



Career and Technical Education for Women and Girls

The new global economy increasingly demands more high-skilled and better educated workers than ever before. While more women are working than ever before, many do not have the skills necessary to obtain the high-wage jobs needed to adequately support themselves and their families. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) believes that career and technical education (CTE) is increasingly important for women and girls seeking to earn their way in a competitive marketplace. AAUW's 2011-2013 Public Policy Program states, "to achieve economic self-sufficiency for all women, AAUW advocates programs that provide women with education, training, and support for success in the work force, including nontraditional occupations." It further states that AAUW will actively work to strengthen educational programs, including "vocational education, to improve postsecondary education access, career development and earning potential."¹

Gender and Career and Technical Education

The last few years have been particularly unkind to American women. Between June 2009 and May 2011, women lost 218,000 jobs and saw their average unemployment rate increase 0.2 percent.² By contrast, men gained 768,000 jobs and lowered their unemployment rate by 1.1 percent.³ According to the Pew Research Center, "Employment trends during the recovery have favored men over women in all but one of the 16 major sectors of the economy."⁴ Even in sectors traditionally associated with women, such as education and health services, men gained jobs at a faster rate than women. As our economy slowly recovers from the recent recession, many workers will need to access training to upgrade their skills to fit new demands. Presently, women experience barriers to entering certain high-wage, high-skill fields due to biased career counseling and recruiting. And, even if they enter nontraditional career and technical education programs, women disproportionately experience sexual harassment and differential treatment in these largely male classrooms.⁵

Women tend to be overwhelmingly clustered in low-wage, low-skill fields (they constitute 98 percent of students in the cosmetology industry, 87 percent in the child care industry, and 86 percent in the health aide industry).⁶ In high-wage, high-skill fields, they fall well below the 25 percent threshold to qualify as a "nontraditional field" (women account for 10 percent of students in the construction and repair industry, 9 percent in the automotive industry, and 16 percent in engineering).⁷ These trends repeat themselves in specific programs nationwide. For example, in 2005, in New Jersey, only 2 percent of automotive students were women.⁸ That same year, in Maryland, 14,843 women took child care courses, while only 381 were enrolled in construction and repair and automotive classes.⁹ Across the country, women make up 87 percent of students in traditionally female fields and only 15 percent of those in typically male fields.¹⁰

AAUW strongly believes that access to high-wage, high-skill jobs should be a right for women and girls from diverse racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, age, and disability backgrounds, including training for nontraditional jobs. It is in the fields traditionally dominated by men that women workers can begin to close the persistent wage gap between women and men. Women who are

trained in nontraditional jobs are able to earn more than those employed in traditional occupations. For example, a woman working as a computer scientist or systems analyst—a nontraditional field for women—can earn a mean annual wage of \$60,684, while a woman working as an administrative assistant—a traditional field for women—will only earn a mean annual wage of \$32,188.¹¹ Further, women who do not earn a bachelor’s degree—and therefore constitute an important population group for career and technical education programming—earn only 66 percent of male workers’ median income.¹² To shrink the wage gap for skilled workers, participation and achievement in career and technical education should not be bound by sex segregation, gender stereotypes, harassment, or barriers that prevent girls and women—including single mothers, pregnant and parenting teens, displaced homemakers, and welfare recipients—from becoming economically self-sufficient.

Federal Investments in Career and Technical Education

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act funds vocational education programs at secondary and postsecondary institutions across the country. AAUW believes that the investment that the federal government makes in high quality career and technical education is essential to meeting the needs of the nation’s evolving high-tech workplaces. The gender equity provisions in the law send the message that career and technical training is critical to ensuring that women have opportunities throughout their lifetimes to develop the skills needed to be competitive in the global economy.

