

ACCESS & EQUITY



High-quality CTE programs include program of study promotion, student recruitment, and operational and instructional strategies to support both access and equity for each and every student, regardless of their sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, ability or age; as well as for all of the special population groups outlined in federal statute. Due to the critical importance of this topic, access and equity issues have also been addressed within each of the remaining elements, but a deeper dive is taken here.

Key Issues to Address
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing connectivity and technology needs • Supporting basic student needs and mental health • Providing supplemental supports to students, including learners with disabilities and English learners • Being attentive to inequities in access to high-quality career pathways • Supporting medically vulnerable learners at home • Using accessible design and providing assistive technology for in-person and remote learning

Ensuring access and equity in a COVID-19-impacted school year will be more challenging, but also more critical, than ever. Equity issues have been at the forefront of many discussions around the shift to remote learning in the spring, which shined a spotlight on equity gaps within our current education system. Many of these gaps have always existed, but were brought to the forefront by the abrupt changes made as districts and institutions shifted the educational experience. New gaps have also emerged as economic conditions have deteriorated. The Perkins V comprehensive local needs assessment, with its emphasis on disaggregated data analysis and evaluation of special population needs and performance in CTE programs, is an important tool for continuing to evaluate equity gaps, and is described more in the [Data and Program Improvement](#) section.

Several equity issues cut across the possible instructional scenarios for the new school year. First, as further described in the [System Supports](#) section, it will be critical for districts and institutions to continue addressing connectivity and device access issues, even in in-person scenarios, in case learning has to quickly

move to a remote environment to address a local COVID-19 outbreak. Meeting basic student needs, such as for food, housing and transportation, as the economic conditions of the pandemic impact students and families, will also be important precursors to learning. In addition, institutions will need to be attentive to learners’ mental health and social-emotional needs, as learners cope with grief and loss, poverty, racial injustice and other traumas from before and during the pandemic. Close communication with students and families about their needs and services available to help meet those essential needs will be key, which may include translating materials into different languages. Institutions and districts that use equity-focused frameworks like [Multi-tiered System of Support](#) may benefit from already having a defined approach for identifying and responding to learner needs.

Learners may also need tutoring and other catch-up interventions in their core academic courses that could impact their ability to take part in CTE courses. According to ACTE survey respondents, CTE professionals are planning to intensively collaborate with staff from special education, English language and other departments to facilitate services and provide one-on-one interaction in person, over the phone and/or online. CTE educators should also take part in individualized education program (IEP)/504 meetings to reaffirm and revise these plans in light of changing situations; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act supports CTE educator participation in IEP meetings as an essential means for CTE educators to have a voice and gain appropriate supports for their students.



Furthermore, the pandemic is seriously impacting learners' access to and transition within high-quality career pathways, and this will have reverberating effects, particularly on learners already underserved by the education system. According to polling from [Strada Education Network](#), Black Americans and Latino Americans are more likely than white Americans to have changed or canceled their education plans during the first wave of the pandemic, but are also more likely than white Americans to enroll in education and training programs in the coming months.

[Unemployment rates](#) were also higher as of May for Black Americans and Latino Americans than for other racial or ethnic groups. Accessible and unbiased career guidance and advising, including follow-up efforts to encourage planned transitions; ease of credit transfer and acceptance of credit for prior learning; and access to industry credentials and programs that integrate basic skills education and CTE will be critical to help mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on the education and career trajectories of many.



CTE educators should be prepared to give all students and families grace and understanding as they work to navigate the challenges of the summer and the new school year. Ben Williams, CEO of the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE), emphasizes this point. “We should enter into the process in a collaborative and supportive way, and check ourselves when we want to pass judgment.” This understanding should extend to instructors, staff and administrators as well, as everyone adjusts to the challenges of COVID-19-impacted learning.

In-person Considerations

Resuming in-person learning will allow many of the services provided by campuses to address basic equity needs to resume as well, such as meal distribution, campus health clinics, mental health and counselor services, and access to technology. Academic supports will be more readily available as well, and CTE students should have access to the full range of classroom supports that were afforded to them before the pandemic, adjusted for social distancing.

However, medically vulnerable learners must decide with their doctors about whether they can return to in-person instruction. Some may feel comfortable returning to campus, with social distancing and frequent disinfection. Others may decide to continue learning remotely, and students who are infected with or may have been exposed to COVID-19 will also need to remain home on at least a short-term basis. States, districts and institutions must support students, including students with an IEP or 504 plan, who need to remain at home through internet-enabled technology and remote instruction provided by a state-operated virtual school or by the district or institution. This may include livestreaming classroom activities, virtual course modules and online group work that enables learners at home and on campus to collaborate. These topics are further addressed in the [Engaging Instruction](#) section.

