

**CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF
CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN MONTANA**

PREPARING A SKILLED AND COMPETITIVE WORKFORCE
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

A summary of the Montana State Plan for
Implementation of the
Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006

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Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education
and the
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JANUARY 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Montana is creating the Next Generation of Career and Technical Education, a system of high quality educational options that will support a skilled and competitive workforce for the 21st Century.

This paper summarizes the key activities underway in Montana to implement the federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, a source of approximately \$6 million in federal funds for Career and Technical Education (CTE) offered in school districts and two-year colleges in Montana.

Under this new State Plan for CTE, over time many of the Montana's CTE offerings will be merged into new "*Big Sky Pathways*" – model programs of study that include academic and CTE content and that connect to Montana's Two-year postsecondary institutions and also its state university programs. In addition, during implementation of the new Perkins Act, all CTE programs (at the high school and postsecondary levels) will benefit from upgraded curriculum, high quality technology, and ongoing training to help CTE teachers demonstrate excellence in their knowledge of current industry standards and good teaching practices. Tech Prep will be shifted from a regional service area approach to having a single Tech Prep consortium with statewide activities around six broad career fields. Members of the consortium will focus on developing model *Big Sky Pathways* that will be adopted by partners in the consortium, and will also be available for use by other school districts and two-year postsecondary institutions within Montana.

The Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) and the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) are working closely on joint program development and oversight. The agencies are creating a joint leadership structure ("*the State CTE Executive Leadership Team*") to provide ongoing review of state activities and progress in improving CTE programs. This joint leadership structure will be informed by the ongoing involvement of a newly formed *State CTE Advisory Committee*.

The State Plan for implementation of the Perkins Act focused on the following issues:

- *Implementing Career and Technical Education Plans of Study;*
- *Re-organizing Tech Prep to Support Big Sky Pathways;*
- *Strengthening Accountability for Results;*
- *Assessing Career and Technical Skills;*
- *Integrating Academic and CTE Skills and Knowledge;*
- *Transforming Professional Development, Recruitment and Retention of CTE Teachers;*
- *Ensuring Effective Instruction and Strategies for Special Populations; and*
- *Connecting CTE to Employers and Workforce Priorities.*

The implementation of the Perkins Act by Montana's CTE teachers, faculty members and administrators is a key element to building a skilled and competitive workforce in Montana. Montana's state agencies responsible for CTE are committed to providing the leadership, support and professional development to help CTE educators succeed in this endeavor.

INTRODUCTION

Montana is creating close links between secondary and postsecondary education and training through a new program initiative known as “*Big Sky Pathways (BSP)*.” These programs will offer students clear plans of study that integrate rigorous academic courses with relevant curriculum, and will help students explore career fields during high school, chart a plan for completing high school, and make a smooth transition into postsecondary education and training.

At the high school level, CTE programs support challenging academic standards and college readiness as well as an introduction to career fields through *Big Sky Pathways*. These CTE programs produce graduates who are ready for both college-level studies and direct entry into the high-skill, high-wage or high-demand careers.

At the technical college level, CTE programs help young adults who are preparing for first-time careers and adults who are changing careers or upskilling within a career field to quickly gain the skills and experiences that are directly related to workplace success. Effective CTE programs at the two-year postsecondary institutions are characterized by their close relationship to employers and smooth transitions of program participants into the workforce at higher levels of income and employment success.

This paper summarizes and organizes into a more digestible format all the detailed goals and strategies that are found in Montana’s State Plan for the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, which it submits to the U.S. Department of Education to receive and distribute the State’s of federal dollars for CTE. The full state plan can also be found at the Montana OCHE Workforce Development website (<http://mus.edu/wd/default.asp>.)

BACKGROUND: THE PERKINS ACT OF 2006

The newest version of federal funding and requirements for career and technical education is called the “Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006,” Public Law 109-270. Some of the new provisions of this law began taking effect in fall of 2007, and other reforms take effect beginning in summer and fall of 2008. In particular, the Perkins Act requires states to:

- *Increase opportunities for individuals to keep America competitive;*
- *Develop challenging academic and technical standards and related, challenging integrated (academic and CTE) instruction;*
- *Prepare students for high-skill, high-wage, or high-demand occupations in current or emerging professions;*
- *Promote partnerships (education, workforce boards, business and industry, etc);*
- *Provide technical assistance and professional development to teachers/instructors and administrators; and*
- *Increase state and local accountability.*

BACKGROUND: CTE FUNDING AND OVERSIGHT IN MONTANA

National funding for the Perkins Act is a little over \$1.1 billion. As a small state, Montana's allocation of the Perkins Act funds in fiscal 2007 was about \$6 million. The State holds five percent for state administration of the program and 10 percent of funds for coordinated "Leadership Activities." Of the remaining 85 percent for local programs, up to 10 percent of this amount is allocated to local recipients through a "Reserve Fund" for special initiatives and activities. The remainder of local funds is distributed to school districts and two-year colleges, with 65 percent of these funds directed to secondary CTE programs, and 35 percent to postsecondary CTE programs.

The Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education (MBRHE) is the designated state board to coordinate the development and submission of the state plan for career and technical education as required by the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (Perkins IV). The State agencies responsible for career and technical education in Montana are the Workforce Development Unit of the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) and the Division of Career, Technical and Adult Education of the Office of Public Instruction (OPI). Given their close coordination of activities, the State Plan refers to the two agencies as the "Partner Agencies."

Montana established a **State CTE Executive Leadership Team** representing administrative leadership for secondary and postsecondary to provide oversight of Title I and Title II funds. Also, a *State CTE Advisory Committee* will be appointed in 2008 to provide consultation to the *State CTE Executive Leadership Team* and its staff. Its membership will include business and industry representatives of the six Career Fields and Clusters Model adopted by Montana.

BACKGROUND: CAREER CLUSTERS AND CAREER PATHWAYS

Montana has adopted the Career Clusters/Career Pathways model as a new organizational tool that can reflect all jobs in the U.S. economy, organized into 16 Career Clusters. This model is far more inclusive and flexible comprehensive than the traditional "vocational" education offerings that were predominant during the second half of the 20th century.

The Career Clusters/Career Pathways model was developed by the U.S. Department of Education and validated by a collaborative approach among state departments of education in 2002. Development teams identified knowledge and skill statements for each of the 16 Career Clusters, as well as 81 Career Pathways that lead through education and training into employment sectors. Clusters are designed to encompass three levels of knowledge and skills: the foundation, pathway and specialty level. At the foundation level, knowledge and skills cut across all pathways encompassed in the cluster. Similarly, at the pathway level, the knowledge and skill statements cover all of the specific occupations contained within the pathway. What the Perkins Act described as "CTE Programs of Study" is very close to what are called Career Pathways in the Clusters model.

The Career Clusters/Pathways model offers a career exploration framework that is workable for middle school and high school students as well as for adult career-changers. It does not require a young student to make a career choice, but gives the opportunity for exploration and thinking about the link between career options and postsecondary education and training.

Building upon and adapting the work of the States' Career Clusters initiative, the Partner Agencies will both adopt the Montana Career Clusters framework (using 6 Career Fields, 16 Clusters, and 81 Pathways). The Partner Agencies are collaboratively developing career and technical programs of study aligned with Montana-specific program concentration areas.

The programs of study have been named *Big Sky Pathways*, and incorporate secondary education and postsecondary education elements including coherent and rigorous content aligned and integrated with challenging academic performance standards and relevant career and technical content in a coordinated, non-duplicative progression of courses that align secondary education with postsecondary education to adequately prepare students to succeed in high-demand, high-skill, or high-wage occupations and in related advanced education.

IMPLEMENTING THE STATE CTE PLAN FOR 2008-2012

In April 2007, Montana submitted a one-year Transition Plan for the first year of the Perkins Act. The Transition Plan covered Program Year 2007-08 or July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2008. In 2008, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education will submit its Multi-year Montana State Plan for Career and Technical Education covering the period of Program Years 2008-09 through 2012-13.

On behalf of the Board of Regents, OCHE will annually review the state's implementation of the state plan as reflected in the annual performance reports submitted by local recipients, including an assessment of the state's aggregate achievement of the adjusted levels of performance for its core indicators.

Their work is reflected in the State Plan and in the organization of this summary document. The key issues presented are as follows:

- *Implementing Career and Technical Education Plans of Study;*
- *Re-organizing Tech Prep to Support Big Sky Pathways;*
- *Strengthening Accountability for Results;*
- *Assessing Career and Technical Skills;*
- *Integrating Academic and CTE Skills and Knowledge;*
- *Building a Corps of Effective CTE Teachers;*
- *Ensuring Effective Instruction and Strategies for Special Populations; and*
- *Connecting CTE to Employers and Workforce Priorities.*

STRATEGY 1. IMPLEMENTING CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION PLANS OF STUDY

The Perkins Act:

Under Perkins IV, states have the responsibility to create and/or recognize a series of CTE offerings called “CTE Programs of Study.” These Programs of Study will be adopted by local recipients at high schools, regional CTE schools, and community and technical colleges. Each Program of Study is meant to be a cohesive set of academic courses paired with CTE courses, with mechanisms that connect the high school program to postsecondary programs. Ideally, Programs of Study should have closely aligned content that doesn’t duplicate and allows qualified students to earn college credits while still enrolled in high school. The CTE Program of Study is also designed to culminate with a recognized credential or degree at the community or technical college level, and can also be designed to lead to a baccalaureate degree.

