Supporting Learners, Families and Instructors for Expanded Access

To truly meet the needs of learners, we must remove the geographic barriers that limit access and opportunity, particularly for learners in rural communities.

This work is essential to ensure that each learner can access CTE without borders — one of the five principles of Advance CTE’s Without Limits: A Shared Vision for the Future of Career Technical Education. Policies and programs should enable, not limit, mobility and access. States should come together to develop and expand new models of collaboration by investing in expanded-access systems that allow access both within and across states.

Achieving CTE without borders will require significant policy and programmatic changes to how CTE is designed and delivered. To support state and local leaders in the development of policies and programs that advance the expansion of CTE and work-based learning within and across states, Advance CTE, the Southern Regional Education Board, and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education partnered to create this CTE Without Borders Policy Playbook. The playbook was developed with input from more than 100 state and local leaders through a series of interactive roundtable discussions and interviews.

This policy playbook focuses on expanded access both within and across states and within and across secondary and postsecondary institutions. With a combination of key strategies, actions and policies across six focus areas, leaders can actualize expanded access within and across states to support learners’ and industry’s needs.

Leaders should leverage this resource to evaluate their CTE systems and discern where in their partnerships, systems, policies and practices they have opportunities to expand access within and across states to meet learners’ and industry’s needs. The strategies and actions in this playbook will support leaders as they determine the scope of this work for their state or region and understand where they have opportunities to prioritize various policy efforts to actualize CTE without borders.
Additionally, because each state operates within a different structure and context, some strategies and actions lend themselves to expanding access only at secondary institutions, postsecondary institutions or within states or across states, while other strategies may encompass more than one area of expanded access. The following keys are identified throughout the playbook to help navigate the strategies and actions.

**FOCUS AREAS**

The following focus areas guide leaders through strategies and actions to develop policies and practices within and across systems, agencies and institutions to expand access to high-quality CTE and work-based learning within and across states. These focus areas provide leaders with an understanding of the full system of policies and supports necessary to expand access to high-quality CTE and work-based learning. These strategies and actions rely on partnerships among K-12 institutions, postsecondary institutions and systems, state agencies, workforce development and industry and employer partners to connect policies and practices to each other and should be informed by comprehensive data, focused on learner outcomes, and designed with equity in mind.

The focus areas are not intended to be, nor are they reflective of, one-year initiatives. For the best results, they require a multi-year approach that each state and/or leader should tailor to their needs and specific goals and continually revisit and revise over time.

**FOCUS AREAS**

- **Drive Decisions With Data**
- **Incentivize Access With Flexible and Sustainable Funding**
- **Capture Learners’ Credits, Credentials and Experiences**
- **Optimize the Conditions for Virtual and Hybrid Learning Opportunities**
- **Inform and Support Learners and Families**
- **Align Partners, Values and Vision**

This is the final of a four-part series comprising the CTE Without Borders Policy Playbook. This section equips leaders seeking to expand access within and across states with strategies and actions to provide wraparound supports for learners and engage families and communities in the development and implementation of expanded access within and across states.
Learners frequently experience geographic barriers when engaging in CTE programs and work-based learning opportunities. Often, learners must travel to access programs, and school districts can face barriers related to funding, resources, and demand to justify expenses for costly CTE programs. CTE access can be inherently inequitable when learners, schools and even entire geographic areas are without access to broadband, technology, resources and flexibility. Inequitable access to CTE programs prevents learners from pursuing high-wage, high-demand careers and widens the skills gap that many states and communities face with their labor markets.

CTE without borders capitalizes on virtual and hybrid learning opportunities to provide expanded access within and across states. Expanded access at its most effective will enable and optimize the conditions necessary for learners to engage in diversified virtual and hybrid experiences to facilitate their learning, assist them in completing their desired CTE program, and successfully transition to the workforce.