History of the Perkins Act

Dating from the 1970’s, the Perkins Act contained provisions that were intended to help ensure women and girls had equal access and opportunity to succeed in vocational education. In previous manifestations, Perkins had included programs specifically to help special populations such as displaced homemakers reentering the labor force, single parents, and students seeking nontraditional employment training—the majority of whom are women. During reauthorization in 1998, the political climate brought about many changes to the way Perkins was structured. In search of “devolution,” Congress sought ways to send block grant money to the states so they could carry out the objectives of federal programs.

It was in this decentralization vein that Congress passed the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. WIA’s goals were simple—help workers transition into high-skill, high-wage jobs, and give states block grants to implement programs that meet these needs. Congress believed the “special populations” that had been serviced under Perkins (displaced homemakers, single parents, and students seeking nontraditional employment training) could be better served under the new WIA legislation as part of the services to “dislocated workers.” As a result, the 1998 reauthorization of the Perkins Act eliminated statewide “gender equity set-asides” that funded programs for special populations, with the hopes the populations would still be served under WIA.

The problem with this otherwise reasonable logic is that WIA block-grant implementation decisions were left to the states, allowing them to decide how to implement programs and what populations to serve. Without explicit direction from the federal government to fund

these programs for women and other underrepresented groups, few states chose to allocate funding for these purposes. This resulted in program closings and significantly reduced services for women in transition to the workforce. As a result, these special populations have gone unserved or underserved since 1998. In 2001, the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, which AAUW chairs, published a report entitled *Invisible Again: The Impact of Changes in Federal Funding on Vocational Programs for Women and Girls*. This study was designed to examine the impact the shift from Perkins to WIA funding had on special populations. Overall, the study found that in most states, special populations were dramatically underserved and that women were having a hard time transitioning from either low-wage jobs or welfare to getting the skills and education they needed to find more family-sustaining employment.

Perkins IV: The 2006 Reauthorization

The 2006 Perkins reauthorization took some positive steps to ensure that women in transition have greater access to the vocational education system, though it stops short of reinstating the gender equity set-asides. AAUW is pleased the current law *requires* local programs receiving Perkins funds to support activities that prepare special populations—including single parents and displaced homemakers who are enrolled in career and technical education programs—for high-skill, high-wage, or high-demand occupations more likely to lead to economic self-sufficiency. Prior law required only that local programs *describe* plans and programs for special populations. However, this requirement was largely symbolic because it did not *require* that local funds be used to carry out these plans.

Other highlights of Perkins IV¹³ include:

- The new law makes several changes to the Perkins accountability system. The measure increases accountability for local programs and requires that both states and local programs disaggregate performance data into categories such as: single parents, displaced homemakers, individuals preparing for nontraditional employment, race, ethnicity, gender, English language proficiency, migrant status, disability status, and low-income status. States and local recipients must also identify and quantify any disparities in performance between these categories of students and the performance of all students.
- The new law creates separate core performance indicators for secondary and postsecondary students. The nontraditional training indicator plays an important role in monitoring and promoting gender equity in career and technical education programs.
- Supportive services, such as child care and transportation, support the full participation of women in transition in career and technical education programs. Since 1999, federal regulations have allowed local programs to use Perkins funds to provide supportive services to special population students who are not eligible or able to receive such services through other programs. The conference report for Perkins IV defines supportive services as “transportation, child care, dependent care, tuition, books, and

supplies and other services necessary to enable an individual to participate in career and technical education activities.”¹⁴

- The new law adds an additional optional performance indicator for states: self-sufficiency. The conference report for Perkins IV defines self-sufficiency as: “a standard of economic independence that considers a variety of demographic and geographic factors, as adopted, calculated, or commissioned by a local area or state.”¹⁵ Including the idea of self-sufficiency into Perkins programs helps to increase the focus on economic independence and preparing students for jobs that pay living wages.
- The Perkins IV conference report maintains Tech Prep—which funds math and science classes to prepare high school students for technical colleges—as a separate program. However, states have the option to consolidate all or part of their Tech Prep grants with Perkins State Basic Grants.

