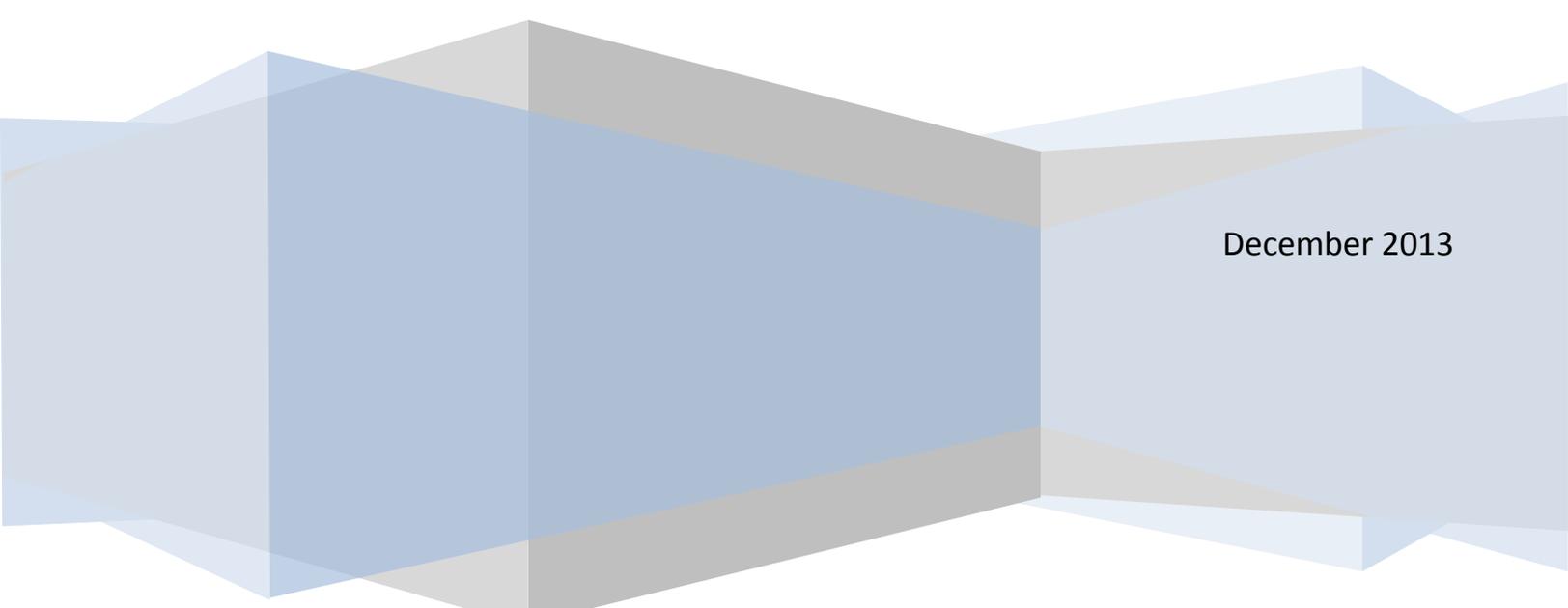


# Career Readiness Is More than Career and Technical Education



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## CTE Technical Assistance Center of New York: Mission and Purpose

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The Career and Technical Education Technical Assistance Center (CTE TAC) of New York assists the New York State Education Department (NYSED) in carrying out its mission of improving the quality, access, and delivery of Career and Technical Education (CTE) through research-based methods and strategies resulting in broader CTE opportunities for all students.

The CTE TAC operates as part of the Successful Practices Network (SPN) under a contract with the NYSED. The CTE TAC increases the capacity of the NYSED to serve, support, and expand CTE across the state.

CTE TAC services are provided to teachers and students in:

- Local education agencies
- BOCES
- High needs school districts
- CTE professional organizations
- CTE student leadership organizations

CTE TAC Work Plan

- CTE data collection and communications
- Networking to strengthen CTE
- Integration of the Common Core State Standards
- CTE program and student leadership expansion
- CTE program approval process
- Best practices in CTE

SPN, in collaboration with the CTE TAC, is promoting and further defining career readiness by connecting like-minded education leaders with tools and support to foster career readiness as a vision for learning. For more information, email us at [CRI@Spnet.us](mailto:CRI@Spnet.us). We also welcome you to take the new **Survey of Career Readiness** at <http://www.nyctecenter.org/survey/CareerReadiness/>.