For this vision to be actualized, the infrastructure for the CTE community should enable the conditions for a variety of virtual and hybrid opportunities and course offerings to be available. Meaningful and equitable engagement in virtual and hybrid learning opportunities requires learners to have access to the tools they need, ranging from broadband access to classroom materials and more. To optimize the conditions for virtual and hybrid learning opportunities when expanding access, leaders should consider:

- Ensuring equitable access to broadband;
- Increasing virtual and hybrid course and work-based learning offerings; and
- Providing ongoing CTE instructor professional development for virtual and hybrid instruction.
ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO BROADBAND

Expanded access to high-quality CTE and work-based learning can take the form of hybrid and/or online experiences. While hybrid and online opportunities create flexibility for learners, instructors, institutions and industry, these experiences are possible only if all participants have access to high-speed broadband.

The latest year for which internet access data is available is 2019, prior to the coronavirus pandemic. At that time, only 83 percent of learners with parents who have less than a high school education had home internet access. Additionally, the percentage of learners with home internet access was lower for historically marginalized racial/ethnic groups such as American Indian/Alaska Native families, Black families and Pacific Islander families. Moreover, only 76 percent of students living in rural areas had fixed broadband access at home, which is lower than the percentages of learners living in towns (79 percent), cities (80 percent) and suburban areas (87 percent).

In a survey conducted by New America and Third Way, 22 percent of college student respondents reported having major challenges accessing stable and high-speed internet. Without their college’s free Wi-Fi, students made do with what they had or did not log in at all. The shift to online learning during the coronavirus pandemic shows that reliable broadband is an essential service and that access is unequal among demographic groups across the country.

Leaders have opportunities to ensure affordable broadband access through longer-term solutions that leverage state, federal, private and anchor institutions to provide support for learners. Leaders can provide learners access to broadband by partnering with state-level workforce development councils or committees to promote statewide availability. Leaders can also leverage state-level budgets that are aimed at supporting equipment for learners in CTE courses to fund open access to broadband statewide.

Ohio created a Residential Broadband Expansion Program to offset construction costs and facilitate the expansion of high-speed internet. The law creates a framework for the state to give $20 million a year in grants that local broadband providers can apply for to expand the infrastructure of high-speed internet access to all areas across the state. The state’s broadband office, BroadbandOhio, also works with providers to provide hotspot locations, including on college campuses and in public libraries.

Rhode Island has leveraged state funds for program equipment, including access to broadband. The state approves these funds if the program is designated high wage and high demand by the governor’s workforce development board. Rhode Island also leverages a $1 million allocation for the state’s program equipment fund through an application process. Additionally, the state is using a braided funding model to purchase the necessary equipment to support learners in their CTE programs.

Providing mobile hotspots and Wi-Fi-enabled buses in under-served areas is another opportunity to provide broadband and allow learners to engage in virtual or hybrid opportunities. School districts in Colorado offer opportunities for learners to have access to broadband and the equipment they need to be successful in their CTE programs, including offering Wi-Fi buses to provide broadband access in under-served areas and mobile labs to provide hands-on learning experiences. The Wi-Fi buses provide a flipped classroom experience for learners: Learners are bused in to meet with industry and employer experts and on the way leverage Wi-Fi to complete their learning. Once they arrive at the facility, they participate in a hands-on learning opportunity to actualize the learning completed on the way to the experience. The Wi-Fi buses and flipped classroom experience are funded by two districts partnering to share the cost of the bus and support learners’ experiences. Other districts in the state are using mobile labs to provide hands-on instruction for learners in health science programs on certain days of the week. The classroom-based instruction for the health science program takes place virtually and is supplemented with
hand-on instruction experiences in the mobile labs.

Partnerships with internet service providers to provide broadband for free or at a reduced cost are another lever available to leaders to ensure access for learners. Arkansas funded Wi-Fi access points and data plans for all school districts in the state. The agreement, signed with AT&T and T-Mobile, included purchasing Wi-Fi access points and data plans at a reduced cost. Learners received the devices and internet access at no cost.100

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Coordinating with institutions, non-profit organizations and philanthropic organizations to support learners’ access to technology for free or for a reduced cost is a way to provide access to technology and/or equipment so learners can engage in their virtual courses or work-based learning opportunities. In the District of Columbia, Goodwill of Greater Washington partnered with Dell Reconnect to recycle used computers in the region and resell them at a reduced price.101

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INCREASE VIRTUAL AND HYBRID COURSE AND WORK-BASED LEARNING OFFERINGS:

Education systems and industry are poised to increase course and work-based learning opportunities by leveraging technology in new ways. Virtual and hybrid learning opportunities are ripe with inventive tools and structures to facilitate meaningful and engaging learning experiences for CTE courses and work-based learning.