Perkins IV also maintained two separate measures regarding nontraditional CTE. AAUW supports holding states fully accountable for making reasonable progress toward eliminating sex segregation in CTE. Increasing enrollment and facilitating persistence—and hopefully completion—in nontraditional training programs are two distinctive goals, with different challenges that require separate, targeted programming efforts to be effective. For example, outreach activities and gender neutral career counseling can help to encourage more women and girls to enroll in nontraditional training programs. However, other critical but specific interventions—such as professional development for teachers, mentoring, parental involvement, and peer support programs—are necessary to bolster female students’ success in CTE programs.

AAUW believes it is important that states be held accountable in both the participation and completion of women and girls in CTE programs. This is the best way to ensure that states and schools have incentives to provide the full range of programming necessary to fight women’s persistent under-representation in CTE programs, especially those fields that are nontraditional for their gender.

Improving Career and Technical Education

Current vocational, career and technical education programs, as well as the public assistance programs that intersect with them, like welfare (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), must invest in women as a vital necessity in the 21st century economy. The time is now to make improvements to existing laws, including reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), reauthorization of TANF, appropriate implementation of the Perkins vocational education programs and accountability standards, and legislation such as the Pathways Advancing Career Training (PACT) Act. The PACT Act, originally introduced in the 108th Congress by Rep. Melissa Hart (R-PA), would help meet the workforce needs of a high-skill economy and fight pervasive occupational segregation still present in workforce training programs.¹⁶ PACT would create education and training programs in fields that are nontraditional for women, and would specifically help displaced homemakers, single parents,

and other individuals prepare for high-wage jobs and economic self-sufficiency.

Any legislation advancing career and technical education must provide programs, policies, and resources for women and girls to have access to education and training for high-skill, high-wage jobs. AAUW continues to support the following priorities:

- State and local education agencies must be held accountable for improving the successful outcomes of women and girls in career and technical education programs, especially in programs that are nontraditional for their gender and lead to high-skill, high-wage employment.
- Funding must be provided to develop and support programs at the secondary and post-secondary levels that promote the exploration, enrollment, and retention in education and training for nontraditional fields that are specifically high-skill and high-wage. Female students must be given a full range of options. Specifically, at the secondary level, career and technical programs must introduce women and girls to a full range of post-secondary options, such as Tech Prep education programs, apprenticeships, associate's and bachelor's degrees, or other post-secondary degree programs.
- Support services must include training-related services such as dependent care, transportation assistance, counseling, tuition assistance, and other services that allow individuals—especially at the post-secondary level—to successfully complete training programs.
- Career guidance and counseling must be provided to all students and delivered in an extensive and fair manner that ensures students are receiving the most valuable information that will lead to high-skill, high-wage careers in fields that may be nontraditional.
- Career guidance and counseling must utilize strategies to expose all students to full and complete information regarding career options that lead to economic self-sufficiency. To achieve this goal, career guidance counselors should also provide programs that help break down gender stereotypes.
- National and state occupational and employment information systems must provide professional development, career information, and materials that support nontraditional career awareness, recruitment, and retention for use by students, parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators.
- Personnel charged with preparing students for their educational and career choices (counselors, teachers, administrators) must receive ongoing training to ensure that female students exploring career and technical education are provided comprehensive and unbiased information about their full range of options. Counselors must be trained

not to track women into “female dominated occupations,” and to develop strategies for working with students pursuing nontraditional employment. Likewise, teachers and administrators must be trained to create classrooms free of harassment and stereotypical behavior.