Medically vulnerable learners could also schedule times to come to campus for one-on-one instruction and practice with equipment and technology. Alternately, instructors, special education coordinators and paraprofessionals could visit a learner at home to provide one-on-one support.

Socially distanced in-person spaces may also cause difficulties for some learners. For instance, learners who are deaf or hard of hearing and English learners may have trouble communicating through masks. One option is for instructors to wear transparent masks or face shields; [audiologists](#) also recommend speaking a little more slowly and projecting your voice a little more when wearing a mask. Blind and low-vision students may also need to learn to navigate redesigned spaces. [Assistive technology](#) (AT) to support and enhance in-person instruction, both low- and high-tech options, should be explored to provide equity and access for all learners.

Remote Considerations

Access to computing devices and high-speed internet is a significant access and equity concern in this model, with ramifications across different learner groups, geographic areas, socioeconomic statuses and special populations. Further details on this issue are addressed in the [System Supports](#) element.

When it is not possible to get all learners connected, CTE instructors will need to develop packets of readings, worksheets, quizzes and at-home kits of activities that can be safely completed at home. More information on these kits is provided in the [Facilities, Equipment, Technology and Materials](#) and [Student Assessment](#) sections. Even with technology access, it will be important for instructors to share important information both synchronously and asynchronously, to design activities that take into account the different resources available to different students and to provide specific materials needed. For example, requiring specific ingredients for at-home culinary activities could place an undue burden on families dealing with economic hardship. Likewise, assignments that require students to have access to a specific piece of technology should be avoided unless all students have been confirmed to have access.



Accessibility for learners in the remote classroom is another concern. A learning management system (LMS) that supports accessibility for students who use AT is an important precursor. Building on this foundation, CTE educators can employ [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) principles and [ExploreAccess.org](#)'s three principles of accessible design: intuitive, perceivable and navigable. While designing courses for accessibility can feel overwhelming, there are many resources to support instructors in this work. Much of accessible

design involves making documents easy to read and easy to use by AT like text-to-speech converters. Trying to make the mobile user experience similar to the computer user experience is another equity issue, as many lower-income learners are more likely to use their phones to access coursework.

Experts recommend that all videos be captioned, not only for learners who are deaf or hard of hearing and English learners but also for students who may have to do schoolwork from a noisy location. Audio descriptions of videos and/or video transcription can also support accessibility, and English learners may need additional explanations of online content and access to translated materials. Terrill Thompson of the University of Washington DO-IT Center recommends that every teacher ask themselves these [questions](#) when evaluating the accessibility of education technology.

Many modifications and accommodations used in person, such as accommodations to timed exams, can be used in the online space, too. As CTE instructors are developing online assessments, they should focus on ensuring that assessments measure what they intend to measure. UDL can assist educators in designing assessments to meet learning goals and avoid barriers that prevent instructors from seeing what a student really knows. Guidance for accessible design, instruction and assessment is included in the [Resources, Tools and Examples](#) section below.

More specific to CTE, ensuring accessibility within any extended reality (XR) or other simulation programs used in CTE courses will be important. Accessibility for learners can also involve giving students a choice of formats; for instance, students could choose to demonstrate their knowledge and skill attainment by writing a reflection, making a video or giving a presentation.

Last but not least, students in remote spaces can be vulnerable to [cyberbullying and harassment](#) from other learners and bad actors who infiltrate public platforms or semi-private meetings. While this issue is not new, the surge in the number of students and educators using online spaces this spring has elevated its prominence. It will be important in the new school year for learners to know the risks and be equipped with resources and supports for addressing cyberbullying.

Blended Considerations

In a blended learning scenario, CTE educators will need to be attentive to all of these concerns, although the relative importance of each consideration will vary depending on the level of blend involved.

In one particular blended learning scenario, medically vulnerable learners and special population learners would be the only students who return to campus, while other students remain remote. In this case, CTE instructors, paraprofessionals and others would be on campus at least part of the time providing one-on-one or small group instruction, while also teaching other students remotely.

