10-26-2025

High School Instructional Staff Perspectives on Effective Strategies for Increasing Enrollment in the Career and Technical Education Pathway

Briana O'Brien
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Briana L. O'Brien

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. James Bailey, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. John Johnson, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2025

Abstract

High School Instructional Staff Perspectives on Effective Strategies for Increasing Enrollment in the Career and Technical Education Pathway

by

Briana L. O'Brien

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Educational Administration and Leadership

Walden University

November 2025

Abstract

The problem addressed in this study was the challenges of enrolling students in the career and technical education (CTE) pathway at a northeastern high school, despite local and national commitments to expanding CTE opportunities. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore high school instructional staff perceptions of the challenges in enrolling students in the CTE pathway and the strategies they suggest would increase enrollment. The study was grounded in the conceptual framework of the concerns-based adoption model and the expectancy-value theory, which allowed for an understanding of staff concerns, motivations, and perceptions in relation to student enrollment in the CTE pathway. Two research questions focused on identifying barriers to CTE enrollment and the strategies staff believed would improve student participation. Data were collected through 10 semistructured interviews with high school instructional staff members. Data were analyzed using thematic coding, revealing six major themes: system-level scheduling and competing priorities, staffing concerns, misconceptions and stigma surrounding CTE, the value of peer influence, the value of teacher influence, and student visibility as a recruitment tool. In response to these findings, a 1-year action plan was developed to improve CTE enrollment through staff capacity building, peer and teacher advocacy, and outreach events that highlight student success. The project study's conclusions identified that increasing visibility of CTE programs and leveraging peer and teacher influence are effective strategies for combating misconceptions and improving enrollment. The research has positive social change implications by increasing awareness of CTE as a rigorous and valuable graduation pathway, ultimately benefiting stakeholders through stronger educational and economic outcomes.

High School Instructional Staff Perspectives on Effective Strategies for Increasing Enrollment in the Career and Technical Education Pathway

by

Briana L. O'Brien

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Educational Administration and Leadership

Walden University

November 2025

Dedication

This project study is dedicated to my husband, my parents, my in-laws, my brother, and my brother-in-law. My husband has been endlessly loving, patient, and encouraging throughout this journey. Thank you for always giving me the space to work and for sharing in my celebrations at each milestone. Thank you for chauffeuring me while I worked every weekend in the car up to the lake. Thank you to my brother-in-law, who was essential in getting on COD to play Warzone with my husband while I worked for hours on nights and weekends. And to my parents and my brother, thank you for checking in on me, cheering me on, and for teaching me from the start to strive for success in everything I do. These values have quietly guided me through this entire journey. To my in-laws, thank you for always understanding when I had to slip away early to get back home and work on this project on chili nights, when I had to "dine and dash" just to squeeze in more writing time. I couldn't have done this without all of you, and I'm so grateful.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. James Andrew Bailey, my chair, who has supported me over the past two years from the very beginning of this project through to its completion. His encouragement, patience, and understanding of the demands of my job and of the time and effort required to finish this work were essential to its success. His kindness, guidance, and realistic perspective made the process manageable and meaningful. I am also grateful to my second chair, Dr. John Johnson, for his support and encouragement throughout this project.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to my colleagues and the many students and stakeholders whose commitment made this work possible. The dedication, creativity, and persistence of educators in building and growing opportunities for students have been nothing short of inspiring.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: The Problem

Career and technical education (CTE) programs provide an unparalleled instructional environment for students to acquire academic and hands-on industry skills. CTE has faced negative publicity since its inception, previously known as vocational education. Vocational education was developed for students who struggled academically and needed a direct pathway into the workforce (Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Hodge et al., 2020; Jobs for the Future, 2022). Over the last decade, CTE has been promoted as a viable option for any student interested in a specific trade or career field (Haviland & Robbins, 2021). Most CTE programs support students planning for a variety of post-secondary goals, including two and four-year institutions, trade schools, the military, or direct entry into the workforce (Haviland & Robbins, 2021).

Increases in CTE enrollment may be attributed to school districts' commitments to promoting alternative pathways to graduation (Aliaga, 2022). Student enrollment efforts involve showcasing the practical skills and career pathways available through CTE and addressing potential students' questions and concerns. Staff engagement in these efforts is crucial to dispelling misconceptions about CTE and demonstrating its value as a viable and rewarding educational pathway. School districts often promote awareness of these programs through district publicity materials posted on websites or available in school buildings, and at outreach events that show the benefits and outcomes of the CTE programs.

CTE programs offer high school students opportunities to acquire practical skills and training for future employment (Aliaga, 2023). In New York State, graduation

requirements are shifting to be more inclusive of CTE because of the increased workforce demands and New York's economic skills gap (New York State Department of Labor, n.d.; New York State Education Department, n.d.). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2022), federal funds have recently been allocated toward engaging students in CTE opportunities (Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Hodge et al., 2020). These financial commitments show the investment in growing the population served by CTE programs throughout the country.

Despite the changing narrative of CTE and the local and national financial commitments to CTE, students are only slowly enrolling in CTE, and they are primarily choosing the college preparation track. School districts and local workforces see the benefits of CTE, hoping to collaboratively support students and their future success in an evolving workforce by preparing them with industry-ready skills (Atwell et al., 2022). However, the understanding of high school instructional staff members' concerns regarding their belief in CTE as a viable graduation pathway is limited. A local school district documented the same concern.

The Local Problem

The problem that was addressed through this basic qualitative study was the challenges in enrolling students in the CTE pathway among instructional staff in a northeastern school district. Within its strategic plan, the school district had a strategic intent for authentic learning experiences, which primarily referred to the CTE programs at the high school. This support of the CTE program was coupled with district funding commitments for a CTE academy building in the current capital improvement project.

The high school promoted the CTE program through various district and high school events to increase awareness and enrollment. The high school has promotional materials on its website and in the main office and a counseling office aimed at making CTE pathways attractive to students and families. Despite the clear commitment to CTE from the district to the high school level, the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE program among high school instructional staff were unknown.

CTE has faced negative publicity nationally, with a perception that CTE programs are primarily designed for students who struggle in school and will not enroll in postsecondary education (Haviland & Robbins, 2021). However, over the last 10 years, that narrative has changed, and CTE programs have grown more popular and acceptable within schools and communities. With these changes, schools that offer CTE programs may face a challenge in promoting the benefits of CTE. The local school district experienced this challenge and faced skepticism when the CTE programs were established. Initially, high school staff struggled to effectively communicate the value of CTE pathways to potential students and their families. Some instructional staff members at the local high school saw a traditional high school program as a means to a high school diploma, without considering the benefits of the new CTE programs. The local site prioritized promoting the CTE programs' offerings and showed direct connections to students' career aspirations and interests. To promote CTE to families, the local school presented CTE's role in achieving upward mobility and job security.

The problem that was addressed through a qualitative research study, using interviews with high school staff, was that even though a unique pathway had been

established to entice students to consider a CTE, there had been no significant increase in enrollment. Factors perceived by high school staff as influencing the effectiveness of recruitment activities were unknown. Despite the local school district's commitment to financial and human resource investments to promote the CTE graduation pathway, enrollment remained less than expected, and the program was not operating at total capacity.

Rationale

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and what suggestions they had to improve enrollment. To address the study problem, I gathered data through semistructured interviews with instructional staff who were involved with the CTE program in the high school. Qualitative methods facilitate understanding the complex social, cultural, and institutional contexts likely impacting local CTE enrollment (see Babbie, 2017). Interviews captured the depth and breadth of high school staff perspectives on the school's CTE enrollment, providing a thorough analysis of the phenomenon (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The constructivist view posits that reality and knowledge are constructed through human interactions and experiences (Burkholder et al., 2020). By employing qualitative methods, this qualitative study on strategies affecting CTE enrollment captured the stories and experiences of high school staff, facilitating a deep understanding of the contextual factors influencing CTE enrollment decisions. The qualitative approach enabled the investigation of the lived realities of those involved, acknowledging that individual and collective actions and

interpretations shape these realities. The experiences of high school staff were foundational to addressing the concerns of enhancing CTE enrollment effectively.

The study was set in a comprehensive northeastern suburban high school serving Grades 9-12, with a population of approximately 2,100 students and 250 instructional staff members, including six administrators. The statistics for the high school include

- 2% of students are English language learners,
- 16% of students are students with special needs, and
- 44% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch.

The high school offered 150 courses and six state-credentialed CTE programs. In addition to the six CTE programs, the high school participated in the local Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), which offers additional CTE programs. The high school offered a traditional high school program, which included general and special education, as well as Advanced Placement courses, dual enrollment courses, and honors courses. The school has an average graduation rate of 88%. Most students at this high school were academically successful, as evidenced by the completion of a traditional high school diploma. On average, 16% of students graduated with a CTE endorsement, which is an additional endorsement added to a traditional high school diploma. The building had a goal to increase CTE pathway enrollment by 10% each year. Recent data on CTE enrollment shows the school is not meeting the building goal. Table 1 shows the student enrollment in the CTE pathway in the Northeast Central School District.

Table 1

Student Enrollment in CTE Pathway in Northeast Central School District

Year	Total school enrollment	CTE pathway enrollment
2021-2022	2175	<1%
2022-2023	2100	9%
2023-2024	2103	11%

According to the high school's profile, 52% of the Class of 2024 enrolled in a 4-year college, and 20% enrolled in a 2-year college. Per the district website, a Strategic Plan existed, in which CTE was listed as one of the four priorities for the district:

- A commitment to continuous improvements: professional learning communities,
- A commitment to a culture of respect: diversity, equity, inclusion, and accountability,
- A commitment to pathways for every student: authentic learning experiences, and
- A commitment to student support: mental health, wellness, and social-emotional learning.

According to the district website, included in the most recent capital improvement project was the construction of a CTE academy, where all CTE programs at this school would occur. The budget for this capital improvement project was $72 million, showing a commitment from the community and district to supporting this high school's CTE program.

Definition of Terms

Career and technical education (CTE): CTE is an educational model that integrates traditional academics with practical, career-oriented training to prepare students for postsecondary education, direct workforce entry, and career advancement in high-demand industries (Haviland & Robbins, 2021). Students in CTE programs are engaged in an instructional environment where they acquire academic skills and hands-on industry skills in a career area of interest (Hodge et al., 2020).

Carnegie credit: A standardized unit of measurement for student coursework, representing instructional time when a student is present in a class for one period every day throughout one school year (Kreisman & Stange, 2020).

Course-taking: The selection, enrollment, and completion of specific courses by students as part of their academic progression (Aliaga, 2023).

Enrollment: The process of selecting, registering, and gaining admission into a specific course of study or school program (Haviland & Robbins, 2021).

Instructional staff members: Educators and school personnel directly involved in delivering instruction and supporting student learning, including teachers, school

counselors, specialists, administration, and other academic support staff who contribute to curriculum implementation and student achievement (Aliaga, 2022).

Job shadow: A career exploration activity in which a student gains practical experience and exposure to the workplace by visiting and watching a professional in their workplace to understand the responsibilities, skills, and daily tasks associated with the job (Mobley et al., 2017).

Pathway: A structured sequence of courses designed to provide students with a clear progression of knowledge and skills in a specific area of interest or program of study (Haviland & Robbins, 2021)

Perkins V: Also known as the Strengthening CTE for the 21st Century Act, Perkins V is a federal law that provides funding and guidelines for strengthening CTE programs to align workforce needs and improve student access to high-quality, skills-based learning opportunities (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

School counselor: A trained educator who guides students in their academic growth, career planning, and social-emotional well-being by providing guidance, resources, and counseling services to help students achieve academic and personal success (Spacek et al., 2021).

Stakeholders: Any individual or group with a vested interest or who is affected by the success, policies, and outcomes of a school and its students (Aliaga, 2022).

Tracking: Grouping and scheduling students based on perceived academic abilities and directing them toward specific academic or vocational programs (Haviland & Robbins, 2021).

Vocational education: Instruction that prepares students for specific trades, careers, or technical fields by providing practical, hands-on training and job-ready skills (Hodge et al., 2020). Vocational education often leads directly to the workforce and is focused on job preparation (Tucker & Hughes, 2020).

Work-based learning: Structured learning experiences that actively engage employers and schools in creating real-world opportunities for students to learn career readiness and industry-specific skills through internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and cooperative education programs (Aliaga & Kotamraju, 2024; New York State Education Department, n.d.).

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because it identified how high school instructional staff members perceived the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway. Schools looking to improve CTE programs may find the results of this study useful. School leaders may be able to use the results to plan professional development for staff members that specifically addresses concerns and challenges faced when looking to enroll students in a CTE program. The stakeholders for this study were high school teachers and counselors. These stakeholders were selected because they may have a direct influence on students looking to enroll in CTE programs. Students and families may benefit from the results of the study because it may inform decision-making around CTE programs.

High school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges in enrolling students in the CTE program were an important topic for study because it revealed concerns related to the enrollment and promotion of CTE programs. School

improvement is an ongoing process, and schools need to evaluate their programs by reflecting on concerns and solutions to potential issues. This study could also inform future decisions for enrollment and recruitment strategies used by high school instructional staff. High school staff may be able to tailor enrollment and recruitment practices based on the results of the study to improve efforts in enrolling students in the CTE pathway.

The findings of this study can contribute to positive social change because they provide schools with strategies for improving enrollment in a CTE program. Improving CTE program enrollment could support student outcomes and lead to a more successful and qualified workforce. The findings can support school districts looking to implement a CTE program or increase enrollment in a CTE program, which in turn may improve student retention, graduation rates, and overall achievement. By identifying and addressing the factors high school staff perceived as challenges to student enrollment in CTE programs, the study leads to more effective communication and marketing strategies that make these programs more attractive to students and their families. Such improvements could boost enrollment locally and provide an example for other schools and districts experiencing comparable challenges. Increased enrollment and demand could lead to broader educational reforms at the regional or national level, influencing policies to support the expansion and enhancement of CTE programs across the country. Increasing enrollment in CTE programs can help bridge the gap between education and workforce needs, contributing to a more robust, more skilled workforce that meets the evolving demands of today's economy. The alignment of educational outcomes with job

market needs may foster economic growth and enhance future generations' upward mobility and job security.

Research Questions

This basic qualitative study investigated the challenges in enrolling students in the CTE pathway among instructional staff in a northeastern school district. Hall and Hord's (2011) concerns-based adoption model (CBAM) was the conceptual framework used for this study. This framework was used to develop two research questions for this study:

RQ1: How do high school instructional staff members in a northeastern school district perceive the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway?

RQ2: What strategies do high school instructional staff members perceive might improve student enrollment in the CTE pathway at a northeastern school district?

Review of the Literature

A literature review is conducted when a thorough analysis of all available literature on a topic is conducted (Paul & Criado, 2020; Taherdoost, 2023). The literature review process engages the researcher in a complete review of all available research on a topic (Paul & Criado, 2020; Taherdoost, 2023). This basic qualitative project study focused on high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and what suggestions they had to improve enrollment. A review of available literature on CTE enrollment strategies revealed a body of literature focused on activities used for enrolling students in high school programs. In this study, the stages and dimensions of concern outlined in Hall's CBAM helped

understand how high school instructional staff perceived challenges in enrolling students in the CTE pathway.

To conduct this literature review, a thorough review of the Walden University Library database was conducted. All articles sourced for this project study were found using filters to identify peer-reviewed, scholarly articles. The following key terms were used in the search: *career and technical education, vocational education, enrollment strategies, recruitment, counseling, qualitative research, high school, course-taking, college-going, college and career readiness, Perkins Grant, change implementation,* and *student motivation*. This search strategy yielded 50 articles, 80% of which were published within the last 4 years (i.e., 2021-2024) to be used in this literature review. Additionally, other articles were sourced through references in articles that were related to the study.

The first section of this literature review explains the CBAM and the expectancy value theory, and their history. I then connect the local problem and research questions to the conceptual framework. Following the conceptual framework, I present the broader view of the problem of CTE enrollment. I organized the problem of CTE enrollment into four sections: current trends and challenges in CTE enrollment, effectiveness of recruitment strategies in CTE, school-level implementation and staff perceptions, and student motivation and decision-making factors.

Conceptual Framework

Concerns-Based Adoption Model

A strong conceptual framework is essential for understanding and analyzing the complexities of how and why instructional staff enroll students in the CTE pathway. This

section explored the CBAM, which provided insights into how individuals adopt and implement innovations in education (Hall & Hord, 2011; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010). CBAM served as the framework for this study because it offered a structured approach to understanding the challenges and concerns instructional staff had for increasing CTE enrollment. In adopting and implementing a CTE program, enrollment strategies used to engage and recruit students into a CTE pathway were explored within the framework of the CBAM (see Hall & Hord, 2011).

CBAM was designed to analyze and facilitate the process of adopting and implementing new practices or innovations (Hall & Hord, 2011; Hall et al., 1973; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010; Texas University, Research and Development Center for Teacher Education & Hall, 1973). CBAM focuses on the human element of change and helps to understand individuals' attitudes, concerns, and behaviors as they engage with new initiatives (Hall & Hord, 2011; Hord et al., 2006). The framework is built around three key dimensions that work together to provide an understanding of adoption and implementation: stages of concern, levels of use (LoU), and innovation configurations (Hall & Hord, 2011; Hord et al., 2006). CBAM is widely used in educational settings to study how educators engage with new programs and practices (Hall, 2010; Hall et al., 1973; Hall & Hord, 2011; Hord et al., 2006; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010). In the context of CTE enrollment efforts, CBAM helped uncover barriers to effective implementation by identifying staff concerns, assessing their level of engagement, and evaluating variations in how recruitment strategies were executed (see Hord et al., 2006).

The CBAM is used to understand how individuals experience and implement changes in their work environments (Hall & Hord, 2011; Hall et al., 1973; OpenAI, 2023). Hord et al. (2006) determined the following conclusions about change,

> 1. Change is a process, not an event. … 2. Change is accomplished by individuals. … 3. Change is a highly personal experience. … 4. Change involves developmental growth. … 5. Change is best understood in operational terms. … 6. The focus of facilitation should be on individuals, innovations, and the context. (pp. 5-6)

This model of change supported framing high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the effectiveness of current recruitment strategies for the CTE pathway. Understanding instructional staff concerns was critical for identifying potential barriers and opportunities to increase student enrollment in the CTE pathway (see Hall et al., 2006). The CBAM's stages of concern range from personal worries about how a new initiative affects individuals to broader concerns about its impact on the organization (Hord et al., 2006; OpenAI, 2023). In this study, the CBAM helped frame how high school instructional staff interpreted and engaged with recruitment efforts of CTE programs, which was a change from the traditional high school model in which they were engaged. Using the CBAM framework, the study provided insight into how school stakeholders' experiences and concerns influence the effectiveness of the recruitment strategies in place.

Hord et al.'s (2006) model identifies key stages and dimensions of concern when educational institutions engage in the adoption and implementation of initiatives.

In the stages of concern, concerns, and perceptions that individuals experience while adapting to change are categorized (Hall & Hord, 2011; Hord et al., 2006). Stages of concern range from basic awareness and informational needs to personal management and refocusing concerns (Hord et al., 2006). Each stage reflects a developmental process that instructional staff, such as teachers and counselors, experience as they engage with new initiatives. The stages of concern presented by Hall et al. (1973) are as follows: "unaware, awareness, exploration, early trial, limited impact, maximum benefit, [and] renewal" (p. 8).

The LoU is a framework used to measure how actively individuals are engaging with the innovation, providing a continuum for assessing the extent and quality of implementation of the change or innovation (Hall et al., 1973; Hord et al., 2006). Hall et al. (1973) have presented six LoU of the innovation, "nonuse, orientation, initial training, mechanical, independent, integrated, [and] renewing" (pp. 17-20). The LoU is a description of what individuals do with the innovation or change (Hall, 2010; Hord et al., 2006). LoU allows the researcher to identify an individual's placement on the continuum (Hall, 2010; Hord et al., 2006). The level then provides insight into the degree of engagement and the actions or behaviors associated with implementing the innovation (Hall, 2010; Hord et al., 2006).

The innovation configurations examine variations in how an innovation or change is implemented (Hord et al., 2006). It identifies the degree to which the implementation aligns with the intended design (Hord et al., 2006). By focusing on the concerns, actions, and implementation activities of staff, CBAM provided a deeper understanding of the

challenges instructional staff faced when recruiting and enrolling students into the CTE pathway (see Hall et al., 1973). CBAM lends itself to qualitative research because it offers a structured way to examine how high school instructional staff perceived, experienced, and engaged with these recruitment strategies, which varied from traditional high school program procedures. CTE recruitment and enrollment strategies were a change from school stakeholders' traditional understanding of program selection. Instructional staff had concerns about the CTE program, which the CBAM helped to evaluate and frame (see Hall & Hord, 2011).

The purpose of my study was to explore high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and what suggestions they had to improve enrollment. By using the CBAM as a conceptual framework, I analyzed how instructional staff members move through various stages of concern, from initial awareness and understanding of the strategies to full engagement and application (see Hord et al., 2006). Gaining insight into stakeholders' views of CTE recruitment efforts helped identify areas where instructional staff needed additional support or professional development to implement recruitment strategies effectively.

I used the stages of concern and LoU dimensions of CBAM to develop semistructured interview questions (see Hall & Hord, 2011; see Hord et al., 2006). The interview questions explored instructional staff's perceptions of the challenges and opportunities in recruiting students into the CTE pathway and assessed their levels of engagement with current recruitment strategies. The stages of concern dimension informed questions designed to uncover how staff felt about the recruitment process,

ranging from their awareness of the strategies in place to personal and organizational concerns regarding their effectiveness (Hall et al., 1973; Hord et al., 2006). The LoU dimension guided questions aimed at understanding how actively staff were implementing these strategies, identifying whether they were in the early stages of adoption, fully engaged in consistent practices, or refining their approaches to maximize impact (Hall et al., 1973; Hord et al., 2006).

Expectancy-Value Theory

In addition to using the CBAM as a framework, this study applied the EVT (Eccles et al., 1983) to understand instructional staff members' perceptions of the motivation and decision-making processes influencing high school students' choices related to high school programming choice. The EVT posits that people's decisions are influenced by their anticipated likelihood of success in each domain and the importance they assign to that domain (Eccles et al., 1983). EVT was used to understand how instructional staff perceived the value and motivational factors influencing students when selecting high school programming, such as a CTE pathway. The EVT explains how a student's expectation of success connects to the value they assign to the attainment of the goal. In the context of this study, the focus was on how instructional staff interpreted and evaluated these factors in relation to recruitment efforts and their impact on student enrollment in the CTE pathway.

Building on the work of Atkinson (1957), who explored how individuals' motivations influence their choices, particularly when faced with risk, Eccles et al. (1983) further developed a model linking expectancy and value to both achievement

outcomes and decision-making. Eccles et al.'s model posits that individual choices, persistence, and performance in achievement-related tasks are primarily driven by expectancies for success and subjective task values (Russell et al., 2009; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Eccles et al. (1983) determined that the following values are subjectively used by students when determining how well they will perform: "attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost" (as cited in Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, p. 72). Additionally, their work provided a structure for analyzing decision-making processes in educational contexts (Russell et al., 2009).

