

## Section 1. Examine the Core Elements of a CTE Program Approval Policy

Any policy — be it regulatory, legislative or programmatic — related to ensuring that high-quality CTE programs are developed and implemented should include and/or address the following core elements. While a CTE program approval policy may include other elements, if a state does not address the list below, its CTE program approval policy will not be able to ensure that all CTE programs are high quality.

**CTE Program Approval:** To ensure that CTE programs in your state are high quality, states must have rigorous front-end validation and approval processes and requirements for new or current CTE programs. The elements listed below are essential to an effective CTE program approval policy, though each state must decide how to measure and implement them in a way that fits state context.

### 1. Rigorous course standards and progressive, sequenced courses

All CTE programs must be comprehensive and aligned with rigorous standards, and they must prepare learners for opportunities in high-skill and in-demand fields. Therefore,

- All CTE programs of study should be developed using rigorous state-approved and industry-aligned standards and be organized into deliberate course sequences;
- All CTE program and/or course standards should be thoroughly aligned with state-approved academic standards;
- Multiple courses should be available within each CTE program, and the CTE programs must start with an introductory course that teaches broad foundational knowledge and skills and then progress to more occupationally specific courses; and
- All CTE programs of study should culminate in a credential of value, ideally one that is state approved and industry validated.

### 2. Secondary and postsecondary alignment and early postsecondary offerings

All CTE programs must vertically align across the secondary and postsecondary education levels to ensure seamless transitions for learners and allow learners to earn credentials of value, including postsecondary certificates and degrees. Therefore,

- Secondary and postsecondary representatives at the state, regional and local levels should collaborate regularly to review CTE programs of study;
- All CTE programs should have both a secondary and postsecondary component, whether it be at a two-year or four-year institution or beyond, with a seamless transition between the two; and
- Transitions should be facilitated through credit transfer and statewide articulation agreements, and secondary learners should have access to dual enrollment or early college opportunities while progressing through their CTE program.

### 3. Industry involvement

Industry partners at the state and local levels must play an active role to identify, develop and regularly review CTE programs of study. Therefore,

- Industry partners should be involved in validating standards and credentials, informing course development, and helping provide work-based learning experiences for learners; and
- Sustainable, consistent processes for engaging industry partners must be in place to ensure the relevance and rigor of CTE programs of study and related learner experiences at the secondary and postsecondary levels.

## 4. Labor market demand

CTE programs must prepare learners for careers in high-skill and in-demand fields. Therefore,

- All CTE programs should be able to justify their existence by demonstrating that labor market information shows a consistent and sustainable demand in high-skill and in-demand occupations for employees in related fields in the state and/or local region; and
- Labor and economic data should include accurate information on the current and projected number of openings in specific career fields, as well as data on salary and any technological or policy advancements that may affect this career field.

## 5. High-quality instruction

Any CTE program must have appropriately certified instructors in place before being approved by the state. Ensuring that instructors have the necessary academic content expertise, knowledge of pedagogy and industry expertise must also be a top priority. Therefore,

- All CTE programs must have in place instructors who are appropriately certified both in teaching and industry knowledge.

## 6. Experiential learning

High-quality CTE programs must provide opportunities for learners to engage in authentic, experiential learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Therefore,

- States, districts, institutions of higher education and employers should work collaboratively to provide all learners with access to relevant work-based learning opportunities, including virtual or simulated opportunities for those who may not have access to in-person experiences in their desired career field; and
- All learners should also have access to experiential learning, which may be offered through participation in Career Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs).

**CTE Program Evaluation:** Once your state has approved a high-quality CTE program, a process must be in place to monitor that CTE program and provide support to help CTE programs close gaps or to transition out CTE programs that are not meeting requirements. This process will ensure that CTE programs are accomplishing their goals, serving learners equitably, and using the latest information and labor market data to maintain relevance. The process requirements and timeline must be made clear and must be administered transparently and consistently. See page 19 for additional details.