



Scott Stump

Assistant secretary for career, technical, and adult education, U.S. Department of Education

The NASBE Interview

Scott Stump, assistant secretary for career, technical, and adult education at the U.S. Department of Education, addressed attendees at NASBE's Legislative Conference in April. Following his remarks on federal education policy related to career and technical education (CTE), with a particular focus on last year's Perkins Act reauthorization (also known as Perkins V), NASBE's board chair, Rachel Wise, and secretary-treasurer Byron Ernest asked him follow-up questions during a panel conversation.



Where is the U.S. Department of Education headed on support for career and technical education?

We are at a point like no other in 30 years. We're in a position where U.S. employers—and many of you as members of your state board and as employers yourselves—understand the skills gap that we're facing in this country. At the same time, we also have a \$1.5 trillion financial aid in student debt that's bearing down on young people—those that have graduated, those that might have started in postsecondary education but with no degree and lots of debt, and parents that have agreed to sign onto Parent PLUS Loans. All of this is converging in new conversations about how we think beyond the K-12 space and really look at that intersection between graduation from high school and what's next in line. And that's why Secretary DeVos's call to us is that we absolutely need to continue rethinking education.

We have to question everything to make sure nothing limits a student's ability to be prepared for what's next. With the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) being reauthorized in 2014, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorized in 2015, and now with career and technical education, the Perkins Act, reauthorized last summer, we have a time and space to start working the local flexibilities and push to put those closest to the learners in charge to drive all of those federal resources—along with your state and local resources—that can be put into play for the benefit of students. We are excited that the definitions in ESSA, WIOA, and Perkins are now more aligned. We love the fact that the performance metrics are also very much aligned.

The president's budget proposal relative to CTE is aggressive. It is expanding Pell eligibility for short-term grants that provide stackable credentials and making reform to the federal work study programs to connect individuals who are serving on campus in a lot of duties out into the workplace for apprenticeships. One of the ways that we're proposing that will be used is for student teachers and those who are in unpaid nursing internships.

Many of you probably heard the secretary's announcement on the Education Freedom and Opportunity Act. It's \$5 billion in private funding, scholarships, investment through voluntary donations, and state-facing scholarship programs that ultimately can be used for CTE. We see this filling a unique void for students, allowing them to have access to a STEM or a cybersecurity program that's not in their district. The funds can also be used

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by the student to pay for concurrent enrollment and also can provide for transportation to an apprenticeship and for tools and supplies. Many of the trades require students to wear boots or scrubs that some students are not going to be able to afford.

What should state boards focus on regarding the Perkins reauthorization?

All of this is about expanding multiple pathways and freedom for students. I'm going to go back to my cattle background. For those of you that never worked cattle, you don't want to give them the widest berth possible because they will run over you. And yes, I have been run over and broke some ribs. What you do is you continually narrow down those places to get them into the alley, and the alley is getting smaller until it's one cow following the other. Take away visual distractions for them, and they'll quietly go where you want them to go. We've done that to students without knowing it. We have created this pipeline of heading to a four-year degree. And while it has been successful in getting more students to go, it's having unintended consequences in student debt and students without degrees because, I would contend, many of them never thought of going in the first place. If we could ask, "Where are you going?" that would change that equation.

With the accountability standards, with the way we measure success in schools, with the way we drive high school graduation requirements based on higher ed admission requirements—and we had lots of conversations about that as we worked on Colorado's guidelines—we've left the path to the multiple career options of the wonderful skill-trade advanced manufacturing, the CMC machinists, professional welding, health-career pathways, medical schematics, and nursing. For many of those, it takes a student actively seeking out an alternative or a different pathway before they can get there. So ultimately, how do we make sure that our mind-set shifts so we can start matching up this disconnect between education and the economy?

That is not to say that education's sole purpose is meeting the needs of the economy. But if our sole purpose is meeting the needs of students,

at some day in the future they are going to be contributing to that economy. How do we ensure that they are prepared and ready to do that and that they are prepared and ready to continue learning? Many adults are in the marketplace right now, but they need to come back for upskilling, changing their roles and professions. In fact, the federal government has just launched a whole cybersecurity retraining possibility, where anyone from any agency that has an interest can immediately jump in and select it to get cyberskills training. The key is, we need to make sure that pathways that empower individuals to thrive are not just there but are equally valued.

We know that a CTE student is more likely to persist in completing high school, and this is particularly true for low-income students. Why is that not core to our foundation of success? We know that students who engage in CTE tend to fare well in the labor market once they have moved on from the high school environment. We know that the median earnings of an individual with an associate's degree in a STEM field exceeds that of individuals with a bachelor's degree program in liberal arts. But unfortunately, too many students are not taking advantage of that, because it doesn't appear to them to be equally valued. About 8 million of America's high school age students participate in a CTE program out of 15 million—so 50 percent. The thing that concerns me more is this whole notion of concentrators. A concentrator takes at least two courses in that sequence, so they decided to come back for more. They have an interest in that area and are deciding to dig deeper into it. Only about 20 percent of our high school population are continuing in that pathway that they discovered as their area of interest.