The Montana Plan:

Montana is placing increased emphasis on the development and continuous improvement of a seamless system of education that supports smooth student transitions from one educational system to another and from one level of instruction to another. The new requirement for “programs of study” complements this priority that Montana has established.

Montana refers to its CTE “programs of study” as “*Big Sky Pathways (BSPs)*.” While Montana will not design BSPs for all the 81 identified career pathway options, for the *BSPs* that are developed within a Cluster, they will cover the Foundation knowledge and skills appropriate to that Cluster. Each *BSP* will include pathway specific knowledge and skills taught at the secondary level, and will also include occupational specialties taught in postsecondary courses offered by two-year postsecondary institutions and by baccalaureate granting institutions. The occupational specialties within a *BSP* (job-specific skills and knowledge appropriate for specific job preparation) will be primarily taught at the postsecondary level.

The initial set of *BSPs* will be identified and will be made available to Local Education Agencies (school districts) and postsecondary institutions. Beginning with the program year 2007-2008, each LEA and postsecondary institution that is a recipient of Perkins funding will begin planning for implementation of at least one program of study. The school district or college’s *BSPs* will be offered as options to students (and their parents as appropriate) when planning for and completing their future coursework for career and technical content areas. Each *Big Sky Pathway* will indicate one or more postsecondary level credentials, certificates, or degrees which are available. The *BSP* can also be customized so it is most relevant to the local job market. Each *BSP* indicates CTE and Academic Courses (and possible electives) that are offered to the student, as well as the courses that are eligible for advance college credit. Other *BSPs* will include coursework that is articulated so it leads directly into a registered apprenticeship program.

STRATEGY 2. RE-ORGANIZING TECH PREP TO SUPPORT *BIG SKY PATHWAYS*

The Perkins Act:

The Tech Prep program saw several major changes enacted in Perkins 2006 aimed at making the results of Tech Prep more measurable and more closely connecting Tech Prep activities with other CTE activities in the state. First, there is a specific definition of a Tech Prep student to allow for consistent measurement of Tech Prep results. There are also multiple new performance indicators that apply to Tech Prep students, in addition to the general performance indicators that apply to all CTE students. The state's Tech Prep plan must be closely integrated with the state's general CTE plan. And, if a state chooses to do so, it may merge Tech Prep funding into the general state grant program and therefore be relieved from the programmatic requirements of Tech Prep.

The Montana Plan:

Montana has chosen to keep Tech Prep as a separate funding stream, but significantly redirect its implementation. A reformulated Tech Prep system, launched in the fall of 2007, is a key player in Montana's updated CTE delivery system. The statewide Tech Prep consortium, known as the *Big Sky Pathways Consortium*, is taking a leadership role in developing and supporting *Big Sky Pathways* with each of the Career Clusters.

Through a competitive process, one statewide Tech Prep consortium was created. Flathead Valley Community College is the lead institution for the *Big Sky Pathways Consortium* (aka *Peaks to Plains Consortium*), and its partner from the eastern region of the state is Montana State University Billings College of Technology. This single consortium is designed to provide administrative leadership for Tech Prep; function as a clearinghouse for information and resources; designate other postsecondary institutions in the state to develop specific career clusters and related pathways; and provide the model for development of *Big Sky Pathways* (programs of study) for local Perkins projects. The consortium will utilize the following six Career Fields and their respective Tech Prep *Big Sky Pathways* for Montana:

- Agriculture and Natural Resources;
- Engineering and Industrial Technology;
- Health and Related Services;
- Social and Human Services;
- Business, Management and Information Systems;
- Arts and Communications.

Through the work of *Big Sky Pathways Consortium*, model articulation agreements and state-wide articulation agreements will be developed. These agreements will allow for transition from high school to two-year postsecondary institutions, and where appropriate, to four-year institutions.

