

Without Limits: A Vision to Advance CTE with Equity at the Center

Without Limits: A Shared Vision for the Future of Career Technical Education, developed by Advance CTE and supported by an additional 38 national organizations, puts forth a bold vision for a cohesive, flexible and responsive career preparation ecosystem that will close equity gaps in educational outcomes and workforce readiness and leverage Career Technical Education (CTE) as a catalyst for ensuring that each learner can reach success in the career of their choice.

As our nation faces the daunting challenges of eliminating systemic racism, economic inequality and social injustice, education must play a critical role in dismantling barriers to economic and social mobility — which it can only do if educational systems themselves become more equitable and accessible. CTE, when designed and delivered with an equity lens, can be a means for every learner from every background to gain the skills and knowledge they need to achieve success.

In the past, CTE was viewed by some as an alternative educational option for non-college bound students, and as a result, a disproportionate number of people of color, women and low-income youth were “tracked” into terminal vocational programs without career growth potential. Over the past decade, CTE has evolved significantly and is moving toward a reality in which learners of all demographic backgrounds and all circumstances view CTE as an affordable, accessible educational opportunity that leads to lifelong, well-paying careers. But we will only achieve truly equitable CTE that works for each learner through sustained, collective action in both the public and private sectors.

A Vision With a Focus on Equity

CTE Without Limits places equity at the center of its vision for the future of CTE. Equity features in the vision as a foundational commitment, is the focus of one of the five principles, and serves as a cross-cutting lens across all of the core principles

CTE Without Limits lays out five inter-connected and equally critical principles:



Each learner engages in a cohesive, flexible and responsive career preparation ecosystem.



Each learner feels welcome in, is supported by and has the means to succeed in the career preparation ecosystem.



Each learner skillfully navigates their own career journey.



Each learner's skills are counted, valued and portable.



Each learner can access CTE without borders.

Coming Together to Advance Equity in CTE

Achieving equitable outcomes for learners requires swift, bold commitment from all who are part of the process of developing and delivering CTE programs at the federal, state and local levels, which includes industry partners and the philanthropic community. The vision outlines specific actions stakeholders can take to advance equity within CTE and the broader career preparation ecosystems including:

Fully diagnose and understand the scope of the institutional barriers and systemic racism

States and institutions should conduct equity audits to assess how effectively CTE is serving learners of color and other marginalized populations, such as students with disabilities and students who live in low-income communities. These audits must take into account existing state-level practices that have historically and systemically created barriers for certain learners due to racism or other forms of discrimination.

Design CTE programs and interventions on the margin while maintaining a commitment to quality

States and institutions should build interventions and services to target the needs of learners who encounter the greatest barriers to access and success. States and communities need to meaningfully engage currently hidden populations (such as justice-connected youth and adults; single parents; and learners experiencing homelessness, high mobility, or other instability in their housing situation) as they are often placed on the margins of the education and workforce systems.

Design and implement equitable funding models that direct funding to the learners, communities and programs that need it most

CTE funding structures often perpetuate inequities, with persistent and often growing gaps between well-resourced and under-resourced communities and institutions. States and institutions should identify and leverage flexibilities within federal funding whenever possible to better target and pool resources to achieve more equitable outcomes. In turn, national organizations and state agencies must work together to develop new funding formulas, moving away from inequitable practices, such as relying on local property taxes or seat time as the main drivers of funding. State and federal policymakers also must reconsider limitations on financial aid for high-quality, short-term CTE programs and other means of allowing aid to best support each learner throughout their career progression.

Invest in research and development to ensure that virtual opportunities are high quality and meaningful and offer equitable access

The federal government, national organizations, philanthropy, states and institutions must invest in virtual experiences that are high quality and enable more equitable access to CTE for learners no matter where they live or their background. This is critical to not only expanding access and opportunity for learners but to maximizing the resources and capacity of our entire CTE system.

Explore the Vision

The above examples highlight some of the key steps leaders across all sectors must take to successfully ensure that CTE becomes more equitable, accessible and meaningful for each learner.

To read the full vision, access additional resources and sign up to stay engaged, please visit www.careertech.org/without-limits.