*The Career and Technical Education Technical Assistance Center of NY has made every effort to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information contained in this white paper. The views expressed are theirs alone and do not necessarily represent the position of the NYS Board of Regents or the NYS Department of Education.*



1585 Route 146  
Rexford, NY 12148  
Phone: 518-723-2137  
Fax: 518-723-2140  
[ctetac@spnet.us](mailto:ctetac@spnet.us)

**Career Readiness Is More than  
Career and Technical Education**

*Today there is growing agreement among educators that our students need to be prepared for both college and careers. In recent years the most common education goal has been to raise student aspirations and expectations to be academically ready for college as their “ticket to success.” The conversation is shifting to acknowledge that students must be career ready as well.*

For many who work in Career and Technical Education (CTE), there is a feeling of exhilaration that this revised goal of “college and career” is an opportunity to attract more students into CTE programs. When college readiness was the primary goal over the last two decades, we saw a steady increase in Advanced Placement (AP) courses and a decline in enrollment in CTE programs. Perhaps now with this change of focus, the long-awaited recognition of the value of CTE can be realized. It does seem logical that CTE is a strong pathway toward a career. One solution to reach the goal of career readiness could be to simply enroll more students in CTE courses.

### **Career Readiness and CTE: Harvesting the Best of Both**

Career readiness and CTE, however, are not exactly the same. In our advocacy for career readiness, we must understand the subtle difference between these two career-labeled education initiatives. While most current CTE programs *do* make students career ready, they are not the *only* education programs that make students career ready.

CTE is a program composed of a curriculum related to a career pathway or cluster. The CTE curriculum represents dozens of jobs and career cluster fields in which the curriculum is defined by the tasks required to work in those careers. The CTE program goal is to develop student proficiency in technical skills, with most students continuing their education before starting work in a related career. Even students who do not enter a career field related to their CTE program learn much about their personal abilities, application of knowledge, and work habits. It is some of these skills acquired through any effective CTE program that contributes to student career readiness. A summary of differences between CTE and career readiness follows.

<b>Career and Technical Education</b>	<b>Career Readiness</b>
Describes a School Program	Describes a Student
Set of Courses/Modules	Set of Characteristics
Involves Some Teachers	Involves All Teachers
Technical Curriculum	Instruction that Enables Learning

Not all CTE programs are the same. Some programs are more exploratory, such as developing skills in information technology or agriculture that lead to a wide variety of careers; others are focused on preparing students for licensing in a specific career field, such as certified nursing or cosmetology. Common among nearly all high-quality CTE programs, however, is the development of career readiness skills through practical, real-world learning experiences.

Although technical skills are important and often essential for job readiness and career readiness, it is the work habits and personal skills developed through high-quality CTE instruction that are transferable to *any* career and are more likely to contribute to career readiness and lead to career success. When employers describe ideal workers, their list does not usually begin with technical skills. Employers seek individuals with a strong work ethic, an ability to work with others, and a willingness to learn. Career readiness is more about those hard-to-observe abilities and attitudes that make students successful in a lifelong career or — as is so often the case — careers. Career-ready students are committed to career goals, are confident in their abilities, and display positive work habits.

CTE is a set of courses or a program.  
Career readiness is a set of student characteristics.

In secondary schools, we tend to think about solutions — for both college and career readiness — in terms of courses and programs. The core of high school curriculum, including subjects such as mathematics and science, is designed to develop foundation knowledge in those subjects that will prepare students for higher education, enhance their cognitive skills, and equip them with the basic mathematical, scientific, and other forms of literacy that every citizen needs to live responsibly in society.

- If we want to make students *college ready*, we add college preparatory courses. We have seen this trend with more AP and dual credit courses.
- If we want to add make students *career ready*, our tendency is to consider adding CTE programs. Solutions take the form of specific courses and programs, along with certified teachers in those specific courses. Adding these courses (or dropping others) often creates a competition within schools for limited resources.

