

The Value & Promise of Career Technical Education Talking Points

Opening Slide (SLIDE 1)

- We all know that communications is an ongoing challenge when it comes to Career Technical Education –and that misconceptions about what CTE is and isn't can be a barrier to more students participating in it
- The communications challenges exist for multiple reasons:
 - CTE comes in many shapes and forms, making it difficult to explain
 - Even though CTE has evolved and gotten more rigorous, but too many hold onto long-held perceptions of “vocational education”
 - CTE is often marketed as an option for those not going to college – set up as a “lesser track” for students
- This presentation will share some new research to help you better communicate the value and benefits of CTE and recruit more students into high-quality CTE programs – setting them up for a lifetime of success

Agenda (SLIDE 2)

- Today, we are going to walk through major findings from a report that explores parents and students attitudes about CTE and college and career readiness – the Value and Promise of CTE
- We'll spend some time exploring effective messages to help engage more parents and students around the many opportunities afforded by CTE
- And then we will dig into some insights and recommendations to help you put this research into action

The Value and Promise of CTE (SLIDE 3)

- In April 2017, Advance CTE, a nonprofit organization that represents State CTE Directors and other state leaders responsible for advancing CTE across the country, released the report: *The Value and Promise of CTE: Findings from a National Survey of Parents and Students*
- And here's the URL where you can find this report and related tools and resources

Research Goals (SLIDE 4)

- This report drew on research conducted over a four month period that sought to:
 - Explore attitudes among parents and students about CTE – for both those involved in CTE and those not involved
 - Understand what might motivate – or stand in the way – of students enrolling in CTE programs
 - Identify the most effective messages to “sell” CTE to students and parents, and
 - Identify the best ways to actually get the messages in front of parents and students

Research (SLIDE 5)

- To achieve these four goals, Advance CTE commissioned eight focus groups and a nationally representative survey of parents and students
- Importantly, the research included both those parents and students currently involved in a CTE program – as well as “prospective” parents and students
 - These prospective parents and students are those not currently involved in CTE, but demonstrating some degree of interest after hearing a brief description of CTE.

Key Takeaways (SLIDE 6)

- The report details five major findings, each of which we will cover in more depth as we move through the presentation. Briefly, they are:
 - Satisfaction with CTE is very high among parents and students
 - College and career are both aspirations for parents and students
 - What is probably no surprise, Career Technical Education has an awareness challenge
 - The real world benefits of CTE are a big selling point for both parents and students
 - The right messengers are critical to getting the word out about CTE

CTE Delivers for Parents and Students (SLIDE 7)

- One of the most exciting findings from this research is that students enrolled in CTE programs, and their parents, are incredibly satisfied with their education.
- As you can see, 55% of parents and students are very satisfied with their school experience, compared to only 27% of those not enrolled in CTE programs.
- Not only are the satisfied with their overall experiences, they are very satisfied with many things that are unique to CTE, like the opportunity to learn real world skills, earn college credits, and explore career areas, opportunities that often aren't a part of a more traditional high school experience.

CTE Delivers for Parents and Students (SLIDE 8)

- They were also more satisfied with nearly every indicator tested, from the quality of the teachers to opportunities for internships, demonstrating that CTE is a viable option for all students, not only those looking for CTE-specific program elements.

CTE Delivers (SLIDE 9)

- Additionally, 91% of parents believe CTE gives their children a leg up on their career
- 82% of students are satisfied with their ability to learn real world skills
- And 80% of parents of students in CTE are satisfied with their ability to enroll in internships
- These are all significantly higher than students and parents who are not enrolled in CTE.
- This satisfaction with CTE demonstrates that CTE is a fantastic choice for students, and think about all of the way you can use this information when making the case for your programs.

College and Career Success are Both Important (SLIDE 10)

- Another key finding is that college AND career success are critically important to parents and students
- Although 60% of parents and students strongly agree that getting a college degree is important, finding a career that a student is passionate about is actually the most important to parents and their children, with 70% strongly agreeing with that sentiment.
- This idea of finding a career they are passionate about also outweighs having a job that pays well – demonstrating that passion seems to win over paycheck when it comes to parents and students in this age group.

