



Unlocking Opportunities

Supporting English Learners' Equitable Access
to Career and Technical Education

By Julie Sugarman

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Executive Summary

Increasing equitable access to educational opportunities has been a major focus of educators, advocates, and policymakers in the United States for at least half a century. English Learners (ELs), whose average four-year high school graduation rates are among the lowest among federally defined student groups, often face challenges to meeting increasingly high expectations for graduating from school college and career ready. Many ELs come to U.S. schools needing to catch up on literacy and academic skills and to learn how to navigate new systems, including earning credits to fulfill graduation requirements.

Career and technical education (CTE) can play an important role in helping ELs stay engaged in school and persist to graduation as well as setting them on a path to a career in which to earn a family-sustaining wage. Once considered a less-rigorous high school pathway than the academic track, CTE has experienced a renaissance since the 1990s, as more high-skilled and white-collar professions began to be included in course options. Almost all states include student achievement of college and career readiness benchmarks in their school accountability systems, and in most states, participating in CTE and other work-based learning programs counts toward these metrics. Participation in CTE—especially taking more than one course in a single occupational area—is correlated with benefits in graduation rates and earnings as an adult.

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With the broadening of the scope of and audience for CTE, educators and advocates have brought attention to the need to ensure equitable access for historically marginalized student groups. This theme became a major focus of the 2018 reauthorization of the federal law that provides funding for CTE and outlines accountability mechanisms, the *Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act*, originally passed in 1984. The law requires schools and states to use CTE participation and completion data for a variety of student populations in order to identify underenrolled groups.

In 2019–20, ELs in most states were enrolled in CTE more or less in proportion to their share of the state's high school population. However, the lack of local data make it difficult to gauge how many individual schools and districts nationwide may have serious over- or underenrollment issues, and trends in student interest may have shifted in the economic upheaval of the early 2020s. It is also almost impossible to know if ELs who face the greatest challenges to persisting in school and attaining a high school diploma—for example, those with interrupted formal education or whose families rely on them to work and help pay household expenses—are reaping the benefits of CTE instruction in proportion to their numbers.

Federal law (including *Perkins* and decades of civil rights statutes) requires state and district administrators to ensure staff who work with ELs understand these students' rights to meaningful access to the full curriculum. State CTE administrators are required to conduct periodic monitoring visits to observe and help schools improve practices for enrolling students, communicating with families, and so on. Nevertheless,

scheduling EL students in CTE can be challenging, as ELs often have a full schedule of academic courses—sometimes with additional support or remedial classes—and classes in English language development that are typically prioritized above electives such as CTE. They may eventually have room in their schedules in later years, especially if schools can offer summer school and other options to help students catch up on earning credits for graduation, but they may have missed the window to start a sequence of CTE courses that would take two or three years to complete and make it possible to take an industry certification test.

Another reason administrators might be reluctant to schedule ELs in CTE is if they know that the instructors—who often are hired from industry rather than traditional teacher training routes—have little preparation for or understanding of how to work with ELs. There is, however, a range of strategies that can be used to address these issues. Schools can include CTE teachers in training on this topic and provide targeted help aligned to making content comprehensible in their subject areas. Even better, in a class that is co-taught by an EL instructor and a CTE content specialist, the EL teacher can meet ELs' language development needs and also demonstrate those techniques for the partner teacher. EL staff are also important allies in helping recruit students to sign up for CTE, as they typically know EL students well and are trusted resources. CTE and EL staff and school counselors can all work together to better understand how to navigate culturally specific issues that might inhibit enrollment (such as parents' views of appropriate courses for boys and for girls) and to plan communication and recruitment strategies that work for diverse populations.

EL departments can also directly support students using their own local, state, and federal resources, for example, with events on careers and workforce training or by directly supporting students in CTE classes or work-based learning. EL students might be particularly interested in CTE courses in translation and interpretation, especially coupled with work experience where they can put their existing language skills to use in the community. Schools can also work with adult education and workforce programs to help ELs access additional training and employment opportunities, and to ensure a smooth hand-off for students who choose not to continue their education in the K-12 system.

With all of the supports that schools can provide to encourage ELs to participate in CTE, there are still some significant obstacles for students—especially those who immigrate as older adolescents and those who need to work to earn money. Schools may be able to encourage such students to remain in school by organizing flexible learning opportunities, such as early morning or evening classes, and giving students work-based learning credit for jobs they already have.

With many school systems focused on an equitable recovery from the pandemic, ensuring all students have meaningful access to CTE can be an asset in meeting educational goals and preparing students for their future.

With many school systems focused on an equitable recovery from the pandemic, ensuring all students have meaningful access to CTE can be an asset in meeting educational goals and preparing students for their future. State and local policies and practices that foster interdepartmental cooperation, support tailored to students' and families' needs, and accountability for student access to programs are essential building blocks for providing those opportunities.

1 Introduction

High schools not only play a central role in preparing individual students for their futures, they also signify a society's economic and cultural priorities. For decades, policymakers have wrestled with questions of how to prepare youth for the economy of the future while maintaining the traditional academic subjects as the foundation of a well-rounded education. Contrary to the myth that schools are stuck in a 19th-century factory model,¹ high schools increasingly offer innovative programs beyond the core curriculum, including dual enrollment,² project-based learning, and career and technical education (CTE).

CTE is the field of education most explicitly tasked with this balancing act. In fact, many of the key questions of policy and practice in CTE exemplify some of the most important trends in education. These include developing systems to serve traditionally marginalized student groups, using data to ensure equity, and setting minimum qualifications and training for teachers. Each of these issues is critically important to ensuring that English Learners (ELs) and immigrant-background students are well-served by CTE programs. Further, CTE offers a rich example of the enormity of the task of building real capacity into educational systems in order to support the meaningful participation of these students.³

High school ELs, who made up about 6.7 percent of the total high school population in 2019–20,⁴ are a diverse group. Notably, they include newcomers who often arrive with limited or interrupted education, students who are progressing in their development of English but have not yet become proficient, and long-term ELs (those who have been identified as ELs for six or more years). Each of these groups—and each individual EL—has unique strengths and needs when it comes to planning a high school course of study and transition to postsecondary opportunities. But ELs as a group have among the lowest four-year high school graduation rates of any student group: 71 percent compared to 87 percent for all students in school year 2019–20.⁵ Further, compared to 95 percent of native-born youth, about 88 percent of foreign-born youth completed high school or an equivalent.⁶

Given these trends, and the critical importance of high school graduation as a minimum requirement to earn a family-sustaining wage, policymakers and advocates have long sought solutions to help more ELs stay engaged in high school, graduate, and have opportunities to train for gainful employment. CTE offers promise as one such solution, since hands-on and relevant instruction offers a fertile environment for both language development and student engagement. With the support of federal policies that provide a framework to ensure equity in participation, more CTE programs can offer innovative programs that meet both student and community needs.

1 Audrey Watters, "The History of the Future of High School," *Vice*, October 16, 2018.

2 Dual enrollment programs allow students to earn college credit or even an associate's degree while still in high school.

3 Julie Sugarman, *The Impacts on English Learners of Key State High School Policies and Graduation Requirements* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2021).

4 U.S. Department of Education, "EdDataExpress Data Download Tool," accessed January 6, 2023.

5 National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 219.46. Public High School 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR), by Selected Student Characteristics and State: 2010-11 through 2019-20," updated December 2022.

6 National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 219.67. High School Completion Rate of 18- to 24-Year-Olds Not Enrolled in High School (Status Completion Rate), Number of 18- to 24-Year-Olds Not in High School, and Number Who Are High School Completers (Status Completers), by Selected Characteristics: Selected Years, 2010 through 2020," updated April 2022.

This report provides an overview of policies and practices that support ELs' CTE participation in a number of states. The next two sections describes how CTE has changed over time and federal policy regulating CTE, with a discussion of how each of these affects ELs. The data on EL participation that follow present a positive story of EL access. Section 5 discusses opportunities and barriers to EL enrollment and participation described by the state and district CTE and EL administrators interviewed for this study, and the report concludes with recommendations for state and local educators seeking to further strengthen policy and practice.

