

The Power and Promise of Career Technical Education: A Student's Role



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Career and technical education (CTE) at its best offers relevance, rigor, and relationships—key ingredients for high school success and readiness for college or a career. CTE no longer exists in its earlier form of vocational education, which met the needs of only a relatively small number of students, preparing them for a limited choice of jobs. It has evolved and expanded into a new way of learning, targeted to all students. CTE has changed.

I want to share with you a new model for CTE called programs of study. These programs are tied to career pathways in 16 career clusters containing secondary and postsecondary elements, coherent and rigorous content in a nonduplicative progression of courses, dual/concurrent enrollment and credits, and an industry-recognized credential, certificate, or postsecondary-level degree.

It is now possible for a student to be on a path to almost any job that he or she can conceive of doing. The pathways guide a student to a career of choice, clearly showing the courses needed in order to reach the goal. Programs of study are designed to ensure that all students will have the necessary skills to enter either college or a career by integrating applied learning, higher academic expectations, and technical coursework that will lead to student success. The plan is to engage students, make learning rigorous and relevant, build capacity, create strategic partnerships, and focus on program completion, thereby providing students with access to high-quality academic, technical, and work-based learning opportunities that ultimately lead to increased employment and earnings.

The Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) have been adapting to this change and are an integral part of it. They already support and align with the newly emerging CTE program-of-study standards and contribute strongly to the lives of students by providing opportunities to learn in-depth about and acquire the new CTE skills that prepare students for college and/or to achieve a high level of performance in the

workplace. Students have their own role in this education enterprise, taking more responsibility for their own success by taking advantage of valuable educational opportunities available to them. As a high school and college teacher as well as a federal education official, I have had the honor of knowing and observing many CTE students like you. Your abilities and attitudes are impressive. Here are some observations:

- You come to school motivated and ready to learn.
- You are not afraid to set your own goals high.
- You stay motivated and engaged.
- You demonstrate regularly that studying hard and doing your best lay the cornerstone of a successful future.
- You see education as a gateway opportunity preparing you for high-skill, high-wage work.
- In school, you seek out teachers and coaches who set high goals for you and hold you to them.
- You look for mentors to guide you on a career path that challenges you and will lead to increased employment and earnings.
- You seek educational advice from your counselors and academic advisers.
- You learn about the many options that are available to all American youths today and chart a course for yourself.
- You create a peer group that shares your goals.

In other words, you are proactive and you take advantage of all the educational opportunities that are available to you.

To improve educational pathways for students, not only should parents and educators set high academic expectations for students, they also should encourage students to set high goals for themselves and provide them with necessary help and support to reach their goals.

Each of us has a role to play in the CTE's new

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programs of study. Educators have a responsibility to prepare their students so they will be ready for the next levels of study to which they choose to move. All educators should engage students in relating their

learning to career opportunities. Let's all work together in this new education reform movement that is preparing American students for success in meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

Characteristics of traditional vocational education compared to emerging practices that contribute to the new vision.

Traditional Vocational Education	Emerging Practices
For specific students	For all students
Limited program areas offered	16 career clusters and 79 pathways offered
Separate "track" focusing on technical education but often lacking academic rigor	Technical education integrated with academics in a rigorous and relevant curriculum
High school focused	High school and postsecondary partnerships providing pathways to employment and/or associate, bachelor's and advanced degrees
Students trained with focus on specific occupational skill set	A logical progression for learning foundational, academic, and occupational skills needed for life in the 21st century
No clear pathway to postsecondary education (dead-end programs)	A clear pathway to postsecondary education open to every student



The Future Educators Association[®], a member of the PDK International family of associations, is a federally-recognized Career and Technical Student Organization dedicated to supporting young people interested in education-related careers. FEA enhances various teacher preparation

programs across the nation by providing personal growth opportunities directly related to the education profession. FEA is significantly contributing to the development of the next generation of great educators, and you can be a part of it. For more information about FEA, go to www.futureeducators.org. To see a list of all CTSOs recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, visit www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cte/vso.html.