



**Putting Learner Success First:**  
A Shared Vision for the Future of CTE

Imagine a reality where all learners are given the opportunity and support to realize their full potential.

### ***A reality where all learners***

...have access to a high-quality education that leads to rewarding career opportunities

...gain the skills they need, when they need them, without the limitation of place or time

...encounter no barriers between academic and technical instruction, secondary and postsecondary education, and the workplace

...are empowered with the information they need to map out a flexible pathway that leads to success

...are taught by a range of knowledgeable experts who can deftly link the classroom to the real world

This reality is possible, but only together can we make it happen.

### **Aspiration for the Future of CTE**

In the fall of 2015, *The Future of CTE Summit* brought together a broad array of stakeholders to build a shared understanding of and commitment to where Career Technical Education (CTE) needs to go to meet its full promise to learners, employers, communities, states, and the nation as a whole.

For decades, the CTE community has worked tirelessly to reinvent itself to better align with the needs of the modern economy, and has made great strides to improve the quality of and access to CTE. Yet, the CTE community cannot continue this journey alone. As the purpose of education broadens—to one that values both college and career readiness for all learners—CTE finds itself no longer on the periphery.

It was within this context that participants generated hundreds of ideas targeting virtually every aspect of the journey from cradle to career. We heard calls for a bold transformation of teaching and learning that is driven by and through technology, as well as an affirmation to truly hold ourselves accountable to doing the

work we've already started. There was a demand to focus on all learners, not just a specific population. Many pointed to successes across the country, while also making clear that access to quality programs is far from universal.

At the heart of the discussions was consensus and clarity that we need a learner-centric system—a system truly driven by, focused on and dedicated to the success of all learners at all ages—that is fully supported by education, workforce and economic development, and business and industry partners.

This vision is a framework of principles and action steps that demands commitment from the full range of national, state and local stakeholders to improve not only CTE but the education system as a whole. Achieving this vision will require systemic collaboration across the full spectrum of an individual's life from K-12 and postsecondary education into the workforce and across multiple career opportunities. The success of this vision is incumbent upon the support and commitment of the people—the leaders, practitioners and partners at every level—who are the key to advancing these actions through research, policy and practice.

---

***A Shared Vision for the Future of CTE is supported by:***

Advance CTE: State Leaders  
Connecting Learning to Work

National Council of State Directors  
of Community Colleges

Association for Career and  
Technical Education

National Skills Coalition

Council of Chief State School Officers

U.S. Chamber of Commerce  
Foundation

National Association of State Boards  
of Education

## **ALL CTE PROGRAMS ARE HELD TO THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE**

For all learners to find success, we must be steadfast in our expectation of excellence for all CTE programs of study. This is the only way we will eradicate the negative stereotypes and realities that persist in communities across the country. The CTE community has worked hard and made great strides to improve the quality of its programs of study. Yet, an even greater commitment from all stakeholders is necessary to ensure excellence in all programs, across all zip codes and for all learners. We know what works. Now we need to hold ourselves accountable and demonstrate an unwavering commitment to this principle.



# TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, WE WILL:

## ■ **Develop and implement rigorous review and approval processes and policies to ensure only high-quality programs of study exist**

All programs must be comprehensive, rigorous and prepare learners for opportunities in high-skill and in-demand fields—period. At a minimum, CTE programs of study should be flexible and responsive to both workforce and workplace needs; impart skills and competencies necessary for lifelong success in the evolving labor market; integrate academic and career content; have formalized alignment between secondary and postsecondary systems to ensure seamless transitions and offer dual credit opportunities; and culminate in a credential of value. This will require states to review and strengthen program approval and monitoring processes, and for regional or program accreditation requirements to be re-evaluated, to ensure excellence and quality at the secondary and postsecondary levels.

## ■ **Align funding to high-quality programs of study**

With strengthened review processes in place, federal and state funding should be aligned to support only programs of the highest quality. Any programs that are not leading to beneficial outcomes for learners and employers should be phased out or transformed. In addition, financial aid policies should shift their focus to outcomes such as return on investment to learners, and support a broader range of postsecondary options, including shorter-term programs that fit within a program of study and lead to a credential of value.

## ■ **Develop and implement sustainable processes for employers to inform, validate and participate in the implementation of programs of study**

Employers at the state and local level must play an active role to identify, develop and regularly review CTE programs of study. This includes validating standards and credentials, informing course development, and helping provide work-based learning experiences for learners. Sustainable, consistent processes for engaging employers are necessary to ensure the relevance and rigor of CTE programs of study at the secondary and postsecondary levels, as well as encourage greater coordination across systems to minimize duplication of efforts.