2 The Evolution of CTE

As U.S. schools became increasingly diverse over the course of the 20th century, policymakers struggled with questions of what type of schooling was appropriate for students expected to play different roles in society based on their gender, race, and class. It was common for mid-century schools to create a vocational education track—which required less rigorous academic study—for students not interested in or expected to go to college to prepare for white-collar jobs. Vocational education thus was not only associated with lower levels of academic achievement but also with blue-collar, low-paid work. Students tended to enroll or be steered into vocational tracks based on their background rather than their interests or their aptitude, and there was little mobility to more academic pathways.

By the 1990s, anti-tracking advocacy and a view that higher academic standards for all students would secure the country's economic competitiveness changed the landscape of U.S. education. As a result, vocational education shifted in both name and approach to career and technical education. Retaining its focus on applied knowledge and workplace skills, CTE broadened its scope to include more white-collar professions such as architecture and business. It also responded to the labor market's growing need for middle-skilled workers with some postsecondary education but less than a bachelor's degree, to fill jobs such as home health aides and machinists. CTE programs particularly embraced the growing interest in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). CTE also became one of many options that students could pursue alongside core academic courses. Because of these developments, more affluent and White students began to participate in CTE. No longer a less-rigorous alternative to a traditional diploma, CTE programs touted their success in raising high school graduation rates, although this effect is complicated to some extent by the selection bias of which students chose to take CTE classes in addition to their standard academic coursework.⁷

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⁷ Emily Hodge, Shaun Dougherty, and Carol Burris, *Tracking and the Future of Career and Technical Education: How Efforts to Connect School and Work Can Avoid the Past Mistakes of Vocational Education* (Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center, 2020); Rachel Rosen, Mary Visher, and Katie Beal, *Career and Technical Education* (New York: MDRC, 2018).

the same reason.⁸ Those leaders raised concerns about equity of access and program quality, including the existence of bias in recruiting that kept girls from high-wage, high-tech career training; eligibility requirements or inaccessible facilities that denied students with disabilities equal opportunities; and a lack of diversity in teaching staff.⁹ Equitable CTE programs, in contrast, ensure that courses of comparable quantity and quality are available to all student groups, schools provide supports to students who need additional help or accommodations, and all programs are of adequate quality in areas such as teacher training and qualifications, alignment of the curriculum with rigorous academic standards, and availability of safe and appropriate materials.¹⁰

Concurrent with these changes to CTE, U.S. schools were also responding to shifts in what is expected of high school graduates. Several federal initiatives were at the forefront of these changes. One important milestone was the 2008 adoption of new regulations requiring states to use a common graduation rate calculation for accountability purposes. Among other things, the new definition only counts students attaining a regular high school diploma as graduates, while students passing a high school equivalency test (e.g., the General Educational Development, or GED) or leaving high school with a certificate of completion are considered dropouts.¹¹ Around the same time, a group of states developed the Common Core State Standards in order to have more consistency across states in what English language arts and math concepts would be taught at which grades. This initiative used the term “college and career ready” to describe its overall approach to standards, and this phrase quickly became ubiquitous in discussions about the goals of the K-12 system.

The overall goals of these initiatives, like the equity goals of CTE, were to ensure that all students had equal access to a high-quality education. Specifically, giving states incentives to adopt the more rigorous Common Core standards and using a definition of high school graduate aligned with a college preparatory curriculum would, policymakers and civil rights advocates believed, end the practice of setting lower expectations for students from marginalized and underserved populations. By 2020, all but four states made college and career readiness part of their formal student performance accountability systems, with 39 states giving credit in those indicators for CTE, work-based learning, or apprenticeships.¹²

With expanded career pathways, CTE has revitalized interest in career-focused and work-based learning. Its growing popularity over the last few decades has reversed the sense of stigma once associated with such programs and allowed programs to thrive and attract new public and philanthropic funding. Research consistently shows a correlation between CTE and better graduation rates, college-going, and future wages, especially for students who take multiple courses in the same field.¹³ In some cases, educators

8 Erika B. Lewy, “Learning from the Past: The Evolution of Vocational Education,” MDRC, November 2021.

9 Michael L. Scott et al., *Equity Issues in Career and Technical Education* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, College of Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, 2003).

10 Elisabeth H. Kim, Clare Buckley Flack, Katharine Parham, and Priscilla Wohlstetter, “Equity in Secondary Career and Technical Education in the United States: A Theoretical Framework and Systematic Literature Review,” *Review of Educational Research* 91, no. 3 (June 2021): 356–96.

11 Julie Sugarman, *The Unintended Consequences for English Learners of Using the Four-Year Graduation Rate for School Accountability* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2019).

12 Lynne Graziano and Chad Aldeman, *College and Career Readiness, or a New Form of Tracking?* (Sudbury, MA: Bellwether Education Partners, 2020).

13 U.S. Department of Education, “Bridging the Skills Gap: Career and Technical Education in High School,” updated September 2019.

have worried that the increased competition for seats in these programs—especially in schools of choice with a STEM focus, for example—has limited the space available for students who might not succeed in a traditional high school, and where a more hands-on and engaging curriculum could mean the difference between graduating and dropping out. Competitive admission to some programs may mean that even if seats are available, students with lower grades or a history of discipline issues might not be accepted to the program.¹⁴

On the other hand, many localities have a wide range of CTE options, including both competitive and open admission classes and a wide variety of career pathways. This broadening has, in effect, kept CTE programs from closing due to declining interest in the traditionally offered trades. CTE continues to include opportunities in the trades and increasingly in-demand, middle-skilled careers alongside pathways leading to a bachelor's degree or higher.

3 Federal Support through the Perkins Act

In 2018, Congress passed the *Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act*,¹⁵ the latest reauthorization of the *Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act* of 1984. Commonly called Perkins V, as it is the fifth reauthorization of the original law, the 2018 version authorized \$1.3 billion annually in state grants to support local programs. In addition to its funding role, Perkins V required states to develop rigorous standards and courses of study that lead to an industry-recognized credential. The law also sets out monitoring and accountability measures, requirements for state and local implementation plans, and defines acceptable uses of funds. Most notably, Perkins V set out a new process for local needs assessments, raised the profile of efforts to recruit and ensure the success of special populations (including ELs), and encouraged improved alignment between CTE and other workforce and educational systems.

Written with a strong emphasis on equity, Perkins V includes several provisions to encourage the inclusion of special populations, including traditionally marginalized groups such as students with disabilities, ELs, and students from low-income families. For example, one of the required uses of Perkins funds by state education agencies is to support the recruitment of special populations into local CTE programs. States provide this support with technical assistance to schools and districts that are looking for ways to expand their existing recruiting efforts. The law also requires schools to use funds for specific purposes, including enhancing career advisement and expanding access to CTE programming to students as young as fifth grade. These activities may help make the benefits of CTE more visible to students in special

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¹⁴ Michael Jonas, "Voc-Tech Tension," *CommonWealth*, April 10, 2017.

