

The Value and Promise of Career Technical Education: Results from a National Survey of Parents and Students

Career Technical Education (CTE) has come a long way in the last decade. CTE programs not only teach students real-world knowledge and skills, but increasingly provide opportunities for dual enrollment, industry-recognized credentials and meaningful work-based learning experiences. Yet despite the many benefits of CTE – including a graduation rate for CTE students that is 93 percent, compared to a national average of 82 percent¹ – there are still challenges with limited awareness and outdated perceptions of CTE. Enrollment in CTE programs has remained stagnant over the last decade while demand soars for skilled employees in today's global economy. If we are to prepare all learners for success in the careers of their choice, more parents and students need to understand all that CTE has to offer them.

Advance CTE, with support from the Siemens Foundation, commissioned focus groups and a national survey to explore the attitudes of parents and students currently involved in CTE, as well as prospective² CTE parents and students, to better understand the promise and opportunity of CTE.

KEY FINDINGS

- **CTE Delivers for Parents and Students:** CTE students and their parents are more satisfied with their education experience as compared to those not involved with CTE by nearly every measure, from general satisfaction with school experience, to the quality of their classes and opportunities for career exploration.
- **College and Career Success Are Both Important Goals for Parents and Students:** A top aspiration for parents and students is finding a career about which they or their child is passionate. At the same time, college remains a post-high school goal for nearly all parents and students.
- **Prospective Parents and Students Are Attracted to the “Real World” Benefits of CTE:** There are many elements of CTE programs that stand out to parents and students, particularly the fact that CTE provides real-world skills within the education system, something parents and students want more of from their education, as well as clear pathways into college and careers.
- **CTE Has an Awareness Challenge:** “Career Technical Education” has just moderate name recognition among parents, students and the general public, and understanding of how CTE is structured and delivered remains limited.
- **CTE Needs Champions and Messengers:** The “who” is equally if not more important than the “what” when it comes to communication. School counselors, teachers and CTE students are among the most trusted sources of information about CTE for prospective parents and students alike.

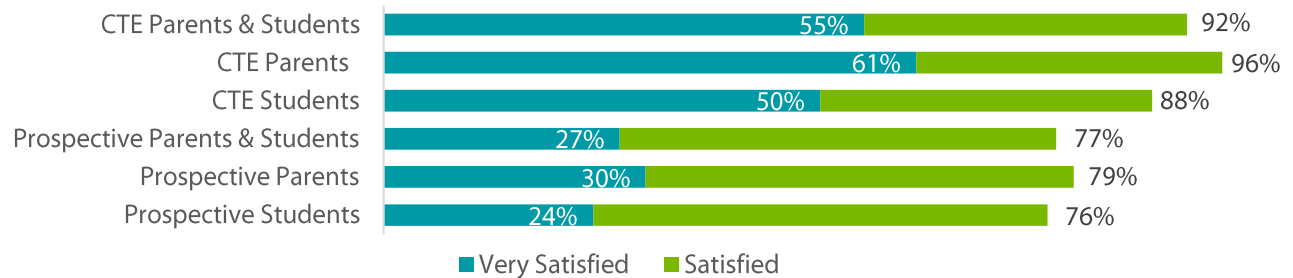
CTE Delivers for Parents and Students

Perhaps the most significant finding is that parents and students engaged in CTE have significantly more satisfaction around the quality of their education and the opportunities they have for college and career readiness. ***Fifty-five percent of CTE parents and students are “very satisfied” with their overall school experience compared to just 27 percent of prospective parents and students.***

¹ https://cte.careertech.org/sites/default/files/CTE_and_Student_Achievement_2017.pdf

