HARBOR FREIGHT
TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

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Dear Ms. Pearson,

On behalf of Harbor Freight Tools for Schools, the following comments are submitted in response to the Institute of Education Science's (IES) request for information on National Evaluation of Career and Technical Education Under Perkins V (NECTEP). Harbor Freight Tools for Schools, a program of The Smidt Foundation, was established by Harbor Freight Tools owner and founder Eric Smidt to advance excellent skilled trades education in U.S. public high schools.

We know that with the rapidly changing work environment, more and more students are looking for options in addition to a four-year college degree. Students are increasingly seeking to explore alternative career pathways that lead to high-demand, family supporting jobs. We also know that the research shows that there is no skilled trades field where current enrollment in high school programs is projected to meet even half of employer demand over the next decade. In the coming years, the skilled trades and the workforce pipelines that support the trades are going to be vital in building the workforce that America needs to maintain our infrastructure to support our economy.

However, it is clear that current federal and state data is insufficient to meet this critical moment. In a first of its kind study commissioned by Harbor Freight Tools for Schools and conducted by Jobs for the Future (JFF), data was sought from all 50 states and the District of Columbia to provide basic information about their skilled trades programs and participants: what programs are offered, who participates, and what outcomes trades students achieve. Only five states were able to provide data in all categories requested. Thirteen states failed to provide *any* data. This demonstrates that there is a significant lack of data surrounding access to, funding for and participation in these kinds of programs, making it difficult to understand how to strengthen these workforce pipelines and how best to target supports to the areas and populations that need it most.

In order to obtain the most accurate data that will allow lawmakers and other stakeholders to make informed decisions about how to best funnel resources and supports through the Perkins V, we make the following recommendations:

Create a Standard Data Category that Encompasses Skilled Trades
Identifying trades students can be challenging, as trades classes are labeled differently across school districts, and the trades can sit within several of the career clusters that are used for Federal reporting. For example, welding is counted as part of manufacturing in some districts and part of agriculture in others. The lack of good estimates of participants makes it difficult to determine whether the programs align with labor market needs—or to answer important policy questions about funding, staffing, and other resource allocation. We recommend creating one standardized data category for reporting all skilled trades classes. This will allow the ability to track the relative amount of funding going toward skilled trades versus other Perkins V programs such as STEM or business. This will also provide a baseline of data for the extent to which skilled trades education is being provided within and across states.

Collect Data on Postsecondary and Career Outcomes Data for Students Who Participated in Skilled Trades Courses
Very few states were able to provide postsecondary and career outcomes data, raising concerns about most states' lack of capacity to understand the value of their skilled trades programming overall or for differentiated groups of students. Several state CTE leaders acknowledged they rely on student surveys to learn about outcomes, but survey completion rates are low, so they don't have a clear picture of what CTE students do after high school. We recommend that the NECTEP include data on post-secondary and career outcomes for students who participated in skilled trades education as this will allow lawmakers and other stakeholders to better understand the benefits of these programs for students.

Include Demographic Data for Skilled Trades Education Teachers
When asked to provide information on teacher characteristics and distribution across trades, no states were able to provide complete demographic data for teachers, and many states were unable to report any information about teachers, because the data reside in human resources or other systems to which they do not have access. We recommend that the NECTEP include data on teacher demographics for all CTE programs. Lawmakers need this information in order to address barriers that may exist for certain demographic groups to become CTE educators.

To better understand the state of skilled trades education across the U.S. we need a more granular description of the availability of trades courses and the structure of programs of study in the trades. This begins with increased collection of and access to data about this specific subset of programs under the larger CTE umbrella. We know that, over the past decade, jobs in skilled trades such as carpentry, plumbing, electrical, and advanced manufacturing have ranked among the top five hardest to fill. However, we cannot begin to work towards solutions to this increasingly critical workforce shortage because we do not have the data necessary to make informed decisions about reducing access barriers to skilled trades education. This is why we hope that the upcoming NECTEP can include these recommendations to address the skilled trades education data desert. We thank you for your consideration of our comments and if you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at dcorwin@hftforschools.org.

Sincerely,

Danny Corwin

Danny Corwin
Executive Director