

Career Pathways in Career and Technical Education

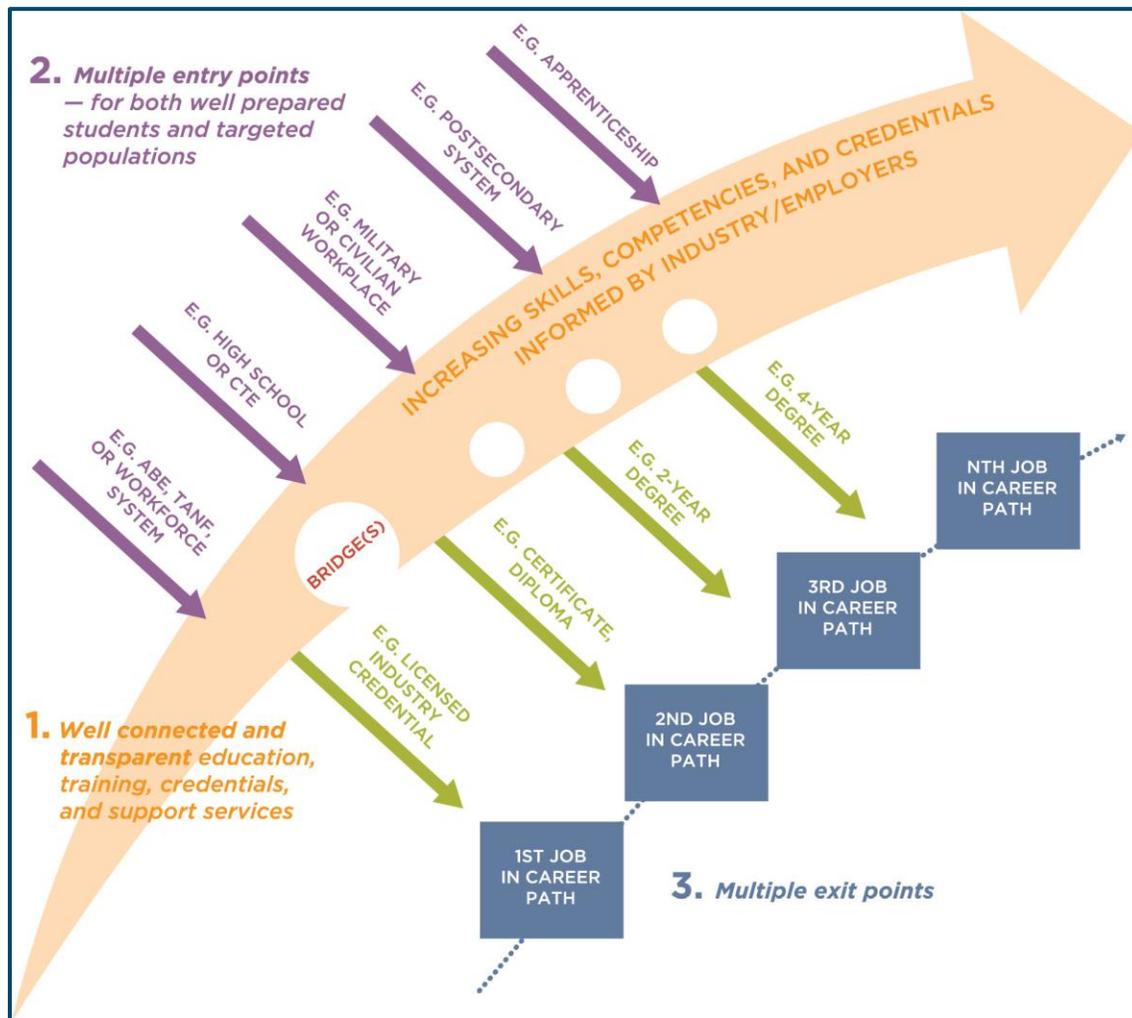
During the early 2000s, state and local leaders developed career pathways programs in an effort to redesign education and workforce development systems to better meet the education and employment needs of low-income, educationally underprepared adults. These career pathways increase individual prosperity and regional competitiveness by aligning adult education, community colleges, human services, and workforce development efforts.¹ Adults with low incomes or low literacy levels are a target population in the career pathways movement. Following the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Act (Perkins V) in 2018, three federal laws include a shared definition of career pathways: Perkins V, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and the Higher Education Act (HEA).

