



# ADAM SMITH

WASHINGTON'S 9TH DISTRICT

## Career and Technical Education Access Act

**Rep. Adam Smith (WA-09)**

**Background:** Across the country, employers in critical industries are struggling to find qualified workers, while millions of students leave high school without clear, affordable pathways into good-paying careers. Career and Technical Education (CTE) offers a proven solution—providing students with rigorous, hands-on training aligned to labor market needs. But too often, states and school districts lack the resources to build and sustain high-quality CTE programs. Equipment, facilities, and technology needed to teach modern trades and professions are expensive, and existing federal funding streams like the Perkins Act cannot be used for capital infrastructure.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, traditional financial aid programs such as Pell Grants are limited to postsecondary students, leaving high schoolers without access to support for industry-recognized training. This creates unnecessary barriers for students who could benefit from career pathways earlier in their education. The Career and Technical Education Access Act addresses these gaps by providing new, flexible federal funding for states to expand and modernize CTE programs, while also creating a secondary school-level CTE Pell Grant to help students earn credentials that translate directly into college credit and high-demand careers.<sup>2</sup>

**The Career and Technical Education Access Act** provides federal funding to enable states to scale and develop state career and technical education programs nationwide and ensure equitable access for underserved students. The bill:

- Creates a voluntary federal grant program to allow states to establish, expand, or improve career and technical education programs tailored to their local workforce needs.
- Provides flexibility for states to implement CTE programs through standalone technical high schools, regional career centers, or hybrid models.
- Mandates states to conduct a regional workforce analysis every three years to assess labor market needs and ensure alignment of CTE programs with in-demand jobs.
- Requires that students completing CTE programs receive automatic college credit transfer options, ensuring their coursework is recognized at participating postsecondary institutions.
- Permit states to use grant funds to develop and implement online and hybrid CTE programs, expanding access to students in remote or underserved areas.
- Creates a CTE Pell Grant for secondary students to access industry-recognized training.

By bridging the gap between high school and the workforce, the Career and Technical Education Access Act empowers students to pursue rewarding careers without delay. This investment strengthens America's talent pipeline, ensures employers can find the skilled workers they need, and creates new opportunities for every student to succeed.

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<sup>1</sup> Ohio Department of Education. (2023). Perkins V regulations and allowable use of funds guidance, FY24. Retrieved from <https://education.ohio.gov>

<sup>2</sup> Federal Student Aid. (2024). *Volume 7 – Pell Grants, Chapter 1: Student eligibility for Pell Grants*. Federal Student Aid Handbook 2024–25. Retrieved from <https://fsapartners.ed.gov>