“College” is the Goal for All (SLIDE 11)

- However, as you can see, college is still very much the intended goal for high school students and their parents – whether they are involved in CTE or not
- About 60% of parents and students identify a four-year degree as their post-high school goal – pretty consistently across groups
- So when you put this information together, parents and students truly want both college and career preparation and any messaging and communications needs to reflect that CTE does both

CTE Awareness is Moderate (SLIDE 12)

- The next finding is that awareness of the term “Career Technical Education” is fairly moderate, which should probably come as no big surprise
- Just under half of prospective parents and students had heard that term

- Despite efforts to rebrand CTE programs, awareness of the term “Vocational Education” is still greater than of “CTE.”
- Finally, while the term “Career Center” is more familiar to prospectives than “CTE,” this is also a generic term with wider meaning.
- This all just adds to the communications challenge of not only selling CTE but also needing to explain what CTE is

Prospective Parents and Students Attracted to Real World Benefits (SLIDE 13)

- We’ll dig deeper in to the real world theme shortly, but the next finding from the research is that the tangible, real world benefits are very attractive to prospective parents and students.
- 86% wish their child could get more real world knowledge and skills during high school, and as we saw a few slides back, CTE delivers this in a way that traditional education may not, creating a fantastic opening and selling point for CTE.

Educators and Students are Best Messengers (SLIDE 14)

- What’s as important as the messages is who your messengers are. As we see here, guidance counselors, teachers and CTE students are alumni are the top three most trusted sources of information about CTE programs.
- When considering how to engage these audiences, you must ensure you’re using these messengers to do so.
- Parents and students want information from those who are closest to them, like their counselors, teachers and peers who they interact with every day. Arming these messengers with the right messages will be critical in getting students and parents interested in CTE.
- Something to note is that while employers are pretty far down on this list, parents and students did voice wanting to have more information about what employer partnerships look like, and how students engage with employers, so bringing them in as messengers may be a approach you take as well, it’s just not currently who parents and students go to for information.

Effective Messaging (SLIDE 15)

- Next, we’ll dig into the findings around what the best messages are to use to encourage parents and students to enroll into CTE programs

Message Testing (SLIDE 16)

- Messages were originally tested among the three focus group sites, and refined after speaking to parents and students.
- Next, Advance CTE tested five messages in the national survey on a scale of 1-3 for their believability and motivation

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- Parents and students could also highlight key words that they liked and didn't like in each messages
- At the end of the survey, they were asked to choose the message that was the most effective in convincing them to enroll into CTE programs

Most Effective Message: Prepare for the Real World (SLIDE 17)

- From this research, it was clear that the message, "Prepare for the Real World" was the most convincing among parents and students.
- This message builds off of the idea that CTE gives purpose to learning through real-world skill building
- Students experience tangible benefits such as hands-on training, mentoring and internships delivered by local employers
- And that this experience helps connect what they're learning in the classroom to what they'll be doing in the workplace, in addition to arming them with skills they are certain to use in the future

Real World Message Entices Everyone (SLIDE 18)

- Additionally, somewhat surprisingly, the research found that this message resonates with every subpopulation surveyed, across race, ethnicity, education level, income level and geographic distribution.
- In fact, all subpopulations chose CTE's ability to offer real world skills as one of the three most important elements of their education

Language That Works (SLIDE 19)

- When talking about real world experiences and offerings, there is some specific language that resonates with parents and students.
- These are things such as mentorships, hands-on experiences, career-focused, exploration of options you are passionate about, leadership, and more.
- Again, these tangible benefits were a major selling point, and should be something you emphasize in your marketing.