¹⁵ *Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act*, Public Law 115–224, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 132 (2018): 1563.

populations—who are often harder to reach and to engage—and thus help schools enroll them more equitably.¹⁶

Like the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), which governs accountability for K-12 education more broadly, the accountability provisions in Perkins V require states to disaggregate data to show the participation and achievement of each of the special populations enumerated in the law, including ELs, and to use that information to identify and close systemic opportunity gaps. States must also consult with community representatives of special populations as they develop their multi-year plans that detail how they will comply with Perkins requirements. Drawing on the findings of their local needs assessment, local education agencies submit a plan to the state to request a share of its allotted federal funding. In that plan, schools and districts must indicate how they will encourage the participation of special populations, investigate barriers to enrollment and student performance, and then eliminate those barriers to enrollment and success in CTE. The plan must specifically describe how CTE instruction will prepare students in the special populations for high-skilled and/or high-demand occupations.¹⁷

4 Participation of ELs in CTE

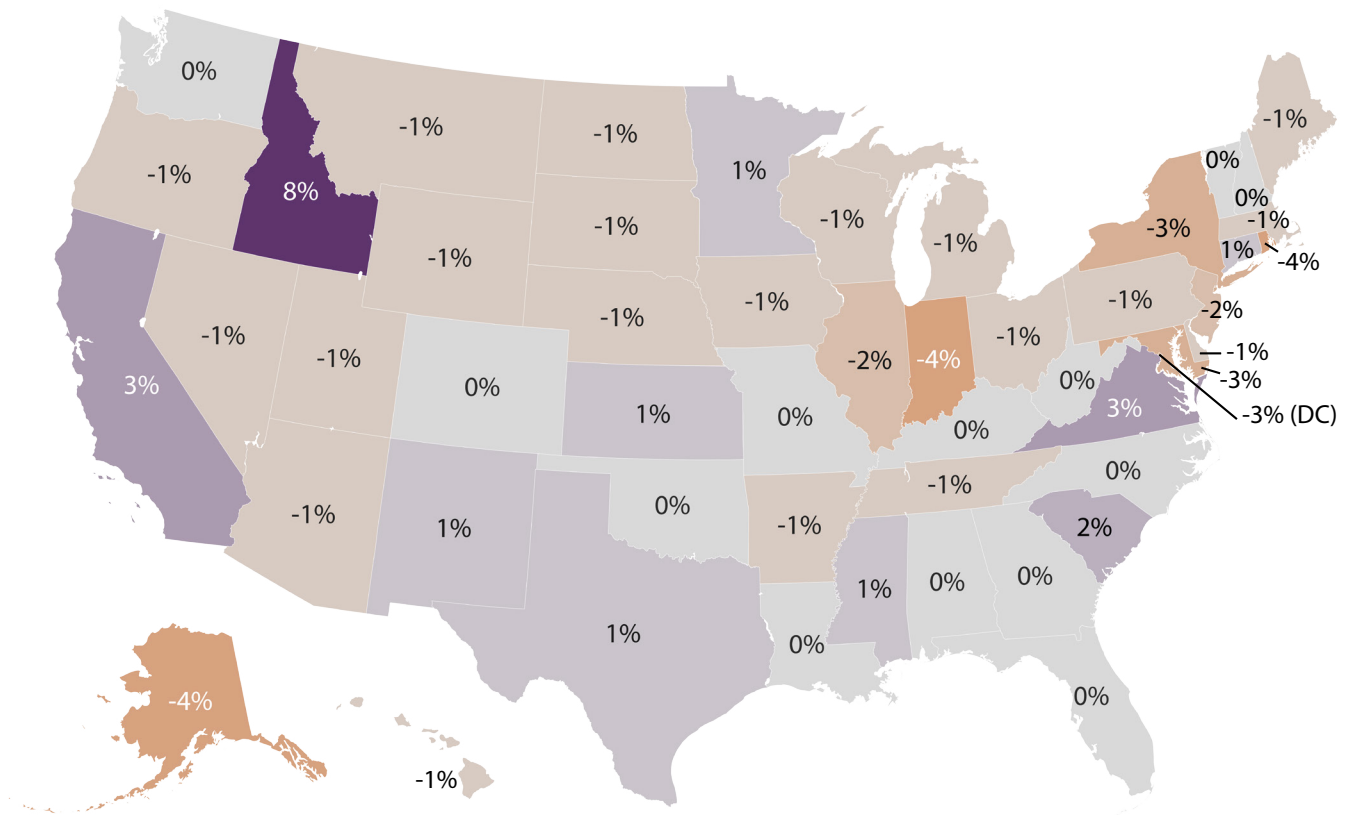
As of school year 2019–20, ELs were included in CTE programs at rates roughly proportionate to their share of the high school population in most states. As Figure 1 shows, Alaska, Indiana, and Rhode Island were the states with the largest underrepresentation of ELs among CTE program participants, with the share of ELs in CTE about 4 percent lower than the EL share of all students in grades 9–12. Meanwhile, Idaho ELs were overrepresented in CTE by about 8 percent, and California and Virginia ELs were overrepresented by a more modest 3 percent. In 39 states, the level of over- or underrepresentation was 1 percent or less.

The data for CTE concentrators—students who take at least two CTE courses in the same program of study—is similar, with over- or underrepresentation of 1 percent or less in 25 states. However, there were relatively high levels of underrepresentation in Alaska, the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Rhode Island, and overrepresentation in Idaho and New Hampshire. (See the Appendix for state-by-state data on EL participants and concentrators and the EL share of all students.)

16 Advance CTE, *The State of Career Technical Education: An Analysis of States' Perkins V Priorities* (Silver Spring, MD: Advance CTE, 2020).

17 National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity, "Special Populations in Perkins V" (At a Glance fact sheet, October 15, 2018).

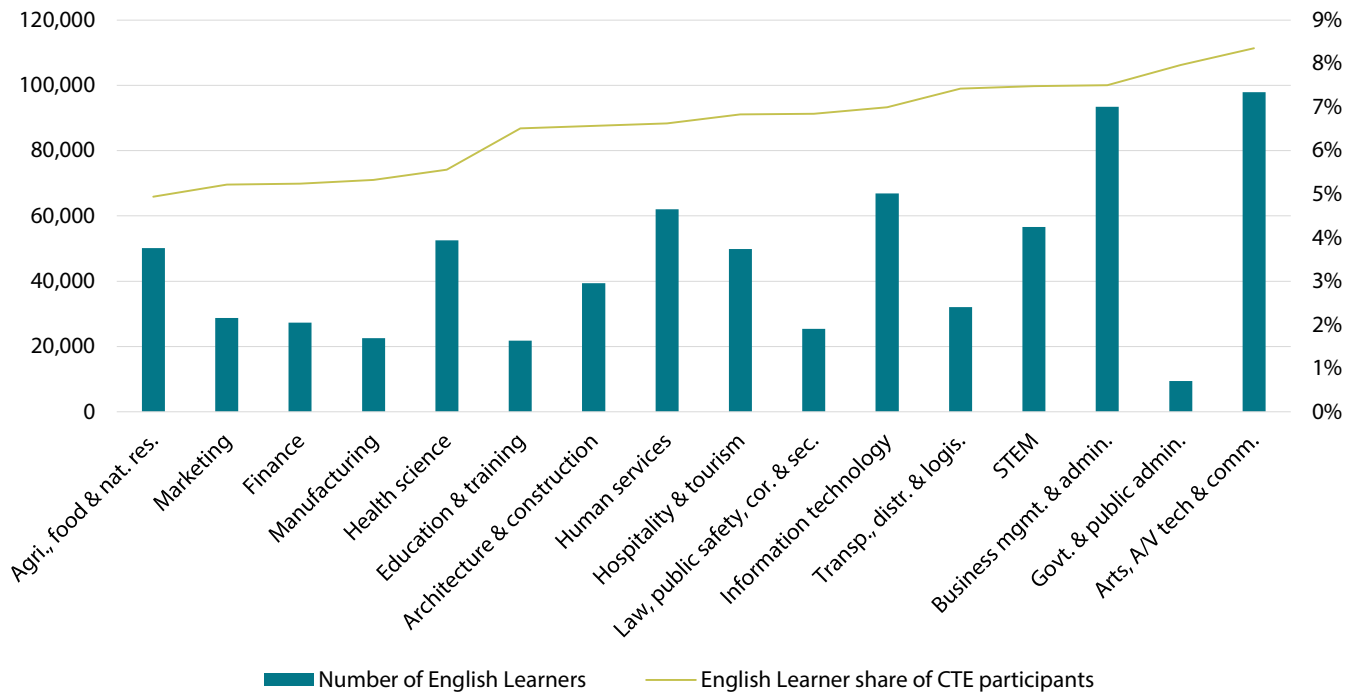
FIGURE 1

EL Over- and Underrepresentation in CTE Programs, by State, 2019–20

Notes: A positive integer indicates overrepresentation of ELs in CTE, and a negative integer indicates underrepresentation. See the Appendix for a breakdown of the data used in this map and for additional information on the data source for New Mexico. Sources: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, “Perkins State Plans and Data Explorer,” accessed March 1, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, “EdDataExpress Data Download Tool,” accessed January 6, 2023; New Mexico Public Education Department, *Perkins V, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (P.L. 115-224) Consolidated Annual Report July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020* (Santa Fe, NM: New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d.).