In this time of declining education budgets, we often inadvertently create contentious conflicts among teachers on whether to allocate limited resources toward AP college-oriented courses or toward CTE. This narrow view is likely to lead to political stalemates that will *not* help students in their preparation for careers. Rather than competitively adding or deleting programs or teachers in specific certification areas, career readiness requires school staff, across all subjects, to work collaboratively.

While more students can benefit from completion of CTE programs, it should not be at the sacrifice of also completing courses that prepare students for college readiness. College and career readiness are not separate paths of courses; they are overlapping sets of student characteristics. Achieving the characteristics of career readiness is not defined by *what* we teach, but *how* we teach. When we advocate for increasing career readiness, it is important to emphasize the instructional characteristics that we so often see in CTE, and occasionally in academic courses, and expand those to *all* instruction. If we change instructional priorities, we can strengthen career readiness.

CTE curriculum defines *what* to teach.  
Career readiness defines *how* to teach.

Several initiatives have begun to define these broader characteristics of career readiness:

- The National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium led the definition of the National Career Clusters® Framework that defines standards for CTE programs. Within this framework are 12 Career Ready Practices that provide developmental experiences necessary to becoming career ready. These are experiences that can be “practiced” using many different approaches in a variety of settings beyond CTE.  
<http://www.careertech.org/career-technical-education/cctc/careerreadypractices.html>
- The work of Dr. David Conley at the Educational Policy Improvement Center defines two readiness skill areas of *Key Learning Skills and Techniques* and *Key Transition Knowledge and Skills* that go beyond traditional standards and curriculum. <https://www.epiconline.org/Issues/college-career-readiness/the-solution>
- The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research examines non-cognitive factors in shaping student performance and defines many of the characteristics that contribute to readiness.

<http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/teaching-adolescents-become-learners-role-noncognitive-factors-shaping-school>

There is much work required to further define — and more importantly — deliberately teach and assess these aspects of readiness.

## Characteristics of Instruction in Career Readiness

While formal research continues to evolve, the instructional and learning practices employed in many exemplary CTE programs help define how *all* teachers can teach for career readiness. Enhancing student career readiness includes the following characteristics of instruction, *i.e.*, strategies on how teachers can help students develop career readiness.

- **Relevance.** Students value education when they see a direct connection between education and application of skills in the real world. This relevance connection is very easy to observe in CTE and it is why students in CTE are often highly engaged. Relevance can and should be developed in any instruction.
- **Work Habits.** Education should be about developing responsible work habits such as initiative and collaborating with others. In CTE, teachers provide extensive feedback to students regarding their work habits in everything from safety to teamwork and responsibility. This emphasis can be a component in any subject matter instruction.
- **Creativity.** Students enjoy the opportunity to apply their own ideas to instruction. These are desired traits in the workplace as well. CTE in many different programs provides opportunities for students to use their judgment, introduce new ideas, and innovate.
- **Engagement.** Students achieve better when they invest energy in their own learning and are fully engaged in doing so. Students are frequently engaged in CTE courses more than academic courses because they see an opportunity to nurture their individual interests, challenge themselves to develop their talents, and participate in relevant instruction. Career-ready students must have that same level of commitment to fully engage themselves in their continued learning.
- **Self-directed Learners.** Students in CTE are given many opportunities to develop independence and take responsibility for their own learning — a desirable characteristic in career readiness for lifelong learning.
- **Proficiency Measures.** Being career ready includes having confidence in your skills and being able to apply those skills. Through CTE, students develop a clear proficiency in applying career-related skills. Learning is not defined by grades but by demonstration of skills in the creative solution of authentic, challenging, and meaningful “problems.”

## Summary

CTE can and *does* contribute to and inform career readiness. However, that contribution is not merely because the CTE curriculum is based on technical skills. *It is the style of instruction and learning within CTE that significantly engenders career (and, for that matter, college) readiness.* Scaling up and embracing career readiness to embody the culture and practice of an entire school community is not about more programs and courses; it is about instruction that defines and develops those engagement and self-learning elements that build career readiness. In seeking these instructional models, academic teachers and school leaders need to look no further than CTE. When teachers across all disciplines work together to address these elements, we can enhance career readiness, college readiness, and life readiness.

*Dr. Richard (Dick) Jones is Senior Consultant for the CTE Technical Assistance Center.*

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