Insights & Recommendations (SLIDE 20)

- Now that we've walked through the research, the major findings and lessons from the message testing, let's spend some time on putting the pieces together

Insights & Recommendations (SLIDE 21)

- The fact that parents and students rate finding a career there are passionate about so highly is a perfect opportunity to talk about how CTE can help students find that passion

- You can focus on the ways in which CTE allows students to explore various options – and find what they want to do or don't want to do – while still in high school.
- But equally important is communicating how CTE provides pathways into both college AND careers through dual enrollment, internships and other experiences
- There is clearly incredibly high demand and interest in gaining real-world skills and opportunities for hands-on experiences as found through the message testing.
- Given CTE naturally offers such opportunities, we need to make sure don't not just talk about the real-world skills students gain, but also how students get them – by engaging with employers, working on hands-on projects and solving real-world problems. And, it's always better to show than tell – especially when it comes to talking about skills
- Finally, something Advance CTE found through the research is that the one area of pushback or concern – particularly from students – was that CTE would make them miss out the traditional high school experience, including sports, electives, spending time with their friends, and so on
- While CTE may require some trade-offs, part of this concern simply comes from a lack of understanding of how CTE is delivered and functions
- We know that CTE offers so much more to high school students and we need to share all the added value CTE can bring to high school while reassuring students that they can still participate in extracurriculars and have a “traditional” high school experience

Core Messages – Core Motivators (SLIDE 22)

- So when we put all of those recommendations together, we get the core message
- What this graphic represents are the three core motivators that must serve as the foundation for any and all communications you do to recruit parents and students to CTE
- At the heart of the message triangle is the idea that CTE Delivers...
 - “Real Options for College and Rewarding Careers,”
 - “Real-World Skills for Students” and
 - “A Real High School Experience with More Value for Students”
- As a whole, these are the messages about the value of CTE that you should repeat each and every time you engage with parents and students – or related groups or organizations – on the benefits of CTE.
- Additionally, these should not only be used in virtual and print materials, but also when developing recruitment activities. For example, during an open house, you can consider having current CTE students and employers discuss what real-world skills they learned, and how they've already used them through work-based learning experiences.

Insights & Recommendations (SLIDE 23)

- So what can you start doing today?
- First and foremost – be consistent with your messages! Start with the core messages or core motivators shown on the previous slide and make sure you and all of your colleagues are the same page to drive your message home
- Something that was heard loud and clear throughout the focus groups and the survey was the importance of having student testimonials, in person or otherwise. Parents and students want to hear from current and former CTE students on why they decided to participate in CTE, what their experience was and all of the benefits they got out of it. It helps build awareness and build a case for CTE
- Another key finding was the importance of localizing your CTE examples. Parents and students want to know how CTE will work for them in their own schools and communities and will be put off by examples that they can't relate to. Again, using local examples can help explain the nuts and bolts of how CTE is delivered and provide an opportunity to highlight specific partnerships with local colleges and employers that are recognizable
- As we discussed earlier, parents and students see college as a major post-high school aspiration. Whether we agree with that or not, we cannot set up CTE as an option for students not going to college and expect the majority of parents and students to be interested. It is critical that you stress the ways in which CTE students are prepared for both college and careers to attract more to CTE.
- Parents and students want you to be specific! Give details on the various benefits students get from participating in CTE – from gaining real-world skills to earning college credit, certifications, and building a network with specific local employers.
- For any true recruitment strategy to be successful, you need to get those closest to parents and students on board (and on message). Teachers, counselors and local partners from business and colleges, were identified as trusted sources of information on CTE and need to be activated and informed about which messages to use.
- Finally, keep your messages positive. Parents and students generally like their schools and their teachers and don't want to hear them being put down. CTE is a true value add, so market it that way.

Resources You Can Use (SLIDE 24)

- Core Messages that summarizes a lot of what we just presented
- Dos and Don'ts which detail how to use the messages and how not to use them
- A fact sheet that you can use as a 1-pager leave behind on the benefits of CTE
- Summary of all the messages we tested along with language that worked and didn't work in each message

- A guide on how State Leaders can use this research
- And coming soon are Advocacy 101, How locals can use this research