

PENNSYLVANIA CTE *Best Practices Initiative*

Implementation Guide for “Student Recruitment and Enrollment Strategies”

Developed by the Professional Learning Community (PLC) on:
“Student Support and Guidance”



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Section One: Overview of Professional Learning Communities/Support and Guidance

A. Introduction

To help expand and sustain the implementation of the strategies identified through the *Pennsylvania CTE Best Practices Initiative*¹ (BPI), the Bureau of Career and Technical Education (BCTE) and Meeder Consulting initiated five virtual Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in 2011. Through these PLCs, administrators and other designated teacher-leaders from throughout the Commonwealth met virtually for six months to focus activity and learning around one of five overarching strategies identified in the BPI.

To further sustain collaboration and peer-to-peer learning, each PLC developed an Implementation Guide on a particular strategy element. These guides are intended to serve as practical, step-by-step resources for CTE leaders and stakeholders throughout the Commonwealth as they evaluate how to improve school and student performance.

The material presented in this guide, collected and edited by consultants from Meeder Consulting, draws upon the collective professional experience and knowledge of the Instructional Support and Guidance PLC members as presented during PLC meetings and in online discussion forums. The guide captures the information and considerations that PLC members identified as being key enrollment and recruitment strategies.

B. Student Recruitment and Enrollment Strategies

Instructional support and guidance plays a critical role in helping CTE students to succeed in the classroom and to transition into post-secondary education and/or the workforce. There are many instructional support and guidance factors that lend themselves to further research and learning. For the purposes of this PLC, members decided to focus their learning on how to improve student recruitment and enrollment at CTCs.

¹ In 2010, the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Career and Technical Education (BCTE), with the support of the Meeder Consulting Group, launched the Pennsylvania CTE Best Practices Initiative. After conducting site visits and phone interviews with CTCs across Pennsylvania, Meeder Consulting documented 13 strategies used by CTCs to create standards aligned systems and to support those systems with people, processes and partnerships. All of these strategies are discussed in detail in case studies and profiles available on the BCTE website.

Over the course of PLC meetings, members discussed strategies related to improving recruitment and enrollment among students across all grade levels. The PLC identified two key areas in which CTCs should focus their efforts:

- Student and parent awareness and marketing strategies
- Communication and collaboration with partner sending schools.

Misperceptions about CTE and the role of CTCs still cloud the impression of many prospective students, their parents, community members and staff at partner sending schools. These misperceptions may hamper the efforts of CTCs to enroll students. As a result, there is a need among CTCs to proactively showcase the value they offer to their students as they prepare for successful transitions to post-secondary education and the workforce.

Building awareness among key stakeholders, highlighting the achievements of CTCs and their students and improving working relationships between CTCs and partner sending schools are key starting points for improving recruitment and enrollment.

C. Benefits of Student Recruitment and Enrollment Strategies

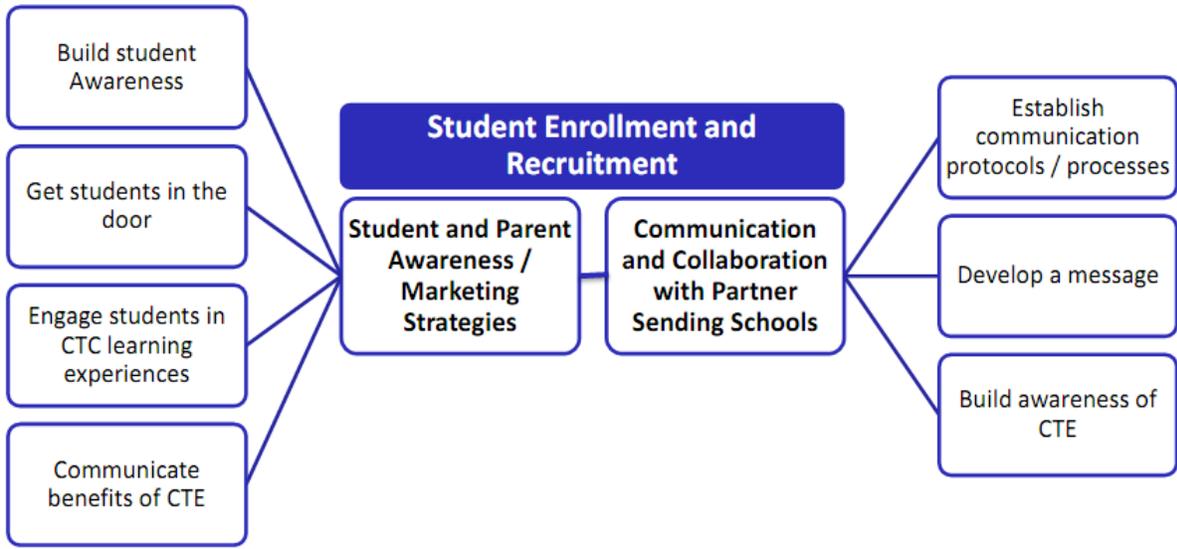
Improving student recruitment and enrollment in CTCs provides several benefits. These benefits, listed below, affect a variety of stakeholders, both in the short term and the long term.