CTE courses have leveraged virtual learning in the past, and this type of learning continues to be advantageous for expanding access. As states work toward achieving CTE without borders, leaders can position their learners for success by authorizing partnerships to further develop CTE online course offerings. In 2015, the Idaho Legislature authorized Idaho CTE to work with the Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA), a fully accredited online school serving students in all of the state’s 115 districts, to develop CTE Digital.102,103 Through this partnership with IDLA, all Idaho learners across the state can access online CTE coursework.104 IDLA establishes strong statewide partnerships and offers learners a course catalog that is responsive to their needs as well as the needs of the state’s economy. Leaders can leverage partnerships with existing online academies to expand access for all learners across the state and bring these academies into the fold of industry partnerships to foster alignment to meet labor market demands.

The Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development established a partnership with Launch Virtual Learning, which is a platform created and operated by Springfield Public Schools. The governor included budget funding to support Launch Missouri, and tuition is free for learners. At the start of the initiative, courses will be available in four pathways: teaching as a profession, marketing, introduction to business and Advanced Placement computer science. Additional pathways that will be developed in the next three years include agribusiness, bio-sciences, construction, education, energy, financial and professional services, health science, hospitality and food service, information technology, manufacturing and transportation and logistics.105

In addition to diversifying course offerings, leaders should also prioritize increasing access to virtual and hybrid work-based learning opportunities. Fully expanded, equitable access includes all components of CTE programs that make them beneficial to learners and industry, especially work-based learning. Work-based learning solves a problem that many job seekers face: It is hard to get a job without previous work experience, and it is hard to get work experience without a job.106 Work-based learning also helps employers gain access to candidates who have the experience needed to fill positions, helps to develop more robust talent pipelines, and provides greater access to a diverse labor pool.

States can support schools and districts by providing virtual and hybrid work-based learning opportunities to increase the accessibility of workplace experiences. Leaders have opportunities to broaden learners’ access to work-based learning through simulated approaches and leveraging technology. Nebraska launched the Nebraska Developing Youth Talent Initiative in 2015 to connect learners to opportunities in the manufacturing and information technology industries.107 The initiative prioritizes access for rural communities in the state and has resulted in projects such as a science, technology, engineering and mathematics trailer and virtual reality videos.108 States can replicate this model by providing
grant funding to schools, districts and even employers that partner with schools to purchase the equipment and materials needed to offer virtual and hybrid work-based learning opportunities such as trailers and RVs with lab equipment and virtual reality equipment.

Behavior youth facilities in Nebraska also leverage technology to simulate real-world experiences for learners by using zSpace machines, which provide a suite of learning applications to provide hands-on learning across multiple areas including health sciences, public services, manufacturing, skilled trades, agri-science and transportation.109 The machines provide learners experiences that would otherwise be inaccessible due to geographic barriers and even a lack of broadband access as the machines do not need to connect to the internet. Leaders can leverage the use of these machines for learners’ work-based learning experiences by purchasing them for schools and districts or partnering with non-profit organizations or foundations to cover the costs.

The range of offerings for coursework and work-based learning opportunities expands to postsecondary institutions as well — North Dakota’s Dakota Nursing Program strengthens the state’s pipeline for health care and medical professionals.110 The program operates through state and local partnerships with community colleges, hospitals and health care facilities, and courses are delivered through a combination of face-to-face labs and virtual classes through the statewide interactive network (IVN). IVN connects learners in real time to in-person classrooms in other parts of the state and allows learners in rural communities to access the limited pool of industry experts and learn in a simulated space.111 Leaders in other states can implement this model by establishing industry partnerships and leveraging CTE equipment funding to purchase online platforms that allow learners to connect with industry experts.