In relation to CBAM, EVT helped understand why implementation of the CTE pathway and student enrollment were or were not happening. The EVT was applied to examine how students perceive the value of their high school courses and programs. According to Wigfield and Eccles (2000), when making decisions, students explore the resources available to them and determine value based on their beliefs about their success in the context of the decision and the importance they place on that success. The EVT posits that when making decisions, value is awarded if individuals have confidence in their ability to succeed in a task and they find the task to be personally significant (Russell et al., 2009; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). The EVT was primarily used in this study when developing interview questions to explore staff perceptions of whether current CTE recruitment strategies effectively communicated the program's value and fostered student motivation to participate. Semistructured interview questions were developed to examine staff views on how well the strategies address students'

confidence in their likelihood of success and the importance they attach to enrolling in the CTE pathway.

Review of the Broader Problem

Current Trends and Challenges in CTE Enrollment

CTE is essential for providing students with industry-based skills and academic knowledge needed for the modern workforce (Haviland & Robbins, 2021). CTE programs provide students with the opportunity to gain practical, hands-on experience in various fields, including information technology, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2023; Haviland & Robbins, 2021). Despite their critical importance, CTE programs often struggle to meet the growing needs of students and the job market due to limited resources and outdated infrastructure (Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Jobs for the Future, 2022).

CTE has undergone substantial transformation in recent decades, transitioning from traditional vocational education to comprehensive programs integrating academic and technical skills (Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Hodge et al., 2020; Jobs for the Future, 2022). According to the Association for Career and Technical Education (2023), CTE programs are crucial for addressing workforce skill gaps and preparing students for immediate employment and further education (Atwell et al., 2022; Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Hodge et al., 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022; Tucker & Hughes, 2020). However, many CTE programs face limited funding, outdated curricula, and a lack of industry partnerships (Jobs for the Future, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

As the economy demands changes in the workforce, schools quickly shift traditional high school programs to include CTE pathways for students. In 2020, the White House proposed a $900 million increase in funding for states to increase CTE program offerings (Associated Press, 2020). States like New York responded with increased CTE funding for schools to build and expand their CTE programming and began conversations about the Blue-Ribbon Commission (New York State Education Department, n.d.). The Blue-Ribbon Commission, established by the New York State Education Department, was tasked with reviewing and recommending changes to high school graduation requirements to ensure they reflect the demands of today's students and workforce. The commission's work aims to create an educational system that promotes equity and inclusivity while addressing the evolving demands of college, careers, and civic engagement (New York State Education Department, n.d.). In November 2023, the Commission proposed replacing the state's three-tiered diploma system with a single diploma complemented by optional endorsements and seals that recognize specialized achievements in areas such as CTE, the arts, civic-readiness, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (New York State Education Department, n.d.). The shift to one diploma type puts focus on skills that transcend beyond high-stakes testing and recognizes a broader range of student achievements and qualities (New York State Education Department, n.d.). Blue Ribbon Commission is a historical milestone for New York State because it shows dedication to connecting educational policy with the realities of a modern, skills-based economy.

To provide grant funds dedicated to CTE programming, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act was first adopted in 1963 and has since undergone several reauthorizations (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Most recently, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) was signed into law on July 31, 2018 (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Perkins V introduced key changes, such as increased emphasis on local control, requiring states to consult with stakeholders in developing CTE programs, and incorporating performance measures tied to workforce outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). It also expanded funding flexibility to better align programs with regional workforce demands, implemented thorough needs assessments for program improvement, and emphasized serving traditionally underserved students (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). School districts use Perkins funds to support career readiness programs, technical skill development, and academic integration, and guarantee student access to rigorous, high-quality CTE pathways.

The workforce has changed drastically with the economy in the last 5 years, with increasing demands for laborers, skilled technicians, and trade professionals (Carruthers et al., 2024a; Haviland & Robbins, 2021). Industries such as construction, plumbing, and HVAC have seen increased demand for students to enter their workforce immediately following high school (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023b). Nationally, the college-going pressure has changed as students unenroll from colleges and universities to reenroll in trade schools or direct entry into a career field (Hodge et al., 2020). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023a), jobs that require only a high

school diploma or equivalent are expected to have the most annual job openings, averaging 7.1 million per year. Programs designed for students to become job-ready are emerging as lucrative and valuable choices for students (Carruthers et al., 2024a; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023b). Industries such as chip fabrication, building trades, and nursing face workforce shortages, aligning with projections that employment rates will grow from 167.8 million in 2023 to 174.6 million by 2033 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023b). CTE programs can fill the gaps where these shortages exist.

CTE, previously known as vocational education, maintained a stigma of a less-than program (Carruthers et al., 2024a; Hodge et al., 2020; Tucker & Hughes, 2020). Students enrolled in vocational education were thought to be incapable of attending a traditional high school program and were not anticipated to attend a 2 or 4-year university (Erwin et al., 2024; Hodge et al., 2020; Tucker & Hughes, 2020). According to Hodge et al. (2020) and Haviland and Robbins (2021), during the 1990s, the term vocational education shifted to CTE, a program for students looking to enter a specific career field regardless of the type of post-secondary programming in which they intend to enroll (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Additionally, the college-going pressure has lessened, and students and families are being presented with options aside from college (Erwin et al., 2024; Haviland & Robbins, 2021). This shift has not been without challenges and questions from parents and educators who wonder if students can be successful by making a fair living if they do not attend college (Erwin et al., 2024; Haviland & Robbins, 2021).

Effectiveness of Recruitment Strategies in CTE

Effective recruitment strategies are critical for addressing enrollment and sustainability of CTE programs (Farrell, 2022; Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Ketchledge et al., 2021). CTE programs rely on innovative and evidence-based practices to engage students, parents, and stakeholders in seeing the value of CTE (Fletcher & Dumford, 2021; Keeney, 2023). Ideally, once the value is established, students discuss course-taking options with their families and counselors to determine the most appropriate program for successful completion (Farrell, 2022). However, before a student is enrolled in a CTE program, recruitment efforts must be made by school districts and local industries (Haviland & Robbins, 2021). School districts must work with local industry partners to establish relationships and develop pathways for students immediately following high school (Farrell, 2022). Haviland and Robbins (2021) found that school staff need to address barriers and improve communication when recruiting CTE programs.

Collaborating with local businesses, industries, and higher education institutions is a highly effective strategy for strengthening CTE programs (Farrell, 2022). Partnerships with industries and post-secondary educational programs create pathways for internships, apprenticeships, and real-world experiences that prepare students for employment immediately after graduation (Jobs for the Future, 2022). Establishing advisory boards with industry representatives helps tailor the programs to meet local economic needs (Fletcher & Dumford, 2021).

Pathways have emerged as a vital organizational framework for CTE programs (Aliaga & Kotamraju, 2024; Haviland & Robbins, 2021). According to Carruthers et al. (2024b), pathways consist of course sequences that align with a specific set of career-focused courses. Pathways typically fall within 16 broader career areas, and most prepare students for direct entry into the workforce and postsecondary education (Carruthers et al., 2024b). These pathways offer structured learning opportunities for students to enroll in coursework focused on an area of interest and obtain real-world experience through on-the-job opportunities, providing them with vast opportunities to connect academic coursework with technical skill development (Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Hodge et al., 2020). However, students often face trade-offs when selecting CTE courses, as participation may prevent them from taking other courses of interest (Carruthers et al., 2024b; Kreisman & Stange, 2020). Schools must consider these competing priorities when designing and promoting pathway options to ensure accessibility and equity in course selection (Carruthers et al., 2024b; Kreisman & Stange, 2020).

Schools can engage in recruitment efforts such as awareness campaigns to showcase the benefits of CTE programs, including certifications, dual-enrollment courses, and work-based learning opportunities (Carruthers et al., 2024b; Farrell, 2022). Advance CTE (2023) suggests schools highlight success stories and potential career pathways beyond high school. Social media platforms, school websites, and community events are effective tools to disseminate information and engage broader stakeholder audiences (Carruthers et al., 2024b). According to Ketchledge et al. (2021), campaigns

that focus on student achievement and program outcomes help families see CTE as a viable and valuable educational program choice.

Research on course-taking patterns also provides insights into effective recruitment practices. Kreisman and Stange (2020) found that most high school students typically enroll in one or more CTE courses throughout their high school experience. Their findings indicate that ninth-grade students and those demonstrating lower academic performance are more inclined to take introductory CTE courses, while higher-achieving students are more likely to progress through advanced pathways as they move through high school. Schools that offer multiple levels within pathways may find that students who remain in a single pathway achieve better academic and labor market outcomes compared to peers who take introductory courses across multiple pathways (Kreisman & Stange, 2020). For example, students completing advanced levels in a drone technology pathway may experience higher job placement rates and wage potential than peers who only complete the introductory course and change pathways.

Recent literature has explored the patterns of student selection into CTE-dedicated high schools of choice and assessed the reasons behind their choices, as well as potential barriers in the school choice process (Ansel et al., 2022; Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Hodge et al., 2020). Ansel et al.'s (2022) findings revealed three issues, including the loss of the mission of CTE in the state, inequitable access to information, and inequitable enrollment across groups of students. Issues such as the loss of CTE's mission in the state, inequitable access to information, and inequitable enrollment across student groups may influence how researchers study the CTE enrollment phenomenon. Haviland and

Robbins (2021) identified that school stakeholders influence student decision-making when selecting CTE or a traditional high school path. School counselors are significant partners in determining student pathways, and they could be connected to enrollment in the CTE pathway (Ansel et al., 2022; Haviland & Robbins, 2021).

School-Level Implementation and Staff Perceptions

Currently, CTE programs vary widely in quality and availability across different regions (Erwin et al., 2024; Haviland & Robbins, 2021). In New York, many districts have seen promising results with students participating in CTE pathways, but substantial room exists for expansion and improvement (Kemple et al., 2023). Nationally, CTE is recognized for its role in reducing dropout rates and increasing student engagement by providing real-world learning experiences that are directly applicable to the workforce (Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Kemple et al., 2023; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022; Tucker & Hughes, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2022), students who participate in CTE courses have higher rates of on-time graduation, are more likely to enroll in postsecondary educational opportunities, and enter the workforce with job-ready skills.

Staff buy-in is essential for the successful implementation of CTE programs (Tucker & Hughes, 2020). Teachers, counselors, and administrators play pivotal roles in shaping students' perceptions of CTE pathways (Aliaga, 2022; Erwin et al., 2024; Jocson & Martínez, 2020). Holm (2019) conducted a Q-method study to explore the perceptions of high school counselors toward postsecondary CTE. Holm incorporated qualitative data through narrative responses and quantitative data through the ranking of statements

to examine high school counselors' subjective reality on postsecondary CTE. Holm identified three main perspectives among high school counselors regarding CTE: (a) advocates who strongly endorse CTE pathways; (b) spectators who remain neutral; (c) conflicted individuals who express mixed feelings about the value of CTE programs. These varying perceptions highlight the importance of understanding stakeholder attitudes and addressing misconceptions to strengthen program support. When instructional staff members believe in the value of CTE and actively promote its benefits, they can positively influence student enrollment decisions (Jocson & Martínez, 2020; Tucker & Hughes, 2020).

School counselors are significant partners in determining student pathways (Ansel et al., 2022; Haviland & Robbins, 2021). School counselors play a key role in offering guidance and support to students as they pursue academic or career pathways (Aliaga, 2022; Erwin et al., 2024; Stipanovic & Stringfield, 2013). School counselors have diverse perceptions of CTE, which may affect students' choices and potentially impact their futures (Aliaga, 2022; Bettencourt et al., 2022). Current literature has revealed that school counselors are key stakeholders in student program choice (Bryan et al., 2022; Ferguson et al., 2019). Middle school counselors influence middle school students in their choices for high school programs, including whether to choose CTE as a high school program (Ansel et al., 2022; Bryan et al., 2022; Ferguson et al., 2019; Holm, 2019). Bryan et al. (2022) explored the school counselors' influence in the college culture and their influence and role in shaping students' post-secondary decisions.

For CTE programs to succeed, counselors must be equipped with comprehensive knowledge about available pathways, local job market trends, and the alignment of CTE programs with college and career readiness goals (Ferguson et al., 2019; Spacek et al., 2021). Research highlights that staff perceptions of CTE often depend on their understanding of its potential to prepare students for post-secondary readiness (Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Holm, 2019). Professional development opportunities focused on educating staff on the outcomes of CTE programs, including their impact on students' labor market success, can improve staff buy-in and advocacy efforts (Kistler et al., 2024). Stakeholders, including core-subject teachers, often express the importance of including rigorous academic content, such as math, science, and English, in CTE programs to ensure students are prepared for career and academic pathways (Aliaga, 2022).

To maximize the effectiveness of CTE programs, schools must invest in ongoing professional development for instructional staff (Clemens, 2019; Farrell, 2022). Training programs that focus on incorporating academic knowledge with technical skills, the use of industry-standard equipment, and alignment with local labor market demands are crucial for ensuring that educators are equipped to deliver high-quality instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Providing staff with opportunities to collaborate with industry professionals through advisory boards can deepen their understanding of current workforce needs and enhance the alignment of CTE curricula with those needs (Fletcher & Dumford, 2021; Jobs for the Future, 2022).

Despite the benefits of CTE, aligning recruitment strategies with school culture and priorities can be challenging (Ansel et al., 2022; Farrell, 2022; Haviland & Robbins, 2021). Many schools face budgetary constraints, including the costs associated with hiring qualified educators, purchasing materials and equipment, and maintaining facilities (Erwin et al., 2024; Kistler et al., 2024). Additionally, competing academic priorities, such as standardized testing and college-preparatory coursework, can limit the resources and attention allocated to CTE programs (Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Tucker & Hughes, 2020). Schools must also consider local labor market trends when deciding which CTE pathways to offer, ensuring that programs align with the skills and careers in demand within their communities (Erwin et al., 2024; Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Kemple et al., 2023).

Lessons from schools that have successfully increased CTE enrollment highlight the importance of structured pathways and strategic resource allocation (Fletcher & Dumford, 2021; Withington et al., 2012). Kreisman and Stange (2020) found that students who take multiple courses within a single CTE pathway achieve greater academic and labor market success compared to peers who take unrelated courses across different pathways. There is value in offering cohesive, multi-level CTE pathways that provide students with clear progression and skill development (Withington et al., 2012). Instructional staff advocating for CTE enrollment can highlight Kreisman and Stange's findings on the relationship between CTE course-taking and labor market outcomes. Their analysis suggests that while lower-level CTE courses have no significant impact

on students' success in the labor market, upper-level CTE courses provide measurable benefits, enhancing students' labor market outcomes.

Student Motivation and Decision-Making Factors

CTE programs have demonstrated significant positive outcomes for students (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2023; Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Hodge et al., 2020; Jobs for the Future, 2022). For instance, students who participate in CTE programs graduate at higher rates than their peers (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2023). According to a study by the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), CTE concentrators, students who complete a series of at least three courses in CTE, or at least two within a specific pathway, had a graduation rate of 94%, compared to the national average of 84% (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Moreover, high school CTE programs are closely aligned with the evolving needs of the labor market (Haviland & Robbins, 2021). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023a) indicates that many of the fastest-growing occupations require skills taught in high school CTE programs. Careers in healthcare, information technology, and skilled trades present substantial job opportunities for those with CTE training. (Atwell et al., 2022). According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (2022), individuals with technical certificates or associate degrees earn, on average, $5,000 to $15,000 more annually than those with only a high school diploma. CTE programs have clear economic value in equipping students with marketable skills that lead to well-paying jobs (Haviland & Robbins, 2021).

Student interest in CTE pathways is shaped by various factors, including career aspirations, the perceived relevance of the program to their goals, and the influence of peers and family (Ansel et al., 2022; Ketchledge et al., 2021; Lewis, 2022). To address misconceptions about CTE and highlight success stories, schools must actively promote the benefits of their programs (Aliaga, 2022). Misunderstandings such as the outdated notion that CTE is a fallback for students not interested in college can deter participation (Aliaga, 2022; Ferm, 2021; Lindsay et al., 2024). Setting up career fairs and program tours, allowing students to sample courses, and encouraging students to visit programs can all positively influence student decision-making to enroll in CTE coursework (Ansel et al., 2022; Aliaga, 2022; Atwell et al., 2022; Bryan et al., 2022; Jobs for the Future, 2022). Recruitment strategies that introduce students to potential career pathways, such as job shadowing and workplace visits, have proven effective in increasing interest in CTE programs (Bryan et al., 2022). Mobley et al. (2017) found that job shadowing was particularly impactful for students because it fostered a greater awareness of career opportunities and provided students with a vision for their future.

Students often engage with CTE programs to explore their interests, develop practical skills, and prepare for future careers (Aliaga, 2023; Aliaga & Kotamraju, 2024; Bryan et al., 2022; Haviland & Robbins, 2021). Students who take CTE courses to sample different fields and take one course or receive one credit are categorized as CTE participants (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In contrast, CTE concentrators take a sequence of courses known as a pathway (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). High school CTE programs prepare students for immediate entry into the workforce and lay

the groundwork for further education and training. Kreisman and Stange (2020) found students make course-taking decisions based on the information provided, as well as the social and human implications of their choices. Additionally, as students progress through high school, their decision-making power about course-taking increases, and as students consider their life after high school, they may become clearer in their plans about course-taking (Kreisman & Stange, 2020).

As students enroll in CTE courses and pathways, demonstrating clear outcomes, such as college credit, industry-recognized certifications, and job readiness, is crucial for sustaining student interest (Aliaga, 2023; Ansel et al., 2022; Fletcher & Dumford, 2021). Programs that offer tangible benefits, such as dual enrollment opportunities and industry credentials, increase the appeal for students and families looking to get an early start on post-secondary education and preparation for the workforce (Aliaga, 2023; Ansel et al., 2022). For instance, Ferm (2021) explained how students who complete CTE programs in high-demand fields often pursue additional certifications or degrees that enhance their career prospects and earning potential. Integrating academic and technical skills in CTE coursework helps students apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings, making them more attractive to employers (Advance CTE, 2023; Ferm, 2021; Ketchledge et al., 2021; Spillers & Lovett, 2023).

Haviland and Robbins (2021) highlight the distinction between students engaging in aligned CTE pathways and those exploring individual courses to discover new skills or potential interests. While enrolling students in a pathway is ideal, providing opportunities for students to participate in individual courses allows them to explore

CTE and build readiness, with the goal of encouraging them to transition into pathway enrollment and eventually become concentrators (Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Kreisman & Stange, 2020). Ansel et al. (2022) found that students have mixed views on the adequacy of information in making informed decisions about high school choices, with students of color expressing a greater need for more information. Therefore, effective counselor-student contact is essential in promoting CTE, as counselors often act as the bridge supporting students' aspirations and the opportunities provided by these programs (Ansel et al., 2022; Bryan et al., 2022; Ketchledge et al., 2021).

Implications

Examining the literature on CTE enrollment challenges revealed areas where additional support and targeted strategies could help increase student participation in the CTE pathway at the local site. The literature also highlighted that CTE programs are rapidly developing and changing with the changing workforce demands. Schools are quickly developing CTE programs to meet these needs. I determined that a project deliverable designed to improve enrollment in a CTE program would be helpful to the field. The genre of my project was a recruitment plan that included a series of activities designed to recruit students into the CTE pathway. This plan would be implemented during an academic school year. Traditionally, the local site conducted an annual master scheduling process that began in January and ended in April. This process started with a presentation to all students where counselors reviewed the course scheduling process. Following this presentation, school counselors began meeting with students one-on-one to design a course load that was appropriate and desirable to the student. Scheduling

meetings were completed by the end of March. Following the conclusion of the scheduling meetings, two counselors, who were the master schedulers for the building, met with the administrative team to determine teacher sectioning and course loads. In early April, the counseling and administrative team reviewed the final course numbers and determined the success of the recruitment process.

The project was a 1-year action plan that could be implemented to improve the recruitment and enrollment process. The project was an action plan completed in one year, beginning in September. The project would be completed by the end of June of the same school year. In June, the administrator would be responsible for reviewing the end-of-the-year results to determine if the school met the SMART goal presented in September. The content of the action plan was largely determined by the findings gathered through the semistructured interviews. Each action step reflected a practice, skill, event, or task for recruitment and enrollment in the CTE pathway. The action steps will be spaced throughout the year depending on the task, event, or activity that they include. The goal of this action plan was to improve the recruitment and enrollment process by including the suggested strategies from instructional staff uncovered in the data collection phase. This action plan was designed after conducting a literature review, interviewing instructional staff, and performing data analysis.

Summary

This basic qualitative study explored the challenges in enrolling students in the CTE pathway among instructional staff in a northeastern school district. The conceptual framework was presented, followed by the literature review covering the broader view of

the problem. The literature review was organized into four subsections that detailed the challenges in enrolling students in a CTE pathway. First, the literature review addressed current trends and challenges in CTE enrollment. The research presented described the positive momentum CTE is experiencing nationally. The second subsection discussed the effectiveness of recruitment strategies in CTE. It also explored the recruitment and enrollment process, and the role that students, families, counselors, and the school community play in student programming. The third subsection focused on school-level implementation and staff perceptions of a CTE program. This subsection details the importance of staff buy-in as well as the role of professional development to share the benefits of a CTE program. Student motivation and decision-making factors were discussed in the final subsection, highlighting the many factors influencing student interest in high school programming.

The literature presented focused on CTE programming for high school students and high school staff. Most current research focuses on a general understanding that CTE has positively improved since its inception as vocational education. Current literature also discusses the benefits of CTE programs, including work-based learning opportunities, industry credentialing, and high student interest. While the literature did address enrollment in student programs, a gap in the research existed. Additional research is needed to understand the challenges in enrolling students in a CTE pathway among high school instructional staff.

The study provided insights into the specific strategies that staff believed were effective in increasing student enrollment in the CTE pathway. These insights may

directly benefit the local site by informing more targeted and effective recruitment practices, leading to higher enrollment in the CTE program. As enrollment increases, the school can offer students more diverse career pathways, which can improve student engagement, retention, and overall academic achievement.

This basic qualitative study focused on the challenges in enrolling students in the CTE pathway among instructional high school staff in a northeastern school district. The local research site was a suburban high school. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and what suggestions they had to improve enrollment. The first research question was as follows: How do high school instructional staff members in a northeastern school district perceive the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway? The second research question was as follows: What strategies do high school instructional staff members perceive might improve student enrollment in the CTE pathway at a northeastern school district? The local site and other schools could use the findings of this study to improve recruitment and enrollment in the CTE pathway. This study was significant in that it made an original contribution by addressing a critical gap in practice related to CTE enrollment at a local high school. The following section addresses the methodology used to address the research questions for this basic qualitative study.