“Career Pathway” Defined in Perkins V, HEA, and WIOA

- Career pathways are a “combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services” that:
- Align with the skills needs of industries in a state or regional economy;
- Prepare an individual to be successful in a full range of secondary or postsecondary education, including Registered Apprenticeships;
- Include counselling to help individuals achieve their education and career goals;
- Include, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
- Organize education, training, and other services to meet the particular needs of an individual in a manner that helps accelerate their educational and career advancement
- Enable an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or equivalent, and at least one recognized postsecondary credential; and
- Help an individual enter into or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.²

Career pathways support people in obtaining a secondary and postsecondary credential, provide participants with adequate career counselling, establish integrated design and delivery, and ensure labor market value. Figure 1 from the U.S. Department of Labor’s “Career Pathways Tool Kit” depicts the multiple entry and exit points of career pathways.³

Figure 1.



First Definition of “Program of Study” in Perkins V

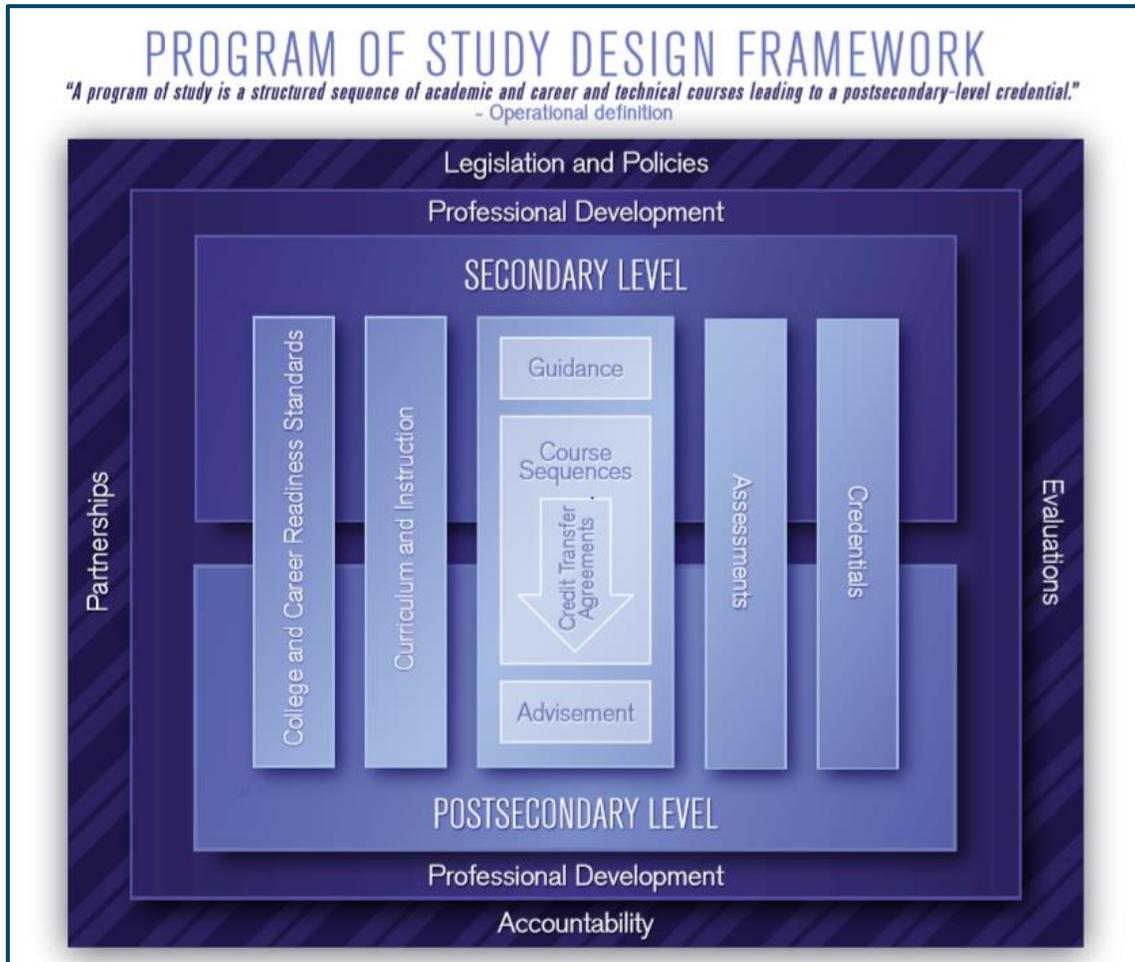
Perkins V is the first time “program of study” has a stand-alone definition in statute. Perkins IV required each state plan and local application to describe at least one program of study, and the description of a program of study was included in the planning section of the law. So, even though Perkins V has the first formal definition, programs of study have been a critical part of career and technical education for a number of years.