## **ALL LEARNERS ARE EMPOWERED TO CHOOSE A MEANINGFUL EDUCATION AND CAREER**

For all learners to be positioned for lifelong success, we need a comprehensive career advisement system that provides them with equal access to high-quality, authentic learning opportunities, particularly those learners who stand to benefit the most from them. The first step is making sure learners are exposed to the full range of career options and opportunities and can explore their interests. Key supports must be provided along the way to keep learners engaged and on track to success.



## TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, WE WILL:

### ■ **Develop and implement a career advisement system that allows all learners to be successful in a career pathway of interest**

A career advisement system needs to be responsive to learners' interests and provide career awareness and exploration for all—not just those enrolled in CTE. It must encompass a range of career pathways, regardless of the availability of programming in a given school, college or community, to provide the most options to learners. Such a system must seamlessly span the full career development continuum from elementary through postsecondary, and include wraparound services, accelerated learning strategies, guided pathways and connections with local employers to ensure smooth transitions into the labor market. Along the way, all learners must understand the educational and industry requirements of their chosen field of study through in-person and technology-enabled resources.

This work cannot rest exclusively on the counselor community. A broader spectrum of stakeholders and mentors—including instructors and industry and community partners—must support these efforts. We need more innovative strategies to engage and support all learners as well as the necessary infrastructure to identify and tap mentors to facilitate this exploration.

### ■ **Provide all learners with authentic, real-world experiences linked to a career interest of their choice**

Career exploration cannot occur solely in the classroom and requires opportunities for learners to engage in authentic experiential learning. States, districts, institutions of higher education, and employers should work collaboratively to provide all learners with relevant work-based learning opportunities, including virtual or simulated opportunities for those who may not have access to in-person experiences in their chosen career field.

## **ALL LEARNING IS PERSONALIZED AND FLEXIBLE**

In many ways, the education system still operates as it did a century ago. All too often, academic and CTE instruction are kept separate, and individuals learn the same material in the same sequence at the same time. With few exceptions, the education system is still beholden to the accumulation of Carnegie units and credit hours as the only path to earning a credential, and transitions from secondary to postsecondary education remain complicated. However, solutions already exist today to break down the silos between academics and CTE as well as secondary and postsecondary institutions to truly put learning and success first. These need to be scaled and become the norm for all learners.





# TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, WE WILL:

## ■ Identify, build and scale policies and models that fully integrate academic and technical expectations and experiences

All learners must have opportunities to gain and demonstrate the full breadth of college and career readiness skills—the academic, technical and employability skills that are so demanded in the workplace—through contextualized coursework and activities, integrated instruction, experiential learning, or performance-based assessments. Innovation needs to be incubated, and proven successful strategies must be scaled to become mainstream.

## ■ Identify, build and scale models of K-12 and postsecondary competency-based systems

Competency-based systems give individuals “voice and choice” in how and where they learn as well as demonstrate their mastery of content and skills. True competency-based pathways offer anytime-anywhere learning that is learner-centered and self-paced. States and districts should identify policies, models and strategies of promising K-12 competency-based systems that start with college and career readiness in mind that allow learners to gain and demonstrate mastery of their learning, regardless of where it takes place. States and institutions should further embrace postsecondary competency-based education models, such as credit for prior learning, to expand access for more learners, and provide more flexibility so all individuals can get the skills they need when they need them.

## ■ Fully align secondary and postsecondary programs of study to ensure seamless transitions

Education systems must support seamless transitions between the secondary and postsecondary education levels so they operate with the learner in mind. Achieving this goal will require, at a minimum: aligned expectations, standards, assessments and credentials; coherent dual and concurrent enrollment policies; common terminology and data systems to support student transitions; and admissions policies that recognize and value competencies in addition to credits.

## **ALL LEARNING IS FACILITATED BY KNOWLEDGEABLE EXPERTS**

All learners deserve to have quality educational experiences facilitated by individuals with passion, experience and expertise. Shifting demographics, emerging technology and evolving workplace expectations demand a new paradigm for who teaches, what is taught and how it is taught. This shift requires new thinking about how we recruit, train and support those who facilitate and validate learning.



# TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, WE WILL:

## ■ Modernize K-12 certification programs to ensure all learners have access to educators who are able to facilitate learning that prepares them for both college and careers

Current certification programs rarely include a focus or requirement around future educators' ability to integrate academic and technical content or provide career-focused instruction. This needs to change. Removing barriers that prevent instructors from moving flexibly between secondary and postsecondary systems is one strategy for increasing learner access to a wider array of options. Exploring new ways to certify instructors, particularly those coming from industry, are also vital to expanding the educator pool. Dual certification options in academic and technical disciplines should become mainstream to support seamless and blended instruction, as well as certifications or endorsements that provide flexibility in the range of courses, program areas or even states in which instructors may teach.