PROVIDE ONGOING CTE INSTRUCTOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR VIRTUAL AND HYBRID INSTRUCTION

To enable consistently meaningful experiences for learners engaging in expanded access, leaders should provide CTE instructors with ongoing, progressive training and professional development. CTE instructor professional development should support high-quality instruction, regardless of modality, and proficient use of technology and tools that are particular to the career field and enrich classroom experiences.

When providing hybrid or virtual instruction for learners, CTE instructors should ensure that their instruction includes an organized class structure and clear communication, delineates clear and aligned learning objectives, provides regular feedback, builds on supportive technology, and supports student connection and community.112 Leaders should dedicate funds and resources to supporting CTE instructors on using promising practices for virtual and hybrid learning environments as well as establish portals for CTE instructors to engage and share resources, ideas and thought partnership within and across state lines.

Educators across the country shifted to online learning over the course of the coronavirus pandemic, and as these structures continue to evolve to expand access, CTE instructors must be adequately trained and proficient in technology and resources to support hybrid and online learning environments and engage learners. Whether using video conferencing platforms such as Zoom or platforms such as Canvas that house modules and materials, educators must be supported to deliver high-quality instruction that maximizes the learning experience. Leveraging training to support educators in navigating platforms and providing ongoing assistance as needed are opportunities for leaders to ensure that instructors are proficient in the tools being used to deliver expanded access.

Instructors’ proficiency is crucial to model for learners what they will experience when they engage in work-based learning and eventually transition into the workforce. Particular training and support should be provided for CTE instructors leveraging tools such as zSpace machines, virtual reality devices, simulators and more. Leaders can support CTE instructors in building proficiency in technology and tools by partnering across districts, regions and even states to deliver joint professional development and achieve economies of scale.
EXPANDED ACCESS AND TEACHER RECIPROCITY: FACILITATING MOBILITY OF EDUCATIONAL PERSONNEL

CTE without borders can support institutions and programs by alleviating some of the strain on the limited number of experts available to guide learners in CTE programs and work-based learning opportunities. While this benefit supports the overall CTE system for expanded access, states should consider expanding their reciprocity for educator certification to facilitate the mobility of educational personnel across states.

The Council of State Governments is partnering with the U.S. Department of Defense and National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification to support the mobility of licensed teachers through the development of a new interstate compact that creates reciprocity among participating states.113 The **Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact** has been finalized and is available for state enactment.114

To facilitate educator certification agreements to allow teachers to instruct across state lines, leaders should consider entering this compact to establish full reciprocity across state borders.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT
Optimizing the Conditions for Virtual and Hybrid Learning Opportunities

- **Dallas Virtual Internship Toolkit**  
  (Dallas Thrives, Dallas Works, Dallas Regional Chamber and Dallas Independent School District)
- **Governor Strategies to Expand Affordable Broadband Access**  
  (National Governors Association)
- **Idaho Digital Learning Portal Course Catalog**  
  (Idaho Digital Learning Academy)
- **Interstate Teaching Mobility Compact Model Legislation**  
  (Interstate Teaching Mobility Compact)
- **Simulated Work-Based Learning: Instructional Practices and Noteworthy Practices**  
  (U.S. Department of Education)
- **Virtual Resources**  
  (NYC Department of Education)
Inform and Support Learners and Families

Expanding access to high-quality Career Technical Education (CTE) and work-based learning within and across states aims to meet the diverse needs of learners across the country. As such, learners, as well as their families, should be centered in the design, implementation and ongoing efforts to improve and expand access to ensure that the CTE system is responsive to their needs throughout every stage of the CTE continuum.

As leaders aim to actualize CTE without borders, they should use an equity lens to engage learners and families and deliver the supports, tools, technology, resources and information they need to make informed decisions about their futures, succeed in their programs, and successfully transition into the workforce.

