# CTE Program Accountability

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Across the country, school districts and governments are focusing attention on how to adequately prepare young adults to enter the working world. In Rhode Island RIDE has invested significant resources into developing CTE programs in secondary schools to meet these goals. These CTE programs prepare high school students for both college and career, and act as a launching pad as students move into the workforce and postsecondary education and training.

**The Problem:** Rhode Island has over 150 CTE programs in industries ranging from culinary and pastry arts to construction technology and biomanufacturing. Based on the program standards established by the CTE Board of Trustees, RIDE developed an approval process for new programs. However, the department lacks a comprehensive, ongoing evaluation and renewal process to continue incentivizing high-performing programs. The challenge is in defining what makes a program high-performing, and identifying evaluation strategies that encourage school leaders to be ambitious. A good evaluation system would also promote communication between RIDE and schools, giving RIDE a chance to provide support and resources where necessary without unintentionally punishing schools that serve more challenging populations.

**Central Research Question:** The central question we address is: *How can RIDE design and implement an evaluation system for CTE programs that incentivizes rigorous programming and successful outcomes for students?*

We then break this central question into two primary research questions:

1. What metrics should RIDE use to evaluate CTE programs?
2. How should RIDE use these measures to evaluate CTE programs?

**Proposed Metrics:** We have identified six key criteria to evaluate potential outcomes and measures that might make up an evaluation system. Each measure should **incentivize excellence** and be **“un-game-able,” transparent, operationally feasible, politically feasible, and coherent in message.** Using these criteria, we evaluated 11 outcomes recommended by academic experts, practitioners in other states, and non-profit leaders to ensure that they not only met the criteria, but were also outcomes-focused instead of inputs-focused. Our emphasis on prioritizing outcomes is based on evaluation literature that finds that a focus on outcomes, rather than intermediary measures and inputs, gives space for creativity and innovation, while pushing programs to be ambitious rather than meet a minimum standard.

We recommend RIDE measure the following outcomes for each CTE program in the state:

1. **Persistence** (within the CTE program and secondary schooling)
   1. Percent of concentrators who finish the full CTE course sequence
   2. High school graduation rate for concentrators and participants
2. **Credentials**  
   Percent of concentrators who become completers by:
   1. Earning at least one postsecondary credit; OR
   2. Obtaining advanced standing in a registered apprenticeship; OR
   3. Obtaining an industry-recognized credential
3. **Post-CTE achievement**
   1. Postsecondary education and training enrollment rate OR job obtainment rate for concentrators
   2. Average wage for completers entering the workforce after secondary relative to average wage for high school graduates
4. **Cost-effectiveness** 
   1. Cost of program per completer (comparing across same programs of study)
5. **Equity**
   1. Demographics of program compared to larger school and district, % of non-traditional completers

**Recommendations:** We recommend RIDE create an annual CTE program “report card,” similar to the practice in Ohio and Tennessee. This report card should record the results of each of these 5 categories, as well as a letter grade or star rating for each category. These evaluations can then be used to inform program renewal decisions. Releasing the report card publicly, and including information on each category and how it is calculated, will ensure that the evaluation system benefits not just RIDE, but also students, families, and industry representatives seeking to understand which programs provide the best training and opportunities for students.

**Next Steps:** As a part of this work, we have found that data that CTE programs report to RIDE is not consistent or reliable for all relevant measures. One goal of this evaluation system is to make CTE data reporting meaningful in a new way in the state, which we believe will increase accuracy and compliance with reporting processes. However, RIDE may also need to provide additional resources and trainings to foster a system of high-quality data collection and transmission. For some key measures, such as numbers of students receiving industry recognized credentials, RIDE should consider methods beyond program self-reporting to collect data. We recommend RIDE follow the lead of other states by investigating the establishment of direct data-sharing links with the industry groups that issue certifications to improve accuracy.

This system will be a major change in how Rhode Island assess and evaluates CTE programs. We recommend that representatives from RIDE discuss the plan with key stakeholders in both formal and informal settings and develop a multi-year plan for rollout in conjunction with these stakeholders.