

# A Win-Win Partnership: First Book and Career Technical Education



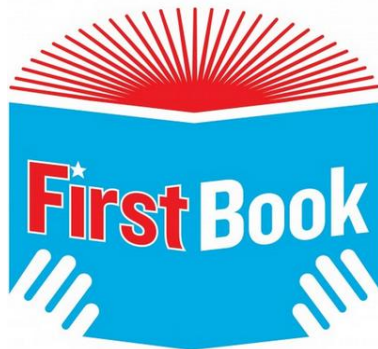
**By Katie Niersbach**, Operations Manager, First Book National Book Bank, Katie manages First Book's partnership with CTE programs, which currently engage 15 sites and 620 students and moves over 3 million units of product for First Book annually.

At First Book, we have delivered over 100 million free and low-cost books to youth in need. Through strategic collaboration with Career Technical Education (CTE) programs nationwide, we have been able to deliver more books than ever before and tied the mission of expanding access to resources for kids in low income communities to CTE students' hands-on education. In the process, we receive a firsthand look at the awesome power of CTE to not only to teach students, but also to serve communities in need.

## The Distribution Challenge

Traditionally, First Book worked with donated warehouse space. Once a book donation became available, the National Book Bank team would secure a location, warehouse donors would agree to receive and store the product, and the Book Bank team would notify our network of over 130,000 programs nationwide about the expected available inventory.

Once all the books were allocated at the programs' request, three to five of our staff members would travel to the site and process the 350,000–500,000 books over the course of a week. As First Book expanded, we continued to look for more efficient ways to provide over eight million books every year to our network, and minimize the uncertainties in the availability of warehouse space, working with sight-unseen inventory and limited access to labor. While we still very frequently work in this framework and rely heavily on our warehousing partners, a more efficient process would allow us to reach even more kids in need.



***When we got that first shipment of books, I told my students, 'This is the real world now.'***

***– Instructor Ashley Kieffer, Effingham Career & College Academy***

## CTE for Growth

In 2008, we learned that students in the Transportation, Distribution & Logistics Career Cluster® were focusing on materials handling. Many of these programs have distribution centers, warehousing equipment and a built-in workforce, but traditionally work with simulated inventory – empty boxes that take up space and student effort.

First Book saw the chance to improve students' educational experience in a new way and access open, staffed locations for our real inventory, while our CTE partners saw an opportunity to make their classrooms come to life. Working together, we created a mutually beneficial relationship that enables CTE students to enrich their learning with real life work experience while First Book expands its capacity to serve more children in need. First Book currently partners with 15 programs in 10 states, providing the physical capacity to hold over 1.8 million books at a time and engaging approximately 630 students.

“When we got that first shipment of books, I told my students, ‘This is the real world now. We’re sitting on \$200,000 worth of books that have been entrusted to us to maintain, warehouse, care for, protect and ship on behalf of First Book,’” explains instructor Ashley Kieffer of Effingham Career & College Academy in Rincon, Georgia.

Programs participate in up to 20 shipments yearly and,

depending on capacity, move anywhere from a few dozen to several thousand boxes.

“They learn how to process orders for a national organization,” says Vicki Phillips, instructor at Lehigh Career & Technical Institute in Schnecksville, PA. “It’s a win-win for both sides.”

### Providing student support

First Book staff provide live demonstrations of how to manipulate and work with data by engaging with students every step of the way, from inventory to processing to shipping. After several successful shipments, CTEP sites are provided a computer loaded with UPS shipping software, and are trained how to process labels, schedule freight pickups and export tracking information. Programs can also customize their interaction with First Book, including processing unboxed and mixed inventory, assembling collections or managing shipments year-round through summer internships.

Our partnerships also engage the community. Each site can select up to five percent of received inventory “off the top” to distribute locally to programs that fit First Book’s criteria of serving children in need.

“It’s very cool,” explains Luke Usher, a student at Effingham

Career & College Academy. “We’re giving children books that they can love and enjoy, because they can’t afford them.”

“The day First Book discovered CTE, our distribution model changed forever,” said First Book Chief Operating Officer Chandler Arnold. “Previously, First Book had millions of books but desperately needed warehouse and logistics support, CTE had amazing warehouse and logistics leadership capacity but needed a real-world products. Seven million books later, I can’t think of a more powerful partnership that not only advances First Book’s core mission but also introduces amazing young people across the country to our organization—giving them a tangible way to make a difference as they develop the skills they need to succeed.” •

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*The First Book – CTEP program partnership has delivered over seven million books since 2008, and they continue to expand. If you think a First Book partnership is right for your program, contact the National Book Bank team at [tceps@firstbook.org](mailto:tceps@firstbook.org).*

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