Similarly, ELs were well represented in most of the 16 federally defined career clusters, as seen in Figure 2. Each career cluster includes a variety of pathways for middle- and high-skilled occupations. With an average share of 6.7 percent of the U.S. high school population, ELs were slightly underrepresented (by between 1 and 2 percent) in agriculture, food, and natural resources; finance; health science; marketing; and manufacturing. They were slightly overrepresented in arts, A/V technology, and communications and in government and public administration (by between 1 and 2 percent).

FIGURE 2

Number of ELs Participating in CTE and EL Share of Participants, by Career Cluster, Nationwide, 2019–20

Note: Agri. food & nat. res. = agriculture, food, and natural resources; arts, A/V tech & comm. = arts, audio/visual technology and communications; business mgmt. & admin. = business management and administration; govt. & public admin. = government and public administration; law, public safety, cor. & sec. = law, public safety, corrections, and security; STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; transp. distr. & logis. = transportation, distribution, and logistics.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, “EdDataExpress Data Download Tool”; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, “Perkins State Plans and Data Explorer.”

While these nationwide findings are encouraging, U.S. Department of Education reports do not provide more fine-grained data on ELs’ participation by school or district, so it is difficult to gauge the degree to which significant local variation in representation suggests problems may exist. Such data are also generally not made available on state dashboards, as CTE is not among the areas for which states must report disaggregated data under ESSA.

Another weakness in data systems is that, while state and local administrators have access to detailed participation and completion data, their data systems may not have the capability to break down data by multiple categories (such as for students who are both ELs and low income, or those who are ELs and have a disability) nor by subgroups of ELs that most states do not capture (such as ELs who are newcomers or ELs with beginner-level English proficiency). Several administrators interviewed for this report noted that they believed that most participants in CTE were not newcomers or beginner-level ELs, but did not have that information at hand.

Finally, while the data in Figures 1 and 2 reflect enrollment numbers collected prior to pandemic-related school building closures, it is likely that the COVID-19 pandemic affected participation and completion rates between 2020 and 2022 in ways that have not yet been fully explored. CTE participation would most certainly have been affected by the shift to remote instruction and the circumstances that kept

many adolescent students—including a disproportionate number of ELs—out of school during remote instruction.¹⁸ Administrators interviewed for this study noted that with significant labor shortages in 2021 and 2022, many older students found opportunities for relatively well-paying, low-skilled jobs and opted to work rather than return to school once school buildings reopened. It remains to be seen whether these trends have a long-term impact on ELs' CTE participation.

5 Opportunities and Barriers

Although equitable access to educational opportunities has been a policy priority for decades, progress in closing opportunity and achievement gaps has been uneven. Federal policies requiring accountability and planning for equity have grown in reach and specificity, but their effectiveness relies on the willingness and ability of state and local administrators to implement practices in their own contexts that lead to better outcomes. In the states and school districts represented in this study (see Box 1), administrators described the interplay of systems and policy with knowledge about what works in their own communities to ensure that ELs and immigrant-background students can access and benefit from CTE classes.

BOX 1 About This Study

This section of the report draws primarily on document review and interviews in four southern and southwestern states: Florida, New Mexico, Texas, and Virginia. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, states in these two regions typically have the lowest outcomes in a variety of measures of child well-being. At the same time, ELs make up relatively high shares of all students in southwestern states compared to other parts of the country, and southeastern states have seen the greatest percent change in their EL populations over the last twenty years. Taking a closer look at these states thus makes it possible to see both some of the most pressing needs and system complexities as well as some variation between geographies with large (and longer-standing) EL populations and others newer to serving ELs. Interviewees included six state administrators and twelve administrators across eight districts, and they were evenly split between EL and CTE directors.

Sources: Annie E. Casey Foundation, "2022 Kids Count Data Book—Summary," updated August 8, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Learners, "English Learners: Demographic Trends," updated August 2022.

A. *EL Access to CTE Instruction*

Under federal civil rights statutes, students cannot be denied access to any educational program offered to all students solely because of their EL status or level of English proficiency.¹⁹ Although this has been law for decades, many localities still struggle to ensure that personnel responsible for enrolling students in programs such as CTE follow this rule. None of the states or districts involved in this study had policies that

18 Leslie Villegas and Amaya Garcia, *Educating English Learners during the Pandemic* (Washington, DC: New America, 2022).

19 Julie Sugarman, *Legal Protections for K-12 English Learner and Immigrant-Background Students* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2019).

would preclude ELs from taking CTE classes based on their language learning status or level. However, in general, where schools can set their own rules for enrollment in classes or specialized programs (such as minimum grade point average or having passed a prerequisite academic class), or where counselors have wide latitude to steer students toward or away from certain pathways, ELs could be disproportionately kept out of enriching or advanced coursework.

Several interviewees noted that explicit federal guidance and statewide civil rights lawsuit settlements provide administrators with backing to convince reluctant educators of their obligations and have helped them change attitudes and practices. Florida schools are subject to the terms of a 1990 consent decree that sets out how the state and its districts and schools will meet their civil rights obligations to ELs. One element

New Mexico's statewide handbook for serving ELs notes that simply enrolling ELs in elective classes is not sufficient, but that programs should evaluate the equal participation of ELs as well.

of this decree indicates that school programs cannot create barriers to enrolling students in curricular or extracurricular programs based on English proficiency and that all programs must be designed to allow ELs to meaningfully participate.²⁰ In turn, state regulations include a statement that ELs are entitled to equal access to programs and services offered to all students, specifically naming

vocational education as one of the included areas.²¹ Many other states include such wording in a variety of legal and guidance documents. For example, New Mexico's statewide handbook for serving ELs notes that simply enrolling ELs in elective classes is not sufficient, but that programs should evaluate the equal participation of ELs as well.²²

Perkins V regulations also provide a framework for ensuring equal participation of ELs and other historically marginalized groups. State CTE administrators oversee this work by reviewing local needs assessments and examining local participation data. They are also responsible for monitoring districts on a rotating basis for adherence to Perkins and civil rights provisions. During such monitoring, staff can review a district's processes, such as whether schools translate written outreach materials and whether families are offered help in filling out enrollment forms.

State administrators can also provide technical assistance to help districts solve problems. In one case, staff from a school reportedly knew that low-income students were not proportionately enrolled in their STEM summer program but believed themselves to be in compliance because all students were welcome. The state administrator advised the program on how it could facilitate the participation of a more diverse set of students, for example, by offering the program during the year to accommodate students who work in the summer, providing transportation, and helping with participation fees by using grant funding.²³ Finally, state administrators can provide resources for programs to help ELs fully participate. A 2018 law in Virginia

20 *League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) et al. v. Florida Board of Education et al.*, No. 90-1913 (United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida, consent decree, August 14, 1990).

21 Florida Department of Education, "Equal Access for English Language Learners to Programs Other than English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)," *Florida Administrative Code* 6A-6.0908 (May 5, 2009).

22 New Mexico Public Education Department, "Serving English Learners" (technical assistance manual, New Mexico Public Education Department, Santa Fe, revised June 2022), 13.

