Career and Technical Student Organizations

Overview and Operational Guidebook

Connecticut State Department of Education — Academic Office

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Introduction

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) ensures that students are prepared for 21st century careers, both for their individual benefit and so that business and industry have the skilled workers they need to stay economically competitive. As defined by Perkins V, a Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) is "an organization for individuals enrolled in a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program that engages in CTE activities as an integral part of the instructional program."[1] CTSOs have direct alignment with two of the four strategic priorities set forth in Connecticut's Five-Year Comprehensive Plan for Education 2023-28: *Every Student Prepared for Learning, Life, and Work Beyond School*—specifically strategic priority: "Elevate Connecticut's curriculum frameworks to provide support for the development of rigorous, engaging instruction and the reliable assessment of universally required skills for life beyond school and a lifelong love of learning" and strategic priority: "Create opportunities for all students to explore multiple career pathways through coordinated and rigorous programs that are developed in partnership with institutions of higher education and local/regional employers, and that align with economic opportunity and advance students in careers of their choice."[2]

CTSOs are one of the integral components and a necessary function that constitutes a high quality CTE program that meets the size, scope, and quality requirements as defined by federal and state guidance.[3] CTSOs provide a co-curricular CTE experience for students across all National Career Clusters and pathways. CTSOs play a vital role in preparing students for successful careers through leadership development, hands-on learning experiences, and meaningful connections with business and industry professionals. Students who participate in CTSOs gain valuable academic, leadership, technical, and career readiness skills through CTSO sponsored training and events.

Connecticut CTSOs shall:

- enhance student learning through contextual instruction, leadership development, and real-world application;
- function as an integral component of classroom curriculum and instruction and provide an extracurricular component;
- build employability and career skills through hands-on demonstrations and work experiences;
- provide opportunities for students to hold leadership positions at local, state, and national levels;
- provide opportunities for students to participate in local leadership and competitive events to demonstrate knowledge and skills at district, state, and national conferences and to be recognized in a skill-based event; and
- facilitate networking with business and industry partners and career professionals which may lead to opportunities for career development (i.e., internships, apprenticeships, professional seminars, etc.).

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1 Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, Pub. L. No. 115-224, § 3(6), 132 Stat. 1563, 1565 (2018).

2 Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), *Five-Year Comprehensive Plan for Education 2023-28,* November 2023, https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/board/boardmaterials110123/five-year_comprehensive_plan_for_education_2023-28.pdf.

3 Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), *Perkins V Secondary Size, Scope, and Quality Requirements,* 2025, https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/cte/secondary-size.docx?rev=8c5aa8846f09453483e699eeef9a3cfc&hash=83DAD2A3A6BC4FA8E9C5D68EC7DF12B2.

Organizational Structure

Each CTSO functions independently through a multi-tiered structure of local school chapters, state level organizations, and national headquarters, enabling collaborative initiatives that surpass what individual schools or states could accomplish on their own. Through comprehensive programming at every operational level, CTSOs provide co-curricular educational experiences that strengthen classroom learning while advancing four core organizational objectives: academic and professional success, leadership cultivation, career skill development, and civic engagement.

National Affiliate Organizations

National affiliate organizations serve as the governing headquarters for each CTSO, establishing the overarching mission, operating standards, and framework that guide all organizational activities. These national entities develop comprehensive curricula, competitive events, and leadership programs that maintain consistency and quality across all participating states and local chapters. National organizations provide resources, training materials, and professional development opportunities that individual states or schools could not create independently, while also facilitating large-scale initiatives such as national conferences, competitions, and recognition programs that bring together students from across the country.

State Level CTSOs

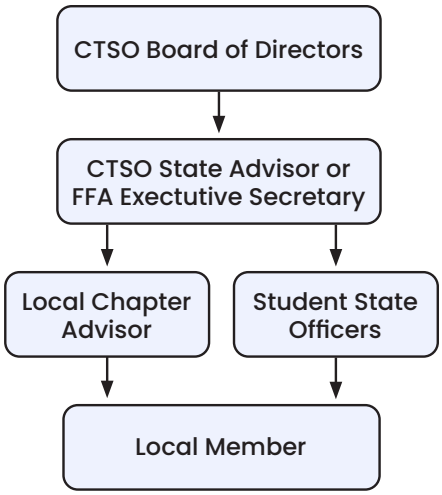
The state level organization should be chartered through the national organization. State level CTSOs function as the intermediary governance structure, adapting national operating standards and programming to meet specific state educational requirements and regional needs where applicable. These entities coordinate statewide activities, manage state-level competitions and conferences, and provide direct support to local chapters through training, resources, and oversight. State organizations work closely with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to ensure CTSO programming aligns with state CTE standards while facilitating collaborative initiatives that extend beyond individual school districts, such as regional competitions, leadership development programs, and industry partnerships that benefit all participating chapters within the state.