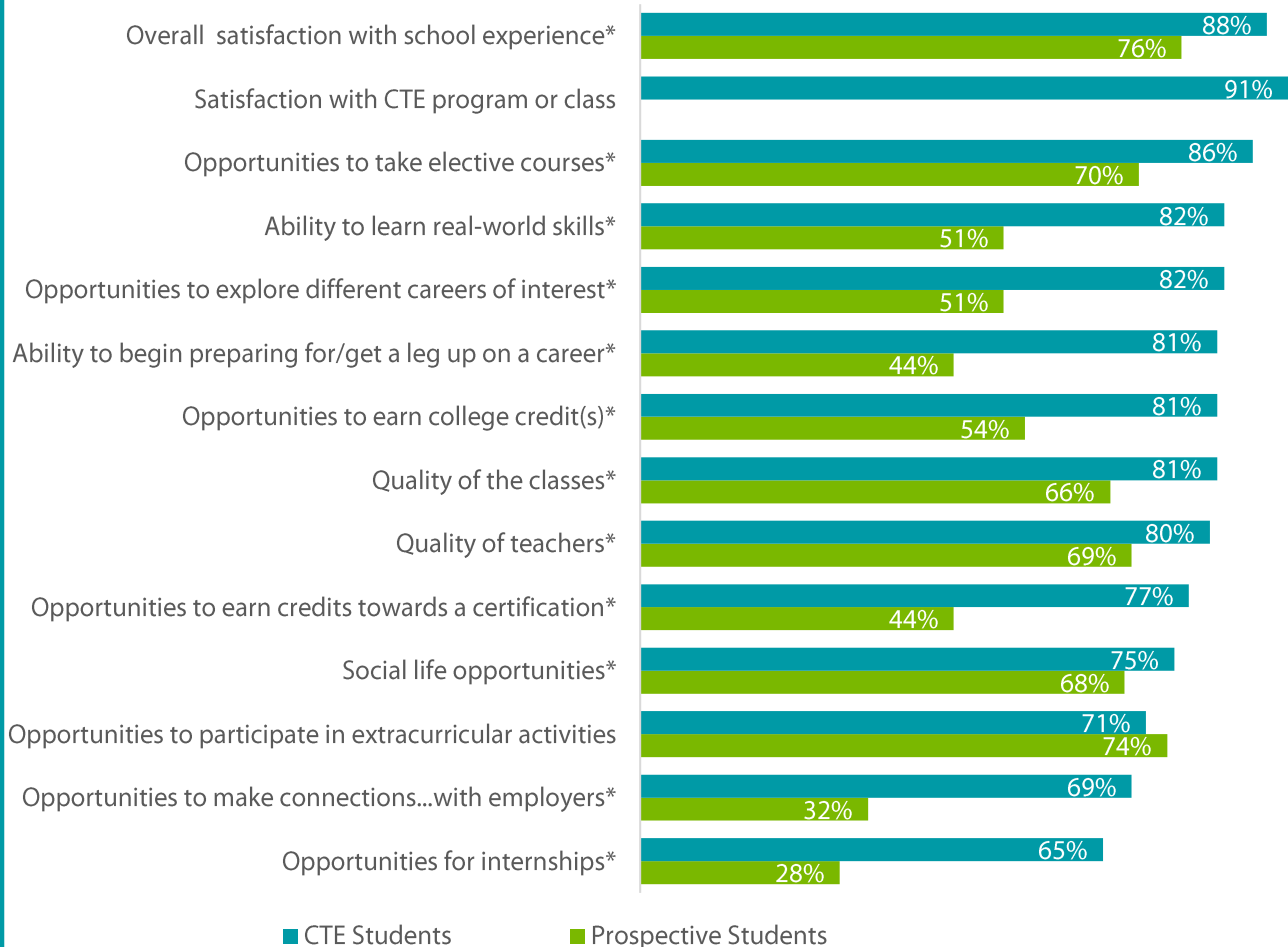
² Prospective parents and students (6th through 11th grade) are those not currently involved in CTE, but demonstrating some degree of interest after hearing a brief description of CTE.

How Satisfied Are You With Your/Your child's Overall School Experience?