Program of study is a “coordinated, nonduplicative sequence of academic and technical content at the secondary and postsecondary level” that:

- Incorporates challenging state academic standards;
- Addresses both academic and technical knowledge and skills, including employability skills;
- Aligns with the needs of industries in the state, regional, tribal community, or local area;
- Progresses from less to more specific (beginning with all aspects of an industry and leading to more occupation-specific instruction);
- Has multiple entry and exit points that incorporate credentialing; and
- Culminates in a recognized postsecondary credential.⁴

Prior to Perkins IV, the Department of Education's Office for Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) had an operational definition: "A program of study is a structured sequence of academic and career and technical courses leading to a postsecondary-level credential." The Perkins V definition builds on the operational definition by adding a focus on labor market value, instructional design, and multiple entry and exit points. Further, OCTAE created the "Programs of Study Design Framework" with 10 supporting elements shown in Figure 2.⁵

Figure 2.



Relationship Between Career Pathways and Programs of Study⁶

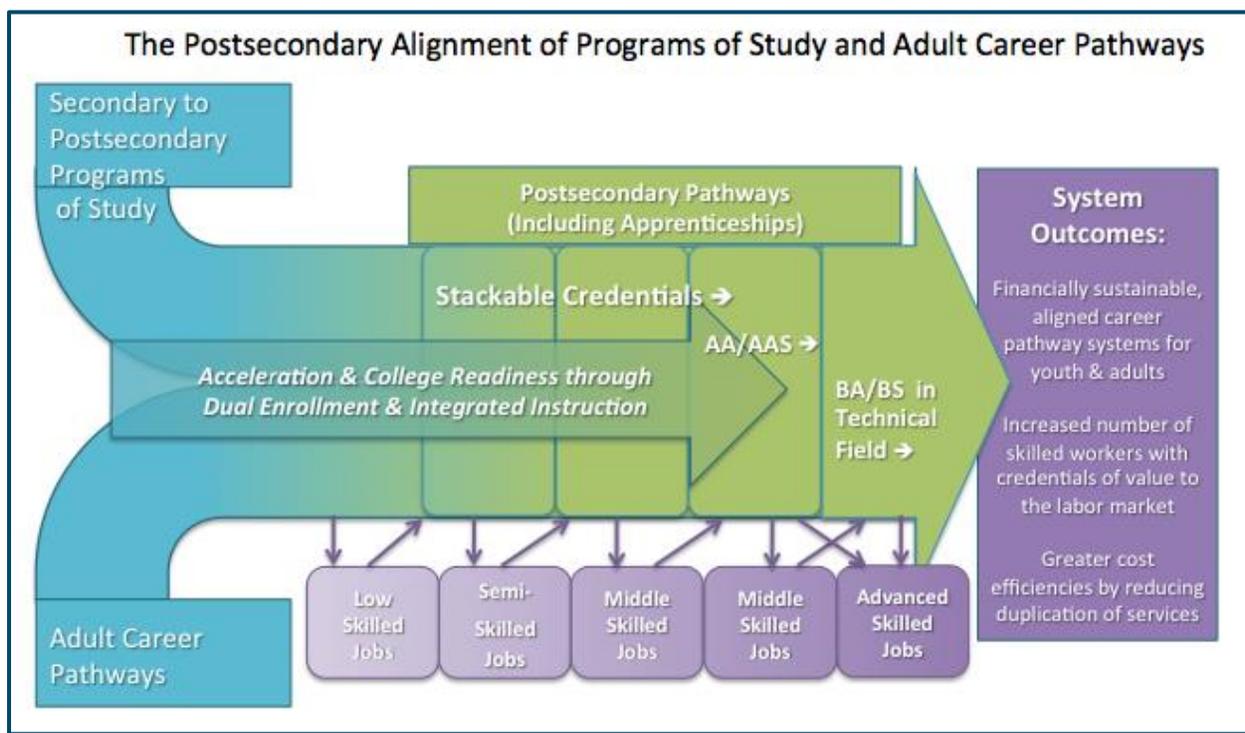
Throughout Perkins V, career pathways are repeatedly mentioned in connection with programs of study. However, as programs of study and career pathways for adults have evolved, they have followed parallel paths that, until now, have not crossed.⁷ Because these two reform efforts were shaped by different legislative directives, delivery systems, and funding streams, programs of study and career pathways frequently work in relative isolation from each other.⁸

