

DOs and DON'Ts for Engaging Students and Parents around CTE

Career Technical Education (CTE) delivers for students. CTE delivers real options for students for college and rewarding careers. It delivers real-world skills to students – and CTE delivers a real high school experience with more value.

That's the message we want to share with students themselves, their parents and any and all stakeholders – like guidance counselors and teachers – who can influence or encourage students to participate in CTE programs in schools across the country.

We learned a lot about what works, and what doesn't, when it comes to making the case for CTE to parents and students. Based on that, here are some DOs and DON'Ts for talking about how CTE delivers for students.

DOs

DO use, repeat and reinforce these core messages about the value of CTE each and every time you engage with relevant audiences – this kind of message discipline is foundational to changing the narrative on what CTE is and the benefits it delivers for students:

- 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

DO talk about how CTE students and their parents are more satisfied with their high school education experience than those who are interested but not participating – in fact, they are twice as likely to report they are “very satisfied.”

DO tell stories about the successes CTE students have had – it makes a stronger case for CTE when you connect the messages to a real student who succeeded in a CTE program.

DO localize your examples – Many parents and students don't really understand what CTE is or how it works. Make sure to share success stories from your community and/or school to give insights into what the programs look like and all they have to offer.

DO emphasize that CTE prepares students for college and careers – Parents and students overwhelmingly view college as an aspiration for their future. Drive home that CTE is an option that provides a unique experience for all students and prepares them for both college and careers.

DO engage school counselors and get their support – They are among the most trusted sources by students and parents for information on all decisions related to school, including CTE participation.

DO emphasize that CTE helps students find their passion – Parents and students both want students to pursue a career they are passionate about. CTE lets students explore careers and find out what they want – or don't want – to do after high school.

DO emphasize these words to describe the benefits that CTE delivers to students – You want to make sure students and their parents know about all the doors CTE opens:

- Learn real-world skills
- Enhance the high school experience
- Get hands-on experience
- Lead to fulfilling, rewarding careers
- Explore career options and what you are passionate about
- Earn college credits
- Instill "leadership" and "confidence"

DO prioritize outreach to middle school students – Students in the later years of middle school (and their parents) are particularly open to and interested in what CTE has to offer.

DON'Ts

DON'T position CTE and college as an "either/or" – Remember to talk about CTE as a pathway to college and a wide range of post-high school options, and reinforce that students can earn college credits, scholarships, certifications and more through CTE. Don't frame CTE as the "non-college" option, since that directly conflicts with parent and student aspirations.

DON'T put down high school – Having a traditional high school experience is important to parents and students. You should talk about how CTE enhances traditional high school rather than replaces it.

DON'T leave out all the other great high school experiences students can have while participating in CTE – CTE is a part of high school and doesn't take away from students' opportunities to participate in other activities they enjoy, such as sports, the arts or whatever else their friends are doing.

DON'T worry too much about the money part of the conversation – While CTE is a smart investment for students, you must be careful when using financial language. Highlighting the financial benefits of CTE may actually raise questions about costs associated with such programs, so be prepared to answer those. And the term "investment" may turn off some parents and students as they may associate it with "risk."

DON'T do all the talking – What matters to you may not be what matters to students and parents. Let them ask questions and answer them directly.

DON'T forget to include local businesses in the conversation – Students want the leg up CTE can give them and highly value the opportunity for mentors, internships and networking with local employers. When describing your programs, talk about these experiences and the specific businesses that are involved.