- Diversify student body
CTCs that improve recruitment and enrollment strategies may benefit from a student body that includes students with a wide range of strengths, needs and interests. This diversification may help to overcome the negative stereotypes sometimes associated with CTCs such as them being "dumping grounds" for less motivated students.
- Improve perception of CTCs
As CTCs focus their efforts on how to recruit and enroll students, they may also change lingering misperceptions about the role and value of CTCs. During the course of recruiting and enrolling students, as this document details in a later section, CTCs will have the opportunity to share with students and parents and to communicate the positive impact CTCs have on student achievement.

Section Two: Student Recruitment and Enrollment Strategies

To achieve improvements in student recruitment and enrollment, CTCs are encouraged to consider the following strategies.

Figure A. Student Recruitment and Enrollment Strategies



A. Student and Parent Awareness and Marketing Strategies

A first step to improving student enrollment and recruitment is to focus efforts on increasing general awareness about CTC programs among prospective students and their parents. Enrollment and recruitment strategies should highlight the combination of academically rigorous and practical, relevant learning experiences to which CTC students are exposed. They should highlight the immediate and long-term educational and career benefits of completing CTC programs. As detailed in this section, several strategies may be implemented to help raise awareness about CTC programs.

I. Build Student Awareness

Depending on their background, prospective CTE students may either lack an awareness of what CTCs provide, or they may have developed misperceptions about the role and value of a CTC education. To counter this unawareness and negative stereotyping, it is important to expose students to the benefits of CTCs early on in their schooling.

Beginning at the elementary school level, CTC representatives should conduct information sessions for students. To reach the largest number of students, these introductory sessions ideally should be conducted on-site at the elementary and middle schools. Such sessions may include information on career choices, the types of CTE programs offered at the CTC, the logistics of attending the CTC and the relevant careers for which the CTC could prepare students. As one PLC member noted, "I believe that one of the best things we can do to increase enrollment is to get the students to our school at least a year in advance of when they can enroll. It gives them time to consider what we have to offer and may put to rest some of their 'fears' of coming to a particular school."

To further enrich information sessions and the opportunities to reach students early on in their academic careers, CTCs should develop and distribute marketing materials. These materials, such as postcards, letters and brochures, provide students with a hard copy of information to refer back to after the sessions and also to share with their parents. These marketing materials may be distributed before, during and after information sessions.

Example:

- **Erie County Technical School (ECTS)**
ECTS hired a marketing consultant to develop and implement a detailed marketing plan for the CTC. The goal of the plan is to help raise awareness and improve the perception of the CTC through regular and ongoing contact with current and prospective students and their families. To support what ECTS and its marketing partner term a "multiple touches" approach to marketing, the CTC developed a series of postcards, letters and other materials that are sent to students before, during and after the enrollment process. Current students also receive materials, such as thank you letters and a welcome back letter, from the principal.

II. Get Students in the Door

To help students and parents understand what type of learning experiences are available at CTCs and determine whether attending a CTC might be in their best interest, CTCs should provide opportunities for them to visit and explore the available programs. These opportunities might include

- Open houses,
- Visits and tours (individuals and groups), and/or
- Orientation sessions.