Local CTSO Chapters

Local CTSO chapters function as school-based organizations in high schools, with CTE teachers serving as advisors across middle schools, high schools, and some postsecondary institutions. Chartered by the state and national organizations, these chapters serve as the primary hub for student engagement, connecting classroom learning to practical experiences through hands-on activities, competitive events, and leadership development. By implementing national and state programming at the school level, chapters provide students with career exploration, skill development, and civic engagement activities that enhance their academic and professional growth.

Governance Structure

Each CTSO's national association has issued a state charter to the CSDE authorizing the existence of one Connecticut chapter. Each CTSO operates independently from the CSDE as a nonprofit organization under the Internal Revenue Service provisions of section 501(c)(3) according to the constitutions, bylaws, policies and procedures of the respective organizations. Each of Connecticut's CTSOs Board of Directors, along with the State Advisor of each CTSO or the FFA Executive Secretary, manages statewide leadership functions and maintains accountability for meeting each CTSO's established requirements and objectives. The CSDE monitors the operation of each CTSO and provides technical assistance and organizational guidance. The CSDE does not have a role in the functioning and regular operation of any CTSO. The continued success of these organizations relies on delivering meaningful and authentic educational value to their student members.



Student leadership drives CTSO operations, with students managing organizational functions under the mentorship of CTE instructors and business and industry professionals. Strong professional support maintains accountability and ensures each organization achieves its educational and leadership objectives. Oversight bodies responsible for organizational leadership and accountability for CTSOs is described below.

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors (Board) provides leadership and guidance to CTSOs through combined advisory and management functions. Elected according to organizational bylaws, the Board establishes policies, authorizes budgets, and determines operational procedures for the state organization. The Board plays a crucial role in creating and executing annual strategic plans and budgets that support state- or regional-level leadership training and competitive event programming. The Board ensures adequate staffing and logistical resources to achieve the CTSO's strategic objectives within operational budgetary constraints. Each CTSO's bylaws should explicitly outline the Board's responsibilities and authority.

Bylaws, Goals, and Objectives

CTSOs operate under national and state bylaws, with Boards conducting annual reviews (or as specified in their bylaws) and updating them to reflect organizational mission, goals, and evolving needs when applicable. Each fiscal year should begin with Boards developing annual strategic plans that include short- and long-term objectives aligned with their mission statements. Board planning receives guidance from national organizations, advisors, business and industry representatives, and State Advisors or FFA Executive Secretaries.

State Advisor or FFA Executive Secretary

Each CTSO Board, in accordance with their established bylaws, nominates or elects a CTSO State Advisor or FFA Executive Secretary. The State Advisors and FFA Executive Secretary should have formal teaching or industrial instructional experience in the Career Cluster(s) supported by the CTSO; have prior experience with the CTSO; expertise in organizing large-scale events; strong communication and project management skills; and proficiency with online tools for event registration, virtual conferencing, and communication. They are contracted on an annual basis by the CSDE and the CSDE's guidance suggests that daily operational management of the CTSO be conducted by the State Advisor or FFA Executive Secretary. The CSDE will not contract with individuals employed by or directly affiliated with the national organization or the CSDE. The CTSO Board-created mission and strategic plan dictate the role, responsibilities and general operational practices of the appointed leader. The CSDE defines its expectations of the CTSO State Advisors and the FFA Executive Secretary in the annual contract.