STRATEGY 3. STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS

The Perkins Act:

Under Perkins 2006, there is an accountability system in which States and Local Recipients (school districts and community colleges) are held accountable for the achievement of students in a series of performance indicators. The performance indicators fall into three categories: skill attainment, retention and completion, and transitions. High school programs must measure academic achievement and high school graduation; technical (career-related) skill attainment; and transitions to college, employment or the military. Postsecondary indicators include technical skill attainment; program retention and completion; and transitions to further postsecondary education, the military and employment. Programs at both levels are also accountable for “non-traditional” participation, meaning the percentage of young men and women that participate in a CTE program for which their gender is significantly underrepresented.

Performance targets are established for each of the indicators at the state level, and then also by each Local Recipient, based on the state performance target. If the state or local recipient does not meet its performance target for any one of the indicators, it must create a plan of action to improve performance on that indicator. In concert with the state or local improvement plan, the federal or state government must provide technical assistance to help improve performance. Under certain circumstances, if a state or local recipient fails to make necessary improvement against the indicators, the federal government and state government is authorized (but not required) to implement various levels of sanctions.

The Montana Plan:

For the Multi-Year State Plan, Montana has chosen to continue using its “blended” option to define CTE Concentrators at the secondary level. Because of the extreme rural nature and small size of many Montana high schools, it would not be practical to only measure students who took three or more credits of CTE courses in a single program area. By using the “blended” option, which includes any student who takes three or more courses in any CTE program area, more students in small rural settings will be included, and the resulting accountability system will have more relevance for local program improvement. The OPI has developed an agency-wide data collection system called Achievement in Montana (AIM) that began use during the 2007-2008 school year. The use of this secure system is enhancing the reliability of data collected by the OPI.

When the Partner Agencies have reached agreement with the U.S. Department of Education about the adjusted level of performance for each of the secondary and postsecondary indicators, each of the Partner Agencies will notify school districts and two-year colleges of what the level has been established, and offer the opportunity for negotiation over one or more of the adjusted levels of performance. As the new performance indicator data is gathered and reported, districts and colleges will be accountable for performance on the indicators. If they fall short of their established performance targets, OCHE and OPI will work closely with them to offer technical assistance and implement improvement plans to improve performance on a program by program basis.

STRATEGY 4. ASSESSING CAREER AND TECHNICAL SKILLS

The Perkins Act:

The law (section 113(b)(A)(ii)) says each state must develop an indicator relating to “student attainment of career and technical skill proficiencies, including student achievement on technical assessments that are aligned with industry-recognized standards, if available and appropriate.” This will require a more consistent approach to measuring technical skill attainment, using assessment instruments that are valid and reliable, and that are based upon industry-recognized standards, where they are available. States are not required to use industry-based credentials for every program, nor are they required to use exactly the same measurement approach for all their programs. But whatever assessments approaches are used should be based on standards (when such standards are available) and must meet criteria for validity and reliability. This means that the assessment approaches must accurately and consistently measure the attainment of technical skills across programs in the state.

The Montana Plan:

The Partner Agencies believe that, when fully developed, an upgraded technical skills assessment system will allow greater comparability and accountability for program improvement. To implement this new requirement for technical skills assessment, OPI is conducting a survey of its CTE programs to determine what assessments are currently in place. OCHE is also reviewing the use of program assessments, including the use of vendor-based assessments and Industry-Based Certifications.

During 2008 and 2009, the Partner Agencies will work closely with teachers and administrators from local programs, will identify what competencies should be assessed in each of the *Big Sky Pathways* and other CTE courses, and determine what assessments mechanisms are most appropriate.

OCHE and OPI will pay particular attention to ensuring that the assessments selected or recommended meet a standard of validity and reliability, are affordable to use on an ongoing basis, provide relevant data on student CTE achievement to the teacher to inform their instructional practice, and can form the basis of a meaningful accountability system that supports the goal of continuous program improvement.

Specifically, the state will examine the viability of state-development tests and scoring rubric for observation of demonstrated student skills. These classroom-based assessments would be aligned to generally accepted and industry-recognized skill standards, and would be administered consistently within each CTE program area based on ongoing professional development and monitoring.

STRATEGY 5. INTEGRATING ACADEMIC AND CTE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

The Perkins Act:

The Perkins Act of 2006 places a high degree of importance on integration of academic and career technical education. One of the key purposes of the Perkins act is to promote the development of services and activities that “integrate rigorous and challenging academic and career and technical instruction.” There is a requirement on local schools, as they create plans for their Perkins funds, to demonstrate how they will “improve the academic and technical skills of students...through the integration of coherent and rigorous content aligned with challenging academic standards and relevant career and technical education programs...”

