

“More and Better CTE”: Leadership Stepping Up to the Challenge

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The legislation that puts the Strong Workforce Initiative in place calls for “more and better” career and technical education. In this video briefing I want to talk about ways we as CEOs can step up to provide the leadership to achieve this goal. As a CEO, you know well that Career Technical Education programs are more resource intensive in terms of faculty time, facilities, and operating budget.

We know that offering a quality program in CTE presents a number of unique challenges. The programs are more expensive to operate, have constantly changing curriculum, and must be solidly linked to the communities we serve.

The budget downturns of the last few years have led many colleges to trim their existing CTE programs and have discouraged colleges from developing new programs. The Strong Workforce Initiative seeks to reverse this trend through funding that encourages colleges to update their program offerings and to develop new programs that meet emerging needs.

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

Successful community college CTE programs are built on well-developed partnerships with the business community and with workforce agencies. While building and maintaining business relationships is a team effort at our colleges, it is our role to lead the effort. Stepping up our leadership in this way communicates to outside parties that these relationships are important enough to the college that they command the attention of the president or chancellor. It also makes the importance of business partnerships clear to those on campus. This visibility provides a clear statement that everyone is expected to do their best to make this work successful.

Successful partnerships grow out of carefully groomed relationships. A CEO’s continual interaction with the community at large—and with the business community in particular—lays the ground work to develop the deeper relationships required for true partnerships to be formed.

When establishing a partnership, the initial challenge is getting everyone to the table to talk. This is where the college CEO can step up and use the leverage of his/her position by hosting or co-hosting such meetings. It is important that each partner have decision makers rather than messengers at the table. First, identify a clear goal—what is the partnership trying to achieve? Are there common or related outcomes all the players want to achieve? Typically, each partner has a need that can be met through the partnership—and fulfilling those needs is essential for the partnership to be a successful enterprise.

Next, identify the resources each partner can put toward achieving the goal. Those resources will be a real measure of commitment.

It should be possible to establish a framework for the partnership in two or three meetings. At that point the execution of the partnership can bring in the vice presidents, deans and faculty. The CEO's continued involvement can be shown through oversight at the policy and partnership level, through requests for updates, and by occasional attendance at implementation meetings.

To illustrate let's look at a win-win partnership. Consider this example: a college, a manufacturing employer, and a workforce agency form a partnership to train more manufacturing technicians. All partners win—the college gains students and places them, the employer has access to qualified job candidates, the workforce agency meets its placement goals, and the community has local residents employed. Leadership has to step up to forge such partnerships—and the opportunity to do so has never been greater.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Developing new programs is a challenging task which involves considerable commitment—and takes intensive planning. Your leadership is key to this process—stepping up to commit the time, talent, and resources to set the program development process in motion.

First, the college should take **time** to understand the labor market need for the program. Labor market need must be based both on projected job openings and on the existing availability of training for the target job. It will be important to go beyond basic labor market information to validate need by working directly with employers in the region. It is essential that this research include the specific skills and abilities that an effective training curriculum must provide, again validated with regional employers. Engaging employers early in the process builds the relationship that will be useful as the program develops.

Nurturing these relationships at the CEO level is the foundation of future commitments to sustain the program. Developing and supporting the on-campus **talent** to carry out this research, planning, program development, and employer connections also takes the CEO to step up and set priorities and establish accountability for this work.

Once need has been established, the fiscal viability of the new or expanded program must be assessed. That assessment involves both the initial cost and the sustaining cost. Initial costs include facilities, equipment, and program development. It is important to include **total cost of operation** when planning initial investments: facility upkeep, equipment maintenance and replacement, and ongoing training needs. Other sustaining costs are salaries, supplies, and operations (utilities, custodial, administration, for example.) Resources may be available through grants, facility bonds, partnerships, or—least attractive—college operating funds. Sustaining revenues will be primarily FTES apportionment. The program must be a high enough priority to the college and the community to support what is usually a large initial investment. If the impact of the program is significant, it may be the decision of the college to initiate and continue the program even if FTES revenue is not projected to cover sustaining costs. CEO leadership is essential to step up the college's engagement in this priority-setting—and campus discussion—early in the program development process.

CEO leadership is also key to stepping in when alternative solutions may be needed or available. In some cases, an all-in development cost commitment may not be necessary. For example, the program may be offered in a leased facility, equipment may be second generation donated by industry, and faculty load can depend more heavily on adjunct faculty. Operating costs may be shared with employers supporting incumbent workers to enroll or by Workforce Investment Board training agreements. Many such partnership arrangements are possible—and all these creative solutions need CEO leadership.

The complex structure of the Strong Workforce Program requires CEO oversight, so a word at this point about use of SWP funds might be helpful. Although SWP funding is ongoing, use of this resource to fiscally sustain a CTE program locks that money into just that program for the foreseeable future. Doing this limits the developmental and start-up funding from SWP so that supporting new and growing CTE programs is limited. In my opinion, SWP money is better used as developmental and start-up money and then for sustaining money for only a limited time—likely to be the three year spending horizon allow for each year's SWP allocation. As CEO, you can set the expectation that new and expanded CTE programs will produce enough growth FTES in those three to sustain the program thereafter. This frees those dollars to be “research and development” funding for the next CTE priority.

Once determining that it is feasible and desirable to offer a new program or expand an existing one, the college can turn to developing the appropriate course offerings and defining the programs degrees and certificates. While this is primarily faculty work, the college will need to provide support to existing faculty or hire additional faculty to build and expand the targeted CTE programs.

