

Higher education victory in Perkins CTE reauthorization

Congress is not known for moving at lightning speed, until they do. Case in point is the recent reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) Act.

Each year, more than \$1.2 billion in federal grants flow to states for CTE programs through the Perkins Act. Perkins CTE programs help equip youth and adults with the academic, technical, and employability skills and knowledge needed to secure employment in today's high-growth industries. Some libraries work directly with their state labor and employment offices to implement federally funded CTE programs. In so doing, libraries help close the "skills gap" and expand economic opportunity to more communities across the nation.

Although the authorization for Perkins CTE expired in 2008, Congress has continued to provide funding. There was no reason to believe that would change anytime soon. Then, in ALA meetings with congressional staff, it began to appear that legislators recognized the window for any education policy legislation was closing with the approaching election.

The prospect of mid-term elections seemed to galvanize Congress to develop a "thin" educational agenda and reach agreement on a compromise bill, which was sent to the president for his signature in a matter of weeks.

As late as June, action on Perkins CTE reauthorization appeared dead for the current congressional session. Now it is likely to be the only significant education policy legislation to pass in the 115th Congress.

Last year ALA had urged congressional passage of a similar Perkins CTE reauthorization bill, which included provisions that recognize school and public library contributions to implementing CTE programs. Although Perkins CTE passed easily in the House in 2017, passage in the Senate stalled over several issues (unrelated to libraries).

ALA's efforts in 2017 were successful nonetheless, as the final bill signed by the president this summer contained several references urging state and local disbursement of Perkins funds to support library programs and maker spaces, as well as institutions of higher education and librarian training. The 2018 reauthorization allows states to set their own CTE program goals, providing an opportunity for libraries to weigh in and advocate for the inclusion of libraries in implementing these state goals.

Congress also has a higher education agenda, as the House and Senate education committees continue to consider a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), although chances of final passage appear to fade daily. ALA has expressed particular concern that the House HEA reauthorization would sunset the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, which allows some students in public service careers—often lower paying—to receive relief on college debt. ALA will continue to work with members of Congress to defend PSLF in the coming months. *TM*

Kevin Maher is deputy director of government relations at ALA's Washington Office, email: kmaher@alawash.org