For students who have already decided to attend the CTC, these events provide an opportunity to experience different technical areas and make an informed choice about which program to pursue. For students who may be unsure or reluctant about enrolling because of the "unknown" factor, these on-site opportunities enable them to see the facility first-hand and to learn about the expectations and experience of CTC students. In both cases, students and their families will come away from the experience with a familiarity and understanding of the type of learning experiences students can expect once enrolled. In the words of one PLC member, "Once we get students and parents in the door, they want to come back."

Example:

- **Schuylkill Technology Center**

Schuylkill Technology Center conducts a three-pronged approach for bringing prospective students and their parents to the school. First, interested prospective students are given a tour of the CTC. Second, students return to the CTC to visit two programs of interest to them. Third, after new applications are processed, applicants and their parents are invited to attend an hour-long orientation session held in mid-May.

The goal of orientation is promote the relationship among the CTC, parents and students. During orientation, the administration welcomes students and families and then instructors provide them with a tour of their classrooms. Instructors review dress codes and tool requirements at this time, and they answer general questions that may arise.

The staff members at Schuylkill Technology Center believe that this approach contributes to observed increases in student satisfaction with their program choices, along with increases in program completion rates. As students begin their coursework at Schuylkill, both they and their parents are well aware of the learning expectations.

III. Engage Prospective Students in CTC Learning Experiences

Providing students with the opportunity to experience typical CTC lessons is a powerful strategy to increase their and their parents' awareness and to their spark interest in enrolling. These hands-on opportunities can be made available to and tailored to students at all grade levels. The goal of these learning sessions is to help students gain a sense of what the particular program entails and how it relates to their interests, education and future careers. As students develop a better understanding and appreciation for the CTC learning experience, they may share their perceptions with

their parents. Thus, parents are gaining exposure to what CTE looks like today compared with what it may have looked like when they were in high school.

CTCs can use a variety of approaches to presenting learning experiences to prospective students. The examples listed below highlight some of these options.

- Summer Camps – CTCs can conduct summer camp programs for middle school students. During this week-long camp, students participate in activities and lessons related to different program areas.
- Student Visits – CTCs can offer opportunities for prospective students to rotate through learning stations designed to introduce the students to what they can learn at the CTC and how their CTC learning experiences relate to their interests and career goals.
 - Erie County Technical School (ECTS) hosts information programs for ninth-grade students. During these 30-minute visits, students participate in hands-on projects that are designed to provide them with a greater understanding of what particular CTE programs entail. The program aims to highlight how learning experiences at the CTC may differ from more traditional classroom instruction.

IV. Communicate the Benefits of CTE

As discussed previously, a key element for both students and their parents in deciding to enroll at the CTC is to understand the benefits CTCs provide and the role they can play in preparing students for success in post-secondary education and the workforce. Sharing “success stories” and measured benefits of CTE builds awareness and can help to overcome any negative stereotypes or misinformation about CTE that may be present.

To battle misperceptions of CTCs as “dumping grounds” for unmotivated or unsuccessful students, CTCs must address these lingering stereotypes directly and communicate the benefits of enrolling at a CTC. Several of the strategies discussed earlier in this section can help accomplish this.

CTCs should consider how to use performance data to showcase their accomplishments to parents. Such data can be shared during information and orientation sessions. CTCs may want to consider developing data sheets that highlight the achievement of students and that can be distributed to parents either in person at information sessions or through the mail. This data also can be showcased on CTCs’ websites.

B. Communication and Collaboration with Partner Sending Schools

PLC members identified effective communication and collaboration between CTCs and their partner sending schools as a second key component to improving student enrollment and recruitment practices at CTCs. The faculty at partner sending schools, especially administrators and counselors, can play a vital role in raising awareness among students about the opportunities available to them at the CTC and guiding them to make informed enrollment decisions. In order for this to occur, the faculty members themselves must be well aware of what the CTE programs at the CTC entail. They also must have an established working relationship with their CTC colleagues so that recruitment and enrollment strategies are implemented consistently and effectively.

There may be a disconnect between CTCs and their partner sending schools that could prevent the schools from working together to best guide and encourage students to consider enrolling at the CTC. In light of these concerns, PLC members discussed several strategies for strengthening the communication and collaboration between CTCs and their partner sending schools. (See Figure A.)