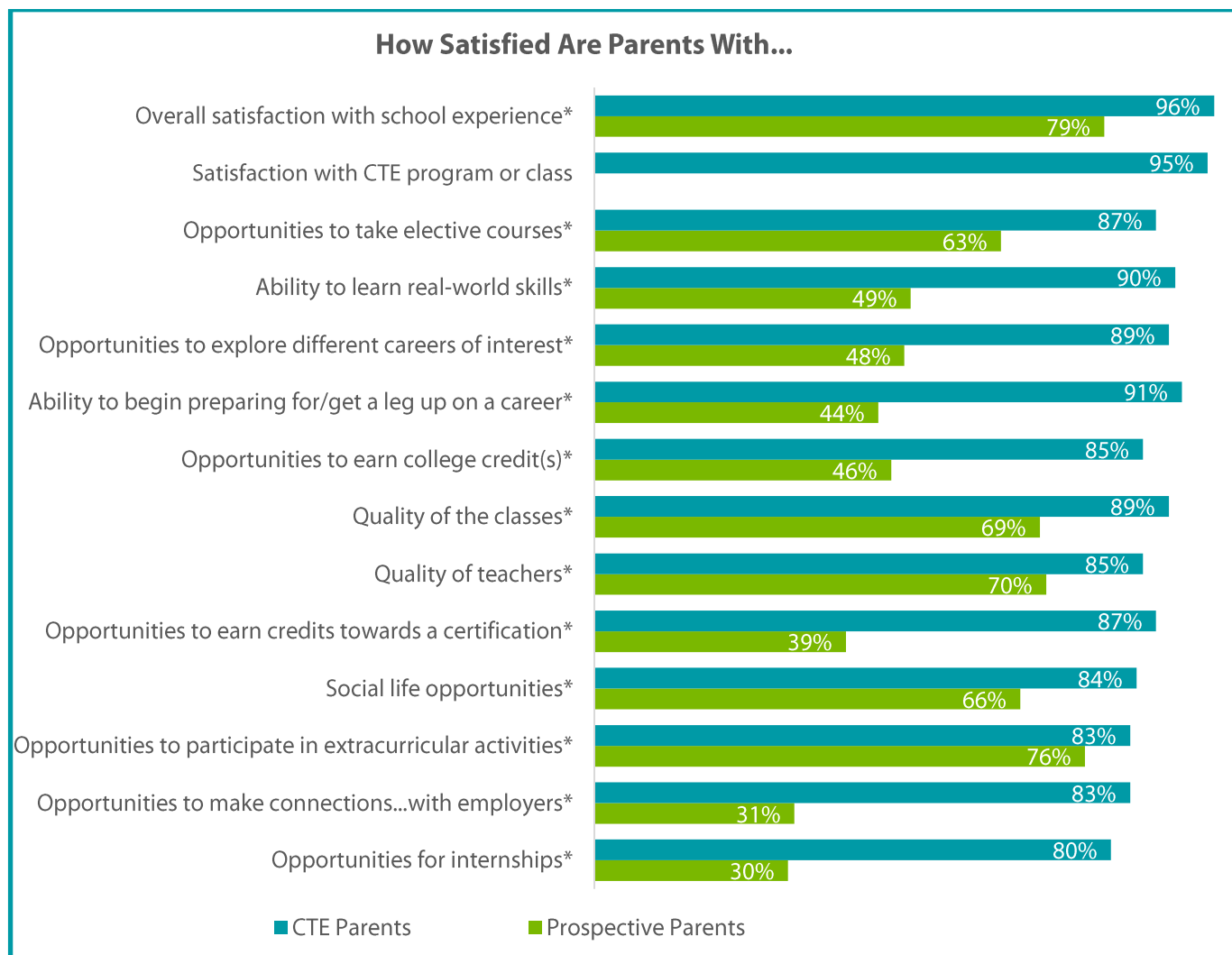
The difference in school satisfaction between CTE parents and students and prospects is even more striking when looking at individual elements of their school experience. This holds particularly true for those aspects related to career readiness and CTE such as opportunities to explore careers, gain real-world skills and network with employers.

How Satisfied Are Students With...