Section 2: The Methodology

I conducted a basic qualitative research approach for this project study. Qualitative research aims to understand a unique event (Babbie, 2017) and is often grounded in a constructivist perspective (Burkholder et al., 2020). The constructivist perspective believes that participants actively construct knowledge around a specific phenomenon and through interactions with the researcher and one another (Burkholder et al., 2020). A qualitative approach requires the researcher to use methods that focus on exploring and understanding social phenomena, human experiences, and behaviors (Burkholder et al., 2020). Additionally, a research topic is amenable to qualitative study when the research questions look to explore the *how* and *why* of human experiences, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, and social interactions (Babbie, 2017). This study explored how high school instructional staff perceived the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and what suggestions they had for improving enrollment. The research questions were designed to elicit open-ended responses. I conducted semistructured interviews to understand high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and what strategies they had to improve enrollment.

Qualitative Research Design: Basic

To conduct this study, I chose a basic qualitative research design. Qualitative research aims to gain insights into phenomena's meaning, context, and patterns rather than quantifying them (Babbie, 2017). While both quantitative and qualitative research study social phenomena, a quantitative approach, which focuses on numerical data and

statistical analysis, was less effective for this study because it did not allow for the perspectives and experiences of instructional staff regarding CTE enrollment and their suggestions for improving enrollment. Additionally, a large sample size is required for a quantitative study (Burkholder et al., 2020). I did not use a quantitative design because there was a small sample size at the local site. CTE enrollment was best researched using a qualitative research method because qualitative methods allowed for an exploration of high school staff perceptions, experiences, and the factors influencing their decisions. I used a basic qualitative approach because I wanted to focus on exploring and understanding how the participants, high school instructional staff, interpreted their experiences and perceptions regarding CTE recruitment strategies (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach enabled me to gather detailed, descriptive data that provided insights into how staff viewed the effectiveness of the strategies in place and the factors influencing their perceptions.

I chose to conduct a basic qualitative study because I wanted to understand the complex, subjective experiences and views of high school instructional staff. By employing qualitative methods, this study explored the stories and experiences of high school staff, facilitating a deep understanding of the contextual factors impacting CTE enrollment decisions. Semistructured interviews captured the range and complexity of high school staff perspectives on CTE (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The data collection process included conducting semistructured interviews where participants' experiences were collected. Then, I engaged in a thematic analysis process that occurred in cycles. I first developed codes, then categories, and finally themes (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Categories help researchers organize codes into meaningful clusters, which then develop into themes (Saldaña, 2021). I reached data saturation after coding the 10 semistructured interviews. The qualitative approach enables the investigation of the lived realities of those involved, acknowledging that these realities are shaped by individual and collective actions and interpretations (Babbie, 2017). This design allowed me to address the research questions in a way that focused on understanding the complex social phenomena involved in CTE recruitment from the perspective of those most directly engaged in the process.

The CBAM aligned with my research questions, which explored high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and what strategies they perceived might improve enrollment. This basic qualitative study aligned with the CBAM and EVT because it allowed me to gather in-depth data on instructional staff perceptions and experiences through semistructured interviews. CBAM and the EVT guided the interview questions to understand the phenomenon of CTE enrollment and recruitment practices. Further, the CBAM and EVT guided the interview questions to best understand high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and what suggestions they had to improve enrollment. The CBAM's seven stages of concern provided a logical structure for developing interview questions, coding, and analyzing data on how instructional staff perceived and adopted these recruitment and enrollment strategies (Hord et al., 2006).

Participants

The population of participants for this basic qualitative study consisted of high school instructional staff at a northeastern high school. The local high school had approximately 300 staff members, including administrators, teachers, and counselors. It was estimated that around 100 instructional staff members met the selection criteria described below and were eligible to participate in this study. Based on the study's qualitative design and the need for in-depth exploration of perceptions, I sought a sample size of 10 to 12 participants. The sample size was adjusted when I reached data saturation through the coding process. Because of the small sample size available, I rejected a quantitative study as I did not have access to the size of the sample needed for quantitative research (see Burkholder et al., 2020). The sample size aligned with the recommendations for qualitative research, which prioritize depth over breadth (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The participants were instructional staff members at the local high school, including CTE instructors, school counselors, and teachers with academic advisement sections who were directly responsible for student recruitment and career guidance. This group was critical to the study as they were stakeholders engaged in the strategies designed to increase CTE enrollment. Because I interviewed staff directly involved in the CTE program, I used the qualitative research method of purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is used to intentionally select participants because of their familiarity, understanding, experience, or perspective on phenomena (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Participants were selected based on their involvement with CTE recruitment, student programming, and guidance at the high school. Inclusion criteria consisted of individuals who had been in their roles for at least one academic year to ensure they had sufficient experience with the CTE recruitment strategies. Additionally, teachers who supported students in conversations about academic programming choices were included in the criteria. These teachers were called academic advisement teachers, and they supported students in Tier 1 academic programming. All school counselors who were in their roles for at least 1 year were included in the criteria. All school counselors in the local site were responsible for scheduling students in 9th to 12th grade. Students in all grade levels were eligible for enrollment in the CTE program. Exclusion criteria applied to staff members who were not instructional staff, did not work directly with CTE recruitment, did not have academic advisement sections, or had been in their positions for less than a year, as they may not have had adequate exposure to the recruitment efforts. This purposeful participant sampling allowed me to select individuals who provided the information required to answer my research questions (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Once I received IRB approval (#06-16-25-1185527), I emailed my superintendent requesting approval to conduct my study. Once approval was granted, I emailed the participants who met the selection criteria I established. In the email, I provided the details about the study, including eligibility requirements, the time commitment of participating in a one-on-one interview, the confidentiality agreement and protection from harm, and a consent form. I also asked for written acceptance of the terms and their consent via email. Once the participants consented to the interview, I scheduled a time to

meet with them and sent a calendar invite to confirm our meeting date, time, and format, virtual or in-person.

Because this study was a basic qualitative research study, I anticipated that the participants would share lived and true experiences about the local site. I maintained confidentiality to protect the participants' privacy and followed ethical research guidelines (see Babbie, 2017; see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The terms of confidentiality were first shared over email, and then again during the semistructured interview. When reporting findings, I eliminated the possibility of any identification of individuals by numbering each participant. This ensured there was no disclosure of individual identities or other identifiable characteristics (see Burkholder et al., 2020). Using the interview protocol I developed, I started each interview by reviewing the confidentiality measures put in place. I reminded participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion (see Babbie, 2017; see Burkholder et al., 2020). I explained the style of the interview, explained the purpose of the study, the problem being explored, and reviewed the research questions. Before beginning the recording of the interview, I asked the participant if they had any last-minute questions. At the end of the interview, I referred to the interview protocol to ensure all steps were followed and explained the next steps of member checking.

Researcher's Role

I was an administrator at the local research site. My role as an administrator afforded me a unique perspective on the challenges and successes of high school programming. The goal of this qualitative study was to explore high school instructional

staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE Pathway and what suggestions they had to improve enrollment. Because of my role at the local site, I had professional relationships with the high school instructional staff. Because of this, I ensured that I received entirely voluntary participation, maintained participant confidentiality, and implemented safeguards to minimize potential bias. This was a common ethical consideration that prevented issues related to coercion or bias in the responses (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As a researcher conducting the study at my workplace, there was a risk of researcher bias influencing the interpretation of data. To reduce this risk, I employed strategies such as member-checking to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts and triangulation to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also engaged in reflexivity by continually reflecting on my role as both a researcher and a colleague of the participants. To address the issue of bias, I critically reflected on assumptions. I remained open to findings that may have challenged views on the effectiveness of CTE programs (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To maintain the integrity of the research, I ensured the conclusions drawn were grounded in an objective analysis of the evidence (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Data Collection

Because I was looking to understand participants' perspectives on the phenomenon of CTE enrollment, I selected semistructured interviews as the primary data collection method. Semistructured interviews with 10 participants who met the selection criteria generated data that effectively addressed the research questions while ensuring

sufficient depth and breadth of inquiry (see Burkholder et al., 2020). Creswell (2013) asserted that qualitative researchers determine alignment among problem, purpose, and design and develop data collection methods appropriate to the participant's setting.

I developed a series of questions to be used during each one-on-one semistructured interview (see Appendix B). In a semistructured interview, the interviewer asks a set of predetermined questions on a topic while asking follow-up questions to explore participants' responses in greater depth (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I developed questions using the three approaches outlined in Rubin and Rubin's (2012) framework, drawing from my experience and knowledge, incorporating insights from existing literature, and integrating findings from preliminary research. The interview questions were designed to elicit instructional staff perceptions and experiences with CTE enrollment (see Eccles et al., 1983; Hall, 2010; Hall et al., 1973; Hall & Hord, 2011; Hord et al., 2006; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010), effectiveness of current recruitment strategies (see Eccles et al., 1983; Fletcher & Dumford, 2021; Keeney, 2023; Russell et al., 2009; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), and recommendations for improving CTE enrollment (see Atwell et al., 2022; Eccles et al., 1983; Haviland & Robbins, 2021; Hodge et al., 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022; Tucker & Hughes, 2020).

Otter.ai, an AI transcription service, was used to transcribe the in-person semistructured interviews. No virtual meetings were requested by participants. The recordings were password-protected to ensure and maintain confidentiality. In addition to the recordings, I kept a researcher's notebook with notes from each interview. Once I

began the coding process, I transferred the notes into a spreadsheet to begin coding and organizing categories and themes. I emailed my superintendent requesting approval to conduct my study. All communication with participants, including the dissemination of the study information and consent form, occurred over email.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, it is essential for researchers to establish the quality, trustworthiness, and credibility of findings to validate the research outcomes (Burkholder et al., 2020). Credibility emphasizes the authenticity of the evidence, confirming that the results genuinely reflect the perspectives and experiences of participants (Burkholder et al., 2020; Kellam & Cirell, 2018). According to Shenton (2004), addressing credibility involves demonstrating that the phenomenon under study is being accurately and authentically represented.

I developed a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of CTE enrollment through the data analysis process. I used Otter.ai to transcribe the semistructured interviews. Within 24 hours of the semistructured interviews, I engaged participants in member checking by emailing the transcriptions to the participants. I requested that they email me back to confirm the transcription was accurate. Next, I analyzed the data using a coding process to identify codes that were emerging from the transcripts. I used a spreadsheet to input each participant's response to each interview question. I used open coding to code the data. In the initial coding phase, I developed threads and sorted codes based on possible themes. I used Heptabase (2025) to efficiently link, map, tag, and retain quotes from the interviews based on emerging themes, creating an easily navigable

repository of information. I was familiar with the Heptabase software, having used Heptabase previously to collect and organize research for other projects.

To begin this process, I reread the transcripts and referred to my notes taken during the interviews. Thematic coding was applied to interpret the data gathered in the study (see Saldaña, 2021). I then began to organize basic themes in Heptabase using open, descriptive coding. This allowed me to see the themes that were emerging and provided a starting point for Round 2 of coding. The codes developed from the first coding cycle were then grouped into categories, reflecting a higher level of thematic similarity. Axial coding was used in the second coding cycle and was completed by identifying categories where each code could be placed. Following the development of categories, common themes were identified from the initial codes and categories (see Saldaña, 2021). I reviewed the frequency of the categories identified through each interview and Heptabase codes to develop themes. I then needed to rename the common themes to ensure the theme encompassed the data from which the theme emerged.

The study was set in a comprehensive northeastern suburban high school serving Grades 9-12, with a population of approximately 2,100 students and 300 staff members, including six administrators. The high school offered 150 courses and six CTE programs. In addition to semistructured interview data, other sources of data for the research included the district's strategic plan, Board of Education agendas, the New York State report card, the district Pathway guide, high school staff and department meeting minutes and agendas, and the high school's course catalog.

Data Analysis Results

Before beginning the semistructured interviews, I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix C) to structure and guide the interview process and ensure focus on how high school instructional staff members perceived the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway, as well as their perceived strategies for improved student enrollment in the CTE pathway. I also created a list of open-ended interview questions (see Appendix B), designed to align with the study's problem, research questions, and conceptual framework. Throughout the data analysis process, I took notes in a researcher's notebook to document my own observations (see Saldaña, 2021). To solicit participants, I emailed 22 potential participants and received responses from 10 individuals interested in taking part in the study. Coordination of the interviews took place over email, and the participants selected a date, time, and location for the interview. All interviews were conducted in person.

The data analysis was conducted through multiple stages, beginning with coding and ending with the development of themes. Interview transcripts were maintained on a password-protected thumb drive. A spreadsheet template was developed to begin the coding process. The spreadsheet included all interview questions and a section for each participant's response below each question. A separate tab was created for each of the 10 interviews. Each interview response was input into the spreadsheet template to begin the coding process. I coded each participant's response to each question using open coding. A column next to each response was titled Framework Look-Fors. These framework look-fors were used for deductive coding based on the framework used for this study.

After identifying these framework look-fors in each response, the first round of coding was completed. I began the second round of compiling the codes in a new tab in the spreadsheet and used them to begin the second round of coding. I used open coding to identify categories where each code could be placed (see Saldaña, 2021). These categories represented codes that were similar and could be grouped together.

The next part of the data analysis was to develop common themes gleaned from the first and second rounds of coding and categories (see Saldaña, 2021). Themes began to emerge in the second round of coding. To ensure alignment with the research questions and the study's problem, I referred to my data collection tools, including my researcher's notebook, participant responses, and the spreadsheet of codes and categories. Using data triangulation, I reached saturation when no new themes appeared. The themes that emerged were related to the problem of study and the research questions. I aligned the six identified themes with Hall and Hord's (2011) CBAM and Eccles et al.'s (1983) EVT to address the research questions.

Accuracy, Credibility, and Findings

To maintain accuracy in the data collection and representation of participant perspectives, several verification strategies were used throughout the data analysis process. Before the interview began, I explained the interview protocol to each participant and provided the participant with a copy of the interview questions. Each interview was audio recorded using Otter.ai, an AI real-time meeting transcription service. Throughout the interviews, I took notes in my researcher's notebook. To maintain consistency and neutrality, I used the list of research questions and, if needed,

prompted the participant by asking for examples or for further explanation. Within 24 hours, I involved participants in member checking by sending them the transcription of the interview and by requesting their review of the transcript's accuracy. All 10 participants responded that the transcript was correct.

I maintained a detailed researcher's notebook throughout the study. The notebook was used to keep notes and observations during the interviews. I also used it to document decisions made during data analysis and record initial impressions of the data. After the initial round of coding, I compared my notebook to my coding spreadsheet and was able to see patterns begin to emerge. These materials helped maintain consistency and allowed for the development of accurate and aligned codes, categories, and themes. The multistep coding process also helped ensure the accuracy of data analysis. Coding was completed over a two-step process, which included open coding and descriptive coding, which then led to the development of categories, where all codes were categorized.

Credibility was developed through reflexive practices embedded throughout the study. As both researcher and colleague to participants, I engaged in critical self-reflection before, during, and after interviews to examine my assumptions about CTE program effectiveness and enrollment strategies. This process helped reduce the potential for bias and strengthened the integrity of the findings. Additional efforts to minimize researcher bias were embedded throughout the data collection process. These included the use of an interview script and protocol to ensure consistency, neutral tone, and body language during interviews, audio recording of each interview, and the transcription of interviews sent to participants within 24 hours. Member checking was completed

promptly after transcription, allowing participants to confirm that their responses were accurately represented. The consistency across participant responses strengthened the study's credibility and supported its conclusions, with all data aligning consistently across participant accounts.

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases of data deviate from the dominant themes or patterns identified in the data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, potential discrepancies and inconsistent themes were carefully reviewed during all stages of the data collection process. Member checking was used to ensure accuracy and credibility. Participants were asked to review their transcripts and give feedback on any inaccuracies. No participants provided feedback that indicated their transcripts were inaccurate or required revision. After a thorough review, no discrepant cases emerged. Participant responses were consistent and aligned with the themes.

Limitations

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and suggestions they had to improve enrollment. This study was limited to the responses of high school instructional staff members in one specific suburban high school in the northeast with an already established CTE program, which limits the ability to generalize the findings. Additionally, although sufficient for this project study, the sample size of 10 participants representing only three departments was small, which is

another limitation of this study. An additional limitation was that data was not collected from any building or district administrators in the school or the school district.

Findings for Research Question 1

The purpose of this study was to explore high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and what suggestions they had to improve enrollment. Ten high school instructional staff members participated in the study. I organized findings from the first research question, which examined staff perceptions of the challenges to CTE enrollment:

RQ1: How do high school instructional staff members in a northeastern school district perceive the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway?

The interviews were designed to answer both research questions, but eight questions were specifically designed to answer the first research question.

Theme 1: Concerns With System-Level Scheduling and Competing Priorities for Students

Questions 6 and 9 asked participants about the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway. All 10 instructional staff members shared their perceptions of challenges in enrolling students in the CTE pathway. Staff members also shared concerns about the impact of CTE on the master schedule. P1 shared concerns about students who are placed in CTE programs:

> I think right now we're not forcing the students to pause and really consider what they're choosing, which is putting them in situations that don't necessarily benefit

> them either, because now they're in a class that maybe they don't feel very passionate about, and they're stuck there.

P5 shared a concern that students must choose to fit a class in their schedule that takes up one full block every day. P5 stated, “But yeah, I think the time commitment is great, but also it makes it harder to fit them in schedule wise.”

Seven of the 10 participants shared that scheduling constraints are a major challenge for students looking to enroll in the CTE pathway. Participants explained that students face competing priorities throughout their 4 years of high school. P10 shared that two credit classes are challenging for students who have conflicting desires and passions. She said,

> I think scheduling is a challenge too, depending on what areas of interest students are-are interested in, if you know, they're interested in music, but also have a world language, because they want to get the seal of biliteracy, fitting in a CTE program one or two credits is really hard.

P8 questioned, “so sometimes students have to choose, do they want to be a part of this band or do they want to do the CTE class?” P5 said, “but at the same time, kids simply sometimes can't fit it into their schedule, especially the full three years.” P2 shared this concern:

> That's something that we struggle with now, is students having to choose between a CTE pathway and a program that's maybe only offered a certain block of the day, and a music class that they've been involved in for seven or eight years, and that's also at the exact same time, right?

P9 stated that the biggest challenge in enrolling students in the CTE pathway is as follows:

> Space in schedules. Being able to make sure they're scheduled for their requirements, other classes they may want to take. And then CTE again, we're so thorough in our CTE programs that they do take up a decent amount of space in a student's schedule, and sometimes, when you're mapping it out with a student, not everything fits, and we very much have to prioritize, like, you need this to graduate, like this has to be in there, or you're not earning a diploma.

These findings highlighted the structural barriers posed by the rigidity of the master schedule and the competing demands students faced when attempting to enroll in CTE programs. While staff recognized the benefits of CTE, they also acknowledged that its multi-year, multi-credit structure often forces students to choose between electives, high-level coursework, and longstanding extracurricular commitments. A system-level solution to the scheduling process and competing priorities should be considered to offer students flexibility to pursue CTE without sacrificing other interests or graduation requirements. Without structural changes, even highly motivated students may be unable to access these career-aligned opportunities.

Theme 2: Staffing Concerns

In Question 4, participants shared their perceptions of the potential consequences the school might face if more students enrolled in the CTE program. Throughout the interviews, participants shared concerns about staffing the CTE program with adequate and appropriate staffing. P8 shared, "Some of the consequences that the CTE teachers

and the programs that they teach, they're very specialized, and there aren't enough teachers to be able to teach some of these classes." P10 said, "staffing the program, and being able to schedule the program, so if one of our programs, two of our programs outgrows the current staffing, you have to hire on more staffing." P9 shared a similar concern when asked about consequences for the school: "Maybe changes in staffing if we have to add in more specific CTE trained and qualified staff, depending on how our programs shift or add or adjust." P2 noted, "increased CTE enrollment would be a good thing; however, it would absolutely require more manpower." P1 shared,

> Some of the issues I think we're going to be facing in the future is one, if we have these programs, do we have enough staff members to field those programs and be able to teach the students at a level where they're in appropriate class sizes.

P3 stated,

> We don't have the teachers or the room to be able to offer a child development one class, for example, to all the kids that are interested. I think we're gonna have to be more what's intentional about the kids we that come into the program.

P5 shared a similar concern about increasing CTE enrollment: "It would mean that we would need more teachers in the area."

Respondents also expressed concerns for staffing implications on non-CTE departments in the building. P8 shared that her classes could see decreases in enrollment if CTE enrollment increased: "I might lose a few students from my, from the engineering classes … but as long as they are starting to figure out what they want to do, and they

realizing engineering wasn't the way." P2 also shared concerns about the need for more staffing if there was an increase in CTE enrollment. She shared,

> I mean, if you had more students in the CTE programs, you would lose students in your elective courses, and your elective course numbers would go down, and then you may lose, you know, teachers would lose courses that they're teaching, and maybe you could lose them to slide over and teach CTE.

P10 shared these sentiments: "So if one of our programs, two of our programs outgrows the current staffing, you have to hire on more staff to produce those, but it could also take away students from other courses."

Additionally, staff shared concerns that other areas in the building may need to reevaluate staffing if there was an increase in student enrollment in CTE. P10 shared,

> If you have a student who's interested in taking a CTE credit, one credit, let's say, then it's going to pull them out of two half-credit electives. So if you know, they were enrolled in civil and criminal law and creative writing, but then decided to switch to culinary, you know, it's going to kind of adjust those numbers in that programming.

P7 shared a similar concern about student enrollment and system-level scheduling related to increased CTE enrollment: "There's only so many students and so many electives, so there's probably another area that would lose student enrollment, so that way students could then take the CTE pathways instead." P3 shared, "It's great that numbers are increasing, but it does limit the opportunities that I can provide for my students, because there's just so many kids, yeah, so many teachers who can host students, right?"

All 10 instructional staff members shared concerns about the school's staffing and the concern for hiring and retaining highly qualified staff for the CTE program.

These findings showed that while staff supported growing enrollment, many expressed concern that there would not be enough certified teachers to keep pace with increased demand. Participants also expressed concern that increasing CTE enrollment could pull students from other electives, impacting course offerings, staffing, and teaching assignments in non-CTE departments. Without careful planning, limited or reduced staffing could hinder CTE expansion and disrupt the balance of course offerings and staffing across the school.

Theme 3: Misconceptions and Stigma Around CTE

The interviews for this study provided insights into the misconceptions about CTE and the stigmas that still exist around CTE programs. P10 stated, "I think the stigma of CTE is still looming." Participants explained that parents may have persisting misconceptions around the value and quality of CTE programs. All participants acknowledged that misconceptions among CTE programs exist. P2 said,

> There's a misconception that students going into college shouldn't take CTE programs. So I think a lot of our traditional college bound students don't even give CTE a second thought, because they assume that they have to stay in the traditional classes and take their high level classes, and, you know, do all these things for their college acceptance, which the students can take, both, right?

Participants drew a comparison between their school's CTE programs and the local BOCES program, explaining that some stigma may come from BOCES programs.

