

Improving Equity and Access to High-Quality CTE for Youth and Young Adults in the Justice System



Background

Ensuring that young people have access to high-quality Career Technical Education (CTE) programs is vital to preparing them for future employment. Yet, youth and young adults in the justice system historically have been left behind in states' and localities' efforts to improve workforce development and employment outcomes. In an economy that is now being reshaped by COVID-19, it is more critical than ever that young people in the justice system are fully equipped to succeed in the rapidly changing labor market and meet workforce needs.

To meet this challenge, states and local jurisdictions will need to work collaboratively across systems to overcome a number of barriers that prevent youth and young adults in the justice system from accessing quality education and workforce development services. One such barrier is that multiple agencies or entities, including justice agencies, state and local education agencies and private contractors, can be responsible in a given state for educating incarcerated youth, resulting in a lack of accountability and communication among all involved parties.¹

Additionally, young people in the justice system have myriad needs that are challenging for states and localities to address, including criminogenic needs. Most youth and young adults in the justice system have a history of poor academic outcomes, involvement in their school's disciplinary system and special education needs.² Further, they may have behavioral health issues and lack transitional and independent life skills, all of which may inhibit their ability to succeed in workforce development and CTE programs if not properly addressed. And young people in the justice system face systemic and legal barriers to employment, including collateral consequences preventing them from engaging in certain occupations, as well as employers who are often reluctant to hire them.³

Youth and Young Adults in the Justice System

More than 30,000 youth are incarcerated in the United States each year in the juvenile justice system, and more than 325,000 youth are placed on some form of juvenile probation. Increasingly, youth in the juvenile justice system are older and are seeking to enter the workforce and transition to independence. As of 2015, approximately 75 percent of incarcerated youth and 50 percent of all youth adjudicated to any level of supervision were age 16 and older.⁴ Young adults — typically defined as young people between the ages of 18 and 24 — can come into contact with the juvenile or adult justice systems, and sometimes both.⁵ Currently, across the country anyone who commits a crime after age 18 is referred to the adult criminal justice system. At the same time, when a young person is adjudicated delinquent in the juvenile justice system, two-thirds of states allow him or her to remain in the juvenile system through age 20. In some states, the young person can remain in that system up to age 24.

Working together with justice and education agencies, state CTE leaders can play a crucial role in dismantling these and other barriers and constructing systems that support young people in the justice system in accessing, feeling welcome in, fully participating in and successfully completing a high-quality CTE program.⁶ State CTE leaders have a critical responsibility to ensure that each learner — including youth and young adults in the justice system — has opportunities to achieve educational and career success and is supported in realizing his or her goals.⁷

This resource, developed by The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center and Advance CTE, outlines five key actions that state CTE leaders can take in partnership with juvenile and adult criminal justice agencies and other entities to ensure that youth and young adults in these systems have access to high-quality CTE programs and the opportunity to secure and maintain viable employment.

Five Actions State CTE Leaders Can Take

1. Ensure that CTE programs for youth and young adults in the justice system are held to the same rigorous standards as other CTE programs in the state.

State CTE leaders should work with justice agencies to ensure that programs and services delivered to youth and young adults in juvenile and adult correctional facilities, as well as to young people on probation or parole supervision in the community, embody the elements of a high-quality CTE program or program of study:^{8,9}

- Program standards should be aligned with national and/or state CTE standards;
- Programs should be aligned with state and local economic trends and labor market needs (i.e., high-skill, high-wage, in-demand careers);
- Learners should have access to hands-on, work-based learning opportunities;
- Learners should be able to earn industry- and employer-recognized credentials; and
- Courses should be taught by qualified instructors.

