GOLDEN STATE PATHWAYS PROGRAM
Capitol Region Technical Assistance

Importance of Intentional Recruitment and Marketing for CTE Programs

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Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs play a pivotal role in preparing students for both higher education and careers. However, the success of these programs depends on intentional and strategic recruitment and marketing. By emphasizing the value of CTE pathways, building strong community partnerships—including collaborations with community colleges—and targeting diverse audiences, schools can effectively increase enrollment, engagement, and support for their CTE programs.

Why Intentional Recruitment and Marketing are Critical

The traditional perception of CTE as a vocational option primarily for non-college-bound students is outdated. Today, CTE pathways offer rigorous academics alongside hands-on training, making them a viable option for both college-bound students and those entering the workforce directly. Intentional recruitment and marketing efforts are necessary to shift this perception, attract a diverse group of students, and highlight the broader opportunities that CTE provides.

Key reasons for intentional recruitment include:

- **Changing Perceptions**: CTE marketing should emphasize the academic rigor, real-world skills, and career readiness that the programs offer, helping to dispel the misconception that CTE is only for students not pursuing college.
- **Showcasing Success**: Sharing stories of CTE students who have gone on to successful careers or further education helps demonstrate the value of these pathways. Highlighting graduates who have entered high-demand fields or continued to community colleges and universities is particularly powerful.
- **Targeting Diverse Audiences**: Recruitment should engage not just students, but also parents, educators, community members, and industry partners to build a comprehensive understanding of CTE's relevance in today's economy.
- **Collaborating with Community Colleges**: Community colleges are vital partners in CTE recruitment efforts. Dual enrollment and articulation agreements allow students to earn college credits while in high school, providing a head start on post-secondary education and reducing the overall cost of a degree.
- **Leveraging Data**: Using data on employment rates, salaries, and local industry needs can make a compelling case for CTE pathways to students and their families, showcasing the tangible benefits of CTE education.

Innovative Strategies for Recruitment and Marketing

A successful recruitment and marketing strategy for CTE programs requires creativity and a multi-faceted approach. Here are some key strategies for schools to consider:

1. **Leverage Social Media and Digital Tools** Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat are ideal for reaching today's students. Schools can post videos of CTE classes,

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showcase student success stories, and create virtual career exploration content. Interactive experiences such as "day-in-the-life" videos from students, or podcasts where students interview alumni or professionals, can build engagement. Virtual reality career exploration tools that let students experience different careers from home or school are also effective in increasing interest.

2. **Host Open Houses and Career Fairs** Open houses and career fairs allow students and parents to explore CTE pathways firsthand. Schools can host joint events with community colleges to highlight dual enrollment opportunities and the seamless transition between high school CTE programs and college degree paths. These events should feature student projects, demonstrations, and interactions with local industry partners to show the real-world applications of CTE skills.
3. **Collaborate with Feeder Schools** Presenting at feeder schools—such as middle or junior high schools—provides an early introduction to CTE programs. Current CTE students and teachers can give presentations, host demonstrations, and share personal experiences to inspire younger students to explore CTE options when they enter high school.
4. **Build Strong Industry and Community College Partnerships** Industry partnerships are key to providing students with real-world experiences, such as internships, job shadowing, and mentorships. Schools should also strengthen collaborations with community colleges to offer dual enrollment and facilitate the transition to post-secondary education. Promoting these partnerships not only enhances the credibility of CTE programs but also attracts students who are interested in gaining both practical skills and college credits.
5. **Highlight Student and Alumni Success Stories** Featuring testimonials from current students and alumni who have succeeded through CTE pathways—whether they entered the workforce or continued their education—helps make the program more relatable and appealing to potential students. These stories should emphasize how CTE programs can lead to immediate career opportunities or support further education through community colleges or four-year universities.
6. **Promote Dual Enrollment and Articulation Agreements** Partnering with community colleges to offer dual enrollment programs allows high school students to earn college credits while completing their CTE pathway. Highlighting articulation agreements—where CTE courses count toward college credits—can reduce the time and cost of obtaining a college degree, making CTE pathways even more attractive to students and their families.

Developing a Comprehensive Recruitment and Marketing Plan

An effective recruitment and marketing plan for CTE programs should include clear goals, targeted outreach to diverse audiences, and consistent messaging across various platforms. Key audiences for recruitment include:

- **Students**: Highlight hands-on learning, industry certifications, and the ability to earn college credits through dual enrollment.
- **Parents**: Emphasize the career readiness that CTE provides, alongside the cost savings of dual enrollment and the potential for high-paying jobs in in-demand fields.

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- **Community Colleges**: Work closely with community colleges to showcase how CTE pathways connect to post-secondary education and offer students a head start on their college degrees.
- **Industry Partners**: Demonstrate how businesses can engage with and benefit from CTE programs by offering internships, job shadowing, and curriculum development support to align education with workforce needs.

A comprehensive plan should also include a timeline for recruitment activities, such as:

- **Feeder school presentations**: Early in the academic year, schools should visit middle schools to introduce students to CTE opportunities.
- **Social media campaigns**: Regularly post content showcasing CTE student work, career exploration, and success stories.
- **Open houses and career fairs**: Schedule events where students and parents can meet CTE instructors, community college representatives, and local industry partners.
- **Community outreach**: Engage local media and community organizations to highlight CTE programs and their impact on the local economy.

Addressing Challenges in CTE Marketing

Marketing CTE programs can present several challenges, including:

- **Industry Misunderstandings of CTE**: Some businesses may not fully understand the modern scope of CTE programs or the benefits of partnering with schools. Schools can address this by hosting industry engagement events where educators share success stories and demonstrate the alignment between CTE pathways and industry needs.
- **Coordinating Schedules with Industry and Colleges**: Aligning school calendars with the schedules of businesses and community colleges can be difficult. Schools can offer flexible engagement options such as virtual internships, short-term job shadowing, or project-based learning.
- **Engaging Non-English-Speaking Families**: Schools should create multi-lingual marketing materials and ensure that recruitment events are accessible to non-English-speaking parents and community members to ensure equitable participation in CTE programs.

Conclusion

Intentional recruitment and marketing are critical to the success and growth of CTE programs. By utilizing innovative strategies, collaborating with community colleges and industry partners, and engaging diverse audiences, schools can ensure that CTE pathways are seen as a valuable option for both college-bound students and those entering the workforce directly.

Through a focused approach, CTE programs can increase enrollment, prepare students for success, and strengthen ties between education and industry, providing a robust talent pipeline for local economies. For GSPP grantees, adopting these strategies will help ensure that CTE programs reach their full potential, benefiting students, businesses, and communities alike.

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