Student State Officers

Student leadership forms the operational foundation of CTSOs. CTSOs function through student management with guidance from advisors and business and industry partners. State chapter effectiveness relies on a capable and dynamic State Officer team, making their selection process and organizational structure critical elements that must be detailed in organizational bylaws. State Officers should be appointed through peer election, with candidacy open to students who satisfy bylaw requirements. State Officers collaborate with the State Advisor or FFA Executive Secretary to develop leadership training and plan events. The State Officer team delivers professional learning and leadership training to the local CTSO members with a peer-to-peer focus. Each CTSO's student governance leadership position names and functions may vary from organization to organization to meet the unique needs and demands of each CTSO. State Officer roles and responsibilities are defined in the organization's bylaws.

Committees

State-level CTSOs may utilize committees when focus groups are required to guide specific planning initiatives such as competitive events, leadership training, or regional activities. These committees consist of support staff who facilitate advisor and member participation in planning and implementing organizational activities. Committee chairs, or other forms of committee leadership, should be filled with current committee participants to maintain consistent operations throughout the years of operation. The Board oversees committee operations through designated liaisons, while committee chairs manage agendas, meetings, documentation, communications, and member correspondence. Chairs submit periodic progress reports to the Board upon request from the State Advisor or FFA Executive Secretary. The Board Chair and State Advisor or FFA Executive Secretary serve as ex-officio committee members.

Local Chapter Advisors

Each CTSO local chapter advisor must hold a current and valid Connecticut Educator Certification in one of the recognized CTE endorsement areas related to the CTSO's associated content area (see Appendices A and B). CTE instructors possess the competencies necessary to serve as local CTSO advisors within their specialized areas. Local Chapter Advisors embed CTSO activities into CTE curricula while advancing organizational mission and objectives at the school and community levels. Through their guidance, CTSOs become effective educational instruments that provide structured, curriculum-aligned activities helping students cultivate professional and personal competencies alongside leadership experiences that prepare them for productive citizenship. Local Chapter Advisors significantly impact chapter growth and development while securing administrative and community support. Advisors should collaborate with program area colleagues to build support, distribute state and national resources to students, and engage students in planning processes to expand membership. Local Chapter Advisors must follow CTSO bylaws, maintain state and national affiliations, and implement state CTSO mission and objectives. Advisors are able to register student memberships with the state and national CTSO affiliate organizations. They keep records of local chapter enrollment and oversee any chapter student officers. The Local Chapter Advisor is the liaison between the CTSO, school, and district leadership. They attend state leadership and competitive events with local CTSO members. If applicable, Local Chapter Advisors can also attend national events with their students.

Local Members

Each local CTSO chapter, under the leadership of the Local Chapter Advisor, must have at least ten (10) paid national or state student members. Depending on the bylaws of the CTSO, the age of student membership can range from middle school to postsecondary with the majority of membership occurring at the grades 9-12 level. Each student pays annual student membership dues in accordance with each CTSO's dues structure defined in their bylaws.

Students participating in CTSOs learn contextualized academic instruction and have the opportunity to work in settings where the career skills learned in the classroom can be utilized. Participation in a local chapter includes activities designed to expand students' leadership abilities, contextualize their academic instruction, encourage them to pursue their education, and equip them with job-related skills in their career field of interest. Students are also able to develop leadership, teamwork, creativity and technical skills.

Students participate in local, state, national and international career-based competitions, aligned with state and national academic standards, designed to measure their academic understanding and skills development. Scholarships and awards also encourage students to continue their career-path education and assume personal responsibility for their own career readiness. Student members can also hold leadership roles within their own local chapters, at the state, and the national or international level.

Students who participate in CTSOs demonstrate higher levels of academic engagement and motivation, civic engagement, career self-efficacy, and employability skills compared to their peers who do not participate in CTSOs.

Program Manager

The CSDE designates a CTSO Program Manager/Education Consultant as the primary liaison and direct connection between each CTSO's State Advisor or the FFA Executive Secretary and the CSDE. They prepare and administer the CTSO State Advisors' and FFA's Executive Secretary's annual contracts and biannual stipend payments with CSDE. They provide technical assistance and consultation to both the state and local chapter advisors. They attend major CTSO events and evaluate the effectiveness of each CTSO's programming. The CTSO Program Manager collects CTSO data and reports trends to CSDE's Academic Office and the State Board of Education. They help promote statewide participation in all CTSOs. The CTSO Program Manager also helps local recipients of the Perkins Grant navigate how to support CTSOs as part of each Local Education Agency's (LEA's) Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA) and annual grant budget. If applicable, the CTSO Program Manager will create and facilitate the process for organizations to apply to be recognized as a CTSO.