State CTE leaders, in partnership with justice agencies, should help monitor the quality of instruction and program adherence to national and state standards. If necessary, they should also work with justice agency and CTE program leaders to improve or phase out CTE programs that are not aligned with economic opportunities or have poor outcomes for learners.¹⁰



2. Help justice and education agencies and program providers adopt and implement promising practices.

State CTE leaders can facilitate critical connections between justice and education agencies that are responsible for educating youth and young adults in the justice system and CTE providers that may be interested in serving this population. For justice agencies that may not be as familiar with CTE programming, state CTE leaders can share resources about research-based practices, such as curriculum frameworks and program design.

State CTE leaders also can work with justice agencies to create tools, resources and professional development materials that are geared specifically toward providers who may be new to working with young people in the justice system. Program providers often lack knowledge and resources about how to best tailor their programming and coursework to meet the unique needs of youth and young adults who

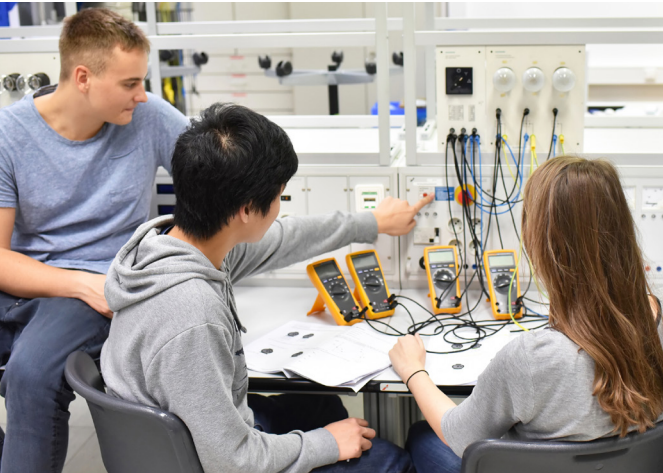
are incarcerated. State CTE leaders, in partnership with justice agencies, can help providers design flexible program schedules and curricula, adapt programs to the multiple skill levels of participants, and work around collateral consequences that may present barriers to specific employment or career tracks.

3. Leverage federal funding to support CTE programs in correctional facilities.

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), signed into law in 2018, increased the allowable state set-aside to serve individuals in state institutions from 1 percent to 2 percent of the Perkins Basic State Grant, and now the law explicitly permits these funds to be used in juvenile justice facilities in addition to adult correctional facilities.¹¹ State CTE leaders can leverage these funds creatively to have a larger impact and support programs within correctional facilities. For

example, CTE leaders can use available Perkins V funds — ideally braiding them with other state or federal funding — to partner with an intermediary (an organization whose sole or primary function is to support work-based learning or other career development activities for learners) to expand CTE programming and work-based learning opportunities for youth and young adults in the justice system. CTE leaders can also develop guidance to help correctional facilities improve career exploration and soft-skill development programs.

Regardless of how states direct these resources, state CTE leaders should ensure that justice agency representatives are part of state planning and implementation teams for Perkins V. Including these representatives will support cross-system collaboration and ensure that state plans include youth and young adults in the justice system as a priority population.



4. Appoint a state-level designee to oversee the development and delivery of CTE programming for youth and young adults in the justice system.

State CTE leaders should designate someone at the state level who is responsible for ensuring that youth and young adults in correctional facilities and under supervision in the community have equitable access to high-quality CTE programs. The roles and responsibilities for this designee can include the following:

- Coordinating with counterparts in state and local justice systems;
- Facilitating the development of formal partnerships between CTE program providers and state and/or local justice agencies;
- Developing a registry of providers that serve youth and young adults in the justice system;
- Supporting transition planning to ensure that young people in facilities can smoothly transition to community CTE programs and/or employment opportunities after release;
- Working to address legal barriers and collateral consequences in their state that may inhibit participation in workforce development programs;
- Monitoring federal and/or state investments in CTE programs for this specialized population; and
- Collecting and tracking data on participant and program outcomes.

5. Collaborate with justice agencies to collect and share student-level data and program outcome data to enhance accountability of CTE programs for youth and young adults in the justice system.

