.

Career Cluster

The National Career Clusters® Framework, developed by Advance CTE, serves as a guiding organizational structure for careers by knowledge, skills, and interests. Current Clusters include Construction, Arts, Design & Entertainment, Public Service & Safety, and more.

Career Pathway

A term defined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act that includes a combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services to help an individual succeed. In addition to this federal legislative definition, the term may be used in other ways in your state or local context.

Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO)

These intracurricular organizations provide CTE students with opportunities for career exploration and leadership skill development and incorporate competitive events that let students practice technical skills, employability skills, and more.

Competency-based/Mastery-based Education

An approach to education in which students advance by demonstrating mastery of knowledge and skills rather than meeting clock hours or time requirements.

Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA)

Perkins V requires eligible recipients to conduct an in-depth evaluation of program quality, student performance, and program alignment with the labor market to receive funding.

Concurrent/Dual Enrollment

A partnership between high schools and postsecondary institutions that allows students to take college-level courses and earn both high school and college credit simultaneously.

CTE Concentrator

A student who has completed multiple courses/credits in one CTE program area. At the secondary school level, it is a student served by an eligible recipient who has completed at least two courses in a single CTE program or program of study. At the postsecondary level, it's a student served by an eligible recipient who has earned at least 12 credits within a CTE program or program of study or who has completed such a program, if the program encompasses fewer than 12 credits.

CTE Participant

A student who has completed at least one CTE course in a single CTE program area but has not yet met the threshold to be considered a concentrator.

CTE-focused High Schools

A specialized or magnet high school that includes academics but puts greater emphasis on CTE courses and experiences, at times organized around a specific career area.

Eligible Recipient

A school district or institution, or a consortium of districts or institutions, is eligible to receive funding through the federal Perkins CTE Act.

Employability Skills

Essential cross-cutting or soft skills needed in any workplace, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, time management, professionalism, and adaptability; often integrated into CTE programs and CTSO activities.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

The primary federal legislation overseeing K-12 education in the United States.

Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP)

A process and a tool to help students define their college and career goals. ICAPs may contain course schedules and transcripts, results of strength/interest assessments, career and education plans, a portfolio, and more. Also known as a personalized graduation plan or individual learning plan (ILP).

Industry-recognized Credential

An employer-recognized qualification showing mastery of career-related skills, including industry certifications, licenses, Registered Apprenticeship certificates, and badges.

Internship

A type of work-based learning in which students perform substantive work over an extended period for an employer in a real or virtual workplace that aligns with their career plans. Internships may be paid or unpaid and may or may not lead to academic credit.

Job Shadowing

A type of work-based learning in which students are paired with an industry professional to observe the day-to-day responsibilities of a particular occupation.

Labor Market Information (LMI)

Data about employment trends, wages, and demand for specific occupations.

Local Application

The plan that eligible recipients must submit to receive Perkins funding, developed with stakeholder input, describes how the recipient intends to spend the funds. The application must be based on the findings of the CLNA.

Minimal Allocation Consortia

Local secondary recipients, usually in rural areas, who would receive less than \$15,000 under the formula, must form a consortium with other secondary recipients to be eligible for funding. On the postsecondary level, the minimum is \$50,000.

Non-traditional Fields

Fields in which individuals from one gender comprise less than 25% of those employed, such as men in nursing or women in welding.

Performance/Accountability Indicators

Measures of CTE program effectiveness must be reported by recipients of Perkins V funding.

Performance-based Assessment

A type of assessment in which students demonstrate their knowledge and skills by completing a real-world or simulated task.

Perkins V

The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, most recently reauthorized in 2018 as the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, is the primary federal law affecting CTE.

Pre-apprenticeship

A type of work-based learning that prepares individuals to enter and complete a Registered Apprenticeship.

Program Approval/Review

A state-required process to ensure programs meet quality standards.

Program of Study (POS)

Defined in Perkins V as a coordinated, nonduplicative sequence of academic and technical content at the secondary and postsecondary level. It incorporates challenging State academic standards; addresses both academic and technical knowledge and skills, including employability skills; is aligned with the needs of industries in the economy of the State, region, Tribal community, or local area; progresses in specificity; has multiple entry and exit points that incorporate credentialing; and culminates in the attainment of a recognized postsecondary credential.

Recognized Postsecondary Credential

Defined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act as a credential, including an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license recognized by the state or federal government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree.

School-based Enterprise

A type of work-based learning in which students operate a business in a school setting that provides goods or services for other students, school staff, and/or the community.

Secondary-postsecondary Consortia

Groups of secondary and postsecondary CTE providers that may be allowed or required, depending on the state, to form a consortium to receive funding.

Sector Partnership/Initiative/Strategy

Defined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act as regional partnerships of industry leaders, education and training providers, and other stakeholders that focus on the workforce needs of key industries in a regional labor market.

Simulated Workplaces

A model popularized in West Virginia and Alabama in which classrooms are organized as a real or mock business operated by learners. Industry professionals serve as mentors and inspectors for each Simulated Workplace.

Special Populations

Learner groups identified in Perkins V for required and permissible uses of funding and required reporting for accountability. They include individuals with disabilities; individuals from economically disadvantaged families; individuals preparing for non-traditional fields; single parents (including pregnant and parenting learners); out-of-workforce individuals; English learners; homeless individuals; youth in or who have aged out of foster care; and youth with a parent in the armed forces and on active duty.

Stackable Credentials

A stackable credential is one of a sequence of non-duplicative credentials that build on each other to advance an individual's qualifications and help them progress along a career and/or education pathway. Valuable credentials are also portable, meaning they are recognized and accepted in different settings.

State Plan

A four-year plan submitted by each state seeking Perkins grant funding, developed with stakeholder input, that describes how the state will distribute funding to local recipients and spend the portion of the allocation it is permitted to keep on the state level for state leadership and administrative funding.

Supplement, Not Supplant

A legal provision that requires that federal funds not be used to replace state and local sources of funding.

Work-Based Learning (WBL)

Experiential learning that occurs at a worksite, on campus, or through simulated experiences and incorporates interactions with industry or community professionals. WBL should be aligned with the curriculum and occur on a continuum, ranging from short-term experiences such as workplace tours and guest speakers to more sustained activities such as internships and apprenticeships.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

The primary federal law impacting the workforce development system.

Workplace Challenges/Industry-sponsored Projects

A type of work-based learning in which students develop a product or service for an employer partner.

Youth Apprenticeships

A type of work-based learning that serves high school students or out-of-school youth aged 16-24. Students are employed while receiving job-related classroom instruction, often through dual enrollment, leading to an industry-recognized credential.

Source: ACTE (Association for Career and Technical Education) and Advance CTE.
Terms and definitions may vary by state or local context.