*Statistically Significant Difference

In fact, parents and students engaged in CTE have higher levels of satisfaction across nearly all aspects of their educational experience compared to parents and students not engaged in CTE. **About nine in 10 parents of CTE students were satisfied with their children's opportunities to explore different careers and learn real-world skills, compared to just five in 10 parents of non-CTE students.**



*Statistically Significant Difference

College and Career Success Are Both Important Goals for Parents and Students

"College" and "careers" are often presented as separate paths – or even pitted against one another – but parents and students see these as complementary and desire both. Findings show that communication about both college and career readiness aligns with parents and students' aspirations and values.

For example, eight in 10 parents and students (involved with CTE or not) say getting a college degree is important, and as many agree it's important to have a job that pays well. A standout finding is that nine in 10 parents and students say "finding a career that I/my child feels passionate about is important to me." Fulfillment and passion outweigh earnings as the ultimate goal, with college viewed as a means to achieving that goal.

Agree Strongly/ Agree Somewhat	All	Current CTE Parents	Prospective Parents	Current CTE Students	Prospective Students
<i>Finding a career that I feel/my child feels passionate about is important to me</i>	93%	94%	93%	92%	94%
<i>The more job experience I gain/my child gains increases chances of success</i>	88%	92%	85%	90%	89%
<i>It's important to me that I have/my child has a job that pays well</i>	87%	87%	82%	90%	91%
<i>Today's job market is much more competitive</i>	86%	91%	88%	86%	79%
<i>I wish I/my child could get more real world knowledge and skills during high school</i>	86%	90%	89%	83%	84%
<i>Getting a college degree is important</i>	85%	88%	84%	84%	85%
<i>I have/My child already has a specific career path in mind</i>	63%	82%	49%	76%	62%

Importantly, CTE parents and students have a clearer sense of urgency around the competitiveness of the job market: 86 percent of CTE agree today's job market is much more competitive compared to 79% of their peers. And, students involved in CTE are slightly more likely have a career path in mind (76 percent) than non-CTE students (62 percent).

Finally, not only is college viewed as important, a four-year degree or higher is the post-high school plan for most students, involved in CTE or not. Nearly eight out of 10 CTE students plan to attend college, including 62 percent who plan to attain a bachelor's degree or higher, which are incredibly consistent with prospective students' attainment goals. At the same time, CTE students are more likely to have a post-high school plan than non-CTE students, with **only two percent of CTE students responding that they "don't know" what they will do after high school, compared to eight percent of non-CTE students.**

Prospective Parents and Students Are Attracted to the "Real World" Benefits of CTE

Prospective parents and students want to hear about the tangible outcomes from CTE programs. The opportunity to gain "real world" skills and benefits is a theme that is particularly compelling for all audiences surveyed. They appreciate information about learning real-world skills through internships and hands-on projects inside and outside the classroom, as well as how CTE can offer pathways into college and careers through college credits, internships, mentorships and networking opportunities. These are the types of experiences that fill a gap in education and make CTE appealing, given 86 percent of parents and students wish they had more chances to learn real-world knowledge and skills in high school.

In fact, when asked to select three elements from a list of facts about CTE programs that were the most important to them personally, "CTE allows students to come out of high school with a real world skill" was selected by 43 percent of prospective parents and students.

Key Words and Phrases to Use with Parents and Students

- "Real world skills"
- "Hands-on experiences"
- "Explore career options and what you are passionate about"
- "Fulfilling, rewarding careers"
- "Career" and "career-focused"
- "Extra advantage for both college and careers"
- "Leadership" and "confidence"
- "Enhanced high school experience"

Similarly, the notion that “CTE classes allow students to earn college credits while still in high school” was selected by 44 percent of prospective parents and students, fairly consistently across all demographics, with a slight bump among high income parents (48 percent), compared to just eight percent of high-income parents who considered the opportunity to earn certifications important.

Rounding out the top choices of prospective parents and students was “CTE programs have partnership with employers in their community...who may provide training, mentorship, opportunities for internships, networking and even entry-level jobs.” Thirty-four percent of prospective parents and students chose this as one of the three most important elements of CTE.