Finding faculty for technical programs is a particular challenge, especially in emerging fields. An ideal candidate has expertise in the subject matter but has the instructional skills to transfer that knowledge to students. It is essential that the CTE faculty hires have spent time working in their respective industry if they are to be credible instructors. Salaries are an issue in hiring technical faculty as often the pay level in any given technical field is significantly more than a community college instructional salary.

While part time instructors are an important resource, in my experience it is important whenever possible for a program to be anchored by a full-time instructor. That full-time instructor can oversee the program needs and advocate for the resources and staffing needs as well as shepherding the curriculum through institutional processes.

Finally, to realize the fruits of their investment colleges must recruit students to fill the classrooms and generate the FTES that will sustain the program. Particularly in emerging occupations, it is important to educate prospective students about an occupational area with which they may not be familiar. In addition to traditional tools such as social media, press releases and open houses, specific outreach made through industry and business groups and professional organizations can be effective. With big picture campus efforts such as CTE student recruitment, CEO Leadership can step up to coalesce college units such as marketing, instruction, and student services to work together to generate a unified message and outreach effort.

BUILDING CAMPUS CAPACITY

To succeed with the renewed emphasis on workforce development, a CEO needs to lead the effort to building a campus capacity to deliver quality CTE instruction. That leadership emphasizes both regional and local capacity and builds data availability and use; support systems for CTE completion; integrated, cross-team planning; and CTE professional development.

The Strong Workforce Program includes a **regional perspective** on workforce needs and solutions. CEOs implementing SWP within each region are expected to step up and provide the leadership for colleges to work together both to identify gaps in labor force and to collaborate to fill those gaps. It takes CEO leadership to help the college community understand the need to work more closely with neighboring colleges. The CEO should layout the reasons that show why working regionally is important and make it clear that regional collaboration is supported from the top. The CEO's leadership will provide support for the deans and faculty who participate in regional efforts and how that work contributes to that on their own campus. Making this a positive message is critical to community colleges achieving our role in economic development. Building those regional bridges through CEO-to-CEO commitment and collaboration is part of meeting the challenge of stepping up to provide leadership from the top.

An essential element in building capacity is the **role of data**. Labor market information is critical in the development and maintenance of workforce programs. To develop new programs or expand existing ones, a clear need for more educated workers in a given occupation must be established. In doing so, emphasize the importance of identifying and offering high skilled, high wage, high demand career programs. There are a number of tools and resources available to help a campus. On a campus with a thriving workforce program, you will find an understanding that data plays a prominent role in decision making at all levels. CEOs should step up and model data driven decision making in carrying out the implementation of the Strong Workforce Program.

Not only does student completion of CTE outcomes meet labor market needs and provide a livable wage, but **student completion** also in part drives Strong Workforce funding. Consequently, CEO leadership is needed to reinforce the importance of student completion in CTE and to foster a culture of continual improvement by looking at what keeps students from getting to the finish line. The Strong Workforce Program funding metrics include completion of a CTE degree, certificate or transfer, wage gain upon completion, and employment in a job closely related to the field of study within six months to a year after completion. These employment achievements have not previously been used to measure community college success, and some on campus may even be uncomfortable with employment factors as measures of success. One of the approaches that you as CEO can utilize is to share the data now available to demonstrate the tremendous economic value our programs have both to our graduates and to the community.

The current public interest in community colleges and the success of all students has led to a plethora of funding streams for student success, student equity, basic skills, adult education, and workforce education. To maximize the **effective use of these separate streams of money**, it takes the CEO to step up and provide leadership on strategic coordination and collaboration of campus initiatives that receive

these resources. Again, data on the outcomes of each of these funded initiatives, reviewed and used at the highest levels of decision making, takes CEO leadership stepping up both to build data capacity and to build the capacity for cross unit teamwork. CEO leadership, focused on **integrated solutions** regardless of funding streams, helps all parties work together to move the needle on student success.

Finally I want to point out the importance of CEO leadership to step up and support CTE **professional development**. In most CTE fields, expected job competencies are continually changing: new technologies, advances in equipment, and innovative applications abound. Teaching to these state-of-the-art competencies means regular training of faculty on these “perishable” skills—and how to teach them. As CEOs, we should strive to create fiscal and other incentives that address reassigned time, externships, and other methods of skill upgrades to ensure CTE faculty currency. We should work to increase opportunities for CTE faculty to participate in professional development such as sabbaticals, industry events, and professional association training to augment discipline knowledge and connections with employers and the workforce system.

ADVOCACY

In our advocacy efforts as CEOs we need to continually include CTE concerns. There are of course the fundamental issues of funding and accountability. We also need to continually showcase our successful CTE programs to a wide audience—especially policy makers. As we know, many legislators don’t have an on-the-ground understanding of what we do—especially in CTE. In addition, we now have we have access to an array data tools that help us tell the CTE story. Beyond the Student Success Scorecard, we have resources such as the Salary Surfer and Wage Tracker that provide employment and wage information. One of the newest resources is the Employment Outcome Survey which provides qualitative information such as students’ satisfaction with the instruction they received.

Creating and delivering the powerful message told through this CTE data is one of the most significant ways in which a CEO can step up and tell our local legislators and our community about the impact of our CTE programs. I can tell you from my own experience in community presentations that data on wage gains by our CTE program graduates really opens the eyes of our elected officials and our district residents and raises the esteem in which they hold our local community colleges.

WRAP UP

Our country—and particularly our state—depend on a well-educated workforce. The skills and abilities needed in that workforce continue to grow rapidly—and so do our challenges to educate and train those who make up that workforce—now and into the future.

With challenge comes opportunity. We are fortunate in California to have resources—funding, data, partners, and a broad range of educational delivery methods. Matching these opportunities to the challenges requires us as CEOs to step up—with vision, inspiration, and tenacity.