I. Establish Communication Protocols/Processes

To improve CTC and partner sending school collaboration around the issue of CTC student enrollment and recruitment, it is helpful to establish agreed-upon avenues of communication. With effective communication between schools, there may be fewer misunderstandings and a greater awareness of the issues and needs faced by both schools. There are several key implementation steps that may help promote consistent and valuable communication.

- *Identify key stakeholders and go through the right channels*
For CTC faculty, PLC members noted the importance of becoming familiar with staff at partner sending schools. To accomplish this, CTC faculty may need to make a concerted effort to meet with their sending school colleagues and to become knowledgeable about their specific roles and responsibilities. As CTC faculty members learn more about which sending school staff members are involved with helping students enroll at the CTC, they can identify the key stakeholders in the process. They also can discuss with their colleagues what will be the most effective means of communication between the schools, for example, establishing a main point-of-contact(s) for each school. Simply establishing this role can help streamline communication between the schools.

- *Set meeting schedule*

Faculty representatives from the CTC and the sending schools also should establish a meeting schedule for the school year. By doing so, they ensure that there will be consistent communication between the schools. The meeting schedule should detail where and when the meetings will take place and who will participate. If possible, the agenda topics for the meetings could also be determined when the schedule is set.

II. Develop a Message

In addition to establishing communication protocols with partner sending schools, CTCs should identify and convey the mutual benefits of enhanced collaboration. To accomplish this, CTC faculty could brainstorm a list of these benefits to present to the partner sending schools. This does not need to be delivered during a formal presentation, but rather the message should be continually referenced and remain at the forefront of collaboration efforts.

Examples of the benefits to partner sending schools may include:

- Students transition more smoothly into post-secondary education and/or careers when they are receiving guidance from faculty at both the CTC and the partner sending school.
- Graduation rates may increase when students who otherwise lacked motivation are placed appropriately into CTC programs that match their interests and needs.

III. Build Awareness of CTE

In order to maximize collaboration efforts, CTCs should create opportunities for staff from partner sending schools to learn about the programs offered at the CTC. They noted that these opportunities can foster a better awareness of CTE among the staff. As staff members from the partner sending schools gain a stronger understanding of the CTC's programs and operations, they may realize how the two schools can best serve each other and, ultimately, the students. They also hopefully would recognize and develop an appreciation for how in-depth the coursework is at the CTC, which could help dispel any misperceptions about CTCs.

Several opportunities are available to build awareness among partner sending school staff. Most of these opportunities, which are listed below, involve bringing the staff to the CTC to learn first-hand what students experience.

- Invite counselors and instructors from the partner sending schools to sit in on courses at the CTC.
- Host "Open House" or orientation sessions at the CTC for just partner sending school staff so that the message can be tailored to their needs and questions.

- Conduct regular meetings at the CTC that bring together staff from both the CTC and the partner sending school.

Examples:

- **Schuylkill Technology Center**

The guidance department at Schuylkill Technology Center hosts and facilitates quarterly county-wide guidance meetings for secondary counselors. Generally these meetings are conducted during the months of October, December, February and April. The meetings are conducted alternately at each of Schuylkill's two campuses.

The topics for each meeting vary based on the needs of the counselors. The CTC uses the meetings as an opportunity to promote a better understanding of the value of a CTC education.

A CTE program is spotlighted at each meeting so that the partner sending school counselors can learn about the curriculum. Counselors visit a program and participate in a hands-on learning activity related to the particular program.

As a result of the Pennsylvania Department of Education's recent request for a K-12 guidance plan, the April 2011 quarterly guidance meeting also included elementary and secondary counselors in order to start bridging the gap of career readiness among students. During this meeting, participants provided valuable input for writing the guidance plan.

The guidance team at Schuylkill is hopeful that such cross-grade collaboration of counselors can continue to grow. Such collaboration and communication among K-12 counselors may result in the students of Schuylkill County having a better understanding of career readiness and the role that the CTC can play in preparing them for successful careers.