23 Author interview with Alexandra Lutz, Manager of College Readiness, New Mexico Public Education Department, April 7, 2022.

required the state's CTE office to create a catalog of testing accommodations that ELs may use on industry certification tests. The law further required school districts to notify ELs that such accommodations are available.²⁴

Over the last decade, EL administrators, advocates, and researchers have become increasingly outspoken about the importance of ensuring access to the full breadth of the curriculum.²⁵ Some EL administrators noted that they and their colleagues had long been engaged in the ongoing work of building a mindset among high school staff that ELs can be successful in rigorous, mainstream coursework with the proper supports. This attention to changing attitudes is a critical accompaniment to reminders and training on schools' legal obligations. Staff must also work directly with ELs and their families to ensure they understand course and graduation requirements, including how CTE classes can fulfill requirements to earn credits by taking elective courses.

B. *Fitting CTE into a Course of Study*

Even when staff fully support the idea of ELs participating in CTE, scheduling issues may prevent some students from taking full advantage of their options. Critically, some populations of ELs may have considerably more (or different) barriers than others. Newcomer students—those within the first year or two of attending U.S. schools—are often among the populations most difficult to schedule, but scheduling complications can persist even for those who have been in U.S. schools for some time.

Educators who work with ELs frequently note that juggling high school schedules—including core courses, electives, and courses that are specific to meeting EL needs²⁶—can be an enormous challenge. Adding CTE to an already full school day can be especially difficult. In addition to taking a full load of core academic classes, many ELs, especially at beginner and intermediate levels of proficiency, must take additional English as a second language (ESL) classes or remedial content classes to catch up on academic material they may have missed. Although generally well-meaning, structures set up to ensure students have the academic support they need may also reduce their options. In Florida, students must take intensive reading if they score at the lowest or second lowest of five levels on the state standardized English language arts test, typically taken in 10th grade. With 93 percent of ELs scoring at those levels in 2021–22, a large share of 11th grade ELs in the state would be in such a class and therefore have one less slot for other electives.²⁷

Even ELs no longer in intensive English or academic support classes may have trouble finding room for CTE in their schedule. Taking remedial courses in the first and second years of U.S. schooling—or failing classes

24 Virginia Department of Education, "The Path to Industry Certification: High School Industry Credentialing—CTE Catalogue of Industry Credentials with Testing Accommodations for English Learners," accessed January 2, 2023.

25 See, for example, Rebecca M. Callahan and Megan Hopkins, "Policy Brief: Using ESSA to Improve Secondary English Learners' Opportunities to Learn through Course Taking," *Journal of School Leadership* 27, no. 5 (September 1, 2017): 755–66; Manuel Vazquez Cano, Ilana M. Umansky, and Karen D. Thompson, *How State, District, and School Levers Can Improve the Course Access of Students Classified as English Learners in Secondary Schools* (San Francisco, CA: National Research and Development Center to Improve Education for Secondary English Learners at WestEd, 2021).

26 Core courses include math, science, social studies, and language arts classes required for graduation. Electives include additional courses in those areas taken beyond the core requirements as well as courses in other areas such as arts and CTE. Most states require students to take one or more electives to graduate.

27 Florida Department of Education, "6A-6.054 K-12 Student Reading Intervention Requirements," accessed December 6, 2022; Florida Department of Education, "Know Your Data Advanced Reports," accessed December 6, 2022.

and having to take them a second time—may mean students have to double up on grade-level math, science, or social studies in later years in order to accumulate sufficient credits to graduate. Students may also have to choose between equally attractive options, such as continuing with elective courses in their native language to build their bilingual and biliteracy skills or trying something new such as CTE. Some of these scheduling issues can be solved by offering before or afterschool classes or summer school, but these can be a hard sell for students who have to have a paid job to help support their families.

Relatedly, while newcomer programs for high-school-age ELs can provide necessary services to help students develop English and academic content skills, attending such a program that is not housed within a comprehensive high school can mean forgoing some of the benefits of CTE programming. Stand-alone newcomer programs typically have small student bodies and small class sizes, making it difficult for schools to allot additional teacher positions dedicated to CTE. Further, students who transfer from a newcomer program to a comprehensive high school might have too few years remaining before their expected graduation to take a sequence of courses in the same career path to gain work-ready skills and industry credentials. While achieving a sequence is of considerable value, districts can offer a variety of types of CTE programming, including electives that are not part of a sequence and career exploration classes. Some districts offer transportation for students in newcomer programs or other alternative high schools to access CTE classes, but again, ensuring students have time in their schedule for travel can be a challenge.

C. *Teachers and Professional Development*

Schools have a very wide range of options when it comes to the content and approach of their CTE courses. Perkins V regulations require schools to work with local employers and other community members and to analyze workforce data to develop programs that meet local occupational demands. Accordingly, state requirements for teacher credentialing tend to be fairly flexible to account for the wide variation in CTE course offerings. Further, because CTE teachers must have specialized content knowledge of their occupation, teachers are most likely to be hired from industry and may or may not have training in teaching and learning. While 41 states include teacher or CTE training among the requirements for aspiring CTE teachers, some states have requirements in some career clusters and not others.²⁸

Because they are less likely to have come through a traditional teacher training route, many CTE teachers will not have had exposure to strategies for teaching ELs, such as using sheltered instruction strategies.²⁹ Ideally, CTE teachers would also know how to foster student engagement by drawing on their knowledge and interests to connect to new learning, demonstrate opportunities to leverage their bilingual skills in the workplace, and use native language materials to aid learning.³⁰ As an example of the latter, when some

Because they are less likely to have come through a traditional teacher training route, many CTE teachers will not have had exposure to strategies for teaching ELs.

28 Education Commission of the States, "50-State Comparison: Secondary Career and Technical Education," updated March 2, 2023; Zeke Perez, Jr. and Tom Keily, "What's Required to Become a CTE Teacher?" EdNote, April 22, 2020.

29 These are strategies such as using visuals, checking for understanding, giving students time to think before calling for a response, and emphasizing key vocabulary.

30 Laurie Olsen, *California English Learner Roadmap Implementation Guide and Toolkit for Administrators: Aligning and Articulating Practices across the System* (Long Beach, CA: Californians Together, 2022), 27.

students in a health science class were having trouble with medical vocabulary used in study aids for a CPR certification, their teacher found Spanish-language materials the students could use to learn the words first in Spanish before studying for the test in English.³¹ Districts can help CTE teachers develop these skills by including them in school- or district-wide professional development on working with ELs and providing targeted training through the EL or CTE department.

Many schools have found the co-teaching model to be successful for ELs, with an EL specialist and content teacher working side-by-side in a classroom. The EL teacher provides language instruction and scaffolds to help ELs access the content teacher's curriculum, and by doing so, models those strategies for the content teacher to use in other settings. A report from Californians Together describes how one district used CTE funds to develop units of instruction bridging computer science (coding) and English language development. CTE and EL specialist teachers worked together to develop the lessons and taught in pairs in the two schools where the units were piloted.³²

D. *Student Recruitment*

Because CTE courses are electives, not required classes, recruiting students is an important component of program implementation. Schools typically begin sharing information about CTE with students and families in middle school or even earlier for programs that have a middle school component. Effective recruitment may include written materials (translated into languages spoken by parents), social media posts, and special events at which programs can share information with prospective students. But for EL and immigrant-background students, it is also critical to encourage past participants to advertise through word of mouth as trusted sources of information. Students often participate in the same activities that their older siblings or other family members did, so, as one administrator described, an important part of recruitment is building CTE as a "community-wide habit."³³

Having diversity within the staff of CTE programs helps students see themselves in such classes and is a motivating factor for them to participate. Beyond this sort of personal identification, it can be effective to ensure that other staff who students already see as trusted resources are knowledgeable enough about CTE to provide advice about it. In one district, administrators saw the need for better counseling for ELs and met that need by adding a student and family advisor position to the International Welcome Centers at each of the district's four comprehensive high schools. These advisors help newly arriving students and families learn about school and community resources, including CTE.³⁴

School counselors often play a critical gatekeeping role for what courses students can access. Ideally, the counselors who work with ELs—especially newcomers—are bilingual and have deep knowledge about resources in the school and district and about ELs' unique needs. Some districts organize their staffing so that these specialists serve in high schools with a high concentration of ELs and prioritize assigning ELs

31 Author interview with CTE administrator, TX, May 31, 2022.

32 Olsen, *California English Learner Roadmap*, 28.

33 Author interview with Carrie Hernandez, Associate Director for Teaching, Learning, and Research, and Aine Garcia-Post, Executive Director of Bilingual Education, Translation and Interpretation, and Community Outreach, Las Cruces Public Schools, NM, August 24, 2022.