P7 shared, “and there's a stigma associated with BOCES, and I don't necessarily agree with it that BOCES is for special students or students that can't handle normal high school.” P10 also shared her experience growing up hearing negative stigmas around BOCES:

> When I was in high school many years ago, like when a kid went to BOCES, you know, there's that, well, they're going to BOCES because they can't thrive here, or they-they aren't going to find success here at the high school.

Three participants shared their experiences from their upbringing, where they remembered hearing negative talk around certain CTE programs. P9 said, “And I think at least back then, a lot of it was, oh, like the quote, unquote dumb kids do CTE, or the-the problem kids do CTE.” Several staff members recalled that CTE was historically framed as a track for students who were not college material, a message they acknowledged continues to influence family decisions today. P3 stated, “I think there's this misconception that it’s for kids who don't do well in AP courses.” P2 shared a persistent misconception that may exist among families:

> The misconceptions and things like that stem from our parents first, a lot, because I think the generation of parents when they were in high school, BOCES kind of had a negative connotation, and that's where CTE was originally housed, right? … There was a, there's a stigma that if you can't handle high school, right? You go to BOCES, and you take a CTE program, and you do auto tech or welding.

Participants described persistent narratives that CTE pathways are somehow less rigorous or of lower status compared to traditional academic routes. P7 shared, “the-the

idea of stigma really does give outside noise that isn't necessarily true. So it's, it's almost like reteaching the public sometimes what the pathway is meant for and what it does." P3 explained that her CTE students sometimes prioritize other classes over their CTE coursework:

> When I hear students say … I can't make up work for this class, I have to do it for math, I'm thinking in my head. But wait a minute, this is two credits and that's one. So, I think the common misconception is that's an elective.

Participants often referred to the idea that staff perceived CTE programs as electives. P5 shared a concern about this perception: "I think we've always generally treated electives as the less than, you know, the easy course." P2 echoed this sentiment and the misconception among college-bound students who may not recognize the rigor of CTE courses: "I don't think they realize the challenge of a CTE program." P8 stated that students may have a misconception that CTE courses are just fun, but not rigorous. She said, "People, they might just have the misconception of drone tech, I'm just going to fly drones all day and have fun or culinary, I'm just going to cook and eat food all the time where there's more to that."

P9 noted that despite the growing industry demand, many parents still equate CTE with outdated vocational stereotypes, often tied to blue-collar labor. P10 stated,

> [Students] think that they're going to be looked down upon because they're doing like a trades, you know, blue collar, right, field, that their student is as isn't as bright as other students, because they're doing more of the hands on stuff, and not following the physics path, or, you know, going to chemistry.

Interviewees discussed how the college-going mindset has been reinforced over the decades. P9 explained, “You know, when we were in in graduating high school, it was college, college, college, college, like that was the option, right?” and has led some families to reject CTE options without fully understanding the career potential behind them. P9 also stated, “There's a lot of misconception with that too. They hear CTE and they think, oh, my kid's not gonna go to college anymore. Not the case, 100% not the case for our programs here, it just, it's specialized, right?” P10 stated,

> Because a lot of the parents had that pressure on them that they're kind of generationally pressuring others, you know, their students to their kids in going to a four-year college, or, you know, being able to apply to these really academically based schools, even if their student isn't at that level.

P2 also noted the generational stigmas that exist for CTE,

> That stigma of CTE being for not college bound kids is the biggest stigma that we have to break, because it's not just among our students, it's among community too, right? And parents, and it's sometimes a generally generational thing that gets passed down that that's harder to break.

Staff shared that parents often resist CTE due to unfamiliarity with non-traditional program offerings and concerns that students may miss out on advanced academic opportunities. One participant recalled a situation where a family discouraged their child from participating in the trades program. P10 said, “But the family kept saying, it's not going to get you anywhere. Where are you going to go with that? What are your plans? You're going to college, this isn't going to look as good for you.” P9, P10, P2, and P5 said

that even when students express a strong interest in CTE, families may push back due to fear that it may limit future options or reduce perceived social status.

Participants shared that even among educators within the school, some have a mindset that CTE programs are less important than a traditional high school pathway. When asked if staff share the same stigma as families, P2 said, “I think some of them, yes, yes, definitely, not all, but I think that there's definitely staff members who feel that way.” Additionally, limited awareness of the rigor and outcomes of CTE may be causing some of the misconceptions among staff members in the building. P1 said, “I think across the school building, it's really difficult to get all staff members to understand what we're doing, why we're doing it.” P2 also stated that showcasing CTE student work may help “staff stigmas against CTE.” P2 stated,

> I think that's something that we have to try to highlight more, is that like they're not just a go in and cook flambe … [or] work with kids like they're, they're a lot more rigorous, yeah, than I think some people realize.

These findings revealed that lingering misconceptions and stigmas among families, students, and even some staff, continue to challenge CTE enrollment. Despite shifts in workforce demand and the rigor of CTE offerings, outdated views still frame these programs as less academic or suitable only for non-college-bound students. Participants noted that these attitudes are often generational and sometimes impact student decision-making. Several staff emphasized that increased visibility into the benefits and quality of CTE programs, as well as stronger communication with families and colleagues, are essential to changing these narratives.

Findings for Research Question 2

The purpose of this study was to explore high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and what suggestions they have for improved enrollment. The following findings were gleaned from the second research question,

RQ2: What strategies do high school instructional staff members perceive might improve student enrollment in the CTE pathway at a northeastern school district?

The interviews were designed to hear participant responses to both research questions, but three questions were specifically created to answer the second research question.

Theme 4: The Value in Peer Influence

Staff overwhelmingly described peer influence as one of the most powerful drivers of CTE enrollment, with participants consistently referencing how students are more likely to enroll when they see their friends engaged in the program. When asked about the most impactful factor on CTE enrollment, P10 said,

> I'm gonna say peer influence, and then I would say parental expectations. … If you have a student who's enrolling in one of the programs but then is going back and telling their friends about everything that they're experiencing there, it's going to pique the interest of their friends, and then their friends are going to want to explore that opportunity and hear more about it.

P3 also reflected on the impact of peer influence: “I think kids are highly motivated what their friends are doing and by their interests.” P10, P9, P2, P8, P7, P4, P6,

P3 emphasized that peer influence and word of mouth among students were one of the most effective tools for increasing visibility and interest in CTE pathways. While enrollment presentations to students were of value to some participants and their students, participants consistently referenced peer influence among students as a main influence in CTE enrollment. P2 said, “We're at an age level where everything they do is-is influenced by peer opinion, peer interaction, peer thought.” P8 shared, “The seniors will totally tell the students straight up if they like the class or not, and why they would like it, not just what the teachers want to hear.” P4 stated, “I think that a lot of students, if they're like, Hey, I'm in this really cool program, kids are more likely to say, oh, I want to check out this program.” P6 said,

> Peer influence too, like word of mouth speaks so well the kids speak so highly of a CTE class and how fun it was, or how engaging it was, or how much they learned in it, or how much it changed them and helped them grow, helps influence other kids.

P5 emphasized that messaging from administrators may not carry as much weight with students as hearing directly from their peers or seeing the experience firsthand, explaining, “I don't know how much it matters to students when it's coming from an administrator. I think it matters more when they hear it from their peers and see it in action.” P4 shared, “We learn more from the kids, and I think the kids learn more from each other.” P6 believed that peers can be more influential than adults, “Because sometimes that peer to peer is so much more impactful than me saying, Well, I think this would be really great for you.”

P10 highlighted the powerful role students play in influencing one another's enrollment decisions, noting that CTE students often act as informal ambassadors. She said,

> Students will be enrolled in a CTE program and go see that teacher, but they'll bring a friend along too. So then that friend's getting exposure to the teacher, to the classroom, to kind of bring them on board too.

P7 shared, "I've noticed over the years that there's-there's a handful of students that try out Drone Tech because their-their friends are in it." P7 shared a strategy he uses to recruit students by inviting them to his classes and pairing potential students with current students: "They can actually kind of buddy, buddy up with people and hang out for the day."

These findings showed peer influence as a critical driver of CTE enrollment. Participants consistently shared that students are far more likely to consider CTE programs when they hear about them from classmates or see their peers actively engaged in a program. Participants described that word-of-mouth and students bringing friends into CTE classrooms were more impactful than formal presentations or adult messaging. These insights suggested that schools aiming to boost CTE enrollment should leverage student voice as part of their recruitment strategy.

Theme 5: The Value of Teacher Influence

Teachers also serve as CTE pathway and program advocates. P2 stated, "And I think that's a big part of what drives our CTE enrollment is student relationships with teachers and [their] knowledge right?" Their ability to articulate the value of CTE

directly influences how students perceive the legitimacy and future opportunities tied to the pathway. P7 recalled conversations he's had with students who are interested in topics related to his CTE program. He shared,

> I would say the most effective is the one-on-one conversations with kids that that having that relationship with a student to be able to say, you know, you seem to really enjoy engineering. Maybe you should consider the Drone technology pathway.

P10 also discussed teacher influence:

> Having conversations with other peers, but then teachers promoting it within… film studies. You know, that's like an intro level class, but if students are really doing well on film studies, it might be a referral that that teacher makes to the communications program.

P7 recalled conversations with potential CTE students following a class meeting, stating that the class meetings were "beneficial" for those students and his program.

Multiple participants shared that students often believe in the value of the program more when they hear about it from a trusted teacher they already know, especially if that teacher has a reputation for building strong relationships or creating hands-on, enjoyable learning environments. P7 shared,

> As they gain confidence talking to me personally and if I have them in class, sometimes that helps too, but it tends not to be from these like major sales pitch conversations or road shows we've used before, but it tends to be in those little moments where I'm talking to the student individually or the parent, and we can

> connect on a little bit deeper of a level that they can they can really trust and opinion from-from an educator like myself.

P8 explained,

> The students notice that and that we're pretty, pretty open and very easy to come up and talk to that. I think because of that, students are, are, are more interested in going and talking to the teachers themselves, looking at the checking out the classrooms and then deciding right then and there if they want to take it or not.

P7 also shared,

> Because we've had so many conversations with the entire high school teaching load and just bumping into the math and science teachers and others that I've had students say, hey, Mr. [teacher], told me about your program. I'm just coming down here to check it out.

P2 also spoke to this point: “We definitely have some programs that are more heavily favored, I think due to the staff do the teachers in the program, students definitely form positive relationships with certain teachers, and then they're more likely to enroll.”

Some staff members also discussed the role of parental and staff perception, suggesting that when parents and staff members hear positive stories from CTE students, it can shift attitudes toward the legitimacy and value of CTE. P1 explained, “I think once we can get more adults on board to better understand what we're doing, then we can better educate our students and our families.” P5 also shared concerns about staff buy-in for the CTE pathway: “I think it's buy in from staff that kind of gets lacking.” P2 echoed this point: “I think where we need to improve is getting staff that aren't involved in CTE

programs more aware and more on board, which is hard because that might take away from some of their electives." In addition to peer influence, participants highlighted the significant impact that teachers have on students' interest and enrollment in CTE programs. When the school community observes CTE teachers and students actively engaged around the building, it helps create a sense of trust and curiosity about the program. P7 shared, "And we can just be ready and prepared to share the exciting things we do and why those misconceptions are a little bit incorrect and what we actually do."

These findings demonstrated that teacher influence is a key factor in shaping student interest and enrollment in CTE programs. Participants shared that trusted teachers can significantly impact student decision-making. Informal one-on-one conversations, teacher referrals, and visible enthusiasm for their programs all contributed to how students and families perceive the value of CTE. Additionally, staff emphasized that building broader staff and community understanding of CTE is essential to shifting outdated perceptions and strengthening support for the CTE pathway.

Theme 6: Student Visibility as a Recruitment Tool

Participants noted that showcasing student success helps build credibility and enthusiasm both among students and their families. P10 described how involving current CTE students in promotional efforts not only showcases their skills but also serves as a recruitment strategy:

> I think it's showing that it is a priority, because we're bringing them on to do so much of our promotional videos, rightfully so, because they do a great job. But I think, you know, then students see what they can produce.

P9 also emphasized how student work itself promotes CTE programs, noting that when peers see what others are creating, it draws interest: “I think we do a lot of promotion from just what the kids are working on, and the kids, it's visible, right?” P8 echoed this sentiment: “I just think, like just seeing the students out flying drones, taking pictures, and then seeing these pictures on social media or on posters around the school. I think that is very beneficial.” P9 stated,

> Again, they see their-their classmates…doing all of these really awesome things, you know, out on the side field with drone tech or taking videos in the pep rally or football games and things like that. And they're like, I want to do that. That looks really, really awesome.

P8 identified leveraging student voice during school events to promote CTE programs as highly impactful. She stated,

> It's great that there are students, once again, who volunteer to be there to talk up the class the teachers have. Teachers don't really say or tell the kids what they have to say. It's right from the student's mouth and from their experience.

During an event like CTE Night, students take an active role in showcasing their programs and engaging with prospective students and families. P4 recalled, “The kids are there from the programs, showing their showing their work off, and maybe like doing like mini sessions.”

Staff shared that student voices at events like CTE Night, class meetings, and student panels carried substantial weight, particularly when students spoke about their personal growth, future goals, or hands-on experiences in the program. P5 shared his

experience seeing students showcase their work at CTE night, “Just having the kids be able to come in and be proud and show their parents something they're proud in and the stuff that they're doing is really enlightening to the parents.” P4 shared that students get excited when they learn about the possibilities and potential projects in the CTE pathway: “Hearing their peers talk about them, showing them, even showing them, like this is what you do in culinary, like, oh, also, you get to eat the food in culinary”

Participants emphasized that challenging previously shared misconceptions requires not only information-sharing but also creating visible examples of student success to shift preexisting mindsets. P4 said,

> I think we have room for growth where we can say, like, hey, right alongside academic, here's CTE like, they can meld perfectly together … students showcasing all of the things that they're doing would be very helpful for that.

P1 spoke to the need for intentional rebranding of CTE: “So I think reframing how students are thinking about education is another big step that we really have to get to-to get them to understand what CTE is.” P10 spoke to the shift in perception around CTE, “because we're trying to take that stigma away from it … students are seeing that it is something that's attainable and achievable, and seeing kind of the real-life implications of it.”

These findings revealed that student visibility is a powerful strategy for increasing interest in CTE programs. When students showcased their projects, spoke about their experiences, or were seen actively participating in hands-on learning, it built credibility and excitement among peers and families. These authentic displays of student work and

efforts helped challenge misconceptions, normalize CTE as an academic and career path, and inspire new enrollment. Making student work and voice more visible emerged as an essential recruitment tool.

Conclusion

For the project, I chose to develop a 1-year action plan for CTE pathway enrollment (see Appendix A). This project was chosen because the semistructured interview results showed staff perceive challenges to enrolling students in the CTE pathway, and they provided suggested strategies for improvement. Six themes were identified from the two research questions, with a repeated focus on the power of peer and teacher influence. Based on these themes, the project focused on outlining tasks, events, and strategies for improving CTE pathway enrollment. The problem of this study was the challenges in enrolling students in the CTE pathway among instructional staff in a northeastern school district. The research questions were as follows: How do high school instructional staff members in a northeastern school district perceive the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway? What strategies do high school instructional staff members perceive might improve student enrollment in the CTE pathway at a northeastern school district? Six major themes emerged from the analysis of 10 semistructured interviews. These six themes offered insight into the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway, as well as strategies for improving student enrollment in the CTE pathway. If used in a school with an established CTE pathway, the recommended project could improve student enrollment in the CTE pathway.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The project developed this basic qualitative study was a 1-year action plan to improve CTE pathway enrollment (see Appendix A). The problem of this study was the challenge in enrolling students in the CTE pathway among high school instructional staff in a northeastern school district. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and what suggestions they had to improve enrollment. To address the study problem, I gathered data through semistructured interviews with instructional staff who were involved with the CTE program in the high school. The research questions were as follows: How do high school instructional staff members in a northeastern school district perceive the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway? What strategies do high school instructional staff members perceive might improve student enrollment in the CTE pathway at a northeastern school district? Data were collected from interviews with 10 instructional staff members, and six major themes emerged.

Findings for RQ1 suggested three themes regarding how instructional staff perceive the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway:

- concerns with system-level scheduling and competing priorities for students,
- staffing concerns,
- misconceptions and stigma around CTE.

Findings for RQ2 suggested three themes regarding strategies instructional staff perceive as potentially effective for improving student enrollment in the CTE pathway:

- the value in peer influence,
- the value of teacher influence,
- student visibility as a recruitment tool.

These findings revealed the need for a school improvement action plan focused on improving CTE pathway enrollment using the strategies staff suggested. The goal of the 1-year action plan was to improve CTE pathway enrollment through capacity building and information sharing, ensuring that students, families, and staff have a clear understanding of the rigor, value, and postsecondary opportunities associated with CTE. The plan emphasized intentional outreach, increased visibility of student success, and strengthened peer and teacher advocacy. The action plan included strategies and action steps, the staff member(s) responsible for the action steps, the target date of each action step, and the evidence of effectiveness (see DuFour et al., 2024).

Rationale

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and what suggestions they had to improve enrollment. Despite the changing narrative of CTE and the local and national financial commitments to CTE, students are only slowly enrolling in CTE, and they are primarily choosing the college preparation track. The local school district has made financial and human resources investments to promote the CTE graduation pathway. However, enrollment remained less

than expected, and the program was not operating at total capacity. I developed a 1-year action plan aimed at improving and increasing CTE pathway enrollment. The purpose of the plan was to expand outreach, enhance the visibility of student success, and leverage the power of student and peer influence and advocacy.

School improvement action plans are effective at improving outcomes for students (Escobar, 2019). The school improvement plan includes a building goal to improve CTE enrollment. It also includes strategies and action steps, the staff member(s) responsible for the action steps, the target date of each action step, and the evidence of effectiveness (see DuFour et al., 2024). This action plan included professional development for all staff to build their capacity and understanding around the CTE pathway. Additionally, the action plan incorporated events and informational sessions tailored to students and families to highlight the benefits of the CTE pathway. During these sessions, student ambassadors would share their CTE stories and experiences, a practice strongly recommended by study participants for its ability to engage peers and shift perceptions. By combining staff capacity building with the power of student influence, the 1-year action plan seeks to improve CTE enrollment through strategies suggested by study participants and supported by research.

Review of the Literature

The research questions for my project study were as follows: How do high school instructional staff members in a northeastern school district perceive the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway, and what strategies do high school instructional staff members perceive might improve student enrollment in the CTE pathway at a

northeastern school district? To address these questions, I engaged in semistructured interviews with 10 high school instructional staff members in a northeastern school district. The data analysis showed that peer and teacher influence were significant factors for student decision-making when considering enrolling in the CTE pathway. This literature review provided a foundation of peer-reviewed literature on influence that supports a project designed to improve CTE pathway enrollment through a 1-year action plan.

To conduct this literature review, a thorough review of the Walden University Library database was conducted. All articles sourced for this literature review were found using filters to identify peer-reviewed, scholarly articles. The following key terms were used in the search: *influence, peer influence, social influence, high school students, teacher influence, adult influence, parent influence, career and technical education,* and *decision making.* The findings of my study indicate that peer-to-peer influence is a significant factor in student decision-making. Students are highly influenced by their peers and often make decisions about course taking and academic programming based on seeing peers participating in the course or program (Carbonaro & Workman, 2016; Giletta et al., 2021; Zingora et al., 2020). The CTE pathway is a program of choice for students and exists alongside programs such as the traditional high school pathway, Advanced Placement pathways, fine arts pathways, and world language pathways. When considering enrolling in the CTE pathway, students have a variety of choices they must make, and the literature supports that peers may influence these choices (see Andersen & Hjortskov, 2022; see Carbonaro & Workman, 2016).

Peer Influence on Student Decision-Making

The theme of peer influence was the most frequently discussed theme among all 10 high school instructional staff members when asked about strategies for improving student enrollment in the CTE pathway. Peer influence has been recognized as a strong predictor of student attitudes and choices during adolescence (Albert et al., 2013; Giletta et al., 2021; Kilday & Ryan, 2024; Shao et al., 2024). Developmental research has shown that peers contribute to shaping values and perceptions of academic and career pathways (Andersen & Hjortskov, 2022; Carbonaro & Workman, 2016; Kilday & Ryan, 2024). The EVT provides a lens for understanding how peer influence shapes decision making (see Eccles et al., 1983). EVT emphasizes that students tend to participate in programs when they have confidence in their ability to succeed and view them as worthwhile (see Eccles et al., 1983). Value is placed higher when peers see other peers participating and finding success (Kilday & Ryan, 2024; Shao et al., 2024). Cialdini's (2009) principle of social proof reinforces this point, suggesting that individuals look to others for cues about what is credible, worthwhile, and socially acceptable.

The 1-year action plan for the project of this study leverages the EVT and the principle of social proof by incorporating peer-driven strategies such as class meetings, student publications, and shadowing opportunities to amplify student voices and highlight success stories. Andersen and Hjortskov (2022) and Shao et al. (2024) found that students are more likely to increase academic engagement when surrounded by motivated peers. Similarly, Carbonaro and Workman (2016) identified that peers influence immediate choices such as course enrollment and pathway enrollment. For high school students,

peer influence often outweighs parental or teacher influence as peer validation becomes increasingly important and valued (O'Brien et al., 2011; Zingora et al., 2020).

The findings from this study confirm that peer influence is a critical factor in CTE enrollment decisions. Staff described students who saw their peers succeeding in CTE programs as more likely to view the pathway as rigorous and valuable. Word-of-mouth and peers seeing peers share their experiences were cited as powerful recruitment tools. Cialdini (2009) asserted that people rely on others like themselves to guide decision-making. Programs that intentionally use student ambassadors or peer-led events have been shown to improve awareness, reduce stigma, and increase enrollment (Andersen & Hjortskov, 2022). The 1-year action plan includes these research-based best practices to ensure that student voice and presence are elevated and at the forefront of the recruitment efforts.

The findings from this study align with the research on influence, and most specifically, peer influence. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of peer influence in shaping enrollment decisions. High school instructional staff members described their perceptions of the importance of students sharing their positive CTE experiences during events like class meetings and CTE night. Additionally, staff members cited the importance of students seeing other students successfully participating in the CTE programs. The 1-year action plan builds on this evidence by incorporating student-driven strategies such as a student ambassador program, shadow days, and class meeting presentations where students share success stories. The action plan steps

developed from the data analysis and the research on influence leverage the influence of peers to help promote CTE participation and enrollment.

Teacher and Adult Influence on Student Decision-Making

While peer influence is significant, research consistently shows that teachers and other adults play important roles in shaping student attitudes and educational decisions (Kilday & Ryan, 2024; Lara et al., 2025). Teachers serve not only as instructors but also as mentors, advocates, and role models (da Silva Pinho et al., 2025; Kilday & Ryan, 2024; Lara et al., 2025). High school instructional staff members identified that teacher encouragement and influence directly shape student participation and enrollment in the CTE pathway. School counselors were also recognized as influential adults, guiding students through course planning and postsecondary decision-making. Within the CBAM, teacher and staff concerns also play a role in how adults act as advocates for CTE. As staff members progress from awareness to adoption of CTE, their ability to guide students toward the CTE pathway increases (see Hord et al., 2006). When teachers express enthusiasm for CTE programs or make personalized recommendations, students are more likely to view those programs as legitimate and worthwhile (see Griffen, 2019). Through the lens of EVT, adult encouragement reinforces students' confidence in their ability to succeed and their perception of the program's value (see Eccles et al., 1983).

