The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990 (Perkins II) contained a number of significant changes from previous federal vocational education legislation. The act required states to develop outcome-based accountability systems built around statewide performance measures and standards. States were given considerable flexibility in identifying outcomes to be measured, selecting measurement tools, and setting standards. Local programs were given the principal responsibility for program improvement, with states intervening only when local programs were unable to demonstrate significant progress. Measures and standards were supposed to be adopted by the fall of 1992 and used thereafter as accountability tools and guides to program improvement.

This study is one of a series of investigations conducted by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education (NCRVE) relating to vocational education accountability and the implementation of these measures and standards. The present research focuses on the effects of the performance measures and standards on state vocational education agencies, local programs, and the relationships between them. The study examines four states that were among the first to adopt measures and standards and implement data collection and reporting systems. Information gathered from these states gives some indication of the impact of the legislation among “early adopters” and the factors that affect implementation. The findings should be of interest to federal policymakers considering the reauthorization of the legislation, as well as to state and local vocational educators looking for ways to improve the utility of their accountability systems.