

## Delivering Career Technical Education

There is a lot of confusion about what Career Technical Education (CTE) is, some of which comes from the many forms CTE can take. CTE can start in early K-12, extend through high school, include postsecondary education and training, and even encompass workforce development programs. It can also be delivered at a wide variety of types of institutions. This diversity of programs and systems is both a strength – allowing more learners to participate in CTE in their communities – and a challenge when it comes to the broader public understanding of what CTE really is and how it can be delivered across the country.

To help clarify the many faces of CTE, here's a cheat sheet on CTE's primary delivery systems:

**Comprehensive High Schools** are “traditional” high schools, offering CTE courses and programs of study, often as electives. Over 80 percent of public school districts offer CTE through comprehensive high schools.<sup>1</sup>



**Technical/Vocational High Schools** are high schools that primarily or solely offer CTE programs. Many of these schools may be career academies or have multiple career academies within them. It is also not uncommon for these schools to be available to students across a district or county to attend full or part time to access CTE-specific courses. There are approximately 1,400 public high schools that fall within this category.<sup>2</sup>

**Area Technical Centers** are co-located sites where CTE is delivered to students from one or more local school districts. Some area CTE centers serve only high school students, while others serve both high school students and adults. The centers may be *shared-time*, offering primarily technical training and credit, or *full-time*, providing students with both academic and technical training and credit. Area CTE centers are often cost effective because they allow schools, districts or regions to pool resources and build economies of scale with qualified instructors and cutting-edge technology. As of 2002, there were 1,200 area CTE centers in 41 states,<sup>3</sup> serving a little more than half of all public school districts.<sup>4</sup>



**Career Academies** are either small schools or “schools-within-a-school” that provide a college preparatory curriculum in the context of a career-oriented theme. Today, there are approximately 7,000 career academies serving 1 million students in a range of specializations.<sup>5</sup> There are a number of prominent career academy models, including National Academy Foundation and Linked Learning, supported by organizations such as Ford Next Generation Learning and National Career Academy Coalition. About a quarter of all public high schools offer specialized career academies.<sup>6</sup>



**Community & Technical Colleges** are two-year educational institutions offering programs leading to associate degrees, diplomas, certifications and/or their equivalents.



Community colleges are more likely to include both career-focused and transfer programs, preparing students to continue onto four-year institutions. Some community colleges can now grant four-year degrees. Technical colleges are more likely to focus on more career-focused programs and certifications. However, these institution types largely overlap. There are nearly 950 public community/technical colleges – along with 100 nonprofit and 670 for-profit two-year institutions – in the U.S.<sup>7</sup>

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**Early College High Schools** are schools that links secondary and postsecondary study by allowing high school students to attend and receive credit for college courses during their secondary studies, often on a no- or low-cost fast track to an associate degree. In most early college high schools, students have the opportunity to graduate in four or five years with a high school diploma and an associate degree.



### Pre-Apprenticeship/Youth Apprenticeship



programs prepare students for Registered Apprenticeship training. A pre-apprenticeship typically takes place in a classroom and/or lab setting, but may also involve work-site visits, job-shadowing or other activities outside the program facility to provide exposure to the work environment. In many places, completion of a youth apprenticeship program – by students under the age of 21 – will count towards a year or more of the full Registered Apprenticeship requirements.

CTE can also be offered through charter schools, magnet schools, virtual schools, and private, for-profit postsecondary institutions.

There is no wrong way to deliver CTE, and each of the models described above has both advantages and drawbacks – as well as incredibly successful programs and not-so-successful programs. What is most important to focus on is the *quality* of the programs being delivered, regardless of the delivery system.

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2018). *Career and Technical Education Programs in Public School Districts: 2016-17*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018028.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> NCES. Common Core of Data. 2015-16. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/tableGenerator.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> NCES. (2008). *Career and Technical Education in the United States: 1990 to 2005: Statistical Analysis Report*. Retrieved from

<sup>4</sup> NCES. (2018). *Career and Technical Education Programs in Public School Districts: 2016-17*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018028.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> National Career Academies Coalition. Retrieved from <https://www.ncacinc.com/nsop/academies>

<sup>6</sup> NCES. (2008). Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Questionnaire". 2007–08. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ctes/tables/h01.asp>

<sup>7</sup> NCES. (2011). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/datalab/tableslibrary/viewtable.aspx?tableid=8460>

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