

The “American Workforce Pathways Act”

Short Title: Workforce Pathways Act

Sponsor: Bernard Taylor (FL-21)

Purpose: To provide dedicated federal funding for trade, career, and technical education (CTE) programs in every public high school, ensuring all students have access to high-quality career training, apprenticeships, and certification pathways before graduation.

Section 1. Findings

Congress finds that:

1. Not every student will attend a four-year college, but every student deserves a pathway to a good-paying career.
 2. The United States faces a critical shortage of skilled workers in the trades — including construction, electrical, plumbing, welding, manufacturing, transportation, healthcare support, and IT fields.
 3. Many high schools lack the resources, instructors, and equipment to provide modern career and technical education programs.
 4. Expanding trade education in high schools strengthens local economies, supports small businesses, and creates opportunities for students to graduate workforce-ready.
 5. Federal investment is essential to ensure equitable access to trade education across rural, suburban, and urban communities.
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Section 2. Establishment of the Workforce Pathways Grant Program

(a) The Secretary of Education shall establish a new **Workforce Pathways Grant Program** to provide formula and competitive grants to states and local education agencies (LEAs) to:

- Develop, expand, and modernize **career and technical education (CTE)** programs in high schools.
- Offer **trade and vocational courses** aligned with in-demand regional industries.
- Provide **apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, and work-based learning opportunities** in partnership with local employers, labor unions, and community colleges.

(b) Each state education agency shall submit a **Workforce Pathways Plan**, outlining:

- The trades and industries prioritized based on local workforce needs
- Program design and integration into high school curricula

- Partnerships with industry, unions, and postsecondary institutions
 - Equity strategies to ensure participation from underserved communities
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Section 3. Funding and Allocation

(a) Authorized funding: **\$10 billion annually for 10 years**, indexed to inflation.

(b) Funds shall be distributed as follows:

- **60% through formula grants** to states based on population and need
- **40% through competitive grants** for innovative, high-impact programs, particularly in underserved or rural areas

(c) Eligible uses of funds include:

- Hiring qualified trade instructors and providing teacher training
 - Purchasing equipment, tools, and technology for trade instruction
 - Creating **career exploration courses** for 9th and 10th graders
 - Covering costs of industry-recognized certifications and exam fees for students
 - Funding transportation to job sites, apprenticeships, or training centers
 - Developing dual-enrollment programs with community colleges or trade schools
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Section 4. Integration with Academic Curriculum

(a) Trade and CTE programs shall be fully integrated into high school schedules and not treated as electives of lesser value.

(b) States must ensure students can **graduate with both a high school diploma and at least one industry-recognized credential, apprenticeship placement, or college credit** in a trade-related field.

(c) Programs shall include **career counseling** and workforce readiness training beginning in 8th grade.

Section 5. Partnerships and Local Control

(a) LEAs are encouraged to form partnerships with:

- **Labor unions and registered apprenticeship programs**
- **Small and medium-sized businesses**

- **Community and technical colleges**
- **Industry associations** and local chambers of commerce

(b) Local school districts shall retain control over curriculum decisions but must meet minimum federal quality standards and align training to in-demand jobs.

Section 6. Accountability and Reporting

(a) States and LEAs receiving funds must submit annual reports including:

- Number of students enrolled and completing trade programs
- Number of certifications earned and apprenticeships secured
- Demographic data to ensure equity
- Post-graduation employment outcomes

(b) The Department of Education shall publish an annual **National Workforce Pathways Report** to measure impact, share best practices, and highlight success stories.

Section 7. Funding Sources

This Act shall be funded through:

- Reallocation of a portion of existing federal workforce development funds
 - Dedicated appropriations under the Department of Education
 - Public-private partnerships and industry contributions encouraged but not required for grant eligibility
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Section 8. Effective Date

This Act shall take effect beginning with the **next full academic year** following enactment. Grant applications shall open within 180 days of passage.