## ■ Prioritize professional learning opportunities that focus on retention of quality instructors, contextualized teaching and learning, and learner engagement

With many CTE instructors entering the secondary and postsecondary classroom directly from industry through non-traditional paths, it is critical that they are supported through induction and mentoring programs to help them succeed in the education system. Ensuring they have the necessary academic content expertise must also be a top priority. At the same time, states, districts, schools and colleges need to prioritize externships or similar professional learning experiences that pair general education and CTE instructors together to better understand opportunities for alignment and integration to connect instruction with today's workplace expectations. Employer partners must support such professional learning opportunities to ensure they are authentic, relevant and ongoing.

The classroom should also be a place where learners are positioned to become leaders and colleagues. States must create incentives for and support models that foster learner collaboration, teamwork and leadership whether through flipped classrooms, a focus on team- or project-based instruction, blended learning, the integration of Career Technical Student Organization curriculum, or other approaches.

## ■ Build and support a pool of experts that instructors may draw upon to supplement learning

Enhancing classroom instruction with experts from the public, private and non-profit sectors can bring the real world into the classroom and blur the lines between education and the workplace, as well as academic and career-focused content. Whether brought in full-time, part-time, as adjuncts or through another approach, these experts can drastically enhance learning by helping learners understand the relevance, application and potential of their knowledge and skills while also building capacity for classroom instructors.

## **ALL SYSTEMS WORK TOGETHER TO PUT LEARNER SUCCESS FIRST**

For individual learners to experience success, the systems and stakeholders that surround them must work in concert. The time for systems working independently or even at cross purposes is over. Alignment across K-12, postsecondary, workforce and economic development and coordination with business and industry are critical to achieve a cross-sector commitment to all learners being fully supported throughout their career pathways.



# TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, WE WILL:

## ■ Establish a common statewide vision and commitment to providing all learners with meaningful career pathways

States need a common vision and expectation of excellence for career programs and pathways, shared by those making decisions and holding the purse strings—state policymakers, education and workforce development leaders, business and industry, labor and the philanthropic community. From there, state and community stakeholders must work collaboratively to commit to concrete, coordinated actions to build and sustain this learner-focused, career preparation system.

## ■ Coordinate federal and state policies, programs and funding to maximize investments and reduce inefficiencies

Learners should experience a cohesive and comprehensive set of options and supports that enable flexible pathways to success. Federal and state policies, national and cross-state initiatives, and investments from business and industry to strengthen their talent pipelines all offer leverage points but also potential redundancies in the broader education and workforce development systems. Programs, policies and funding must be reviewed in the context of one another to ensure seamless and quality pathways that are financially and structurally supported and sustained, particularly as states focus on the implementation of the federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, Every Student Succeeds Act, Workforce Opportunity and Innovation Act, and Higher Education Act.

## ■ Develop and support sustainable partnerships and intermediaries to accelerate learner success

Schools and postsecondary institutions cannot provide high-quality career pathways on their own. They must rely on partners, especially employers and community-based organizations, to augment and supplement learners' experiences. One way to maximize partnerships is by supporting intermediaries—non-profits, workforce boards, sector partnerships, industry associations or individuals within an education system—that serve as connectors for schools, postsecondary institutions, employers and the broader community.

## ■ Build indicators of career readiness—for all learners—into federal and state accountability systems

To become a sustained priority for all districts, schools and postsecondary institutions, expectations must be built into the federal and state accountability systems that encourage and reward career readiness for all learners. This will require enhanced data systems to properly analyze and use such data. These indicators also must address the multi-faceted nature of career readiness to allow for multiple measures to capture the full range of career-ready academic, technical and employability skills and dispositions.



## A CALL TO ACTION

*The Future of CTE Summit* provided a unique opportunity to bring new energy, understanding of and commitment to CTE as a vital education and workforce strategy. The convening broadened the perspective on the power of CTE and the ways in which CTE can be further strengthened. Most importantly, the Summit created a shared sense of ownership over the future of CTE and its role in success for all learners. Success will demand significant effort and change, and while CTE cannot do it alone, CTE stands ready to embrace its responsibility for moving toward this vision.

While the principles and action steps, at first glance, may not appear to be groundbreaking innovations, it is the shared commitment to implementing this learner-centric, learner-driven vision that has the potential to be transformational. Making this vision a reality requires an unwavering, steadfast commitment from all sectors and stakeholders.

We must hold ourselves accountable to do the work even when funding gets tight, political winds shift, or questions arise of whether we really need to set the bar so high. We must join together to demand change where and when it is needed, to support reform that is already underway and to applaud those who have made it. It is only through a shared commitment to action that this new vision will become a reality for learners across the nation.



[WWW.CAREERTECH.ORG/VISION](http://WWW.CAREERTECH.ORG/VISION)