One potentially surprising finding throughout the survey was the consistency of responses across race/ethnicity, education level, income level and geographic distribution. For example, the fact that CTE allows students to gain real-world skills was equally popular across these subgroups and was selected as one of the three most important elements by every single sub-population surveyed. For a few groups – such as parents and students who are Black, Hispanic, and/or parents who live in urban settings – the fact that the graduation rate was higher among CTE students rose to the top as a key element of CTE.

CTE Has an Awareness Challenge

The term “Career Technical Education” has been in use for almost two decades, but in many ways is still catching on as an option for parents and students. Just under half (47 percent) of prospective parents and students report having ever heard the term “Career Technical Education.” A slightly higher percentage of prospective parents and students are familiar with “career centers” (54 percent). On the flip side, 68 percent of prospective parents and students had heard the term “vocational education.”

When asked what they think of CTE based on a short description, 89 percent of prospective parents and students cite a favorable impression, signaling support and interest in CTE. However, when prompted a number of basic, logistical questions around how CTE programs work are raised – such as *When are classes available and for whom? Where are they offered? How do they fit with other required courses? Do they cost money for students?* This suggests clear, informative and proactive communications is critical.

CTE Needs Champions and Messengers

Given the dual challenges of outdated perceptions and low awareness, having compelling and trusted messengers to share information about CTE is paramount.

In particular, prospective parents and students want to understand how CTE works and what it looks like within their schools and communities. Given that, messaging can only go so far. Parents and students trust and want to hear from those closest to CTE programs – counselors, educators and CTE students – about their experiences with CTE and the overall benefits it may have for them and their students.

As far as how they get information, parents and students prefer a mix of in person and online contact. Forty-eight percent of prospective parents and students say they

Who Trust for Information on CTE?	Prospective Parents	Prospective Students
Guidance Counselor	82%	84%
Teacher(s)	79%	83%
CTE students or alumni	77%	77%
College partners	75%	73%
Principal	71%	72%
Employer partners	69%	67%
Superintendent	59%	58%
State Department of Education	59%	59%

want to get information on CTE directly from counselors, 44 percent through an open house at a local CTE school or program, 46 percent through their school or district's website, 40 percent at a school-based career fair and 40 percent through a direct mailing. Only 21 percent said they would use social media to get information on CTE and 23 percent would find a direct email from a school or principal useful.

Quality Must Still Be the Top Priority

There is no question that the results of this survey are exciting for CTE advocates and leaders, with interest high across the board for all that CTE has to offer students. CTE can be a solution for more students to find success. Yet, it is critical to remember that no message or talking point can overcome a program that is not meeting up to its promise to prepare learners for success in college and careers.

At the heart of a successful CTE communications strategy is to have only the highest quality programs in place – and inspire involved parents, students, partners and educators to advocate for them. It is only through a shared commitment to quality, paired with effective communications, that will ensure more students have the opportunity to realize the true value and promise of Career Technical Education.

Methodology

This survey was administered among two main audiences (1) national online survey of 971 US adults (over age 18) with oversamples of: 252 current CTE parents (9-12th graders) and 506 parents of prospective students (6-11th graders), and (2) online survey among 776 students including 252 current CTE students (9-12th graders or recent graduates) and 514 prospective students (6-11th graders). Prospective parents and students were those who expressed interest (somewhat to extremely interested) in CTE during screening. The online survey was fielded March 2–15, 2017.

For this online survey, Edge Research engaged with a reputable, large opt-in panel in which survey exposure is monitored and limited. A non-probability sample to recruit participants was obtained from the online panel provider. Quota sampling was employed to ensure that US adult sample was representative of the U.S. Census on gender, age, race, ethnicity, and region. While the findings are representative, they are not generalizable to all adult Americans.

Acknowledgements

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About Advance CTE

Advance CTE: State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work is the longest-standing national non-profit that represents State Directors and state leaders responsible for secondary, postsecondary and adult Career Technical Education (CTE) across all 50 states and U.S. territories. Established in 1920, Advance CTE supports visionary state leadership, cultivates best practices and speaks with a collective voice on national policy to promote academic and technical excellence that ensures a career-ready workforce. For more resources related to ***The Value and Promise of Career Technical Education***, see <https://careertech.org/recruitmentstrategies>