About 15 years ago, Colorado did a survey of business leaders and said, "What are the skills that employees are lacking?" They laid out a list of 21st century skills, employable skills, all the different needs. Let me take you on a different path to why students are missing those skills when they get to employment. We're at the lowest point in U.S. history of students being engaged meaningfully in the workplace before they graduate high school—last year, one in three. And for students of color and students that are below the poverty line, less.

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So how do we make sure we can connect students earlier so that they have that first experience, that they learn what it means to be an employee? We contend that school is not the most authentic place to learn those skills; the workplace is. Internships are one of those options, and the Perkins law is for it. Some of the largest pieces that Congress focused on in this run of the reauthorization were digging into how we connect students to the workplace with apprenticeships and learning opportunities. It also called for an expansion of concurrent enrollment opportunities to extend the students farther down that learning path more efficiently and quickly to ultimately get them to that industry credential.

Perkins allows for taking away the arbitrary age limit originally set in the law to make it very clear that career exploration should begin earlier. It also continues to emphasize programs of study and career pathways, making sure that students are on an intentional sequence of courses as opposed to just dabbling.

A survey done last spring showed that 50 percent of programs across this country don't have business/industry eyes on the curriculum, the equipment, or the progression that students are making their way through. Congress put in place a local needs assessment that your states will work with local recipients to release every two years, digging into [the needs of] local employers, stakeholders, and special population providers.

Most of you probably have already seen and hopefully approved your transition plan. Next spring, we'll be looking at the full four-year plan, and we know that all states will be working in the summer and fall. We'll be supporting them with short conversation-starter videos. We're not proposing regulations because, in my opinion, they are very compliance driven. Any guidance that we put out will immediately be taken up as "We can or can't do that." We're trying to push creativity. I do not want state plans starting to look like they did 12 years ago because that would be a mark of failure. If you hear me pushing your state to keep thinking wider and broader about how they can expand core students into multiple pathways that lead to an industry credential and the chance for

advancement on additional degrees, know that I gave you forewarning.

Byron Ernest: As state boards work through the new definition of concentrators in the Perkins Act, how should they approach school accountability?

Of the things that keep me up at night, the issue of concentrators is one of them. When the Perkins Act was reauthorized, [the definition] came up pretty quickly. Where we landed: As soon as the student has reached two courses, they're going to be in the concentrator definition. We can argue whether that's the right measure or not; it is what it is. As far as the accountability system goes, I don't know that the measure itself of a concentrator is the most important piece. It is a measure of what the supply is going to be.

In Colorado many years ago, we put in place what we called the Labor Day report, which pulled from those concentrator definitions—what was in the K-12 pipeline, starting as early as seventh or eighth grade—to say, "We have this much student interest in these areas, but we know that our future employment is going to be big in these areas." So we could have a conversation about accountability in relation to what was going on in the labor market, saying, if we're making a promise to a child, "We're going to educate you for X," then at the end of the day, there's going to be great life and a great capacity for returns in X. When it comes to the measures specifically for CTE, two courses do start to give you an idea of how different that concentration is and its effect on the student versus one who does not have those two courses.

Rachel Wise: What would you encourage policymakers to consider as they start to think about CTE beginning at fifth grade?

My oldest son Brady, who finished at Colorado State University about two years ago, has been working, paying his own housing, his own car insurance, car bill. The summer before his eighth-grade year, I asked him, "Brady, has anybody had a conversation with you about

what you want to do next? What do you want to do after high school?” I knew there was this tool called College in Colorado that was a free, interest-inventory resource that allowed every individual in the state to have access to its folder and guide and figure out what the next steps were for them. Engineering turned out to be at the top of the three that it laid out for him. We had a conversation in the fall: “All right, Brady. You’ve got to pick high school classes. Now that you know what you’re interested in, which ones would make the most sense?” His biggest choice was between two CTE programs: business or the agricultural program. The agriculture program had shop, and he knew he’d be doing fabricating and welding for the engineering path—the design that he’d be doing there would be the right way to go. But it also allowed him to know that for concurrent enrollment, he needed regular calculus.

These are the conversations to start in middle school. Otherwise, high school makes no sense, and that’s been the issue for too many students: contextualizing high school by which career path you are on and having real conversations with students like, “If you don’t like math, a STEM career probably is not in your future unless you can get over your hatred for math.” Policywise, you have got to start conversations earlier.

Ernest: How do we as state board members help our states and schools to be innovative in their Perkins state plans?