Perkins Funding Eligibility

Several size, scope, and quality criteria dictate if an LEA is eligible to receive Perkins funding. The CTSO criteria or requirement states, "a secondary school must have a functioning chapter of at least one (1) of the nine (9) Connecticut recognized CTSO's to be eligible to receive Perkins funding."[4] It is required that a school have national organization documentation that national and state dues were paid during the previous school year. A CTSO is not considered valid unless a minimum of ten (10) student members are paid members of the associated national organization and the chapter advisor holds a Connecticut CTE Certificate in one of the CTSO's related content areas.[5]

Perkins Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment and Programs of Studies

All LEA Perkins Grant recipients are required to conduct a CLNA and a biannual update. The CLNA steers CTE program improvement through meaningful goal setting and continuously evaluates the effectiveness of CTE programming with an expanded group of stakeholders. All allocated and budgeted funds must have a direct connection to the LEA's CLNA goals, CTE mission, and strategic plans. Supporting CTSOs is a local permissible use of federal funds, it is not a required use of the funds.

As part of the CLNA process, each LEA grant recipient shall organize CTE programming into programs of study with pathways organized by Career Clusters. The CSDE uses the *Today's Skills, Tomorrow's Careers* publication to help LEA's define the structure of their CTE Program of Studies (POS). In order for an LEA to support a course with Perkins funding, the course must be part of a POS which "includes a minimum of a two-course sequence in a single CTE content area."[6] The minimum two-course sequence must be aligned to one of the defined pathways included in each Career Cluster. For example, if an LEA has defined preparing students for careers in the culinary industry as a priority or goal in the CLNA, and the LEA decides to fund through Perkins a culinary program, the LEA must have a minimum of two courses that align with the "Restaurant, Food, Beverage, and Services Pathway" in the Hospitality and Tourism Career Cluster.

If a POS includes two courses in a single CTE content area, then developing a CTSO as part of the co-curricular pathway is a meaningful addition to the CTE programming. A CTSO is not a singular extracurricular opportunity or a club for students when funded by Perkins; rather, it is a purposeful addition to a CTE pathway that supports the classroom and laboratory instruction within a defined career pathway. If the CLNA determines a CTSO should be added to an established pathway, then the LEA shall collaborate with the CTSO State Advisor or FFA Executive Secretary to form a local chapter. Each CTSO has a process for how to register their local chapters and student members. The State Advisor or Executive Secretary can best guide this process for new local chapters.

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4 *CSDE, Perkins V Secondary Size, Scope, and Quality Requirements.*

5 *CSDE, Perkins V Secondary Size, Scope, and Quality Requirements.*

6 Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), *Connecticut's Career Clusters, Career Pathways, Sample Occupations, and Programs of Study Book,* November 2019, https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/cte/tstc_cc_final.pdf.

Leveraging Perkins Funding

Perkins can help fund several costs associated with operating a local chapter of a CTSO (see Appendix B), but there are limitations. In order to use Perkins funds, each of the funded CTSOs must be an integral part of the CTE program and be affiliated with the state and national levels of the organization.

The table below includes several common permissible uses of Perkins funds directly related to supporting CTSOs. This is not a fully comprehensive list.

Permissible

- textbooks for new courses or newly articulated dual-credit courses
- professional learning for advisors
- substitute teachers for CTSO advisors attending CTSO events and professional learning
- advisor travel costs directly related to advisor professional learning (mileage, airfare, ground transportation, and hotel)
- subscriptions to teacher and student resources to enhance teaching and learning
- site licenses and curriculum models to support student engagement/learning
- student bus transportation to leadership and competitive events as well as CTSO specific field trips
- instructional supplies and equipment
- teacher support for engaging in curricular alignment of courses
- CTSO uniforms and industry specific Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that are stored at the school
- stipends for CTE certified local chapter advisors

Not Permissible

- advisor travel costs to leadership national conferences when supervising or chaperoning students
- additional advisor travel costs when attending CTSO advisor professional learning (e.g. food/meals, beverages, parking, and rental cars)
- individual student CTSO membership fees or dues even if they are part of a curriculum purchase
- uniforms, pins, scarves, or PPE for individual CTSO members
- stipends for non-CTE certified educators
- individual ticketed transportation for CTSO student members (e.g. airfare, bus, train)
- chapter affiliation fees
- student conference registration fees