Resources, Tools and Examples

- Fourteen education and civil rights organizations have put together [these recommendations](#) for crafting a COVID-19 response that equitably serves the most vulnerable learners.
- NAPE's "[Let's Talk](#)" series of archived webinars addresses equity gaps exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The American Youth Policy Forum has compiled [collections of resources](#) for serving disadvantaged populations, such as youth in foster care and justice-involved youth.
- This resource introduces the [Multi-tiered System of Support](#).
- [The Key](#), an Inside Higher Ed podcast, explores the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on education and career plans of Black Americans and Latino Americans.
- This [NCLA](#) podcast discusses access and opportunity for underserved learners in urban areas during the pandemic.
- CAST has a number of resources for UDL and accessibility, including the [Universal Design for Learning guidelines](#), the [National Center on Accessible Educational Materials, questions to ask before selecting educational materials](#) and [tips for developing learning goals](#).
- [UDL on Campus](#) discusses the legal obligations of postsecondary institutions with respect to the accessibility of digital learning materials and related guidance.
- [ExploreAccess.org](#) has published a toolkit for designing an accessible course online.
- This [summary](#) includes specific questions educators can ask about technology accessibility.
- Michigan Virtual University's [Supporting Students with Disabilities in K–12 Online and Blended Learning](#) guide includes detailed considerations by disability type.
- The U.S. Department of Education's [Described and Captioned Media Program](#) provides media designed for students with disabilities, including CTE content.
- [This article](#) describes audiological considerations when wearing masks.
- ACTE, Penn State University's Workforce Education program and the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition hosted a [five-part webinar series](#) on CTE and special education in 2019.
- This resource from the [U.S. Department of Education](#) has tips and resources for cyber safety and digital citizenship.

This is an excerpt from [High-quality CTE: Planning for a COVID-19-impacted School Year](#). Access the complete guide for additional content about providing high-quality CTE programs in a COVID-19-impacted school year. **Last Update:** June 22, 2020

This document is not legal advice, nor is it an exhaustive list of every consideration or action that CTE educators may need to take for the 2020–21 school year. Readers should defer to federal, state, local and/or institution requirements and guidance. The instructional models, ideas, resources, tools and examples shared do not constitute endorsements of any products, services or strategies, as different products, services and strategies will work in different contexts. As knowledge is gained, this guide may be updated to incorporate new ideas and resources and emerging issues.



Access & Equity: Key Questions to Consider

Cross-cutting Questions

- How will the availability, scheduling and delivery of tutoring and other interventions impact students' ability to participate in CTE courses?
- How can professionals and paraprofessionals with expertise in special education, English language instruction and other services help you support learners with different needs?
- How will you maintain communication with learners and their families about their needs, both educationally and for services like food, housing and transportation?
- How will you support learners' social-emotional and mental health needs?
- How can you support learners' access to and continuation along high-quality career pathways?

In-person Questions

- Will medically vulnerable learners and instructors return to campus? If not, how can you provide technology and online platforms for them to learn and teach remotely?
- Can you schedule separate, one-on-one time for medically vulnerable learners on campus or through socially distanced visits at home?
- Can you acquire transparent masks or face shields for instructors who work with learners who are deaf or hard of hearing and English learners?
- Can you let blind and low-vision learners practice navigating redesigned facilities?
- What low-tech or high-tech assistive technologies will learners need for socially distanced in-person instruction?

Remote Questions

- Will the district or institution provide computers and hotspots to all learners or to learners who need them? Will your program use Perkins and CARES Act funding for these purchases, or coordinate with other community services?
- If learners must use specific technology or materials for a project at home, how will you fund and provide those materials?
- How will you address learners who have conflicts, such as working or caring for siblings, during synchronous instruction?
- What accessibility features are available through your LMS; for instance, captioning and described media, text-to-speech capabilities and assessment accommodations?
- How can you verify the accessibility of educational technology tools, including XR and other simulations? Who in your IT and/or special education department can assist with this?
- How can you develop course modules with easy-to-implement accessibility features like clean design and captioning? How can you design remote assessments with appropriate accommodations?
- How and when can learners contact you or other staff, such as special education professionals or English language instructors, for additional support and explanation?
- How can you provide learners with a menu of different ways for interacting and demonstrating their knowledge and skills?
- How can you protect and empower learners against cyberbullying and harassment?

Blended Questions

- If the blended scenario in your district or institution puts medically vulnerable and/or special population learners back on campus, how will you schedule and space these groups to maintain social distancing?
- How will instructors balance their in-person teaching time with these learners while offering remote instruction to all other learners?