- National research activities must support research on the outcomes of women and girls in career and technical education. National research activities, including those conducted by the National Assessment of Vocational Education, must include research on: (1) the participation and outcomes of women and girls in career and technical education; (2) barriers faced by female students in career and technical education programs and practices that address those barriers; (3) effective practices in recruiting and retaining female students in nontraditional careers; and (4) progress that states are making in eliminating sex bias and stereotyping in career and technical education.
- Accountability and disaggregated student data collection must be the cornerstone for planning and funding decisions at both the state and local level. States must use systems that report and disaggregate student information based on demographics (i.e. gender, race, age, disability and special population) and participation in career and technical education programs by specific program area (i.e. career cluster or program) to support the work they plan to do.
- The Office of Vocational and Adult Education must work with other offices within the U.S. Department of Education, such as the Office for Civil Rights, to identify and remedy barriers to gender equity in career and technical education programs.

Resources for Advocates

It is AAUW advocates across the country who speak their minds on issues important to them that truly advance AAUW’s mission. Stay informed with updates on workforce reinvestment policies and other issues by subscribing to AAUW’s Action Network. Make your voice heard in Washington and at home by using AAUW’s Two-Minute Activist to urge your members of Congress to support programs that provide women with education, training, and support for success in the work force, including nontraditional occupations. Write a letter to the editor of your local paper to educate and motivate other members of your community. Attend town hall meetings for your members of Congress, or set up a meeting with your elected official’s district office near you to discuss these policies. AAUW members can also subscribe to *Washington Update*, our free, weekly e-bulletin that offers an insider’s view on the latest policy news, resources for advocates, and programming ideas. For details on these and other actions you can take, visit www.aauw.org/takeaction.

For more information, call 202/785-7793 or e-mail VoterEd@aauw.org.

AAUW Public Policy and Government Relations Department
September 2011

¹ American Association of University Women. (June 2011). *2011-13 AAUW Public Policy Program*. Retrieved August 11, 2011, from www.aauw.org/act/issue_advocacy/principles_priorities.cfm.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Pew Research Center. (July 6, 2011). Two Years of Economic Recovery: Women Lose Jobs, Men Find Them. <http://pewsocialtrends.org/2011/07/06/two-years-of-economic-recovery-women-lose-jobs-men-find-them/>

⁵ Annexstein, Leslie. (2003) *Opening the Door to Career and Technical Education Programs for Women and Girls*. Equity Issues in Career and Technical Education, No. 390, pp. 5-16.

⁶ Association for Career and Technical Education, National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education, and National Women's Law Center. (July 2009). *Building New Possibilities: Promising Practices for Recruiting and Retaining Students in Career and Technical Education Programs That Are Nontraditional for Their Gender*. Retrieved February 24, 2011, from www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Building_New_Possibilities.pdf.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ National Women's Law Center. (2005). *Tools of the Trade: Using the Law to Address Sex Segregation in High School Career and Technical Education: New Jersey Reports & Toolkits*. Retrieved February 24, 2011, from www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/NWLCToolsoftheTrade05.NJToolkit.pdf.

⁹ National Women's Law Center. (2005). *Tools of the Trade: Using the Law to Address Sex Segregation in High School Career and Technical Education: Maryland Reports & Toolkits*. Retrieved February 24, 2011, from www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/NWLCToolsoftheTrade05.MDToolkit.pdf.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Labor. (2009). *National Wage Data, Household Data Annual Averages, Table 39*. Retrieved January 18, 2011, from www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat39.pdf.

¹² U.S. Census Bureau. (2007). *Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Table 7*. Retrieved January 18, 2011 from www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/acs-09.pdf.

¹³ U.S. Government Printing Office. (2006). *P.L. 109-270*. Retrieved March 29, 2011, from frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109_cong_bills&docid=f:s250enr.txt.pdf.

¹⁴ U.S. House of Representatives. (July 26, 2005). *Conference Report on S. 250, Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006*. Retrieved January 18, 2011 from frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=2006_record&docid=cr25jy06-138.pdf.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Institute for Women's Policy Research. (January 2010). *The Workforce Investment Act and Women's Progress: Does WIA Funded Training Reinforce Sex Segregation in the Labor Market and the Gender Wage Gap?* Retrieved February 22, 2011, from www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/the-workforce-investment-act-and-women2019s-progress/at_download/file.