Supplement Not Supplant

Federal Perkins Grant funding operates under the supplement-not-supplant requirement, mandating that federal dollars enhance existing district CTE investments rather than offset local funding obligations. This ensures that Perkins funds create additional value and expanded opportunities while preserving district financial responsibility for core CTE programming.[7]

7 Perkins Act, § 211(a).

Appendix A

Perkins Text of the Law

Section 135(b) of Public Act 115-224, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), provides in relevant part:

> Funds made available to eligible recipients under this part shall be used to support career and technical education programs that are of sufficient size, scope, and quality to be effective and that . . . (5) plan and carry out elements that support the implementation of career and technical education programs and programs of study and that result in increasing student achievement of the local levels of performance established under section 113, which may include . . .
>
> (J) expand opportunities for students to participate in competency-based education programs;
>
> (L) supporting the integration of employability skills into CTE programs and programs of study; and
>
> (O) supporting career and technical student organizations, including student preparation for and participation in technical skills competition aligned with career and technical education program standards and curricula.[8]

8 Perkins Act, § 135(b)(5)(J,L,O).

Appendix B

Connecticut Career and Technical Education Endorsements and Certifications

As of July 1, 2025, the CSDE currently recognizes the following organizations as CTSOs: DECA, Educators Rising, FBLA, FCCLA, FFA, HOSA, ProStart, SkillsUSA, and TSA.

DECA

Applicable Clusters:

- Digital Technology
- Financial Services
- Hospitality, Events, & Tourism
- Management and Entrepreneurship
- Marketing & Sales

CT Educator Endorsement Code:

- 010 Business, 7–12
- 089 Marketing Education, 7-12
- 090 Occupational Subject, Vocational Technical Schools

Educators Rising

Applicable Clusters:

- Education

CT Educator Endorsement Code:

- 045 Home Economics, PK–12
- 046 Vocational Home Economics
- 098 Trade and Industrial Occupations

FBLA

Applicable Clusters:

- Digital Technology
- Financial Services
- Management and Entrepreneurship
- Marketing & Sales

CT Educator Endorsement Code:

- 010 Business, 7–12

FCCLA

Applicable Clusters:

- Arts, Entertainment, & Design
- Education
- Hospitality, Events, & Tourism

CT Educator Endorsement Code:

- 045 Home Economics, PK–12
- 046 Vocational Home Economics
- 098 Trade and Industrial Occupations

FFA

Applicable Clusters:

- Agriculture
- Energy & Natural Resources

CT Educator Endorsement Code:

- 040 Agriculture, Pre-K-12
- 041 Vocational Agriculture, 7-12

HOSA

Applicable Clusters:

- Healthcare & Human Services

CT Educator Endorsement Code:

- 103 Health Occupations
- 109 Health Occupations in a Vocational-Technical School

ProStart

Applicable Clusters:

- Hospitality and Tourism

CT Educator Endorsement Code:

- 045 Home Economics, PK–12
- 046 Vocational Home Economics
- 090 Occupational Subject, Vocational Technical Schools
- 098 Trade and Industrial Occupations

SkillsUSA

Applicable Clusters:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Arts, Entertainment, & Design
- Construction
- Digital Technology
- Healthcare & Human Services
- Hospitality, Events, & Tourism
- Supply Chain & Transportation

CT Educator Endorsement Code:

- 047 Technology Education, PK–12
- 045 Home Economics, PK–12
- 046 Vocational Home Economics
- 090 Occupational Subject, Vocational Technical Schools
- 098 Trade and Industrial Occupations
- 103 Health Occupations
- 109 Health Occupations in a Vocational-Technical School

TSA

Applicable Clusters:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Arts, Entertainment, & Design
- Construction
- Digital Technology
- Energy & Natural Resources
- Supply Chain & Transportation

CT Educator Endorsement Code:

- 047 Technology Education, PK–12
- 090 Occupational Subject, Vocational Technical Schools
- 098 Trade and Industrial Occupations
- 110 Unique Subject Area Endorsement (Computer Science)

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