The Montana Plan:

During implementation of the 2008-2012 plan, OPI will revise the ***Montana Standards and Guidelines for Vocational and Technical Education***. These are the standards by which CTE programs are evaluated and approved at the secondary level. During the process, in which there will be significant opportunity for public input and involvement of educators, program standards will be reviewed, and programs will be aligned with the *Big Sky Pathways* during this revision. Accreditation standards in technology, workplace competencies, and career and vocational/technical will be used as the basis for aligning curriculum.

As part of the Standards and Guidelines review, OPI (in coordination with the *Big Sky Pathways Consortium*) will launch a curriculum crosswalk process. In this process, CTE teachers will be engaged to identify state academic standards that are appropriate to be integrated into each BSP and each CTE course. The academic standards will be identified on a course-by-course basis so teachers know exactly what integration is appropriate. OPI will include Montana CTE teachers and will also draw upon other national resources and models, to provide sample instructional resources to assist in academic integration.

Related processes to support academic/CTE integration will also include: Strengthening the focus on Academic/CTE Integration in program approval and program renewal applications; and, Creating a monitoring rubric relating to Academic/CTE Integration that will be incorporated into OPI’s monitoring and technical assistance visits and technical assistance that is provided when a school district has failed to meet its performance targets for academic skills attainment.

Based on the information gathered each year from monitoring and technical assistance visits and from applications for program approval and renewal, OPI will prepare an annual summary for internal review of the progress that Montana CTE secondary programs are making with regard to Academic/CTE Integration.

STRATEGY 6. BUILDING A CORPS OF EFFECTIVE CTE TEACHERS

The Perkins Act:

The Perkins Act calls on states to offer “comprehensive professional development for career and technical teachers, faculty, administrators, and career guidance and academic counselors.” The new law says that State Leadership Funds must be used for professional development programs that are “high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher’s performance in the classroom, and are not 1-day or short-term workshops or conferences.” This limitation **does limit the use of local funds for professional development**, but is a significant change in the use of state leadership funds. Another element of the state plan (Sec. 122 (c)(3)) indicates the state must have a plan for improving “the recruitment and retention of career and technical education teachers, faculty, and career guidance and academic counselors,” as well as for improving “the transition to teaching from business and industry.”

The Montana Plan:

Montana recognizes the significant need for professional development that is “high-quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused,” as stated in section 124 of the Perkins Act, as such, the Partner Agencies are taking action to reform and strengthen the culture of professional development for teachers and administrators.

OPI has developed a new professional growth model known as the Extended Learning Experience. The Extended Learning Experience (ELE) strengthens and deepens teacher knowledge through a week-long, summertime professional development experience. The Partner Agencies are also exploring a new approach to professional development that would be built around identifying the knowledge and skills every CTE teacher and faculty member should possess. As these new models of professional growth are developed, Perkins recipients will be asked to explain how their proposed uses of funds will identify and strengthen the skills and knowledge that teachers and administrators need to be successful.

Montana will also explore developing and implementing a professional growth concept known as the “Community of Practice.” A “Community of Practice” is a group of interested teachers/faculty, administrators and counselors that come together during a fixed length of time to focus activity and learning around a particular challenge or promising practice.

Building and maintaining Montana’s CTE teaching force may be one of the biggest challenges facing the state and its school districts and colleges. The first challenge is to have a clear understanding of the options for action. To create a workable strategy for these issues, the *State CTE Executive Leadership Team* will convene a *CTE Teaching Force Study Group* to examine the issue of teacher supply and retention. The Study Group will examine data to address a variety of issues about the supply of Montana’s teachers, and recommend strategies for replenishing the current teaching workforce as retirements and departures take effect.

STRATEGY 7. ENSURING EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

The Perkins Act:

Perkins IV identifies the following students as “special populations”:

- individuals with disabilities;
- individuals from economically disadvantaged families, including foster children;
- individuals preparing for non-traditional fields, (*for their gender*)
- single parents, including single pregnant women;
- displaced homemaker, and
- individuals with limited English proficiency.

In its plan, each state must describe the program strategies for special populations, including a description of how it will ensure that students receive access to CTE activities, will not be discriminated against, and will be provided with programs designed that are designed to help meet or exceed the State and local performance targets on the performance indicators.