- **Erie County Technical School (ECTS)**

To improve communication between ECTS and its partner sending schools and to reinforce ECTS's role as an extension of the sending schools, ECTS hosts home school counselors at the CTC four times each year. During these meetings, several issues may be addressed, such as:

- International Organization for Standardization (ISO) process and audit results,
- Prep for the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and how ECTS can assist with PSSA prep, and

- How best to serve at-risk students.

Since enrolling in the BCTE Technical Assistance Program (TAP), ECTS staff also use these meetings to emphasize the extent to which numeracy and literacy skills are addressed at the CTC. Thirty minutes of each meeting is set aside to provide counselors with the opportunity to participate in a hands-on activity during which ECTS students act as the instructors. During this activity, the counselors do a math activity, a writing activity and a hands-on building activity. ECTS values this experience as a way to impress upon counselors from partner sending schools the rigorous learning taking place at the CTC.

Section Three: Challenges and Solutions/Considerations

Some of the challenges that CTCs may encounter as they seek to improve their recruitment and enrollment strategies, as well as possible ways to address these challenges, are discussed in this section.

- Challenge: Resistance from partner sending schools
Suggestions for How to Address Challenge:
 - Request opportunities to meet with partner sending school teachers and administrators to share information on the value and benefits of CTE.
 - Emphasize how increased student enrollment at the CTC can benefit the partner sending school in terms of student support, graduation rates, etc.
 - Identify one or more CTE "champions" at the partner sending school and work with them to build relationships.
- Challenge: Misperceptions of CTCs among parents and partner sending school staff
Suggestions for How to Address Challenge:
 - Build awareness through the use of data that CTC students can and do pursue post-secondary education.
 - Highlight the value of the CTC experience—what it prepares students to do after they graduate and how it helps students to transition successfully into post-secondary education or the workforce.

To advance student recruitment and enrollment efforts, CTCs should consider employing innovative practices such as those listed below. Although these practices often include the need for additional funding and time, they can result in dramatic improvements.

- **Form a Marketing Committee.**

A marketing committee can include members from the CTC, Joint Operating Committee, Occupational Advisory Committees, the Local Advisory Committee, business and industry partners, and/or sending schools. The role of the committee is to assess the image of the CTC in the community and to make recommendations regarding opportunities and materials that can be used to promote and showcase the CTC to prospective students, families and the wider community.

- **Bring in external resources.**

If funding permits, CTCs may choose to hire external consultants to develop a marketing program. These experts can provide guidance on the best ways to promote a CTC.

Appendix: Resources

This section contains lists and summaries of and links to reports, articles and other resources that may be useful to those interested in learning more about successful support and guidance strategies. Note that these resources do not necessarily address student recruitment and enrollment strategies directly. Rather, they cover a broad range of topics related to support and guidance.

Reports, Articles and Handbooks

- [Are They Really Ready to Work?](#)

Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Conference Board, Inc, Society for Human Resource Management, and Corporate Voices for Working Families
2006

This paper, one of the leading forays into the 21st century skills discussion, was based on an in-depth study conducted by partnering organizations on the corporate perspective on the readiness of new entrants into the U.S. workforce. It links the education and workforce development systems and comes to the conclusion that current students lack the skills necessary for workplace success. The paper defines improvements needed in the education of basic knowledge and applied skills as well as future skill needs and emerging content areas.

- [Career Exploration \(Theme\)](#)
Techniques (Association of Career and Technical Education)
March 2006
This issue of *Techniques* magazine focuses on career exploration activities. Four articles specific to the theme are included and focus on diverse topics like serving at-risk students and using online tools.
- [Create a Positive School Culture that Stresses Personalization in Relationships](#)
Techniques (Association for Career and Technical Education)
November/December 2006
This article was part of a series that more closely examined the recommendations made in ACTE's high school reform position statement and highlighted best practices for implementing each of the recommendations. Creating a positive school culture that stresses personalization in relationships was the third recommendation in the paper. This article provides information on student advisories and mentors for students classified as "special populations."
- [Establishing an Effective Guidance and Advisement System](#) (Click on this link to go to the SREB publication page. Paste "Establishing an Effective Guidance and Advisement System" into the search box.)
Southern Regional Education Board – High Schools that Work
March 2007
This newsletter from SREB discusses one of the key practices of the High Schools that Work Program. It outlines information on the following questions:
 - Why establish a guidance and advisement system?
 - What is the role of the adviser?
 - What are the goals of the adviser/advisee program?
 - Where do you begin with an adviser/advisee program?
 - What are the conditions for establishing an effective adviser/advisee program?
- [Planning for Success: Role of IGPs and Assessment in Kentucky's Agricultural Education Curriculum](#)
The Agricultural Education Magazine
May/June 2002
This short article describes how Kentucky uses Individual Graduation Plans (IGPs) and a tenth-grade assessment to help students to choose a career path, understand the course of study and requirements to achieve that career, and develop a plan to meet their goal.