Strong student-teacher relationships are consistently linked to positive academic and career outcomes (Griffen, 2019; Kilday & Ryan, 2024). High school instructional staff identified that teachers are highly influential in student decision-making, especially when considering coursework. Teachers and counselors who build trust are often able to

identify students' strengths and interests and can guide them toward programs aligned with their abilities (Griffen, 2019). In relation to the CTE pathway, this influence is especially important as teachers or counselors may be the first to suggest that a student consider a career-aligned pathway through the CTE program. When teachers validate student interests and build trust, they can provide legitimacy to CTE as a viable option. This concept is explained by Cialdini's (2009) principle of liking, which asserts that individuals are more easily persuaded by people they know and trust. Additionally, Griffen (2019) found that students often rely on these trusted adults to support their educational goals and achievements. In the case of this study, trusted adults would support students in determining how a pathway fits into their future goals. Teachers and counselors are trained to provide information on viable course-taking options for students tailored to their interests, making their influence on student decision-making significant (Griffen, 2019).

Teachers have a critical role in shaping awareness of CTE as a meaningful and attainable pathway for students. Misconceptions persist among students and families who may believe that CTE is a less rigorous pathway or is only valuable for non-college-bound students (Carruthers et al., 2024a). Teachers and counselors are well-positioned to correct these misconceptions by framing CTE as a rigorous pathway that exists to support students in various post-secondary goals. Teachers act as program advocates and can refer students to relevant pathways through their daily instruction and through promotional events and activities.

The 1-year action plan incorporates adult influence by positioning teachers and counselors as key advocates for CTE programs. Findings from this study confirmed that teacher encouragement is highly influential in student decision-making. Staff participants emphasized that students are likely to enroll in CTE courses when they can establish a relationship with a CTE teacher through conversations and classroom visits. Teachers are encouraged to recommend pathways based on student strengths observed in introductory courses or during shadowing opportunities. Counselors will integrate CTE discussions into scheduling meetings with students and families and during the open house and CTE night events. By leveraging authority and trust, the action plan positions teachers and adult influence as an integral part of increasing CTE enrollment.

Influence Through Visibility and Persuasion

Visibility plays an essential role in persuasion, particularly in educational settings where students often look to peers as models of success (Shao et al., 2024). Steenberghs et al. (2021) found that students often explore opportunities when they see peers actively engaged and achieving in those areas. Weigard et al. (2014) found that students tend to modify their behavior in the presence of peers, or even when they perceive themselves to be under peer observation. This concept aligns with Cialdini's (2009) concept of social proof, which posits that individuals are strongly influenced by the actions and endorsements of others around them. As identified in the data analysis of this project study, students seeing other students find success in CTE is proof that the programs are rewarding. According to Cialdini, in the context of this study, social proof exists when

students see their peers in publications and as ambassadors of CTE, placing value and legitimacy in CTE.

Student visibility can take many forms, including school events such as open house, in-building displays such as a news show, and through social media posts highlighting programs. Research on student-led promotion supports the effectiveness of showcasing authentic student voices and experiences (Carbonaro & Workman, 2016; Zingora et al., 2020). When students present their work and experiences during events, they validate the value of CTE and normalize participation in the program. Social media posts and an online presence transcend beyond the school's walls and provide families and the public with visible examples of student success (Ngo et al., 2024; Zingora et al., 2020). Ngo et al. (2024) suggest that seeing student accomplishments is persuasive and can increase awareness and legitimacy of the content within the social media post or promotional activity.

Findings from this study emphasized that visibility was one of the strongest influences on student interest in the CTE pathway. Staff described how promotional videos and seeing peers in action during events such as CTE night and shadow days were powerful recruitment tools. The 1-year action plan builds on these insights by incorporating activities led by students where their voices and experiences are elevated and visible.

Project Description

The research conducted for this project study led me to develop a 1-year action plan. The goals of this plan were to improve CTE pathway enrollment through capacity

building and information sharing, ensuring that students, families, and staff have a clear understanding of the rigor, value, and postsecondary opportunities associated with CTE. The staff members would receive the action plan over the summer to ensure that the building administrators could plan for the activities, events, and tasks throughout the year. The action plan centered on a specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goal to increase CTE enrollment (see Conzemius & O'Neill, 2014). The action plan then listed the action steps that should be acted on to address the SMART goal. The action plan began with a staff meeting presentation explaining the SMART goal and followed with the action plan for the year. The purpose of the staff meeting presentation was to build capacity among staff and outline the expectations and tasks for staff throughout the year. The rest of the action plan outlined activities, events, and tasks designed to increase outreach and visibility of student success and strengthen peer and teacher advocacy throughout the school year. The action plan included strategies and action steps, the staff member(s) responsible for the action steps, the target date of each action step, and the evidence of effectiveness.

The 1-year action plan included a Google Slides presentation that should be provided to staff during the opening days of September. The Google Slides presentation was titled *Increasing Capacity for CTE & CTE Enrollment Strategies* (see Appendix A). The goals of the staff meeting presentation were to increase awareness around the benefits of the CTE pathway in the school. Additionally, it outlined the future activities, events, and tasks that would be implemented in the school to improve and increase CTE pathway enrollment. The staff meeting presentation should be given during the opening

days of school in September to ensure that staff members are grounded in the year-long plan. The presentation included the following topics:

- goals and purpose of the action plan,
- study findings of 6 themes,
- What is the CTE pathway?
- CTE SMART goal and purpose,
- CTE pathway enrollment history,
- capacity building around the CTE SMART goal,
- CTE pathway benefits and requirements,
- student experiences in the CTE pathway,
- community partners recognition for being part of the CTE pathway,
- action steps to address the SMART goal,
- questions.

The 1-year action plan project materials to increase CTE pathway enrollment included a Google Slides presentation for the opening staff meeting and a detailed action plan document containing the SMART goal, timelines, responsibilities, and evidence measures for each initiative. Together, these materials provided a clear roadmap for building staff capacity, engaging families, and leveraging peer and teacher influence to promote CTE pathway enrollment.

Implementing the 1-year CTE enrollment action plan would require several key resources, including staff time and commitment to participate in a staff meeting, and staff time and commitment to engage in outreach strategies and promote CTE in daily practice.

Materials such as the Google Slides presentation for the opening staff meeting, handouts for informational sessions, and marketing tools such as posters, flyers, and social media content would be necessary to highlight student success and program benefits. The plan also depended on students being willing to participate as student ambassadors, with a requirement of staff time allocated for training students to be prepared for CTE night and CTE shadowing.

Existing supports included administrative commitment to improving CTE enrollment and experienced CTE teachers with strong student relationships. Additionally, current outreach events, such as CTE night, existed, but study participants noted that this event should be expanded to the school day. Access to district communication channels, including newsletters, websites, and social media, existed to help tell student success stories and provide information on the program. Finally, peer networks among the student body served to provide the influential promotion of the CTE pathway. These existing structures and relationships positioned the school to implement the 1-year action plan to improve CTE pathway enrollment.

Potential barriers included limited staff capacity due to competing priorities, scheduling conflicts, and restrictions for students and staff. Additionally, persistent misconceptions about CTE, including insufficient and inaccurate awareness of program rigor and postsecondary opportunities, may be potential barriers. These challenges can be addressed by integrating CTE promotional and recruitment activities into existing structures, such as academic advisement and class meetings. By integrating the information, staff do not need to dedicate time to additional events outside of the school

day. Flexible scheduling for events and ambassador activities can further reduce conflicts. Misconceptions should be addressed directly through targeted information sharing and student success stories. Additionally, staff and community success stories should be used to complement and validate student experiences.

The success of the 1-year action plan relied on the coordinated efforts of multiple stakeholders, each with their own roles and responsibilities. Student ambassadors would play a key role by sharing their CTE experiences during events, class meetings, and informal peer interactions. They would participate in promotional activities, including school tours and creating content for social media and newsletters. CTE teachers would serve as program advocates, identifying potential student ambassadors, forming relationships with potential students, and integrating CTE promotion into daily instruction. School counselors would assist by presenting accurate CTE information to students and families and ultimately scheduling students into the CTE pathway. Building administrators would oversee the implementation of the action plan, coordinate scheduling for promotional events, and ensure resources are allocated to support staff and student involvement.

Additionally, the building administrator would be responsible for the staff meeting presentation of the 1-year action plan at the opening day staff meeting. Key milestones of the 1-year action plan will occur by the end of each quarter. For example, the student ambassador selection and open house will occur by the end of Quarter 1, shadowing and class meetings will occur during Quarter 2, middle school outreach will occur in Quarter 3, and enrollment review will occur in Quarter 4. During each quarter,

intent-to-enroll surveys will be administered to students and parents to gauge interest and enrollment plans. These survey responses will be compared with spring enrollment data to determine the effectiveness of the enrollment and recruitment activities.

Project Evaluation Plan

A goal-based evaluation will be used to evaluate the 1-year action plan. The evaluation would focus on determining the extent to which the strategies and activities implemented in the 1-year action plan resulted in progress toward the SMART goal of increasing CTE pathway enrollment. The overall goals of the project were to improve CTE pathway enrollment through capacity building and information sharing, ensuring that students, families, and staff have a clear understanding of the rigor, value, and postsecondary opportunities associated with CTE. The plan emphasized intentional outreach, increased visibility of student success, and strengthened peer and teacher advocacy. The action plan included strategies and action steps, the staff member(s) responsible for each action step, the target date of completion, and the evidence of effectiveness. The CBAM could be used during implementation to assess staff stages of concern and LoU throughout the year. By asking staff in surveys about their concerns and LoU, insight would be provided to understand how staff are engaging with the action plan and where additional support may be needed.

Because the action plan outlines specific, measurable objectives and identifies evidence of effectiveness for each action step, a goal-based evaluation approach would be used (see Conzemius & O'Neill, 2014). Goal-based evaluation was well-suited for this project because it directly assesses whether the project's stated objectives were achieved

within the designated timeframe. This approach would involve reviewing documented evidence from each action step, such as participation numbers from events, survey feedback from staff and students, and records of student ambassador activities. To provide indicators of progress before enrollment data are available, quarterly intent-to-enroll surveys will be administered to students and families following major recruitment activities. CTE enrollment data would be reviewed by building administrators and counseling staff at the mid-year point, and again in June, to determine if the SMART goal was achieved through the recruitment and enrollment activities for the year. The administrators would analyze surveys and feedback to identify patterns of awareness, participation, and engagement. Data would be studied quarterly during leadership team meetings and meetings with counselors to review celebrations and areas of growth. During these meetings and reviews, adjustments to the action plan steps would be made as needed based on the data. Overall, progress would be monitored throughout the year according to the timeline of the action step by reviewing the evidence of effectiveness. By using a goal-based evaluation, the action plan for the SMART goal would ensure that the project's impact and evaluation are measured accurately and appropriately.

The success of the project depended on the active involvement of several key stakeholders. Building administrators would ensure that the action plan is implemented with fidelity and monitor progress throughout the year. CTE teachers would act as program ambassadors, promote their programs, and engage in direct outreach to students. School counselors would be responsible for providing accurate information on the CTE pathway and enrolling students in the pathway. All instructional staff would play a role in

reinforcing the value of CTE through classroom conversations and by sharing opportunities with students. Student ambassadors would be essential to outreach efforts, showcasing their skills, sharing personal experiences, and serving as role models for potential students. Families are also critical stakeholders, as their perceptions and support influence student decision-making.

Project Implications

Local Setting

In the local setting, the 1-year action plan to improve CTE pathway enrollment could create lasting social change by strengthening how students, families, and staff understand and value CTE. By building staff capacity and embedding CTE promotion into existing school structures, the project ensured consistent and accurate messaging about the rigor, benefits, and postsecondary opportunities linked to CTE pathways. These actions can help eliminate misconceptions and increase information sharing about the benefits of CTE, making it an equally respected option alongside the traditional academic pathway.

Local stakeholders include administrators, teachers, school counselors, students, families, and community partners. For these stakeholders, increased CTE enrollment directly benefits the school and the local community. Through CTE, students gain access to hands-on, skill-based learning in high-demand industries. Their involvement improves post-secondary readiness and expands career options. Additionally, students would be involved in the appropriate path based on their goals and desires. Teachers would have more opportunities to involve students in authentic learning experiences that are designed

to simulate real-world experiences. Administrators would strengthen the school's ability to meet all students' needs and district goals. Local employers would benefit from increased CTE enrollment because the outcomes of increased enrollment would generate a more skilled and prepared workforce, improve school-community partnerships, and support local labor market demands. The findings from this research can inform CTE enrollment systems, practices, norms, and policies that impact students' lives and improve their outcomes.

Larger Context

This project study could contribute to statewide and national efforts to expand CTE as a pathway to postsecondary and workforce success. Research serves a critical function in understanding the causes of social issues and identifying potential solutions (Babbie, 2017). My research could impact policies and should provide direction for district and building leadership and other school stakeholders seeking to improve CTE enrollment. By demonstrating how outreach, student visibility, and teacher advocacy can drive enrollment, the 1-year action plan offers a replicable model that other districts can adapt to their own contexts. Additionally, increasing CTE enrollment on a larger scale supports equity in education by providing all students with access to secondary programs that prepare them for post-secondary opportunities, including college and careers.

Increased CTE participation can help address skills gaps in high-demand industries, reduce underemployment, and increase economic mobility for graduates. As perceptions of CTE shift toward recognizing its rigor, relevance, and value, more students may pursue programs with industry certifications, apprenticeships, and degrees

in fields critical to economic growth. Over time, projects like this can influence policy and funding priorities, reinforcing the important role of CTE in schools and local communities. In the larger context, sustained improvements in CTE enrollment can contribute to a stronger, more adaptable workforce and improved economic stability.

Conclusion

The 1-year CTE enrollment action plan addresses the local problem of increasing student participation in the CTE pathway in a northeastern school district. Through targeted strategies that emphasize capacity building, intentional outreach, and the influence of peer and teacher advocacy, the plan creates opportunities to increase awareness and understanding of the rigor, value, and postsecondary benefits of CTE programs. This project presents suggestions for improved CTE enrollment gleaned from semistructured interviews and data analysis. This project also aligns with current research on effective recruitment and engagement strategies. Section 4 will address the importance of this work, its implications for social change, and considerations for future research and practice.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

I developed a 1-year action plan to address improvements to CTE pathway enrollment using the strategies high school instructional staff suggested. I held semistructured interviews with 10 high school instructional staff members who provided suggestions and strategies for improving CTE enrollment and recruitment. I selected an action plan because the staff members shared a wide variety of tasks, events, and activities that all focused on the central goal of improving CTE enrollment. Current research supported the suggestions that staff provided and highlighted the power of influence on students when making decisions (see Carbonaro & Workman, 2016; Cialdini, 2009; da Silva Pinho et al., 2025; Giletta et al., 2021; Lara et al., 2025; Zingora et al., 2020). The activities outlined in the action plan prioritize peer and teacher influence.

While recent literature has studied the importance of CTE programs and the value they hold, a gap exists in the literature on the activities needed to increase CTE enrollment. Because of this, the suggestions and strategies from the 10 high school instructional staff members were primarily used to develop the action plan deliverable. The action plan focuses on capacity building and information sharing, ensuring that students, families, and staff have a clear understanding of the rigor, value, and postsecondary opportunities associated with CTE. The plan emphasized intentional outreach, increased visibility of student success, and strengthened peer and teacher advocacy. The action plan included strategies and action steps, the staff member(s)

responsible for the action steps, the target date of each action step, and the evidence of effectiveness.

A limitation of this action plan is that it relies on an established CTE program. Schools without an existing CTE pathway, experienced instructors, or strong advocates of CTE may face challenges replicating the strategies outlined in the plan. The effectiveness of the action steps also depends on administrative support, staff buy-in, and adequate resources to implement events, promotional efforts, and capacity-building activities. Additionally, the plan's outcomes are influenced by external factors such as state policy changes, shifts in labor market demand, and student interest, which may limit its direct transferability to other contexts.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The problem that was addressed through this basic qualitative study was the challenges in enrolling students in the CTE pathway among instructional staff in a northeastern school district. Despite the changing narrative of CTE and the local and national financial commitments to CTE, students are only slowly enrolling in CTE, and they are primarily choosing the college preparation track. To conduct the project study, I gathered data from 10 high school instructional staff members through semistructured interviews and developed a 1-year action plan for improving CTE enrollment based on their suggestions. An alternative approach to this problem would be to collect data from students or parents in semistructured interviews or anonymous surveys. Interviewing students or parents could provide a different perspective on the strategies suggested for

increased enrollment in the CTE pathway. This approach could uncover motivations, barriers, and perceptions that may not be visible to staff.

An alternative definition of the local problem could focus less on student enrollment numbers and more on overall awareness, accessibility, and inclusivity of CTE programs. Rather than framing the issue solely as a shortage of students choosing the CTE pathway, the problem could be defined as a lack of consistent, equitable exposure to CTE opportunities for all students, regardless of background or academic track. This reframing could lead to alternative solutions. One potential alternative solution could be increasing counselor training to ensure consistent messaging about CTE across the district. A second alternative solution could be integrating CTE-related experiences into core classes. These solutions would aim to expand the pipeline of informed and interested students, rather than concentrating primarily on recruitment efforts at the high school level.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

Conducting this study required working through each stage of the research process, from reviewing existing literature to collecting and analyzing data, and ultimately developing a practical project grounded in the findings. The literature review was the most straightforward part of the process. Locating, reviewing, and synthesizing scholarly sources came naturally, and organizing the information around relevant topics and themes felt manageable from the start. In contrast, coding and analyzing the interview data was one of the longest and most challenging parts of the study. Coding was a new process for me, so I needed time to work through the steps, make multiple

passes through the transcripts, and refine the codes into clear categories and eventually themes. While it was time-intensive, this stage deepened my understanding of the data. While challenging and time-consuming, I found the coding process to be very rewarding once it was complete, as I was able to see the themes within the data and could answer my research questions.

The project itself was one of the easier components to complete. Developing an action plan and accompanying presentation felt natural because it closely aligned with my professional work as a leader. Designing a practical plan with specific goals, action steps, and accountability measures was a familiar process that I could envision implementing in a real school setting.

Conducting this project study provided me with valuable experience in bringing together multiple sources of research and data and finding conclusions to answer central questions. Interestingly, the practice I gained in organizing information for the literature review proved to be a significant help when I moved into the coding phase, a connection I did not realize until I was already deep into the data analysis. This experience reinforced how every phase of the research process builds on the others and contributes to the quality and coherence of the final project.

Conducting this study fostered my growth as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. As a scholar, I strengthened my ability to evaluate and synthesize research, connect it to a local problem, and apply conceptual frameworks to guide my work. Coding and analyzing qualitative data were new to me and initially challenging, but the iterative process forced me to become entrenched in the data and eventually develop

well-supported themes. As a practitioner and project developer, I learned to translate research findings into an actionable plan that balanced evidence-based strategies with the suggestions from those currently involved in the work of CTE recruitment and enrollment. Developing the 1-year action plan was a natural extension of my leadership work. It reinforced my ability to bridge research and practice to design initiatives that are both grounded in theory and feasible to implement.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

This work is important because it addresses the real and persistent challenge in secondary education of setting students up for success while in school and beyond high school. This work is also important because it ensures that students have access to, and awareness of, high-quality CTE opportunities that prepare them for postsecondary pathways beyond college. By focusing on strategies that leverage staff capacity, student visibility, and peer and teacher advocacy, the project moves beyond simply promoting CTE to creating a sustainable framework for enrollment growth. The process of engaging with staff perspectives highlighted the value of involving those closest to the work in identifying solutions. Through this project, I was reminded that meaningful change often starts with listening to and empowering stakeholders.

Through this project, I learned how essential it is to connect research to action in a way that directly serves a school community's needs. The study reinforced the importance of evidence-based decision-making while also acknowledging the practical realities that influence implementation. Most importantly, the experience affirmed that

strategic planning rooted in both data and collaboration can result in realistic, impactful solutions for school improvement.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Within the Walden learning community, social change is operationally defined as actions, initiatives, and efforts undertaken by individuals, organizations, and institutions to enhance society's well-being and improve quality of life (Walden University, 2015). Social change involves transforming social structures, policies, practices, and mindsets to address injustices and societal challenges (Stephan et al., 2016). A qualitative approach was ideal for this doctoral project study because it enabled an in-depth exploration of personal experiences of the CTE pathway, perceptions, and motivations of stakeholders, which are crucial for understanding how individuals and communities can contribute to meaningful change. In this qualitative project study, I drew on the Walden definition of social change to identify and implement strategies for driving meaningful, sustainable change within the local setting. By focusing on practical solutions informed by the needs and challenges of local stakeholders, this project study reflected Walden's vision of social change: leveraging research to create a measurable, positive impact on individuals' lives and the community at large.

Social change agents are tasked with positively influencing and affecting local societies through research, interventions, and actions (Callahan et al., 2012; Sandhu, 2017). The focus on positive social change has transformed my perspective when approaching problem-solving. Walden's educational philosophy inspires students to become scholar-practitioners, bridging the gap between theory and practice to drive

systemic change and address pressing social issues. Throughout this process, I learned that social change can be affected through small-scale improvements and larger systemic changes affecting society. I have learned that positive social change actions can grow from localized efforts to a broader commitment to contributing to positive transformations on a larger scale.

The findings of this study carry methodological, theoretical, and empirical implications. A methodological implication includes the use of semistructured interviews and thematic coding, which provided a reliable process for capturing instructional staff perceptions and identifying actionable strategies for improving CTE enrollment. For my leadership, this process also demonstrated the importance of engaging stakeholders through structured conversation and data analysis used to inform decision-making. Theoretically, applying the CBAM and EVT allowed for a deeper understanding of how staff concerns, motivations, and perceptions influence enrollment practices. These frameworks were useful in examining program adoption and use within a secondary education setting. Beyond this study, the CBAM and EVT could be applied to other school initiatives, such as implementing new instructional practices or revising school policies. By examining staff concerns and motivations during the adoption process, administrators could determine where additional support is needed and highlight the initiative's value to build buy-in and sustain implementation. Empirically, this study contributes to the growing body of research on CTE by highlighting the importance of peer and teacher influence, the visibility of student success, and systemic scheduling barriers. These findings validate existing research on CTE recruitment challenges. The

findings also extend current research by offering practical solutions for local and broader applications.

