



Secondary Career Technical Education and Economic Recovery

In a time of economic uncertainty, Career Technical Education (CTE) is an absolute must. CTE graduates are fueling our economy and keeping our citizens safe – they are health care workers and providers on the front-line; transportation, distribution and logistics professionals keeping our supply chain moving; and information technology (IT) specialists helping us connected by expanding broadband access and developing and improving virtual platforms.

Within the first three months of COVID-19 (coronavirus), over 40 million individuals filed for unemployment,¹ with job losses reported in all sectors.² Young adults are among the most impacted by the economic downturn. Consider:

- Nearly 7.7 million young workers under the age of 30 were unemployed³ and three million dropped out of the labor force as of May 2020.⁴
- The unemployment rate for teenagers aged 16-19 hit 31.9 percent in April 2020, the highest it has even been in over 70 years.⁵ The only other time the unemployment rate for this population reached over 25 percent was during the Great Recession.
- The unemployment rates are also much worse for non-White young adults – 35.5 percent and 31.1 percent for Black and Latino teenagers respectively, compared to 29 percent for White teenagers.⁶

For those individuals just at the beginning of their careers, losing opportunities to gain experience and a foothold in the labor market can have major, long-term impacts. For example, the millennial generation, who entered the workforce during the height of the Great Recession, is estimated to have relatively low levels of home ownership, net worth and real income compared to previous generations.⁷

While many early recovery efforts and investments are fairly focused on short-term workforce development and postsecondary CTE programs that can reskill adults to get them back into the workforce, less attention is being paid to the importance of continued investment in CTE at the secondary level. This approach is short-sited as secondary CTE is critical to preparing learners for an evolving workforce and ensuring they have the foundational and transferable skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. If we do not continue to provide quality CTE programs and experiences to learners starting in K-12, our next generation of workers will lose out on critical opportunities for lifelong success and security.

CTE Prepares Learners for College, Careers and Life

There are measurable, positive outcomes for secondary learners who participate in CTE programs, regardless of their post-high school plans. For example:

- Graduates from high school-level CTE programs are almost equally likely to go onto college as learners who did not complete a CTE pathway.⁸
- Among high school graduates who enter the workforce directly, CTE learners are more likely to be employed (and have benefits) than their peers who did not complete a CTE pathway.⁹



- Students in CTE programs and their parents are three times as likely to report they are “very satisfied” with their and their children’s ability to learn real-world skills as part of their education compared to parents and students not involved in CTE.¹⁰
- High school CTE students are more likely to have a post-high school plan than their peers not involved in CTE.¹¹

Secondary CTE Provides Real-World Experiences

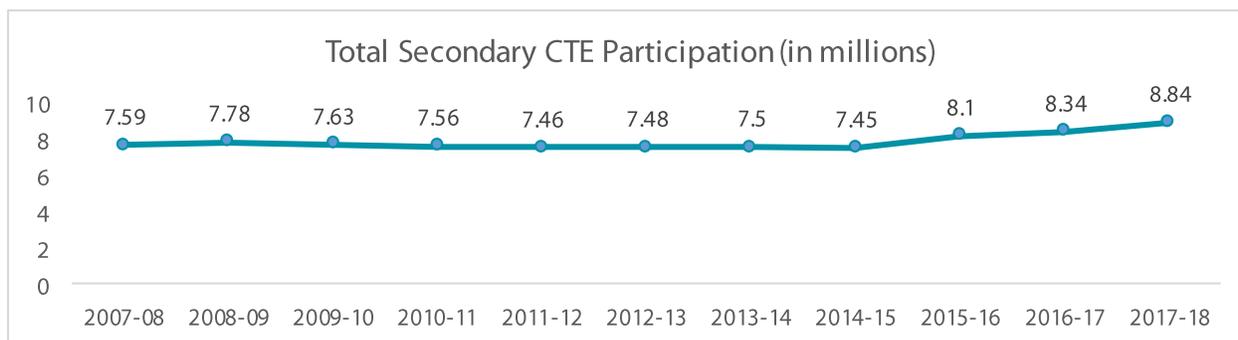
Part of what makes CTE so critical is that it provides learners with exposure to the world of work and real-world experiences early in their career development. Increasingly, high-quality CTE programs offer opportunities for work-based learning experiences, which not only reinforce classroom learning but can also provide youth employment opportunities.