- [Problems in Recruiting Students into Agricultural Education Programs: A Delphi Study of Agriculture Teacher Perceptions](#)
Journal of Agricultural Education (Volume 44, Number 2, 2003; pages 75–85)
This article examined what agriculture teachers perceive to be the major barriers in their efforts to recruit students into their programs.
- [Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different?](#)
ACT
May 2006
This report outlines the results of a study conducted by ACT that examined the academic skill levels required for jobs that typically did not require a high school diploma and the skills required to be successful in college. Job profiles from ACT's WorkKeys program and the company's College Readiness Benchmarks on its ACT college admission and placement exam were compared in the study. Findings showed "that the math and reading skills needed to be ready for success in workforce training programs are comparable to those needed for success in the first year of college," providing insight into setting career and college readiness standards.
- [Redesigning the Ninth-Grade Experience](#) (Click on this link to go to the SREB publication page. Paste "Redesigning the Ninth-Grade Experience" into the search box.)
Southern Regional Education Board – High Schools That Work
2008
The ninth grade has often been identified as a key element in transforming high schools, especially as it relates to providing more personalized instruction. This paper, from renowned high school reform expert Gene Bottoms, discusses how to design an effective ninth-grade program to reduce student failures. Elements discussed include:
 - Early orientation and preparation in the middle grades
 - Ninth-grade academy
 - Specialized ninth-grade courses
 - Guidance, advisement and support
 - No-zero policy
- [Special Issue: Career Development and the Changing Workplace](#)
Professional School Counseling, 6(4)
April 2003
This issue of *Professional School Counseling* contains numerous useful articles on the evolution of career and academic advisement to focus on both post-secondary and career readiness. Key articles include "Aligning School

Counseling, the Changing Workplace, and Career Development Assumptions" and "Beyond College for All: Policies and Practices to Improve Transitions into College and Jobs."

Website

Pennsylvania Bureau of Career and Technical Education – Guidance and Counseling
http://www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/career_development/7341/guidance_and_counseling/585085

This site includes a link to "Tools for Developing a Comprehensive K-12 Guidance and Counseling Plan."

Case Studies

Researchers from Meeder Consulting conducted one-day site visits at CTCs selected by the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Career and Technical Education (PDE-BCTE) and prepared detailed case studies based on the promising practices identified during these visits. The following resource provides overview information on those practices relating to student recruitment/enrollment and collaboration with partner sending schools. For the comprehensive summary of these practices, see the case studies at:

http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/best_practices/7683/case_studies/794984#link5.

Erie County Technical School (ECTS)

- Working with a consultant to develop a comprehensive CTC marketing plan.
- Strong relationships with sending school counselors lead to cohesive support and guidance for students.

Greater Altoona Career and Technology Center (GACTC)

- Prospective students are invited to visit GACTC's "Career Evaluation Center," an on-campus learning lab with individual stations representing GACTC's CTE programs. Prospective students are able to "test" programs in which they might be interested by performing a sample activity.

Indiana County Technology Center (ICTC)

- ICTC counselors make suggestions for sending school courses that a student should take based on his/her career objectives, the Pennsylvania Programs of Study (POS) and related articulation agreements with post-secondary

institutions. These suggestions are sent home via a letter to parents and sending school counselors.

Upper Bucks County Technical School (UB Tech)

- "Marketing Committee" works to build general awareness of the CTC in the community.
- Guidance staff meets individually with students receiving grades below a "C" level and identifies the student's problem areas. During these meetings, they also review the student's "work ethic" grade as well as instructor comments and the tasks on which the student has been working.

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