Future research can extend these findings by incorporating the perspectives of students and families, as their insights may provide additional strategies for improving CTE enrollment. Expanding the participant pool to include administrators, district leaders, and industry partners could also strengthen the understanding of systemic and community-level influences on enrollment. In practice, schools should continue refining recruitment strategies by embedding CTE promotion into existing structures such as academic advisement, class meetings, and community events. Schools should continue leveraging student ambassadors to reduce stigma and increase peer influence. While this study contributes to existing scholarship on CTE recruitment by offering practical strategies, further research is needed to determine effective ways to engage all stakeholder groups in CTE recruitment and enrollment.

Conclusion

This study explored high school instructional staff members' perceptions of the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway and what suggestions they had to improve enrollment in the CTE pathway. CTE represents a valuable pathway for many students, making this study an important contribution to the research on secondary education. Upon completion of the literature review and semistructured interview data analysis, I developed an action plan to address the needs identified by the participants and carry out the strategies they suggested for improved enrollment in the CTE program. The findings of this study included systemic barriers such as scheduling conflicts and staffing

shortages, while also emphasizing the powerful role of peer influence, teacher advocacy, and student visibility in shaping enrollment decisions. By transforming these insights into a 1-year action plan, this project provides a practical path forward for increasing access to CTE and helping students become more equipped for postsecondary education, careers, and lifelong success.

References

Advance CTE. (2023). *The state of career and technical education: Increasing access to industry experts in high school*. https://www.careertech.org

Albert, D., Chein, J., & Steinberg, L. (2013). The teenage brain: Peer influences on adolescent decision making. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *22*(2), 114–120. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721412471347

Aliaga, O. A. (2022). Stakeholders' perceptions of career and technical education. *International Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, *27*(1), 31–57. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385135843_Stakeholders'_Perceptions_of_Career_and_Technical_Education

Aliaga, O. A. (2023). An analytical framework to measure participation in secondary career and technical education. *Career and Technical Education Research*, *48*(2), 19–38. https://doi.org/10.5328/cter48.2.19

Aliaga, O. A., & Kotamraju, P. (2024). The interplay of CTE credit-taking, occupational program choice, and full-time work directly after high school: Addressing the policy-driven school-to-work perspective. *International Journal of Adult Education and Technology, 15*(1), 1-27. https://doi.org/10.4018/IJAET.346824

Andersen, S. C., & Hjortskov, M. (2022). The unnoticed influence of peers on educational preferences. *Behavioural Public Policy*, *6*(4), 530–553. https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2019.14

Ansel, D., Dougherty, S., Ecton, W., Holden, K., & Theobald, R. (2022). Student interest and equitable access to career and technical education high schools of choice.

Journal of School Choice, *16*(4), 588–622. https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2022.2039427

Association for Career and Technical Education. (2023). *What is CTE?* https://www.acteonline.org/cte

Associated Press. (2020, February 11). President Trump proposes $900M increase in career technical education money. *Fox59.* https://fox59.com/news/president-trump-proposes-900m-increase-in-career-technical-education-money/

Atkinson, J. W. (1957). Motivational determinants of risk-taking behavior. *Psychological Review, 64*(6), 359–372. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0043445

Atwell, A., Klein, S., Ecton, W., D'Amico, M. M., & Sublett, C. (2022). Community college responses to align career and technical education programs with changing labor markets. In C. Cutler White (Ed.), *Advocacy for change: Positioning community colleges for the next 75 years. New Directions for Community Colleges*, *197*, 45–58. John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20496

Babbie, E. (2017). *Basics of social research* (7th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Bettencourt, G. M., George Mwangi, C. A., Green, K. L., & Morales, D. M. (2022). But, do I need a college degree?: Understanding perceptions of college and career readiness among students enrolled in a career and technical high school. *Innovative Higher Education*, *47*(3), 453–470. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-021-09585-3

Bryan, J., Kim, J., & Liu, C. (2022). School counseling college-going culture: Counselors' influence on students' college-going decisions. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *100*(1), 39–55. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12408

Burkholder, G. J., Cox, K. A., Crawford, L. M., & Hitchcock, J. H. (2020). *Research designs and methods: An applied guide for the scholar-practitioner*. Sage Publications.

Callahan, D., Wilson, E., Birdsall, I., Estabrook-Fishinghawk, B., Carson, G., Ford, S., Ouzts, K., & Yob, I. (2012). *Expanding our understanding of social change: A report from the definition task force of the HLC special emphasis project*. Walden University. https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/ld.php?content_id=57389562

Carbonaro, W., & Workman, J. (2016). Intermediate peer contexts and educational outcomes: Do the friends of students' friends matter? *Social Science Research*, *58*, 184–197. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2016.02.005

Carruthers, C. K., Dougherty, S., Goldring, T., Kreisman, D., Theobald, R., Urban, C., & Villero, J. (2024a). Career and technical education alignment across five states. *AERA Open,* 10. https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584241276504

Carruthers, C. K., Dougherty, S., Goldring, T., Kreisman, D., Theobald, R., Urban, C., & Villero, J. (2024b). *Who takes high-earning CTE pathways?* https://jesusvillero.com/files/CTE_Pathway_Earnings.pdf

Cialdini, R. B. (2009). *Influence* (5th ed.). Pearson.

Clemens, R. F. (2019). "College for all? These kids can't dig ditches": Confronting the leadership challenges for justice-based reform in underperforming schools.

Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, *22*(1), 95–111. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555458918799129

Conzemius, A., & O'Neill, J. (2014). *The handbook for SMART school teams: Revitalizing best practices for collaboration* (2nd ed.). Solution Tree Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

da Silva Pinho, A., Slagter, S., Gradassi, A., Molleman, L., Braams, B. R., & van den Bos, W. (2025). Teacher knows best? The social influence of teachers and peers in high school. *Journal of research on adolescence: the official journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, *35*(3), e70063. https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.70063

DuFour, R., DuFour, R. B., Eaker, R. E., Many, T. W., Mattos, M., & Muhammad, A. (2024). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work* (4th ed.). Solution Tree Press.

Eccles, J. S., Adler, T. F., Futterman, R., Goff, S. B., Kaczala, C. M., Meece, J. L., & Midgley, C. (1983). Expectancies, values, and academic behaviors. In J. T. Spence (Ed.), *Achievement and achievement motives: Psychological and sociological approaches* (pp. 75–146). W. H. Freeman.

Erwin, B., Peisach, L., & Keily, T. (2024, March 29). *Lessons on expanding quality CTE and work-based learning*. Education Commission of the States. https://www.ecs.org

Escobar, I. H. G. (2019). School improvement plans, a tool to improve the quality of education. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences.* [Online]. 6(1), 440–450. www.prosoc.eu

Farrell, R. L. (2022). *Creating a vision for K-12 student's career choice and development: An analysis of social support as an environmental factor in social cognitive career theory* (Doctoral dissertation, Binghamton University, State University of New York). ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. https://www.proquest.com/docview/2688980899?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true&sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses

Ferguson, S. L., Kluttz-Drye, B., & Hovey, K. A. (2019). Preparing students for a bright outlook: survey of the preparation of high school counselors for advising on technician careers. *Journal of Research in Technical Careers, 3*(1), 66–82. https://doi.org/10.9741/2578-2118.1046

Ferm, L. (2021). Vocational students' ways of handling the academic/vocational divide. *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*, *8*(1), 1–20. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1299710.pdf

Fletcher, E. C., & Dumford, A. D. (2021). Preparing Students to Be College and Career Ready: The Effect of Career Academy Participation on Student Engagement in

College and Career Preparatory Activities. *Career and Technical Education Research*, *46*(2), 23–41. https://doi.org/10.5328/cter46.2.23

Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. (2022). Good jobs that pay without a BA. https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/goodjobs/

Giletta, M., Choukas-Bradley, S., Maes, M., Linthicum, K. P., Card, N. A., & Prinstein, M. J. (2021). A meta-analysis of longitudinal peer influence effects in childhood and adolescence. *Psychological Bulletin*, *147*(7), 719–747. https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000329

Griffen, J. (2019). Families and counselors taking action to transform culture: An action–inquiry case study of an urban high school. *Education and Urban Society*, *51*(4), 501–525. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124517728101

Hall, G. E. (2010). Technology's Achilles heel: Achieving high-quality implementation. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, *42*(3), 231–263. https://doi.org/10.1080/15391523.2010.10782550

Hall, G. E., & Hord, S. M. (2011). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes* (3rd ed.). Pearson.

Hall, G. E., Wallace, R. C., & Dossett, W. A. (1973). *A developmental conceptualization of the adoption process within educational institutions* (Report No. 3006). University of Texas at Austin, Research and Development Center for Teacher Education. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED095126

Haviland, S., & Robbins, S. (2021). Career and technical education as a conduit for skilled technical careers: A targeted research review and framework for future

research. *ETS Research Reports Series, 2021*(1), 1–42. https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12318

Heptabase. (2025). *Heptabase* [Computer software]. https://heptabase.com

Hodge, E., Dougherty, S., & Burris, C. (2020). Tracking and the future of career and technical education: How efforts to connect school and work can avoid the past mistakes of vocational education. In *National Education Policy Center*. National Education Policy Center. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED605784

Holm, K. R. K. (2019). Perceptions of postsecondary career and technical education: A Q method examination. *Career & Technical Education Research*, *44*(1), 5–22. https://doi.org/10.5328/cter44.1.5

Hord, S. M., Rutherford, W. L., Huling, L., & Hall, G. E. (2006). *Taking charge of change* (2nd printing with minor additions and corrections, revised PDF version, 2014). SEDL. https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/taking-charge-of-change-2014.pdf

Jobs for the Future. (2022). Work-Based learning for CTE: A guide for policymakers. https://www.jff.org

Jocson, K. M., & Martínez, I. D. (2020). Extending learning opportunities: Youth research in CTE and the limits of a theory of change. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *53*(1–2), 165–176. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2020.1763552

Keeney, P. (2023, October 11). Modern career and technical education is for everyone. Here's why it should start in middle school. *Chalkbeat.*

https://www.chalkbeat.org/2023/10/11/23912836/modern-career-and-technical-education-is-for-everyone-heres-why-it-should-start-in-middle-school/

Kellam, N., & Cirell, A. M. (2018). Quality considerations in qualitative inquiry: Expanding our understandings for the broader dissemination of qualitative research. *Journal of Engineering Education*, *107*(3), 355–361. https://doi.org/10.1002/jee.20227

Kemple, J. J., Unterman, R., Dougherty, S. M., Sludden, J., & Kamin, S. J. (2023). NYC as a laboratory for learning about career and technical education: Lessons from CTE-Dedicated high schools. The Research Alliance for New York City Schools. https://eric.ed.gov?id=ED626096

Ketchledge, W., Kosloski, M., & Reed, P. (2021). Factors influencing student enrollment in career academy programs. *Career & Technical Education Research*, *46*(1), 34–52. https://doi.org/10.5328/cter46.1.34

Kilday, J. E., & Ryan, A. M. (2024). The intermediary role of peer relationships between teachers and students' classroom engagement. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *92*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2024.101649

Kistler, H., Dougherty, S. M., & Woods, S. C. (2024). Teacher exit and educational opportunity: Lessons from career and technical education. *Educational Researcher, 53*(3), 156–166. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X231223132

Kreisman, D., & Stange, K. (2020). Vocational and career tech education in American high schools: The value of depth over breadth. *Education Finance and Policy, 15*(1), 11–44. https://www.nber.org/papers/w23851

Lara, L., Miranda-Zapata, E., Saracostti, M., & de-Toro, X. (2025). The predictive influence of family, teachers, and peers on affective, cognitive, and behavioral school engagement in primary and secondary school students. *Revista de Psicodidáctica (English Ed.)*, *30*(1). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psicoe.2024.500159

Lewis, Z. (2022). Paths in education: How students make qualification choices at Level 3 and what influences these choices. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, *74*(4), 707. https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2022.2118957

Lindsay, J., Hughes, K., Dougherty, S. M., Reese, K., & Joshi, M. (2024). *What we know about the impact of career and technical education: A systematic review of the research*. American Institutes for Research, Career and Technical Education Research Network.

Loucks-Horsley, S., Stiles, K. E., Mundry, S., Love, N., & Hewson. P. W. (2010). *Designing professional development for teachers of science and mathematics*. Corwin Press. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452219103

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.

Mobley, C., Sharp, J. L., Hammond, C., Withington, C., & Stipanovic, N. (2017). The influence of career-focused education on student career planning and development: A comparison of CTE and non-CTE students. *Career and Technical Education Research*, *42*(1), 57–75. https://doi.org/10.5328/cter42.1.57

National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). The condition of education 2022. https://nces.ed.gov

New York State Education Department. (n.d.). *Blue Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures*. https://www.nysed.gov/grad-measures/nys-blue-ribbon-commission-graduation-measures

Ngo, T. T. A., Nguyen, N. T. A., La, U. N., Truong, D. N., & Nguyen, H. Q. B. (2024). Impacts of social media experiences on academically related peer influence and fear of missing out of secondary and high school students. *International Journal of Engineering Pedagogy, 14*(2), 112–129. https://doi.org/10.3991/ijep.v14i2.43567

O'Brien, L., Albert, D., & Chein, J. (2011). Adolescents prefer more immediate rewards when in the presence of their peers. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *21*(4), 747–753. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2011.00738.x

OpenAI. (2023). *ChatGPT* (May 24 version) [Large language model]. https://chat.openai.com/chat

Paul, J., & Criado, A. R. (2020). The art of writing literature review: What do we know and what do we need to know? *International Business Review*, *29*(4). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2020.101717

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2021). Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Russell, C. R., Robinson, J. S., & Kelsey, K. D. (2009). Motivating agriculture students to participate in career development events. *Career and Technical Education*

Research, *34*(2), 103–118. https://doi.org/https://acter.metapress.com/content/b78g023151t41585/?p=d0c2975bd8014e0db539be4a45c51e54&pi=3

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Sandhu, B. (2017). The value of lived experience in social change: The need for leadership and organizational development in the Social Sector. *The Lived Experience.* http://thelivedexperience.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/The-Lived-Experience-Baljeet-Sandhu-VLE-summary-web-ok-2.pdf

Shao, Y., Kang, S., Zhang, C., Lu, Q., & Li, R. (2024). How peer relationships affect academic achievement among junior high school students: The chain mediating roles of learning motivation and learning engagement. *BMC Psychology*, *12*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-01780-z

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. Education for Information, 22(2), 63–75. https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201

Spacek, A., Rayfield, J., Doss, W., Lawver, D., & Ritz, R. (2021). Texas high school counselor perceptions of agricultural education. *Career & Technical Education Research*, *46*(1), 53–70. https://doi.org/10.5328/cter46.1.53

Spillers, J. G., & Lovett, M. (2022). Do they feel ready? Self-efficacy of career and technical education high school student. *Research Issues in Contemporary Education*, *7*(1), 1–25. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1344352.pdf

Steenberghs, N., Lavrijsen, J., Soenens, B., & Verschueren, K. (2021). Peer effects on engagement and disengagement: Differential contributions from friends, popular peers, and the entire class. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.726815

Stephan, U., Patterson, M., Kelly, C., & Mair, J. (2016). Organizations Driving Positive Social Change: A Review and an Integrative Framework of Change Processes. Journal of Management, 42(5), 1250–1281. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316633268

Stipanovic, N., & Stringfield, S. (2013). A qualitative inquiry of career exploration in highly implemented career and technical education programs of study. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, *22*(4), 334. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1044783

Taherdoost, H. (2023). Towards nuts and bolts of conducting literature review: A typology of literature review. *Electronics*, *12*(4), 800. https://doi.org/10.3390/electronics12040800

Texas University, Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, & Hall, G. E. (1973). *A developmental conceptualization of the adoption process within educational institutions.* ERIC. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED095126

Tucker, S. L., & Hughes, A. J. (2020). Endorsement of career and technical education: Phenomena influencing core-subject teacher perceptions. *Journal of Technology Education*, *31*(2), 40–55. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1254754

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023a). Education level and projected openings, 2023–2033. *Career Outlook.* https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2024/article/education-level-and-projected-openings.htm

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023b). *Employment projections, 2023–2033.* https://www.bls.gov/emp

U.S. Department of Education. (2022, February 25). New resource highlights how states use American rescue plan funds to reengage students through career and technical education. https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/new-resource-highlights-how-states-use-american-rescue-plan-funds-reengage-students-through-career-and-technical-education

U.S. Department of Education. (2018). *Strengthening career and technical education for the 21st century act (Perkins V)*, Pub. L. No. 115-224, 20 U.S.C. § 2301 et seq.

Walden University. (2015). Social change. https://www.waldenu.edu/about/social-change

Weigard, A., Chein, J., Albert, D., Smith, A., & Steinberg, L. (2014). Effects of anonymous peer observation on adolescents' preference for immediate rewards. *Developmental Science*, *17*(1), 71–78. https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.12099

Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J. S. (2000). Expectancy–value theory of achievement motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*(1), 68–81. https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1015

Withington, C., Hammond, C., Mobley, C., Stipanovic, N., Sharp, J. L., Stringfield, S., & Drew, S. F. (2012). Implementing a statewide mandated career pathways/programs of study school reform model: Select findings from a

multisite case study. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, *21*(2), 138–158. https://doi.org/https://rowman.com/page/IJER

Zingora, T., Stark, T. H., & Flache, A. (2020). Who is most influential? Adolescents' intergroup attitudes and peer influence within a social network. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, *23*(5), 684–709. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430219869460

Appendix A: Project Implementation Plan

Appendix A details a 1-year action plan aimed at increasing CTE enrollment. The 1-year action plan is designed to ensure that strategies to increase CTE enrollment are both actionable and measurable, with a clear focus on improving CTE pathway enrollment. The goals of the action plan are to improve CTE pathway enrollment through capacity building and information sharing, ensuring that students, families, and staff have a clear understanding of the rigor, value, and postsecondary opportunities associated with CTE. The plan emphasizes intentional outreach, increased visibility of student success, and strengthened peer and teacher advocacy. Each action step includes clearly defined responsibilities, target dates, and evidence of effectiveness to support progress monitoring and accountability throughout the school year.

Action Plan Purpose

The purpose of this action plan is to provide a structured, one-year roadmap for increasing CTE pathway enrollment. By combining targeted outreach strategies, staff capacity building, and student-led advocacy, the plan aims to remove barriers, address misconceptions, and enhance awareness of the benefits and opportunities available through the CTE pathway with the goal of increasing student enrollment.

Action Plan Goals

- Improve CTE outreach and information sharing by hosting at least three major outreach events and tracking attendance and feedback from students and families.

- Ensure students, families, and staff have a clear understanding of the rigor, value, and postsecondary opportunities associated with CTE, as measured by surveys showing awareness and understanding increased by 20%.
- Increase visibility of student success through events, in-school displays, and media promotion by showcasing at least one CTE student story or project monthly through announcements, social media, or school displays with evidence of viewership.
- Strengthen peer and teacher advocacy to encourage CTE enrollment by establishing a team of student ambassadors and teacher advocates and monitoring the number of student referrals.
- Improve student enrollment in the CTE pathway by achieving a 10% increase in CTE enrollment from September to June.

Target Audience

The target audience for this action plan includes high school students, their families, high school instructional staff, CTE teachers, school counselors, and building administrators. Other stakeholders who may be interested in this plan include district leaders and community stakeholders with an interest in expanding CTE opportunities.

Materials and Equipment

- Auditorium,
- audio and visual equipment (laptop, projector, screen, microphone),
- Google Slides presentation for the opening staff meeting,
- CTE promotional materials (flyers, posters, program guides),

- access to district communication channels (email, social media, website),
- event supplies for open houses and CTE day,
- class meeting Google Slides presentation,
- audio-visual equipment for student-created videos and presentations,
- tracking tools for monitoring action step completion and enrollment trends.