34 Author interview with Hernandez and Garcia-Post.

to them. Nevertheless, all school counselors can benefit from training on working with ELs. In particular, counselors talking to families about CTE may need help navigating culturally specific issues such as parental expectations or cultural norms around what types of classes are appropriate for boys and girls. Immigrant parents may need more information from school counselors than their native-born counterparts on topics such as earning credits, which types of credits are required for graduation, and the need for parents to advocate for their children to be enrolled and receive specialized supports in courses such as CTE. And of course, interpretation and translation is not only legally required for such information, but communications must be delivered in a way that is culturally appropriate for families and instills trust.³⁵

E. Connections across Administrative Offices

For CTE programs to work well for ELs, schools need to draw on resources managed by a variety of departments, each with their own priorities and specialized knowledge. Coordination and communication among EL, CTE, school counselors, and other staff is particularly critical for immigrant-background students, as they may not have parents or guardians with the systems knowledge or the capacity to give advice to and advocate for their children around elective courses. Having adults with a holistic appreciation of a student's strengths, needs, and goals can be critical for decisionmaking. Often, ELs create strong relationships with EL specialists (instructional assistants, family liaisons, and so on), so building their knowledge of school and community resources can be especially beneficial. Some states require individual learning plans for all students (as in Rhode Island) or ELs (as in Tennessee),³⁶ and these documents can be used to bring this kind of information together in one place to track students' progress toward long-term goals, including planning ahead for taking CTE classes.

Only one of the interviewed administrators was aware of situations where EL staff provided direct instructional support to students in CTE classes. In most cases, federal funding through ESSA Title III support for ELs could be used for this purpose, as it would supplement the core EL services that are the state and district's responsibility. In fact, providing CTE to ELs is an explicitly allowed use of funds in Title III of ESSA.³⁷

Other examples of using federal Title III dollars and other EL program resources for more indirect support include taking ELs on field trips to area employers that have a special interest in encouraging bilingual individuals to train for their career paths, and hosting events to introduce the CTE program to ELs' parents in linguistically and culturally appropriate ways.

In one district, ELs in the summer school program funded by Title III take English, math, and language development along with either physical education or a graphic design class. The graphic design course offers an opportunity for creative expression, to use English in a unique context, and to learn about a potential career path that students might not otherwise know exists. The students also learn about

Having adults with a holistic appreciation of a student's strengths, needs, and goals can be critical for decisionmaking.

³⁵ Sugarman, *Legal Protections*.

³⁶ Rhode Island Department of Education, "Rhode Island Individual Learning Plan Adoption Toolkit" (toolkit, Rhode Island Department of Education, Providence, RI, May 2018); Tennessee State Board of Education, "English Learner Individual Learning Plan Procedures" (guide, Tennessee State Board of Education, Nashville, June 30, 2020).

³⁷ *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015*, Public Law 114-95, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 129 (December 10, 2015): 1960.

entrepreneurship and have the opportunity to present their final projects to the president of a graphic design company, who is a former EL himself.³⁸

Another way CTE and EL strengths can be combined is through CTE courses in translation and interpretation. These types of courses would be an obvious draw for students who are gaining fluency in English and already fluent in one or more other languages. Although none of the districts in the study had implemented this kind of program, the American Translation Association has profiled six high schools with such programs; some offer students college credit or the opportunity to earn industry certification.³⁹

Finally, EL and CTE staff can also collaborate with staff within their schools as well as external partners responsible for high school completion, postsecondary education planning, adult education, and workforce development. Schools often tout their goal of graduating students as college and career ready, but typically, any one staff member in a school may not have a detailed understanding of the diverse pathways to postsecondary opportunities, especially as these pathways may involve navigating educational and government systems outside the high school. One district has invited a representative of a local technical college to speak to both students and parents about their training programs—providing information both to students and to immigrant parents looking to train for a new profession or get a credential in an area they have experience in.⁴⁰ Regular communication with external programs ensures that high school staff can make recommendations that help students avail themselves of these options, including planning for prerequisites.

There are also several promising options beyond the walls of high schools to which CTE staff can consider referring both in-school ELs as well as those students who are about to or have just left school, including nongraduates. These include work-based learning, dual enrollment with community colleges, or completing a high school degree with a GED (for which the preparation and test may be available in Spanish). Adult education programs can also provide support to ELs who have graduated or left school via English language acquisition courses. Other external youth-focused programs can also provide students in school or those who have left school with connections to workforce training and preparation, career services, and adult education. In particular, the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA) youth program can provide both supportive services to in-school youth interested in or participating in CTE programs as well as eligible youth who have left school. For more details on this program, see Box 2.

38 Author interview with Clarissa Duskin, Coordinator of English Learners, Recently Arrived Students, and Translation Services, St. Lucie Public Schools, FL, May 24, 2022.

39 American Translators Association, "High School Level CTE Interpreting Programs," accessed December 21, 2022.

40 Author interview with Vicky B. Saldala, Director, Bilingual/ESOL Department, Broward County Public Schools, FL, June 10, 2022.

BOX 2

The WIOA Youth Program

The *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA) offers a promising opportunity to serve EL students interested in CTE via its Title I youth program. WIOA governs the delivery of federal funding for workforce development and adult education programs, which are administered by states and territories and delivered by local providers. Under WIOA Title I, which regulates workforce development services for adults, youth, and dislocated workers, local workforce development boards receive funding to administer youth programs that support in-school youth and out-of-school youth in obtaining good jobs, gaining occupational training or work experience, working toward high school diplomas or equivalents, and transitioning to postsecondary programs or apprenticeships. Depending on the area, local workforce development boards may manage some of these services themselves and/or contract others out to local providers.

WIOA youth programs serve young people facing specific barriers, rather than all interested students as CTE programs do. To be considered an eligible in-school youth, participants must be between the ages of 14 and 21, enrolled in school, low income, and face one or more of a series of barriers, including being an EL. To be considered an eligible out-of-school youth, participants must be between the ages of 16 and 24, not enrolled in school, and similarly face one or more barriers, including being an EL. WIOA Title I, however, does require participants to be U.S. citizens or to be eligible for or possess work authorization in the United States, making unauthorized immigrant youth almost entirely ineligible to participate.

For both in-school and out-of-school youth, WIOA youth programs deliver a combination of academic supports, work experience, occupational training, and supportive services, with at least 20 percent of local funding required to be spent on work experience activities. Interviews with local WIOA youth program staff conducted for this project indicate that providers utilize a variety of approaches and models to serve youth, most commonly using outreach and referral systems to recruit youth and then developing individualized plans of service that help participants address specific barriers to their long-term career and educational success. When working with in-school youth, WIOA youth programs generally coordinate with high schools to reach and serve students and can supplement CTE programs or other services being delivered by K-12 districts.

Interviewed providers serving in-school youth described a range of approaches for supporting participants. These included raising awareness of career services offered by the local WIOA youth program, delivering workforce development-centered summer activities and programs, and providing funding to supplement supports for the participation of eligible youth in high school CTE programs. Such services could potentially include targeted instruction and other supports for eligible ELs seeking to participate in CTE programs. The WIOA youth program also places a strong emphasis on supporting out-of-school youth, with 75 percent of the program's non-administrative local funding required to be spent on this population. Through local workforce and adult education providers, out-of-school youth can receive support in accessing a range of educational and training services such as GED programs, occupational job training, internships with employers, and individualized career or educational counseling. To better serve out-of-school ELs, providers can also integrate English instruction and workforce activities, though few providers interviewed for this project said they used this approach. Additional tailoring of services for EL youth, however, is necessary to increase participation as providers also reported that youth generally needed an intermediate or advanced level of English proficiency to participate in available workforce activities.