State CTE leaders should work with justice and education agencies to develop outcome and performance measures that are tailored to youth and young adults in the justice system and work directly with programs to identify key measures that are aligned with their program and services. These measures should be incorporated into formal data sharing agreements between state and/or local education and juvenile and criminal justice agencies. These agreements will not only help CTE leaders collect and track data on individual educational outcomes and program performance measures but also enable them to share these data to help agencies and programs drive improvement efforts.

State CTE leaders can provide technical assistance to program providers on how to best capture and report these data and use the data to inform programming and drive improvement efforts. They also can share these data with state agencies that are funding and contracting providers to hold them accountable for participant outcomes.

Additional Resources

Below are several resources that state CTE leaders can consult to learn more about the distinct needs of youth and young adults in the justice system and the importance of providing equitable CTE services for this population.

- ➔ [Locked Out: Improving Educational and Vocational Outcomes for Incarcerated Youth](#) (CSG Justice Center, November 2015)
- ➔ [Reducing Recidivism and Improving Other Outcomes for Young Adults in the Juvenile and Adult Criminal Justice Systems](#) (CSG Justice Center, November 2015)
- ➔ [Improving Approaches to Serving Young Adults in the Justice System](#) (Justice Policy Institute, December 2016)
- ➔ [Patterns and Trends in Educational Opportunity for Students in Juvenile Justice Schools](#) (Bellwether Education Partners, August 2019)
- ➔ [On Track: How Well Are States Preparing Youth in the Juvenile Justice System for Employment?](#) (CSG Justice Center, September 2019)



This resource is part of the Making Good on the Promise series, which confronts the negative aspects of CTE's legacy and defines the key challenges learners face today.¹² The series provides promising solutions to help state leaders close equity gaps in CTE to ensure that each learner is able to attain the promise of CTE — a high-skill, high-wage, in-demand career.

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The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center is a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that combines the power of a membership association, representing state officials in all three branches of government, with policy and research expertise to develop strategies that increase public safety and strengthen communities. For more information about the CSG Justice Center, visit www.csjusticecenter.org.

Advance CTE: State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work, first established in 1920, is the longest-standing national nonprofit that represents State CTE Directors and state leaders responsible for secondary, postsecondary and adult Career Technical Education (CTE) across all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories. For more information about Advance CTE, visit careertech.org.

Endnotes

1. The Council of State Governments Justice Center. (2015). *Locked out: Improving educational and vocational outcomes for incarcerated youth*. New York: Author.
2. *Ibid.*
3. The Council of State Governments Justice Center. (2015). *Reducing recidivism and improving other outcomes for young adults in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems*. New York: Author.
4. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Easy access to the census of juveniles in residential placement. <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezacjrp/>; Hockenberry, S., & Puzanchera, C. (2018). *Juvenile court statistics 2015*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice. <http://www.ncjj.org/pdf/jcsreports/jcs2015report.pdf>
5. While there is no universal definition of the age range for young adults, this brief defines the young adult population as ages 18-24.
6. Agus-Kleinman, J., Salomon, N., & Weber, J. (2019). *On track: How well are states preparing youth in the juvenile justice system for employment?* New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center.
7. Advance CTE. (n.d.). *Advance CTE's statement on equity in Career Technical Education*. Silver Spring, MD: Author.
8. Advance CTE. (2017). *Policy benchmark tool: CTE program of study approval*. Silver Spring, MD: Author.
9. Association for Career and Technical Education. (2017). *2018 ACTE quality CTE program of study framework*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
10. Advance CTE. (2018). *Ensuring career pathway quality: A guide to pathway intervention*. Silver Spring, MD: Author.
11. State institutions in Perkins V are referenced as "institutions, such as State correctional institutions, juvenile justice facilities, and educational institutions that serve individuals with disabilities" (section 112(1)(2)(A)).
12. Advance CTE. (n.d.). *Making good on the promise*. Silver Spring, MD: Author.