1-Year Action Plan

SMART Goal: Increase the number of CTE Pathway enrolled students by 10% from the 2024-2025 school year to the 2025-2026 school year.			
Action Step	**Person(s) Responsible**	**Target Date**	**Evidence of Effectiveness**
Present SMART goal and action plan to staff during opening day staff meeting, including overview of CTE benefits, pathways, and enrollment strategies.	Building Principal	September	- Staff meeting agenda and attendance - Post-presentation survey
Provide a professional development session for all staff on CTE pathways, benefits, and how to integrate CTE promotion into their daily interactions with students.	Building Principal	October	- PD agenda, attendance records - PD evaluation forms
Integrate CTE pathway discussions into PLT meetings to review student interest, review action steps, and celebrate accomplishments	PLT Leaders PLTs	Monthly	- PLT Agendas - PLT Meeting Notes
Establish CTE Ambassadors (student representatives) to assist with outreach, recruitment, and sharing experiences.	Work-Based Learning Coordinator CTE Teachers	September	- Ambassador roster - Invitation email - Meeting notes
Hold Open House with CTE student ambassadors and counselors available to support conversations with families about CTE pathways.	Building Principal School Counselors Student Ambassadors CTE Teachers	October	- Attendance at Open House - Sign-in sheets -Stakeholder feedback
Create and distribute promotional materials (flyers, social media posts, videos) highlighting student success stories and CTE benefits.	Building Principal CTE Teachers Student Ambassadors Communications Officer	Ongoing (Monthly)	- Copies of materials - Social media analytics
Highlight CTE programs in weekly student broadcast and morning announcements.	Academic Advisement Teachers CTE Teachers Students in Communications Program	Weekly	- Broadcast schedule - Viewership reports
Conduct quarterly student and parent intent-to-enroll surveys following CTE recruitment activities.	Building Principal School Counselors	Quarterly	- Survey response data indicating intent-to-enroll - Comparison of intent-to-enroll trends across quarters

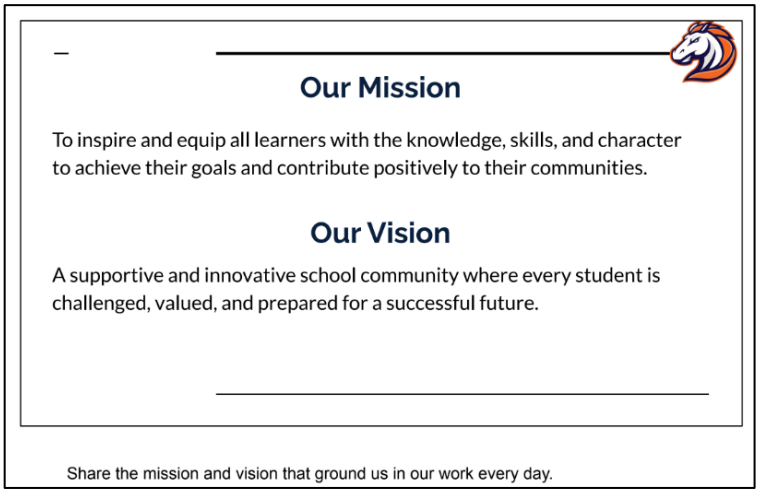
Host CTE Day where prospective students shadow CTE classes to experience programs firsthand.	Work-Based learning Coordinator CTE Teachers Student Ambassadors	November & March	- Attendance list - Student feedback survey
Host a class meeting presentation to promote and share CTE pathway information with all grade levels.	Building Principal Student Ambassadors CTE Teachers School Counselors	December	- Presentation materials - Attendance records
Incorporate CTE information into student scheduling meetings, ensuring all students receive a pathway introduction.	School Counselors	January-March	- Scheduling meeting agendas - Counselor logs
Use CTE classes to support execution, promotion, planning, catering, budgeting, etc., for school and district events to promote program participation and exposure.	Building Principal CTE Teachers Work-Based Learning Coordinator	Ongoing	- Event programs - Photos - Social Media Posts - Teacher logs
Leverage peer influence by having current CTE students speak at feeder middle school visits and events.	Work-Based Learning Coordinator Building Principals Student Ambassadors	February-April	- Visit schedule - Feedback from middle school students - Student enrollment data
Increase teacher advocacy by encouraging core and elective teachers to refer interested students to CTE programs.	Teachers	Ongoing	- Referral logs - Student enrollment data
Showcase CTE student work at school-wide events (pep rallies, assemblies, art shows, STEM nights).	Building Principal CTE Teachers CTE Students	Ongoing	- Event photos - Attendance - Social media posts
Post quarterly CTE program highlights on district website and social media to increase visibility.	Webmaster Communications Officer	Quarterly	- Website analytics - Social media posts - Social media analytics
Conduct a review of action plan progress to adjust strategies as needed.	Building Principal	Quarterly	- Updated action plan - Data review
Review CTE enrollment data at end of school year to measure progress toward SMART goal.	Building Principal	June	- Student enrollment data

Staff Meeting Presentation

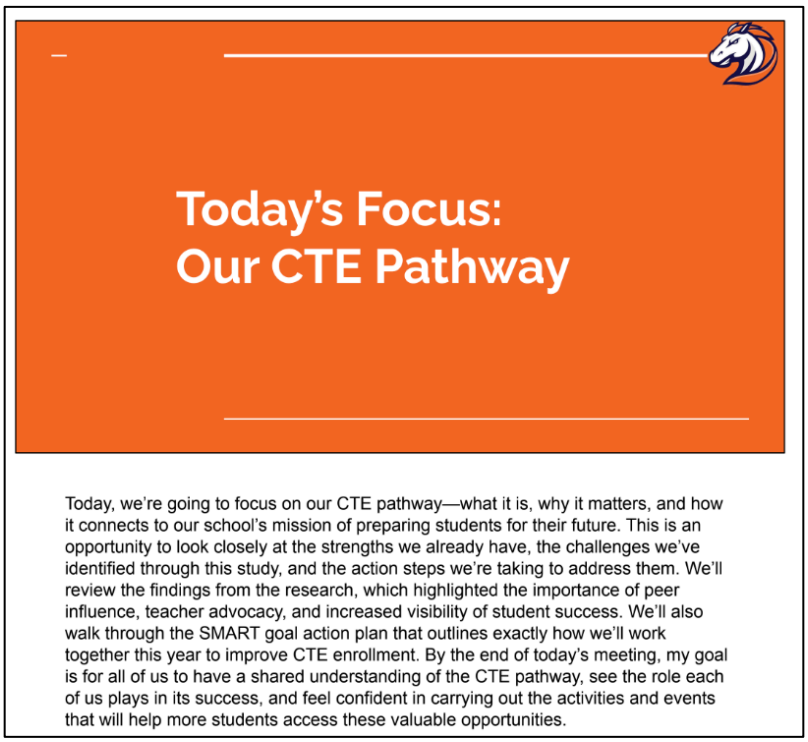
This section includes the presentation titled, *Increasing Capacity for CTE & CTE Enrollment Strategies,* which will be given to all high school instructional staff during the opening school days in September. Included in each slide are presenter notes that outline how the slides should be explained and presented to staff. This presentation should take approximately 1 hour to present.

Slide 1

Slide 2

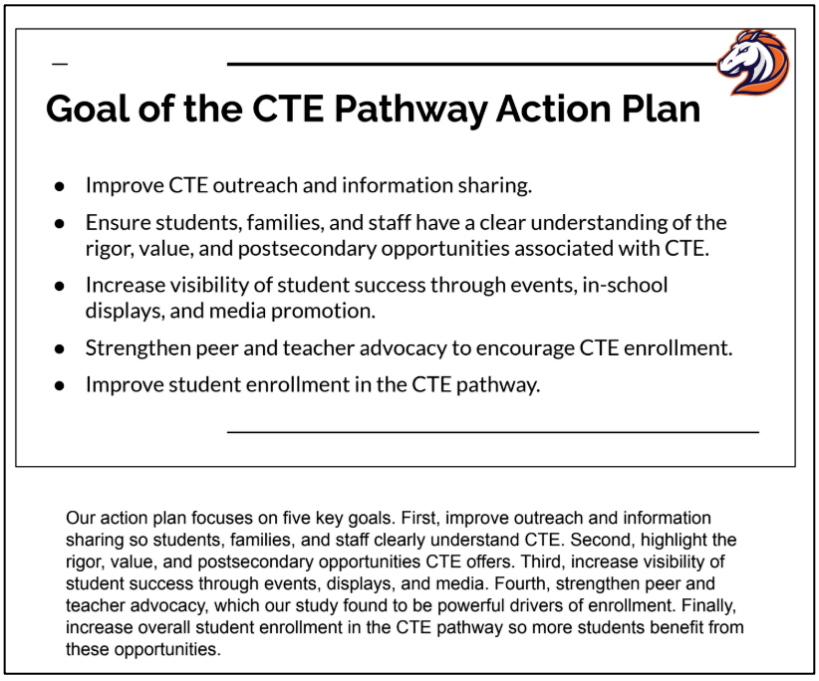


Slide 3



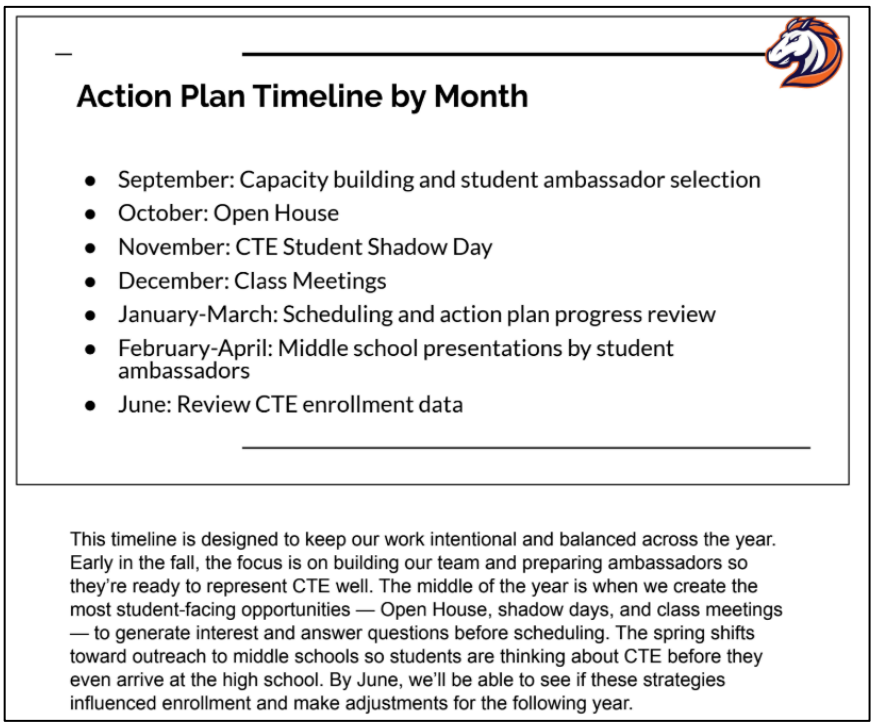
Today, we're going to focus on our CTE pathway—what it is, why it matters, and how it connects to our school's mission of preparing students for their future. This is an opportunity to look closely at the strengths we already have, the challenges we've identified through this study, and the action steps we're taking to address them. We'll review the findings from the research, which highlighted the importance of peer influence, teacher advocacy, and increased visibility of student success. We'll also walk through the SMART goal action plan that outlines exactly how we'll work together this year to improve CTE enrollment. By the end of today's meeting, my goal is for all of us to have a shared understanding of the CTE pathway, see the role each of us plays in its success, and feel confident in carrying out the activities and events that will help more students access these valuable opportunities.

Slide 4

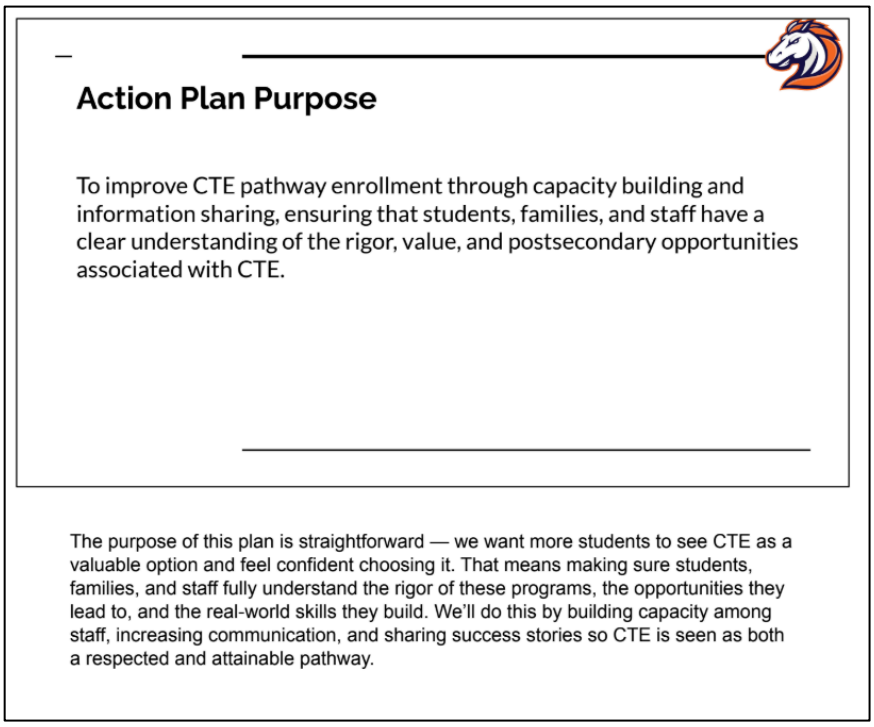


Our action plan focuses on five key goals. First, improve outreach and information sharing so students, families, and staff clearly understand CTE. Second, highlight the rigor, value, and postsecondary opportunities CTE offers. Third, increase visibility of student success through events, displays, and media. Fourth, strengthen peer and teacher advocacy, which our study found to be powerful drivers of enrollment. Finally, increase overall student enrollment in the CTE pathway so more students benefit from these opportunities.