As leaders expand access to high-quality CTE and work-based learning within and across states, they should consider:

- Deploying robust communication strategies to advertise accessible CTE opportunities;
- Providing learners with holistic advising; and
- Coordinating wraparound services and social supports.
EXPAND ACCESS THROUGH AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH TO SUPPORT ALL LEARNERS

All learners should be prepared and supported to successfully complete their CTE programs and work-based learning opportunities and transition into a successful career. Leaders in this work should adopt an equity and asset-based approach when tailoring policies, programs and practices to meet the diverse needs of learners.

An asset-based approach focuses on strengths and views diversity in thought, culture and traits as positive assets. Adopting an asset-based approach calls on leaders to bolster learners’ strengths and opportunities by recognizing the experiences of learners within the CTE system and structuring supports to remove any barriers. Adopting an asset-based approach is a shift from focusing on what learners do not have or do not do to considering how the system can support the success of all learners in CTE programs.

Adopting an asset-based approach through the lens of expanded access to CTE programs and work-based learning requires leaders to examine the limitations in virtual, hybrid or external opportunities and provide supports and services to meet learners’ needs. Leaders can more deeply comprehend the learner experience by leveraging their voice in the development of expanded access to CTE programs to inform the systems and structures of support. Capturing learner voice and input in the development of CTE programs, especially those that expand access, can allow for a more supportive system that sustains learners from the onset of their CTE experiences to their completion and eventual transition into a career.

DEPLOY ROBUST COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ADVERTISE ACCESSIBLE CTE OPPORTUNITIES

Learners frequently miss opportunities simply because they are not made aware of the opportunities available to them. Leaders, institutions and agencies should prioritize equitable communication practices to inform learners and families about the accessible CTE programs available to them with expanded access. This work includes identifying methods of communication that reach as many learners as possible, especially learners who are under-represented in CTE programs and work-based learning opportunities.

Comprehensive communications plans should be informed by data; leverage stakeholder interviews with learners, families, community members, teachers, school leaders, administrators, employers and industry; and raise the visibility of expanded access to high-quality CTE and work-based learning opportunities. When considering the timeline for implementation of expanded access within and across states, leaders should factor in developing a long-term communications plan that includes a large-scale rollout and increases the awareness for CTE programs among learners, families, educators and employers. PrepareRI in Rhode Island launched a short- and long-term communications plan to ensure that all learners were informed about their right to enroll in high-quality, equitable CTE programs anywhere in the state. Rhode Island’s communications plan can be found in the PrepareRI action plan in Appendix W on pages 378-384.
PROVIDE LEARNERS WITH HOLISTIC ADVISING

Holistic advising is a practice of not only viewing learners through an academic lens but also regarding them as a whole person. Viewing learners as a whole person takes into consideration the personal and systemic barriers that may prevent them from succeeding in CTE programs and couples each challenge with a solution that is tailored to that learner’s needs. Within the scope of CTE without borders, in addition to learners being aware of expanded access at large, they should be well informed about various in- and out-of-boundary CTE programs and work-based learning opportunities. Counselors and advisers are responsible for effectively communicating with learners so they can take advantage of opportunities that will support their career goals.

Leaders have opportunities to embed holistic advising as the standard for learner advising for expanded access by naming it as a priority in communications plans and creating alignment among all state, district and institutional partners. Leaders can also provide training, professional development and technical assistance to ensure that local partners are implementing holistic advising effectively and equitably.

Ohio Virtual Academy is a full-time online public school for K-12 students. The online school incorporates Stride Career Prep, which provides learners the chance to explore career options by taking core academic courses as well as career-focused electives in the high-demand field of their choice. Learners can earn college credits, gain industry experience and develop real-world skills through the platform. The platform also provides learners with virtual student success coaches to get advice on creating resumes, networking, interviewing, financial aid, college preparation, internships and more — providing learners with comprehensive support throughout their CTE programs.
As institutions and agencies provide expanded access within and across states, they should provide support to help learners of all backgrounds succeed in and complete their CTE programs and transition into the workforce to achieve their career goals. Wraparound services refer to comprehensive supports to ensure that a learner’s full range of needs are addressed. Wraparound supports can include academic, health, socio-emotional, familial, financial and logistical support and more. Leaders can coordinate wraparound services to support learners by collaborating across state agencies to develop a user-friendly portal that helps learners find the resources and assistance to meet their needs. The Arkansas Department of Education partnered with the Department of Health and the Division of Children and Family Services to develop the Statewide Community Resources Portal, which allows users to search for the wraparound services they need by county, region and category.

