

Putting Real-World Skills to Work An Employer Guide for Making the Case for CTE

As employers and industry leaders, the business community has a strong interest in ensuring students graduate from high school with the real-world skills that will allow them to pursue rewarding careers and become valuable contributors to the workplace.

Career Technical Education (CTE) can provide the skills that employers are increasingly demanding of employees as they enter their careers. CTE combines the academic knowledge and technical skills that employees need to be successful, often in fields that are in high demand. What's more, CTE provides work-based learning experiences, like internships, job shadowing, and mentorship, which connect what students are learning in the classroom with real-world skills, making them better prepared for future success.

Despite the great benefits to students and employers, enrollment levels in CTE programs have remained stagnant in recent years. The business community can be a powerful voice in turning this around.

Employers are a trusted voice on this issue, with more than two-thirds of prospective CTE parents and students saying in a recent survey that they trust employer partners for information about CTE.

This guide provides ideas for how business and industry can support efforts to encourage more students to pursue CTE and be better prepared for the workforce.

How to Make the Case for CTE

State CTE leaders recognized that one of the obstacles to enrollment is the pervasive stigma that CTE is a lesser option for students. To overcome this misperception, Advance CTE, the national association representing state CTE leaders, with support from the Siemens Foundation, commissioned a national survey of current and prospective CTE students and their parents to better understand how to talk about CTE and the value it delivers.

What Employers & Industry Leaders Should Know About Students and Parents and CTE*

They Get Today's Job Market: 86 percent of CTE parents and students agree today's job market is much more competitive.

They are Career-Minded: Students involved in CTE are more likely to have career path in mind (76 percent) than non-CTE students (62 percent).

They Value Higher Education: Nearly eight out of 10 CTE students plan to attend college, including 62 percent who plan to attain a bachelor's degree or higher.

They Have a Plan: Only two percent of CTE students say that they "don't know" what they will do after high school.

They Trust Employers: 69 percent of prospective parents and 67 percent of prospective students trust employer partners for information about CTE.

**Read more in [The Value and Promise of Career Technical Education: Results from a National Survey of Parents and Students](#)*

A core set of messages for communicating the benefits of CTE to prospective parents and students emerged from this research:

- ✓ **CTE Delivers Real Options for Students for College and Rewarding Careers**
- ✓ **CTE Delivers Real-World Skills for Students**
- ✓ **CTE Delivers a Real High School Experience with More Value for Students**

Employers and industry leaders can support greater CTE participation by speaking about the real-world skills your company needs and the greater options available in your industry. For example, you can talk about:

- The number and kind of skilled openings at your company
- The number and kind of skilled openings within your industry
- How long it has taken your company and industry to fill these positions
- The difference you see in employees who start at your company with previous work-based learning experience
- How individuals with a CTE background are doing at your company or industry
- How you are partnering with local schools around CTE and work-based learning
- The importance of not only building your talent pipeline, but making your community a desirable place to live

Who Should Hear From You

Although you work outside of the school environment, as an employer or industry leader you likely interact with many important CTE stakeholders, including:

- **Your employees**, who may be parents themselves and/or employees who may be interested in serving as mentors or hosting a job shadow for CTE students during a work-based learning experience at your company.
- **Other employers**, whom you can bring to the cause by advocating for CTE's benefits.
- **Local business associations**, which represent the interests of the larger business community in your area or state and can add their voice to promoting CTE.
- **Industry associations**, which represent other employers in your industry sector, who likely share the talent pipeline needs and can serve as a network of those interested in advocating for CTE.
- **Federal, state and local policymakers**, who are making decisions about education and workforce development policies and should know how CTE programs help build a skilled workforce.
- **The media**, who you may talk to on a regular basis as part of your company's external outreach efforts and who should hear how CTE ties to your company's ability to grow, compete and create jobs.

These are just some examples of the types of audiences that are critical to building momentum for CTE in your communities.

Who to Trust for Information on CTE?	Prospective Parents	Prospective Students
Guidance counselors	82%	84%
Teacher(s)	79%	83%
CTE students or alumni	77%	77%
College partners	75%	73%
Principal	71%	72%
Employer partners	69%	67%
Superintendent	59%	58%
State Department of Education	59%	59%

Source: [The Value and Promise of Career Technical Education: Results from a National Survey of Parents and Students](#)

What You Can Do

Here are some ideas for how you can support efforts to encourage more students to take advantage of CTE:

- **Incorporate support for CTE in your messaging:** Include the value of CTE in company's or organization's communications that address the workforce and skills needs of your company and industry.
- **Develop a work-based learning program:** If you don't already have one, work with local education leaders to make your company a part of the CTE system by offering work-based learning opportunities to students, such as internships, youth apprenticeships, mentoring or job shadows.
- **Encourage your employees to get involved:** Incentivize employees to be mentors to students and support CTE by, for example, volunteering in local schools during work hours or sending letters in support of CTE to policymakers.
- **Participate in CTE-related events:** Ask local education officials if you can participate in networking events that provide students and parents first-hand information about the real-world skills needed to succeed in your workforce; or make yourself available to attend meetings that education leaders have with policymakers to make the case for CTE.
- **Get other employers and your local business and industry associations involved:** Encourage larger groups of employers to support CTE by urging them to join in the effort. For example, you could offer to be a spokesperson for CTE should a business association need to put one of its members on the phone with a reporter; or you could offer to lead or help coordinate an initiative that is sponsored by the association and is dedicated to advancing CTE.

Have Questions or Need Help?

Advance CTE, the national association representing state CTE leaders, can get you resources and answer any questions you might have. Contact us at info@careertech.org anytime.

Not only does the business community have an interest, yours is a trusted voice in the effort to build support for CTE. More students in CTE means more qualified employees who can enjoy rewarding careers. **CTE is a win-win.** Get involved today!