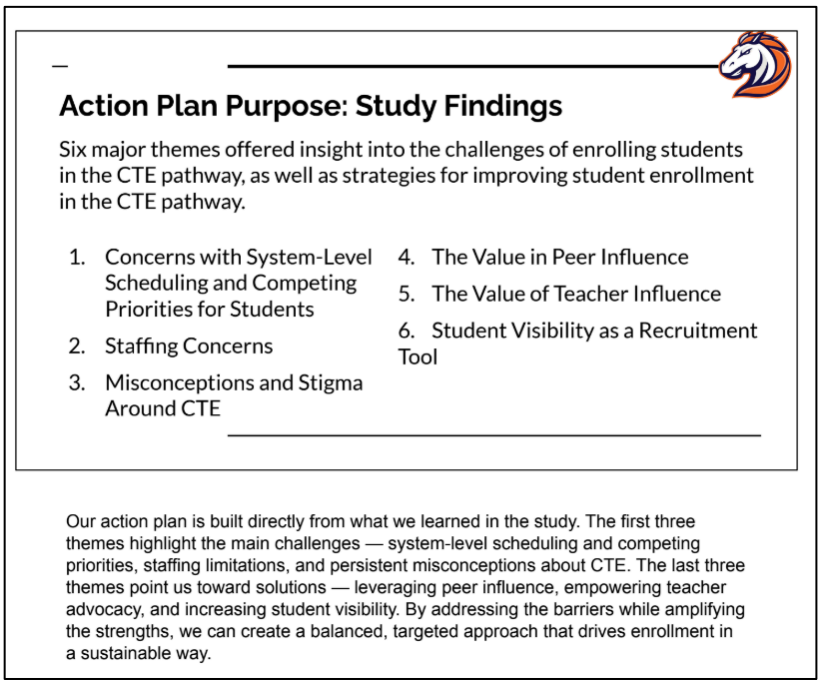
Slide 5



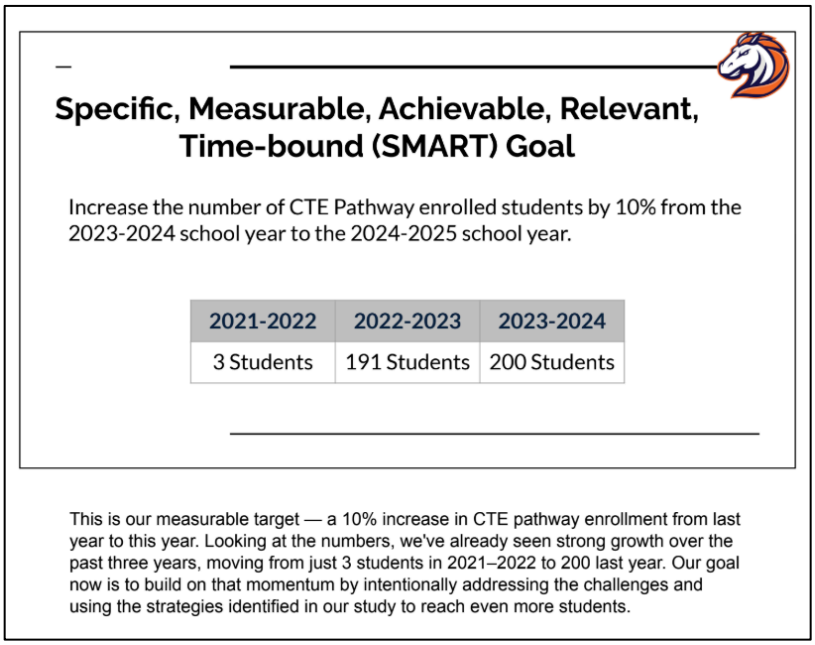
Slide 6



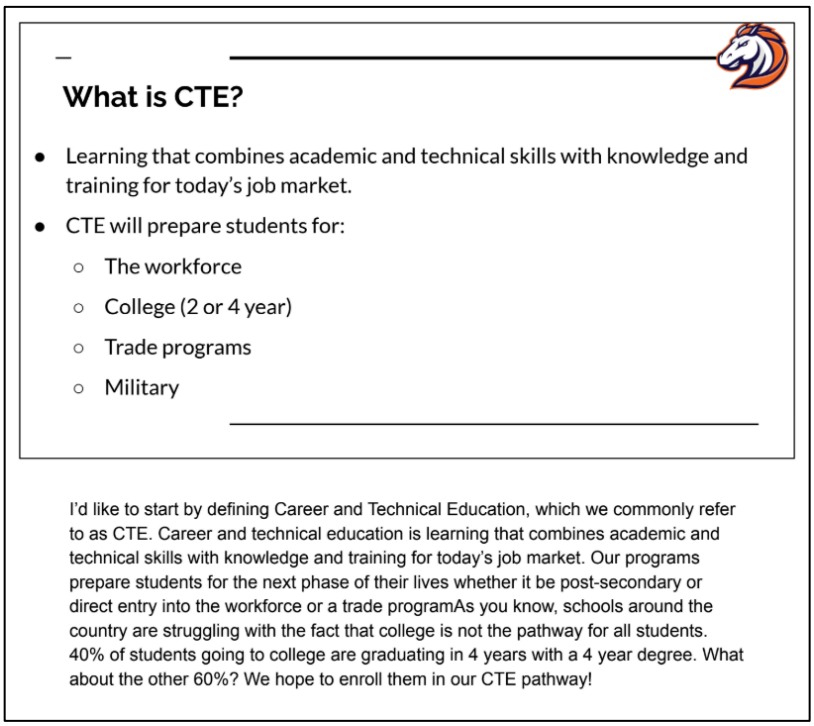
Slide 7



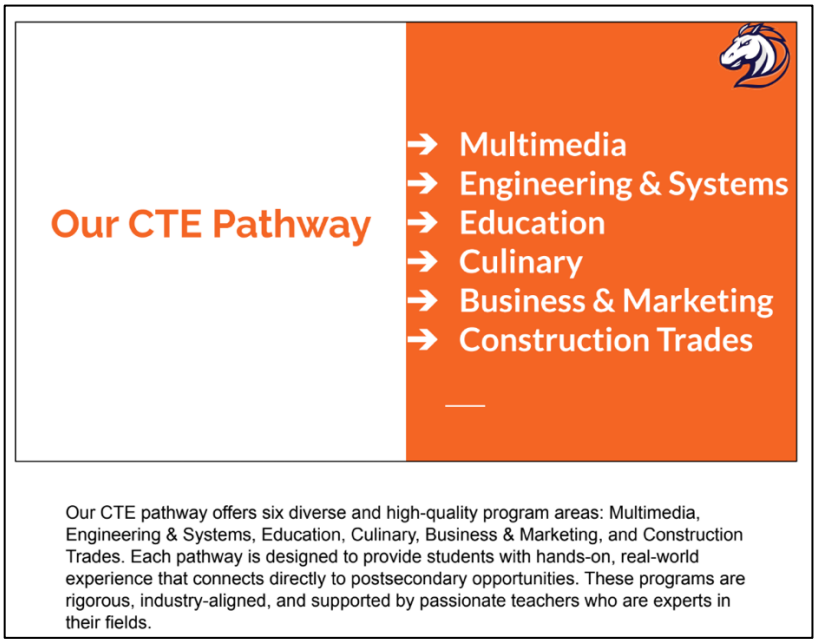
Slide 8



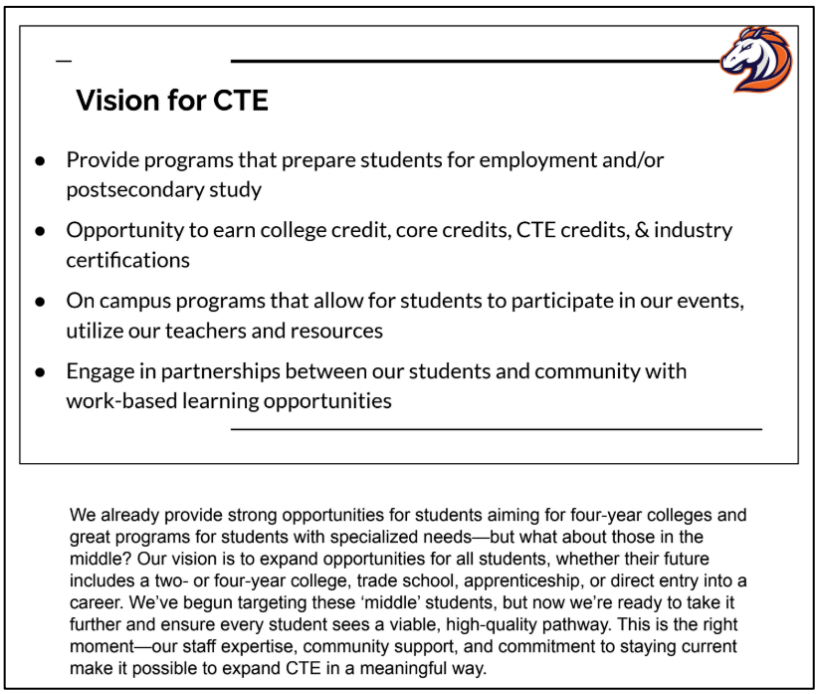
Slide 9



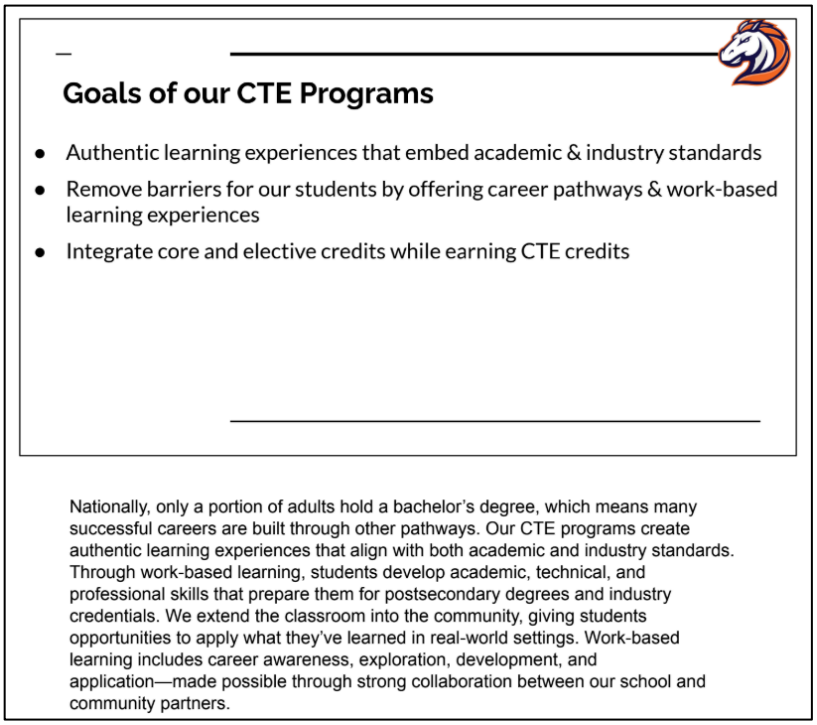
Slide 10



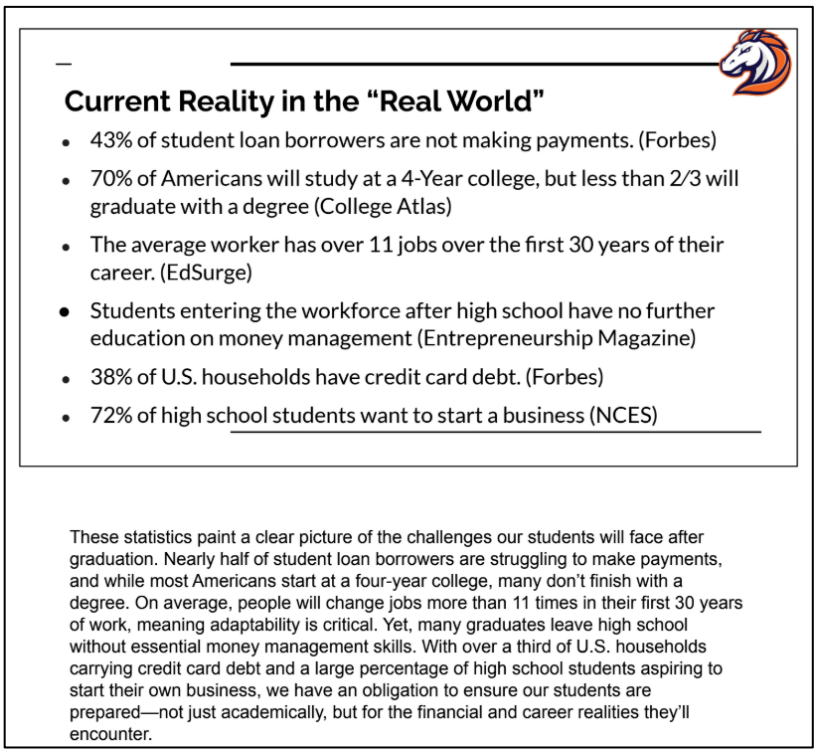
Slide 11



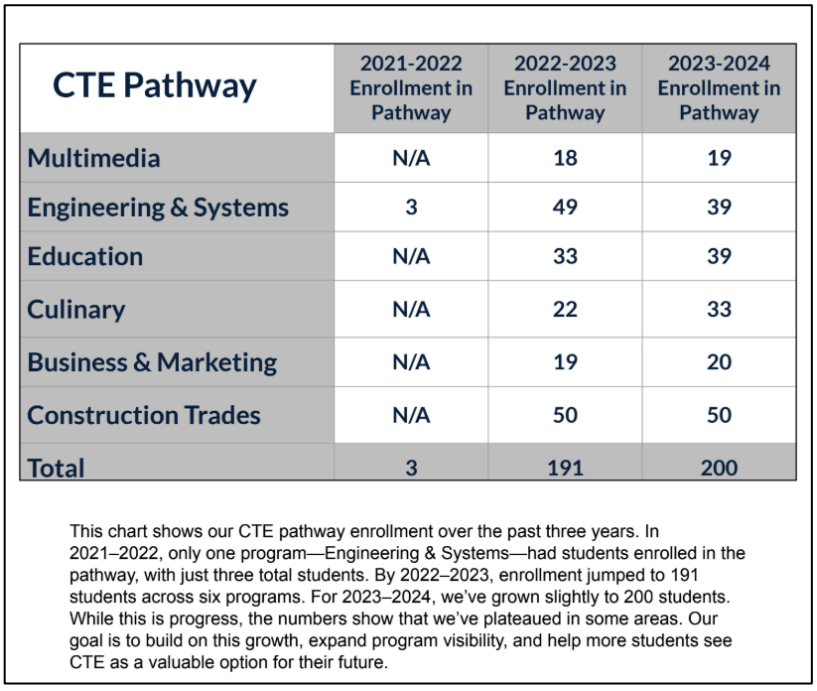
Slide 12



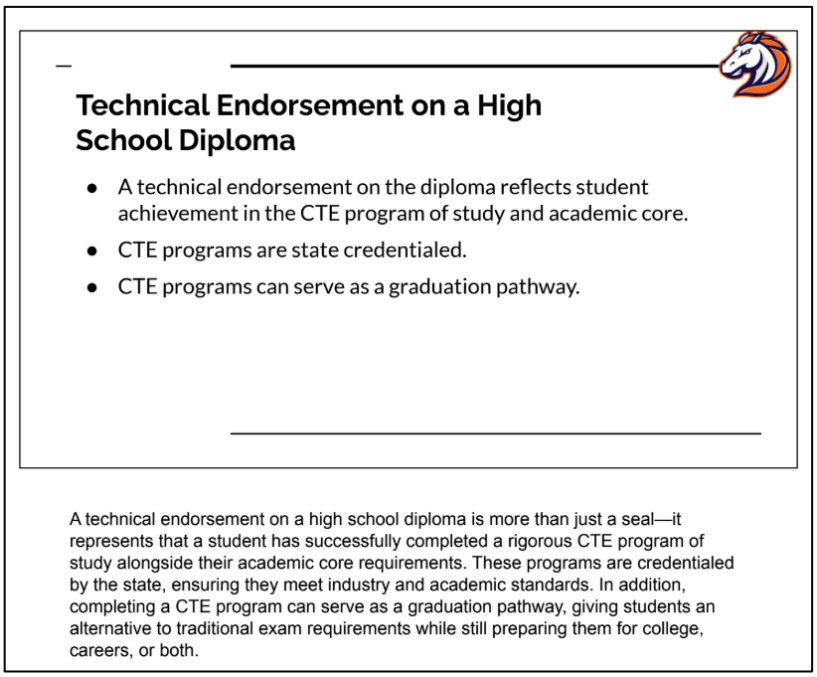
Slide 13



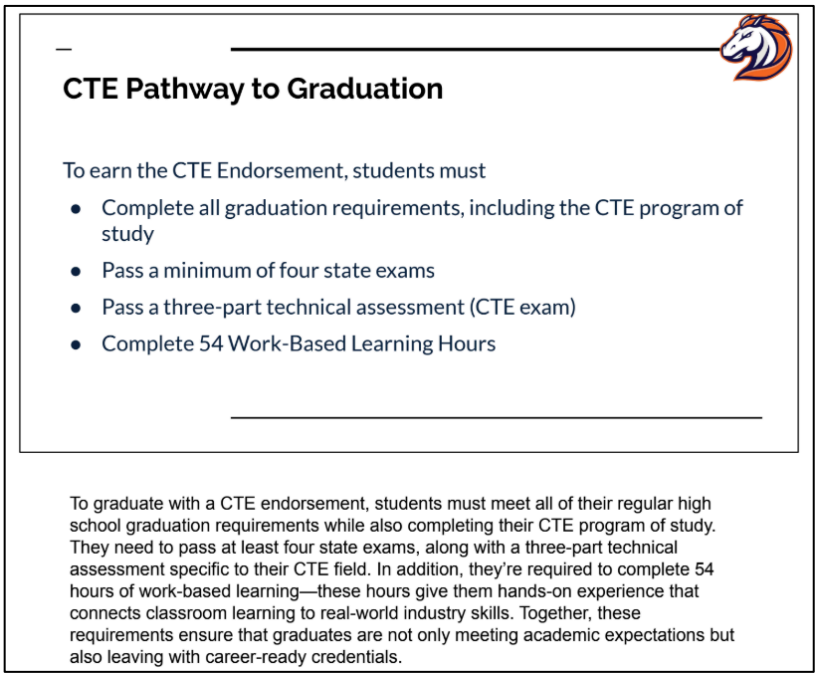
Slide 14



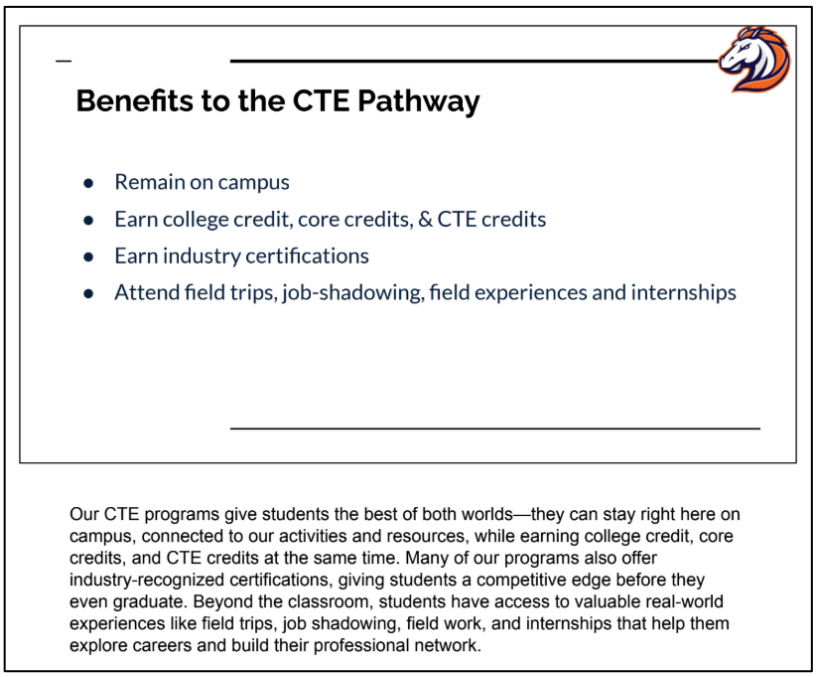
Slide 15



Slide 16

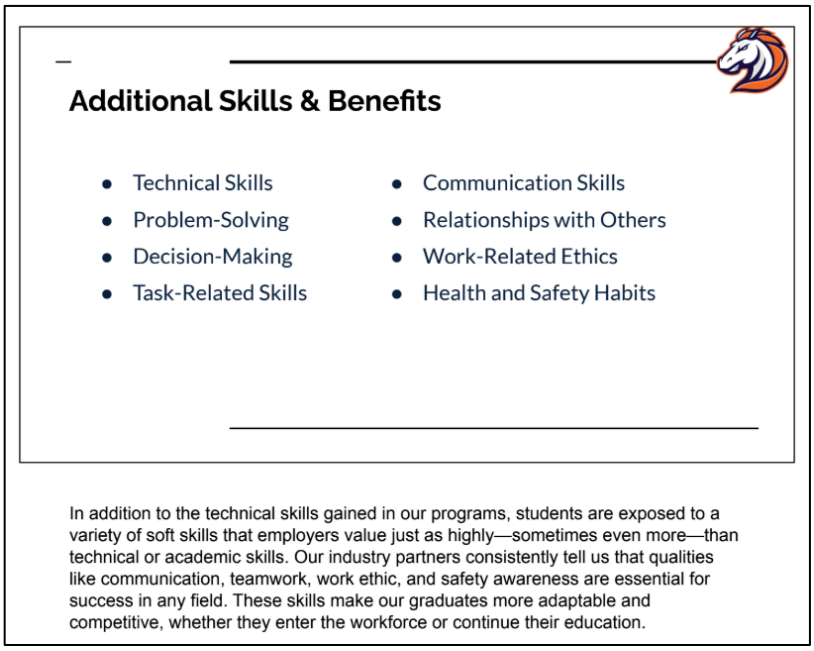


Slide 17



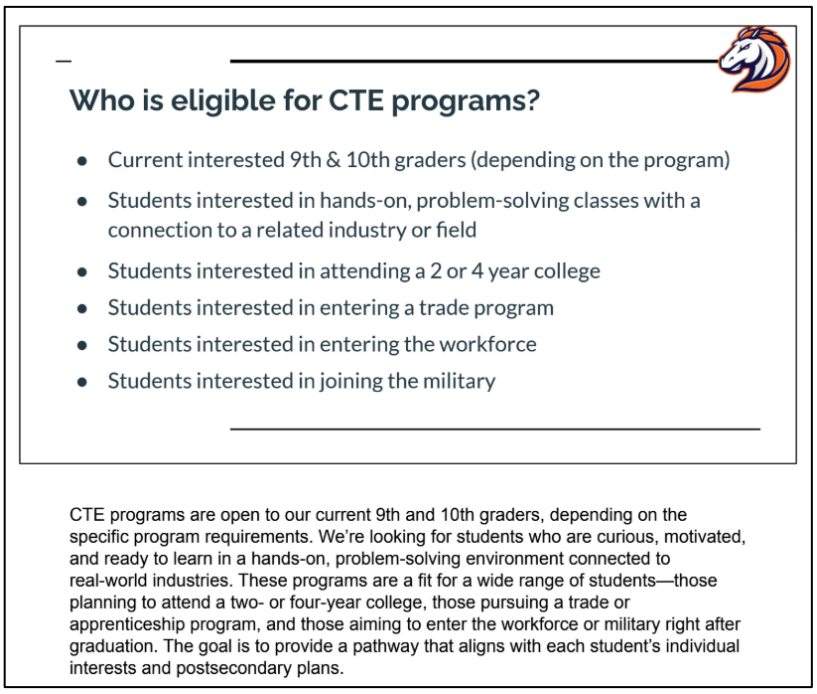
Our CTE programs give students the best of both worlds—they can stay right here on campus, connected to our activities and resources, while earning college credit, core credits, and CTE credits at the same time. Many of our programs also offer industry-recognized certifications, giving students a competitive edge before they even graduate. Beyond the classroom, students have access to valuable real-world experiences like field trips, job shadowing, field work, and internships that help them explore careers and build their professional network.

Slide 18

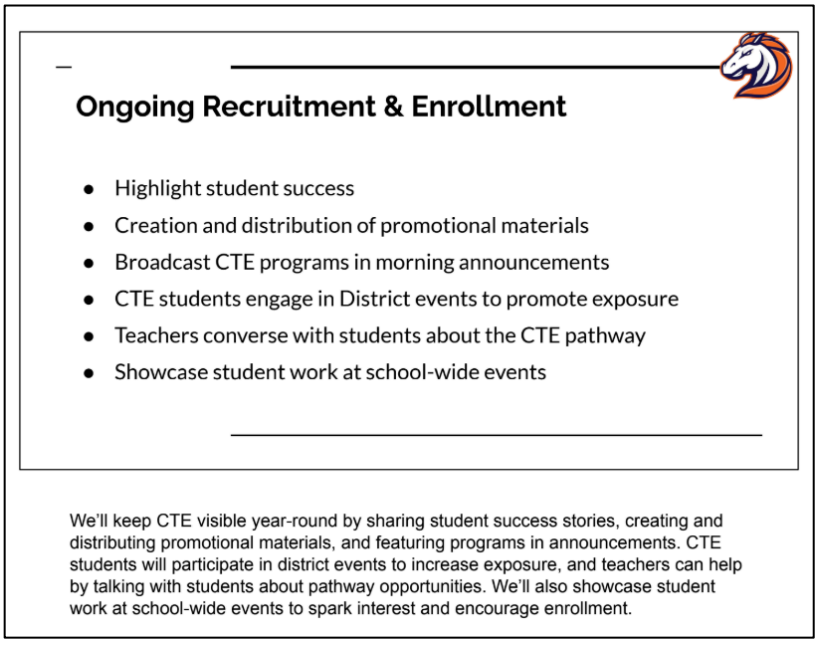


In addition to the technical skills gained in our programs, students are exposed to a variety of soft skills that employers value just as highly—sometimes even more—than technical or academic skills. Our industry partners consistently tell us that qualities like communication, teamwork, work ethic, and safety awareness are essential for success in any field. These skills make our graduates more adaptable and competitive, whether they enter the workforce or continue their education.

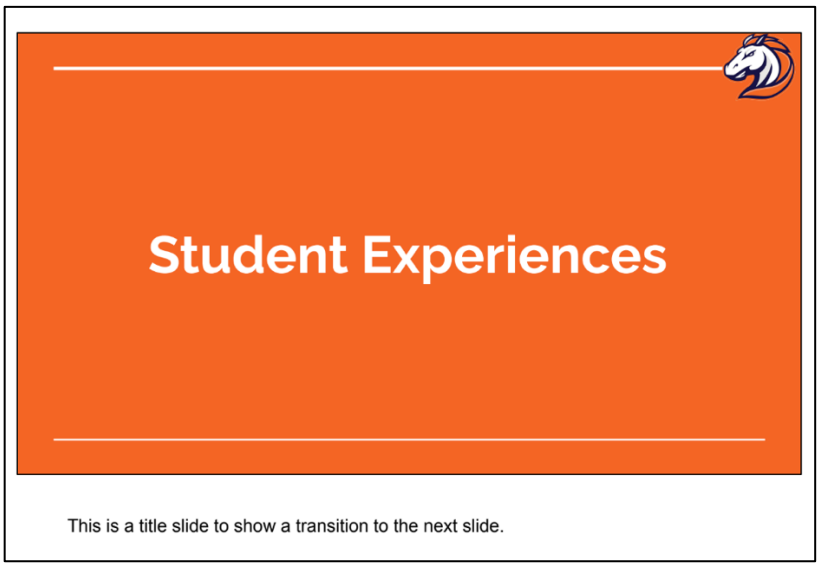
Slide 19



Slide 20

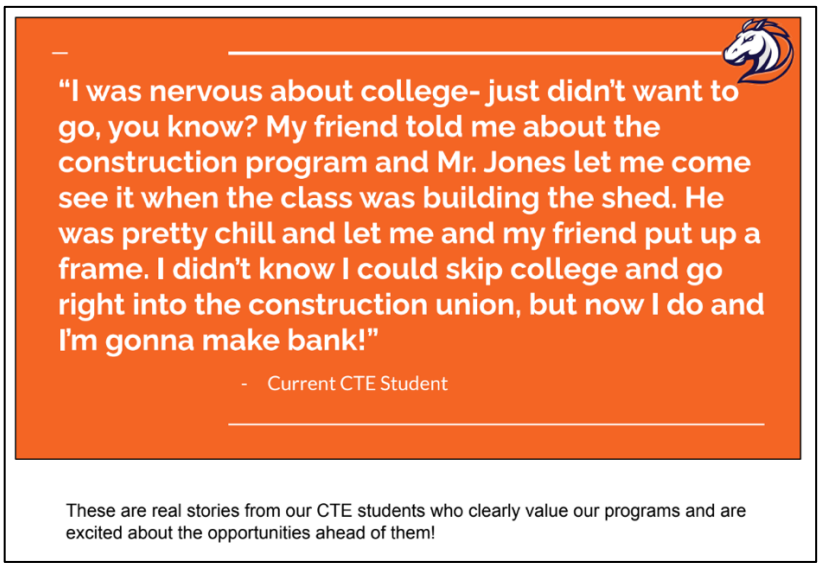


Slide 21



Slide 22

Slide 23



Slide 24

Slide 25

Upcoming Events

- Pathway PD: Superintendent's Conference Day, October 10, 2025
- Open House, October 16, 2025
- CTE Shadow Day, November 14, 2025
- CTE Pathway Night: January 19, 2026, 6-8pm
- Class meetings
- Scheduling

These upcoming events are key touchpoints for increasing awareness and enrollment in our CTE pathways. Each is designed to showcase student success, engage families, and connect with potential CTE students. From targeted professional development to open houses, shadow days, and class meetings, these moments give us multiple opportunities to promote our programs and support informed student scheduling.

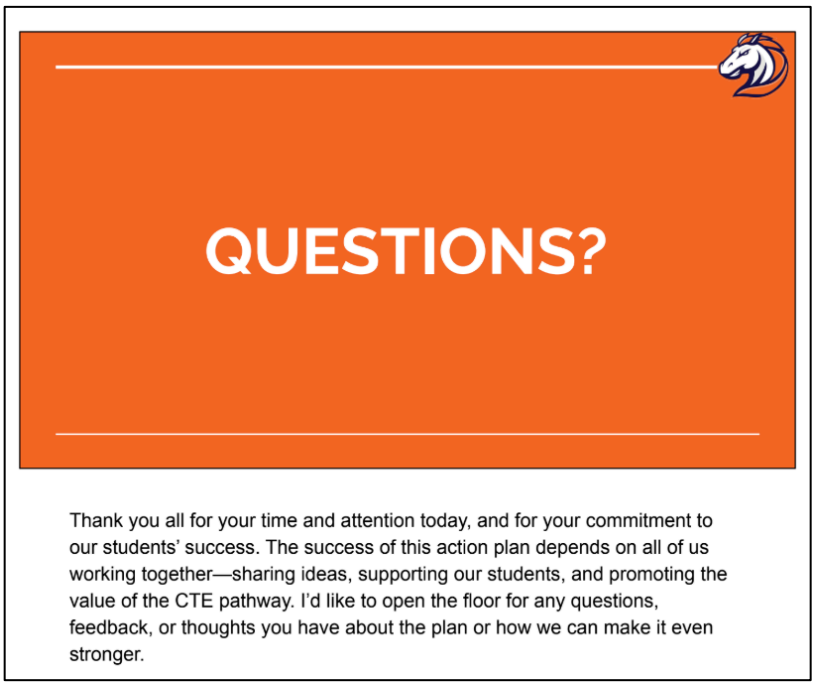
Slide 26

The Future of CTE




As we look to the future of CTE, we're not just thinking about programs—we're thinking about possibilities. Every event, every student success story, and every new partnership moves us toward a stronger, more visible, and more impactful CTE pathway. The work we do this year lays the foundation for lasting growth and opportunity for our students.

Slide 27


QUESTIONS?
Thank you all for your time and attention today, and for your commitment to our students' success. The success of this action plan depends on all of us working together—sharing ideas, supporting our students, and promoting the value of the CTE pathway. I'd like to open the floor for any questions, feedback, or thoughts you have about the plan or how we can make it even stronger.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Research Questions

- How do high school instructional staff members in a northeastern school district perceive the challenges of enrolling students in the CTE pathway?
- What strategies do high school instructional staff members perceive might improve student enrollment in the CTE pathway at a northeastern school district?

One-on-One Interview Questions

- Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?
- How would you describe your understanding of the CTE pathway and its intended purpose in your school?
- How might increased CTE enrollment affect you or what you teach?
- Can you think of any consequences for the school if more students enrolled in CTE programs?
- In what ways have you thought about relating what you are doing in your classes to CTE pathways?
- How confident do you feel in your ability to guide students toward CTE options?
- Are there other forms of information that might help improve your confidence?
- What supports or training would help improve this process?

- In your experience, what are the biggest challenges or barriers students face when considering enrolling in the CTE pathway?
- What are some common concerns or misconceptions that students and families have about CTE pathways?
- How do these concerns influence their decisions?
- Have you observed any patterns or trends in which students are more or less likely to enroll in CTE programs?
- If so, what factors do you think contribute to these trends?
- How do you think school culture and priorities influence CTE enrollment?
- What external factors (e.g., parental expectations, labor market demand, peer influence, policy changes) do you believe most impact CTE enrollment?
- How effective do you think current recruitment efforts are in communicating the benefits of CTE to students and families?
- What strategies have been most effective in increasing student interest and enrollment in CTE pathways?
- What changes or improvements to current CTE recruitment practices would you recommend to better align with students' interests and career goals?
- Is there any additional information or insight you would like to share about the challenges or opportunities in CTE enrollment?
- Do you have any other information you would like to add?
- Probing Questions
- Is there an example you would like to share?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

- Welcome the participant.
- Explain the semistructured interview process.
- Thank the participant for participating in the interview.
- Review the interview protocol and the schedule.
- Provide the participant with a copy of the consent form and review the form, specifically addressing,
    - Confidentiality
    - The protection from harm
    - The right to withdraw from the study.
- Explain the purpose of the research study and the research questions.
- Explain Otter.ai, the audio transcription process.
- Provide the participant with a copy of the interview questions.
- Ask the participant if they have any questions.
- Start Otter.ai, the audio transcription process.
- Begin the interview with the first question.
- Follow the question order.
- Ask one question at a time.
- Maintain the natural flow of conversation.
- Ask probing questions.
- Take notes in the researcher's notebook as needed.

- At the end of the interview, ask the participant if they have any last thoughts or questions.
- Stop the recording.
- Check Otter.ai to ensure the recording worked.
- Review next steps.
- Explain member checking and the timeline for review.
- Ask if the participant has any questions and address them.
- Thank the participant.