The Montana Plan:

For some time, the emphasis in the Perkins Act has been on non-discrimination and equal access to services for special populations and extensive procedures to ensure these protections are already in place. Now, in concert with similar accountability requirements in ESEA that provide greater scrutiny to academic performance of students in certain sub-groups, there is a renewed urgency to discover educational strategies to improve student performance and close achievement gaps for CTE students in special populations.

Montana will provide leadership to assist school districts and two-year postsecondary institutions to gather and share information about strategies for special populations that show promising outcomes and can be implemented with reasonable costs. Montana refers to this activity as its *Promising Practices Initiative*.

As part of the Initiative, the Partner Agencies will analyze program data on the performance of special populations against the performance indicators used under Perkins 1998 as well as other relevant data already collected by school districts or two-year postsecondary institutions in Montana. The Partner Agencies will also survey teachers and faculty, administrators, and coordinators focusing on the needs of special populations to determine what are perceived to be the biggest knowledge gaps about promising practices relating to special populations.

Using this information, the **State CTE Executive Leadership Team** (with input from staff and the State CTE Advisory Committee) will create a plan for the strategic use of state funds for identifying and sharing promising practices for services to Special Populations.

STRATEGY 8: CONNECTING CTE TO EMPLOYERS AND WORKFORCE PRIORITIES

The Perkins Act:

A newly stated purpose of the Perkins Act is “*providing individuals with opportunities throughout their lifetimes to develop, in conjunction with other education and training programs, the knowledge and skills needed to keep the United States competitive.*”

In this purpose, Congress drew a careful balance helping individuals grow and advance in their areas of interest and aptitudes, but also making sure that available programs are focused on those that help keep the United States competitive.

Also, throughout the Act, there are multiple references to preparing students for jobs that are “high skill, high-wage, or high-demand” in “current or emerging occupational areas.”

The Montana Plan:

While there is not a federal definition for the terms “high-skill, high-wage or high-demand,” Montana, in coordination with the Montana Department of Labor and Industry has developed a methodology defining the criteria. This definition will be applied to every CTE program that is supported by Perkins funding:

“High Skill Occupation:

- The occupation requires completion of an associate degree, postsecondary career technical education, more than 12 months of on-the-job training, or a combination of work and formal training; **or,**
- At least half of the 10 basic O*NET skills for this occupation are ranked at or above 50% in importance and at least 5 of the other O*NET skills required for this occupation are at or above 50% in importance.”

“High Demand Occupation:

- **The occupation** has a greater than average projected annual job growth rate for Montana (1.6% using 2004-2014 projections); **or**
- The occupation has at least 50 annual average job openings **in Montana.**”

“High Wage Criteria:

- **The occupation** has an average annual wage which is greater than the wage at the 75th percentile (\$39,615 in 2006) for occupations in the state of Montana.”

In the program approval and review process, the Montana will ask each eligible recipient to explain how each program area relates to current or emerging occupational opportunities using the “high-skill, high-wage or high-demand” criteria. If local conditions for employment warrant a determination that a targeted occupation does not meet the state criteria, but is appropriate for the local area, the local recipient may appeal to the **State CTE Executive Leadership Team** to resolve the issue. Montana will also require that eligible recipients indicate how business and industry is giving input into the CTE curriculum. Programs that do not have affiliations with business and industry are required to establish and maintain a business and industry affiliation in order to be eligible for funding.

CONCLUSION

Through the resources made available to Montana's school districts and two-year colleges through the Perkins Act, and the other state and local funding for career and technical education that is leveraged through the federal funds, Montana is moving forward to update career and technical education services and provide more options for students wishing to pursue postsecondary studies.

The State's Big Sky Pathways will help students increase their motivation and focus on career opportunities that can be accessed through postsecondary education and training, as well as registered apprenticeships.

Ultimately, these efforts will help students make smoother transitions into postsecondary education and training and into skilled employment. The Next Generation of Career and Technical Education in Montana will help the state grow the skilled and competitive workforce it needs to economic competitiveness and to ensure healthy community and economic development.

The Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education and the Montana Office of Public Instruction, working together as Partner Agencies under the direction of the State CTE Executive Leadership Team, are committed to providing the leadership, support and professional development to help CTE educators succeed in this endeavor.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This summary, as well as the Transition and Multi-Year State Plan, was prepared with the assistance of the Meeder Consulting Group, LLC, a firm that helps empower education leaders with creative and research-based solutions, aligning policy and practice with high expectations. More information can be found at <http://www.MeederConsulting.com>.