Especially given their clear connections in Perkins V, these two reform efforts should be well-aligned to provide rigorous on-ramps to meaningful postsecondary education and training for both recent high school graduates and adults. Ideally, career pathways and programs of study in the same sector would share opportunities like employer partnerships and labor-market-valued credentials identified

as most relevant for their local economies. They would leverage each other's industry connections and other strengths, reducing duplication and building synergies.

State and local efforts to align career and technical education (CTE) programs of study with career pathways require a commitment from multiple partners working toward greater transparency, alignment, and systemic change. OCTAE's Integrated Career Pathways Model,⁹ (see Figure 3), shows how career pathways can serve both adults and high school age students, while also promoting collaboration, alignment, and cross-system development of structured pathways toward recognized postsecondary credentials.¹⁰

Figure 3.



Recommendations to State CTE Leaders

Perkins V implementation offers an opportunity for states to better align programs of study and career pathways to ensure that more learners can get high-quality education and training that meets their needs and helps them move into good jobs. We recommend that state leaders:

- 1) Use federal State Leadership Funds, as explicitly permitted in the law, to integrate and align programs of study with career pathways to best serve low-income adults (now in "special populations") and other target populations.
- 2) Use data focusing on special populations and communities of color to answer the state plan question on how states will align programs of study and career pathways to the needs of the state, regional, and local labor market.
- 3) Encourage local uses of funds, as specifically permitted under the law, to pursue coordination with other education and workforce development programs and initiatives, including career pathways and sector partnerships developed under WIOA.

Endnotes

- ¹ Judy Mortrude, *Better Together: Career and Guided Pathways*, September 2018, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018/09/2018careerandguidedpathways.pdf>.
- ² Adapted from Sec.3(7) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act [Public Law 113-128], <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-113publ128/html/PLAW-113publ128.htm>.
- ³ U.S. Department of Labor, *Career Pathways Tool Kit: An Enhanced Guide and Workbook for System Development*, available at https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/10/20/10/11/Enhanced_Career_Pathways_Toolkit.
- ⁴ Adapted from the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), [Public Law 115-224], Sec.7(41) <https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/hr2353/BILLS-115hr2353enr.pdf>.
- ⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Adult, Career and Technical Education, *Programs of Study Design Framework*, <https://cte.ed.gov/initiatives/octaes-programs-of-study-design-framework>.
- ⁶ U.S. Department of Education, *Advancing Career and Technical Education in Career Pathways*, <https://cte.ed.gov/initiatives/career-pathways-systems>.
- ⁷ *Advancing CTE in State and Local Career Pathways*, March 2014, Jobs for the Future, for the Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. <http://s3.amazonaws.com/PCRN/docs/AdvCTEFinalReport012816.pdf>.
- ⁸ *Advancing CTE, Jobs for the Future*.
- ⁹ *Career Pathways Systems*. U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, <https://cte.ed.gov/initiatives/career-pathways-systems>.
- ¹⁰ *Advancing CTE, Jobs for the Future*.