- Participating in a CTE-related cooperative education, internship, apprenticeship or mentorship program in high school is associated with higher subsequent job quality, defined by wages, benefits, work hours and job satisfaction.¹²
- Such experiences are also critical to building social capital for young adults, which has lifelong benefits. Studies have found that young and older adults (ages 29-43) who obtained their job through their social network had higher wages relative to adults who used formal job searching techniques and that social networks can help young adults find their first jobs, even during times of unemployment. Unfortunately, youth and young adults of color are less likely to have strong social networks without some interventions or supports than their White peers.¹³

As the unemployment rate for youth and young adults remain incredibly high, CTE can ensure learners continue to gain key work experience, build out their networks and gain social capital, setting them up for greater success in the future.

There is Great Demand for Secondary CTE

As our country recovered from the last economic downturn, the interest in and demand for secondary CTE increased as families, learners and policymakers recognized the need to better prepare students – starting as early as the middle grades – for an evolving and more complex labor market. Over the last decade, enrollment in secondary CTE increased by 16 percent.



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- Ninety-four percent of parents approve of expanding access to CTE and other vocational programs that prepare students for jobs, with 60 percent strongly approving.¹⁴
- Seventy-six percent of Americans say middle or high school is the right time to start exploring possible career options, compared to just 7 percent who say college is the right time.¹⁵
- Ninety percent of Americans agree that CTE should be offered in every high school, with nearly universal support (98 percent) among families with direct experience taking CTE courses.¹⁶

The Need for Ongoing Investment in CTE

Over the past decade, CTE became a priority for states, local communities, the federal government, philanthropy and the private sector as a strategy to build a talent pipeline to meaningful careers for learners and to close the disconnect between our education and workforce sectors. The field has made great strides to ensure each learner has access to and can successfully complete a high-quality CTE program that is aligned with high-skill, high-wage and in-demand careers.

As states and communities continue to grapple with the harsh realities of the coronavirus and its impact on their budgets, it is imperative that CTE programs be recognized as an essential investment so that both the current and future generation gain the critical skills necessary for success in the ever-changing economy. CTE is both a proactive and responsive strategy for attending to the economic downturn – CTE programs prepare learners for lifelong success while also offering targeted skilled training for others.

Now is not the time to back away from our commitment to advancing high-quality CTE, but rather the time to double down and ensure CTE programs are available for every learner who seeks to better their own lives and opportunities.

¹ <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/14/coronavirus-unemployment-claims-numbers-257875>

² <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>

³ <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/6953-unemployment-under-30/8b646ef429cecb7d77a7/optimized/full.pdf#page=1>

⁴ <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/6954-3-million-left-workforce/8b646ef429cecb7d77a7/optimized/full.pdf#page=1>

⁵ <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2020/unemployment-rate-rises-to-record-high-14-point-7-percent-in-april-2020.htm>

⁶ https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm, based on quarterly averages

⁷ https://www.stlouisfed.org/~media/files/pdfs/hfs/essays/hfs_essay_2_2018.pdf?la=en

⁸ <https://nces.ed.gov/datapoints/2020019.asp>

⁹ <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020060.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://careertech.org/resource/value-and-promise-of-cte-results-from-a-national-survey>

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Brookings_Child-Trends_Pathways-for-High-Quality-Jobs-FINAL.pdf

¹³ <https://www.search-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SOCAP-Lit-Review.pdf>

¹⁴ https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/parentpoll2017_memo.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.k12.com/career-technical-education.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.k12.com/career-technical-education.html>

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