A critical wraparound support within the scope of CTE without borders is transportation, especially for learners engaging in expanded access that facilitates in-person classroom and work-based learning opportunities. Transportation is especially important for learners in rural communities who frequently are unable to access CTE programs. Leaders have opportunities to meet the transportation needs of learners engaging in on-site classroom and work-based learning experiences through state-level regulation. For example, in Rhode Island, the PrepareRI initiative, which provides learners in-state open access to CTE programs, guarantees learners access to career preparation programs that are approved by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). The regulation states that in the event a learner enrolls in a RIDE-approved career preparation program outside of their resident district, the districts administering the programs shall be reimbursed by the resident district in accordance with the cost benchmark for the program in which the learner is assigned.

Leaders can also leverage regulatory changes to CTE funding to provide targeted state funding to ensure that learners have transportation to high-demand programs. Rhode Island is developing a statewide transportation system for all learners that will encompass both within-district and out-of-district transportation. Leaders also can leverage state-level legislation and memoranda of understanding to support learners’ transportation needs. The Rural Schools Innovation Zone (RSIZ), a partnership of three school districts and two institutions of higher education providing expanded access for learners in South Texas, supports five academy programs to increase student growth and achievement in college and career readiness. The partnership is designed as a sustainable collaborative to provide learners in rural South Texas with high-quality opportunities for postsecondary success, with each academy focusing on college and career pathways open to all RSIZ learners. Each academy pathway is aligned to regional workforce demand with dual credit and certification opportunities.

The RSIZ came to fruition by district and local leaders leveraging state-level legislation providing incentives for districts to partner with an open-enrollment charter school, institutions of higher education, non-profits or government entities. Districts receive funding and accountability incentives for engaging in partnerships, and the “partnered campus” must be granted a charter authorization agreement. The three school districts administered their respective CTE programs before the Texas legislation went into effect in 2017. The legislation allowed the creation of the non-profit organization, RSIZ, to be authorized as a charter school and provide open access for learners in all three partnering districts. The RSIZ leverages funding from the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), philanthropic contributions, and partnerships with organizations such as Project Lead the Way to sustain the zone and provide access to resources such as curriculum and materials. To meet learners’ transportation needs, learners are shuttled to and from program locations; buses and vans are funded by state dollars.
RESOURCES TO SUPPORT Informing and Supporting Learners and Families

- **Attainment for All: Postsecondary Pathways Centering Equity in Wraparound Student Services**  
  (The Hunt Institute)

- **Elevating Family Voice in Career Pathways**  
  (Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group)

- **Engaging Families and Communities to Support Special and Underserved Populations in CTE**  
  (Association for Career and Technical Education)

- **Implementing Individual Career and Academic Plans at Scale**  
  (Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group)

- **Powerful Student Support Practices**  
  (Southern Regional Education Board)

- **Strategic Messaging for Effective Communications: Using Research Insights to Connect to Key Audiences**  
  (Advance CTE)

- **With Learners, Not for Learners: A Toolkit for Elevating Learner Voice in CTE**  
  (Advance CTE and Association for Career and Technical Education)

- **YouthForce NOLA Family Engagement Toolkit**  
  (Urban League of Louisiana and YouthForce NOLA)

Visit Advance CTE’s Learning that Works Resource Center to read the complete *CTE Without Borders* series.
Endnotes


93 Ibid.


97 House Enrolled Act 2 https://search-prod.lis.state.oh.us/solarapi/v1/general_assembly_134/bills/hb2/EN/05/hb2_05_EN?format=pdf


Endnotes continued


114 Ibid.


122 PrepareRI. (n.d.). https://www.prepare-ri.org/


