

## By any name, Career and Technical Education is a wonderful resource for America's students -- July 2006

By: Congressman Mike Castle

On July 29, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006. I was an author of this legislation since it fell under the jurisdiction of my Subcommittee on Education Reform and served on the conference committee to negotiate an effective and improved reauthorization. The Perkins Act aims to prepare youth and adults for the future by building their academic and technical skills in preparation for postsecondary education and/or employment. The bill enhances Perkins by ensuring both secondary and postsecondary students participating in the program are acquiring rigorous academic and technical skills and will have the opportunity to transition into further education and/or successful employment.

The Perkins Act governs widely supported programs at both the secondary and post secondary level. For example, nearly all high school students complete at least one vocational education course, and approximately 26 percent of students are considered vocational concentrators -- those students that focus on a single occupational area.

Here in Delaware, we have 5 career and technical high schools that enroll a total of 5,500 of the 29,500 total high school students. At the postsecondary level, the Perkins Act supports a broad array of options primarily at the community college level, including Delaware Technical & Community College. In the 1999-2000 school year, over 50 percent of all students enrolled at the less-than-four-year postsecondary level reported that they were majoring in vocational areas.

The Perkins Act makes significant reforms to academic achievement and accountability to ensure students have the skills necessary to enter the workforce or continue to an institution of higher learning. As I mentioned, there are 5 career and technical high schools in Delaware. While all of these schools have met adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act, there is more to be done in academic achievement in these schools across the country. Through this legislation, we will improve vocational and technical education by increasing the focus on academics, in conjunction with the skill attainment that is incumbent of the program.

One of the unique attributes of vocational and technical education programs is their ability to show students a path that could end in a certificate, credential, employment, military, or postsecondary education. The Tech-Prep program, within the Perkins Act, is intended to focus on a well-defined link between high school and at least two years of postsecondary education. The final legislation we passed, revises requirements of the program in order to ensure articulation agreements between secondary and postsecondary institutions are in fact being implemented.

Of all the changes we made to the original bill, one of the biggest and best changes I think we made was for Congress to finally make the switch from "vocational and technical education" to "career and technical education." In my opinion, this was an important statement for the Congress to make.

While the President has proposed another avenue for high school reform and the Perkins Act, I believe strongly that the

reforms we consider today go a long way in driving program improvement, and ultimate success for students across the country. The dialogue surrounding high school reform is important and is happening in earnest. I trust that the conference agreement will compliment these efforts. As a result of the changes in the bill, I believe we will help states, community colleges and other postsecondary education institutions, and local educational agencies all around the country, as well as here in Delaware, better meet the needs of the students participating in career and technical education.