I would go back to what you as a board are challenged to do: It’s to set a vision and key strategies and really allow your own staffs and all the rest of the players—whether it be the WIOA, ESSA, CTE, or the adult education components—to figure out the mechanics behind it. But be thinking. You know the pulse of your states. Is it a “we need to get students out into the workplace” agenda? Set the large goal—right now, there’s 30 percent; let’s get 50 percent of the high school population having a meaningful workplace learning experience, potentially an apprenticeship. If you’re looking for a way to solve some of the structural capacity issues, we’ve got to look at apprenticeship as using experts in field as instructors. Then we have

to back up and figure out how to get them an interim license.

We need to shift the mind-set. You’re going to have to go back and look at your community college percentages. Right now, 60 to 70 percent of students at most community colleges are in nontransfer groups with little or no utility in the employment marketplace. That’s great for moving onto a four-year institution, but if you look at the data critically, you’re going to find that most students are not transferring on. Our practices are not leading students into a certificate or degree program that could lead on to a bachelor’s as well. If that’s a strategy for your state—getting more students into those certificate pathways—lay that out as an agenda item.

Wise: Do you see an intersection of IDEA and vocational rehabilitation? What suggestions and strategies do you have for states?

Multiple pathways in CTE today are for all students. And if we allow individualized education programs (IEPs) to drive our students with disabilities to certain career pathways instead of providing the right accommodations to get them into a STEM or a cybersecurity pathway, we’re going to miss the boat. Perkins V requires every LEA to do a local disaggregation of their data by special populations, by race, ethnicity, and origin and by gender, and it’s going to become very apparent because it’s by program pathway that the data will show up. My fear is—when we get down to the STEM, the health, the advanced manufacturing—we’re going to start to see some places where there are gaps, and we need to make sure that those local individuals, local special populations, and staff who are on those stakeholder committees identify those gaps and then say, “How can we make sure that we are providing access to all students to each of these local pathways?”

Ernest: How can we make sure we have the right teachers with the right pedagogy in the classroom with our students?

One of the things, first and foremost, [that

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is] important for all of you: Most of you have authority over teacher licensure institutions in your states. Historically, we have had agriculture and consumer science and business, and all of the CTE areas had to get licensure paths at land-grant institutions. Those have been decimated over the past 20 years. Look at that licensure path and say, “We really need more.” How do we work with our institutions of higher education to create dedicated, easy licensure pathways so that the student who is on an engineering path but decides, “You know what, I don’t want to be an engineer,” has an easy way to step into a profession?

The second thing: Over 50 percent of our instructional force in CTE across the country has come out of the workplace. My second son is the other example—a computer science major from Colorado State working for Trimble, a geospatial company right outside Boulder. As much as he loves working with students and would absolutely volunteer for those pathways, he’s not going to make a shift, especially if he has to take a 15- to 20-credit program that costs \$500–\$750 a credit. We’ve got to make sure that through authorizations we can get people in the classroom and then provide what they need, which is what Colorado did. They said, “OK, not each person coming from business is going to need the same thing.” Nurses have been trained as clinical preceptors, and so they have a training and pedagogy. How do we make sure we honor that and not require the same thing of a nurse as we do of a machinist? ■

More information on opportunities and flexibilities with Perkins V can be found in the Perkins V section of the Perkins Collaborative Resource Network at <https://cte.ed.gov>.

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¹Tamar Jacoby, “Why Germany Is So Much Better at Training Its Workers,” *The Atlantic* (October 16, 2014).

²U.S. Department of Labor, “Apprenticeship: Data and Statistics,” updated March 6, 2019, https://doleta.gov/oa/data_statistics.cfm.

³National Conference of State Legislatures, “Apprenticeships in K-12 and Higher Education,” website (November 26, 2018), <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/apprenticeships-in-k-12-and-higher-education.aspx>.

⁴Kate Blosveren Kremer and Andrea Zimmermann, “Opportunities for Connecting Secondary Career and Technical Education (CTE) Students and Apprenticeship Programs” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education,

June 2017).

⁵Sometimes programs are called apprenticeships without such approval and thus are not “official” registered apprenticeship programs. This article addresses approved RA programs and those that are industry recognized apprenticeships.

⁶Geoff King and Kristin Baddour, “State’s Role in Advancing High-Quality Youth Apprenticeship,” *Economic Opportunity* blog (Washington, DC: National Governors Association, N.d.), <https://medium.com/nga-economic-opportunity/states-role-in-advancing-high-quality-youth-apprenticeship-87efb0fafccb>.

⁷“Training and Employment Guidance Letter,” WIOA No. 13-16 (Washington, DC: Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, January 12, 2017), https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL_13-16_acc.pdf.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Rule 160-4-3-.13, Ga. Comp. R. & Regs., “Youth Apprenticeship Programs.”

¹⁰Katherine Eastman, “Manufacturing Program Opens Doors for Synergy Students,” *Journal Inquirer* (June 11, 2018).