Sources: Memorandum from Byron Sideman, Deputy Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Labor, *Training and Employment Guidance Letter WIOA No. 21-16*, March 2, 2017; memorandum from Portia Wu, Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Labor, *Training and Employment Guidance Letter WIOA No. 23-14*, March 26, 2015; author interviews with WIOA youth program staff in Texas, Virginia, Florida, and New Mexico, 2022.

F. *External Barriers to Participation*

As much as educators can do to develop systems for equitably enrolling and serving ELs, there may be external forces that work against their best efforts to motivate students to participate in CTE or even to stay enrolled in school. Older adolescents who recently arrived in the United States often feel pressure to work to support their families or pay back money used to get them to the country. Immigrant-background students may also have opportunities to be trained for middle-skilled jobs by their family or to join family businesses. They may choose these more immediate and certain paths and not see the benefit of taking extra courses to be trained for higher-skilled jobs.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated a number of obstacles for EL and immigrant-background students to staying on a path to high school graduation. Many schools reported ELs were disproportionately absent from school or not enrolled during periods of remote learning. Among other factors, adolescents may have needed to work to support family members who lost jobs or became sick, or to supervise younger siblings while parents worked outside the home; others were absent due to technological challenges involved in accessing remote learning.⁴¹ Some interviewees noted that as the recovery began and workplaces raised wages to attract desperately needed workers, especially in the service industry, some students found decent-paying jobs and chose not to come back when school buildings reopened.⁴²

Some districts have found ways to harness students' need to work to help them stay on a path to graduating high school. Many districts have schools that run on an alternative schedule, with night or morning classes that allow students to work at other times.⁴³ In one district in Virginia, seeing the trend that students were reluctant to leave jobs to return to school as the pandemic waned, staff created a structure for students to attend classes in the morning and then to get work-based learning credit through CTE for jobs they already held. The plan allowed students to re-engage in school and also receive extra support from the work-based learning counselor on employability skills.⁴⁴

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School staff play an important role for teens engaged in work-based learning. With support structures in place, staff can ensure that students' rights are upheld in the workplace and help students learn soft skills, such as being on time. Educators can also help employers meet students where they are by helping them understand students' developmental readiness for occupational tasks.

For unauthorized immigrant students, issues related to their status may be disincentives to participating in CTE or in particular CTE pathways. Some of these students may not feel it is worth bothering to take

41 Melissa Lazarin, *English Learner Testing during the Pandemic: An Early Readout and Look Ahead* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2022); Villegas and Garcia, *Educating English Learners during the Pandemic*.

42 See also Noble Ingram, "Some Young Immigrants Work to Support Their Families. Can Schools Support Them?" EdSurge, June 8, 2021.

43 Ingram, "Some Young Immigrants Work to Support Their Families"; Julie Sugarman, *Beyond Teaching English: Supporting High School Completion by Immigrant and Refugee Students* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2017).

44 Author interview with Angela Wilder, Director of Alternative Education, Rockbridge County Public Schools, VA, August 19, 2022.

CTE classes that lead to jobs requiring postsecondary education if they feel that college is out of reach, particularly if they live in a state where they are ineligible for in-state tuition or unable to attend a public college. Further, without a Social Security number, unauthorized immigrant students may not be able to take the tests required to receive an industry-approved credential or state license. This can be a disincentive to take a sequence of courses in one occupational area to get a concentration. Completing a concentration—as opposed to simply taking one or two CTE courses for elective credit—can give a student a boost toward postsecondary education, for example by awarding an endorsement on the high school diploma.⁴⁵ In Nevada, all students working toward a standard diploma must earn two College and Career Ready Flex Credits, which can be earned by taking advanced CTE, math, science, or social studies credits.⁴⁶ Unauthorized immigrant students taking the CTE route can earn the necessary credits by taking a sequence of CTE courses, but might choose a different pathway if they cannot earn an industry credential as well. The added complexity of navigating educational choices as an unauthorized immigrant underscores the importance of well-informed guidance from trusted adults.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

CTE courses offer rich opportunities for students to prepare for a career and apply their academic learning in authentic contexts. Strong educational policies and administrative oversight with a focus on equity are necessary conditions for ensuring that ELs have access to these classes. However, as with most areas of education, students' individual experiences will vary considerably based on the capacity and context of their school and the ability of educators to provide the right guidance at the right time.

Several of the key obstacles that can keep ELs from fully benefitting from CTE revolve around issues of access. This problem endures even with strong federal policies not only forbidding discrimination, but actively calling on states and districts to foster the participation of groups such as ELs. Structurally, the most significant issue may be finding room in students' schedules for CTE when many, even most, ELs already have full schedules with English language development classes and courses needed to catch up on credits in core content areas. But equally concerning are access issues that stem from communication barriers, including a lack of good guidance for immigrant-background students and their families, who may need more or different information than their peers. And some students—especially those who are unauthorized immigrants—may have access to CTE classes but feel those options are foreclosed to them because of their immigration status or obligations to take any immediately available job to help support their family.

With CTE continuing to expand in popularity⁴⁷ and the EL population growing and becoming more diverse, this is a good time for educators and policymakers to take stock of ways that systems can be strengthened to increase ELs' likelihood of success. Some possible steps include those described below.

45 Advance CTE, *Endorsements, Electives & More: CTE & State Graduation Requirements* (Silver Spring, MD: Advance CTE, 2015).

46 Nevada Department of Education, "2021-2023 Nevada Graduation College & Career Ready Credit & Assessment Requirements" (guidance, Nevada Department of Education, Carson City, n.d.).

47 See, for example, Mila Koumpilova, "In Urban Districts, a New Embrace of Career and Technical Programs," *The Washington Post*, August 19, 2022.

For state departments of education:

- ▶ Include CTE participation and completion data on state report cards and data dashboards. Such data should be disaggregated at a minimum by ESSA's student subgroups, including ELs, so that educators and community members can evaluate EL data for their school and in comparison to other schools in the state. In order to ensure meaningful analysis of whether ELs' participation is proportionate to their share of student enrollment, states should also publish the total number of ELs enrolled in the grades during which students can participate in CTE.
- ▶ Pass a state board of education resolution or legislation prohibiting a school from denying participation in any courses available to all students on the basis of English language proficiency.⁴⁸ The department should support this resolution or legislation with clearly stated expectations for how schools can use state and local resources (such as ESSA Title III dollars, as appropriate) to support EL participation in elective coursework.
- ▶ Review training and certification requirements for CTE teachers and consider adding requirements for coursework or professional development hours dedicated to instructional strategies to support ELs.

For local districts and schools:

- ▶ Use data schools already collect for a variety of reporting purposes to disaggregate CTE participation and completion rates of ELs and specific groups within the EL population. For example, schools that receive federal Title III funds must identify newcomers (immigrants within their first three years in U.S. schools), long-term ELs, and ELs with disabilities, and therefore could create the capacity in their data systems to disaggregate CTE data by these categories in addition to ELs as a whole. Information technology, CTE, and EL staff may work together to identify other locally relevant categories, such as major language groups or students at lower versus higher English language proficiency levels.
- ▶ Provide information sessions in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate for the local community about CTE and how it fits into the bigger picture of high school graduation requirements and postsecondary opportunities.
- ▶ Ensure EL specialist staffing ratios are sufficient to allow specialists to provide direct linguistic support in academic and elective classes such as CTE in addition to providing direct instruction in English language development. Incorporate co-teaching where possible and provide professional development schoolwide on co-teaching strategies.
- ▶ Create opportunities for EL and CTE educators and administrators, school counselors, and family liaisons to share knowledge and resources and to work together to create a mutual system of support and mentorship. At a minimum, ensure that all staff know where to find accurate and up-to-date information on high school graduation requirements, CTE course offerings, and community options for work-based learning, dual enrollment, and other enrichment opportunities.

48 See California's AB 2735 for an example of such legislation. State of California, *An Act to Add Section 60811.8 to the Education Code, Relating to English Learners*, AB 2735, Chapter 304 (2018).

- ▶ Hire or train school counselors to be able to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate support to EL students and immigrant families. Prioritize assigning counselors with such knowledge to schools with large populations of ELs and assigning EL students to such counselors.
- ▶ Consider policies and programs to encourage students who need to work to remain enrolled in school, such as evening classes, blended learning programs, and work-based learning credit for jobs that students already have.

Beyond the K-12 sphere, better connections with adult education and workforce development programs can further expand opportunities for students whose needs are not met through the traditional high school pathway. As education policymakers continue to invest in systems aimed at closing achievement gaps and ensuring equal access to academic success, CTE may prove an effective asset in improving high school and postsecondary outcomes for ELs.

As education policymakers continue to invest in systems aimed at closing achievement gaps and ensuring equal access to academic success, CTE may prove an effective asset in improving high school and postsecondary outcomes for ELs.

Appendix. CTE Participants and Concentrators, by State, 2019–20

State	CTE Participants in Secondary School			CTE Concentrators in Secondary School			Total Enrollment, Grades 9–12		
	ELs	All Students	EL % of Students	ELs	All Students	EL % of Students	ELs	All Students	EL % of Students
Alabama	3,367	158,763	2.1%	1,136	96,462	1.2%	4,810	215,088	2.2%
Alaska	810	11,524	7.0%	228	3,845	5.9%	4,017	37,650	10.7%
Arizona	3,733	125,857	3.0%	807	56,037	1.4%	13,718	354,746	3.9%
Arkansas	7,524	116,305	6.5%	2,369	45,663	5.2%	10,241	144,008	7.1%
California	50,660	368,950	13.7%	7,842	73,249	10.7%	217,610	1,963,189	11.1%
Colorado	5,461	74,776	7.3%	4,108	54,570	7.5%	20,230	276,976	7.3%
Connecticut	7,625	114,541	6.7%	4,095	72,757	5.6%	8,810	163,891	5.4%
Delaware	1,407	28,105	5.0%	511	15,455	3.3%	2,498	42,382	5.9%
District of Columbia	197	3,052	6.5%	20	679	2.9%	1,864	18,991	9.8%
Florida	19,510	334,193	5.8%	6,104	198,554	3.1%	52,154	854,259	6.1%
Georgia	13,983	410,277	3.4%	3,300	136,719	2.4%	19,344	523,898	3.7%
Hawaii	1,737	27,674	6.3%	834	16,684	5.0%	3,540	51,713	6.8%
Idaho	5,040	42,700	11.8%	654	5,582	11.7%	3,732	93,985	4.0%
Illinois	13,099	278,883	4.7%	5,445	142,906	3.8%	37,564	602,018	6.2%
Indiana	423	73,848	0.6%	79	13,040	0.6%	13,310	321,343	4.1%
Iowa	4,963	106,519	4.7%	602	30,814	2.0%	7,866	150,499	5.2%
Kansas	4,592	51,689	8.9%	2,374	29,915	7.9%	11,113	144,593	7.7%
Kentucky	3,756	141,364	2.7%	1,284	61,075	2.1%	5,941	201,416	2.9%
Louisiana	4,698	165,210	2.8%	2,803	112,345	2.5%	6,509	200,527	3.2%
Maine	148	8,204	1.8%	107	6,808	1.6%	1,415	55,633	2.5%
Maryland	4,586	110,933	4.1%	743	27,922	2.7%	19,952	266,312	7.5%
Massachusetts	3,916	62,349	6.3%	931	25,457	3.7%	21,313	296,040	7.2%
Michigan	3,778	97,407	3.9%	2,238	64,365	3.5%	23,413	467,668	5.0%
Minnesota	8,531	121,141	7.0%	4,156	73,575	5.6%	16,136	275,333	5.9%
Mississippi	476	28,341	1.7%	134	9,176	1.5%	1,524	131,259	1.2%
Missouri	2,850	124,606	2.3%	708	41,778	1.7%	5,874	266,216	2.2%
Montana	232	29,394	0.8%	72	11,601	0.6%	735	42,625	1.7%
Nebraska	4,084	115,953	3.5%	583	28,845	2.0%	4,553	97,683	4.7%
Nevada	7,265	69,109	10.5%	2,679	32,053	8.4%	17,188	145,115	11.8%
New Hampshire	180	9,877	1.8%	670	3,967	16.9%	1,078	55,957	1.9%

State	CTE Participants in Secondary School			CTE Concentrators in Secondary School			Total Enrollment, Grades 9–12		
	ELs	All Students	EL % of Students	ELs	All Students	EL % of Students	ELs	All Students	EL % of Students
New Jersey	2,413	76,709	3.1%	663	44,659	1.5%	20,348	423,899	4.8%
New Mexico	8,231	58,717	14.0%	1,919	15,443	12.4%	12,824	99,266	12.9%
New York State	2,176	52,048	4.2%	1,331	52,358	2.5%	55,866	821,444	6.8%
North Carolina	28,782	541,806	5.3%	1,414	47,365	3.0%	23,509	464,490	5.1%
North Dakota	576	23,007	2.5%	98	8,129	1.2%	991	31,983	3.1%
Ohio	2,151	133,627	1.6%	1,217	87,071	1.4%	13,615	505,189	2.7%
Oklahoma	8,126	147,913	5.5%	1,267	27,063	4.7%	10,340	194,185	5.3%
Oregon	3,242	89,239	3.6%	1,252	56,886	2.2%	8,499	180,985	4.7%
Pennsylvania	1,646	59,973	2.7%	912	35,682	2.6%	18,724	544,641	3.4%
Rhode Island	471	7,756	6.1%	511	10,803	4.7%	4,453	45,190	9.9%
South Carolina	15,924	217,091	7.3%	2,495	36,900	6.8%	12,408	225,370	5.5%
South Dakota	601	24,117	2.5%	291	15,910	1.8%	1,173	39,118	3.0%
Tennessee	4,124	176,932	2.3%	860	71,545	1.2%	9,927	291,866	3.4%
Texas	206,398	1,619,219	12.7%	84,787	826,768	10.3%	189,910	1,588,808	12.0%
Utah	7,484	165,252	4.5%	1,732	54,463	3.2%	10,236	201,563	5.1%
Vermont	89	5,250	1.7%	70	2,769	2.5%	343	24,702	1.4%
Virginia	28,346	305,230	9.3%	2,434	43,391	5.6%	23,702	393,975	6.0%
Washington State	14,488	180,211	8.0%	749	8,943	8.4%	27,361	342,695	8.0%
West Virginia	193	41,421	0.5%	85	26,792	0.3%	562	76,661	0.7%
Wisconsin	2,542	84,309	3.0%	984	39,088	2.5%	10,650	260,938	4.1%
Wyoming	296	17,052	1.7%	28	3,660	0.8%	624	27,881	2.2%
Total	526,930	7,438,423	7.1%	162,715	3,007,586	5.4%	1,014,117	15,245,862	6.7%

Notes: The federal government's data explorer reports that New Mexico had only 1,468 English Learner (EL) participants in CTE in 2019–20, which would make the EL rate of participation (2.3 percent) far more disproportionate to the total EL population in high school (12.9 percent) than in most other states. The annual report for that year posted on the state's website listed 8,231 ELs out of 58,717 total secondary CTE participants. Because the state's number aligns more closely to the federal government's data for the prior four years of EL enrollment in CTE in New Mexico (8,300 to 9,000), this data analysis uses the state's number of participants instead of the federal number. State and federal data list the same number of concentrators for 2019–20.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, "Perkins State Plans and Data Explorer," accessed March 1, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, "EdDataExpress Data Download Tool," accessed January 6, 2023; New Mexico Public Education Department, *Perkins V, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (P.L. 115-224) Consolidated Annual Report July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020* (Santa Fe, NM: New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d.).

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