

The Benefits of Implementing a Career and Technical Student Organization

Increasing pressure to meet state standards, cutbacks in funding and programs all have put an enormous load on career and technical education instructors. In a time when cutting back has become the norm, the one area that CTE teachers should not compromise is that of the career and technical student organization (CTSO).

The value of a CTSO is greater than ever. When implemented correctly by a dedicated and trained CTE instructor, the CTSO is an integral part of a well-structured, high-performing CTE program.

According to the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), “CTSOs play an important part in preparing young people to become productive citizens and to assume roles of leadership in their communities. These organizations provide a unique program of career and leadership development, motivation, and recognition for secondary and post-secondary students.”

CTSOs have been proven to be extremely effective instructional tools. While terms like “curricular” or “co-curricular” have been used to describe CTSO activities, there is no question that CTSOs are **anything but EXTRA-curricular**. CTSOs are not “clubs” or “competitions.” They are much, much more.

According to SkillsUSA, CTSO activities are integral to career and technical education when they:

- Are instructional strategies used to develop, improve and expand occupational competencies related to a particular career and technical subject and as such increase the relevance of the instruction;
- Enrich and enhance classroom/laboratory learning as an extension of the classroom/laboratory instructional program;
- Present organized activities for students to gain personal and leadership skills, making them more employable, preparing them to become productive citizens and assisting them in assuming positive roles in the home and community;
- Demonstrate goals and purposes that parallel the philosophy of career and technical education and the subject matter (or program area) which the organization reinforces, and are compatible with the overall purposes and objectives of career and technical education today; and,
- Provide training and realistic learning experiences in an organized educational program that are directly related to the preparation of individuals for employment in careers and preparation for their roles as active family and community members.

CTSOs flourish best as an instructional tool when they are integrated into the CTE curriculum by a trained, dedicated and enthusiastic educator. The teacher provides organized curriculum-oriented

activities that help students gain career, leadership and personal skills that maximize employability and the ability to become productive citizens in the workforce, home and community.

There are several career and technical student organizations, each catering to a different career cluster. The most prominent are: DECA, FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America), FCCLA (Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America), National FFA Organization, HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America), SkillsUSA, and TSA (Technology Student Association). The state advisors of each of the organizations are more than willing to help you find the right CTSO for you. However, regardless of which organization a teacher, school, or district decides to implement, all the CTSOs offer the same benefits to students:

Each CTSO:

- Provides for personal development. Through leadership training, as well as local, state and district conferences, students involved in a CTSOs help young people in the maturation process, helping them grow and assume active roles in their community.
- Develops “people” skills. Each CTSO program helps students develop life-long skills such as developing interpersonal relationships, teamwork, and setting and achieving goals.
- Develops leadership skills. Research has shown that membership in a CTSO fosters and develops positive leadership skills. CTSO members are more likely to take active roles in their community.
- Provides for experiential learning. Each CTSO utilizes a hands-on approach to learning – whether it be in a leadership training or a competitive event.
- Develops responsibility. CTSO members learn to take responsibility for their actions; to be accountable. CTSO members learn that for any organization to be successful, each member must do his or her part.
- Develops self-confidence. By experiencing success – again whether in a leadership role by speaking to business, industry or political leaders, or even through a competitive event – CTSO members gain a new sense of self-confidence in their skills and abilities.
- Provides opportunities for recognition. Many young people have never had an opportunity to be recognized for their work or earned a single award. Through CTSO activities, young people are provided with a wide range of activities that allow them to showcase their skills and talents in an arena where they can be recognized by business and industry professionals.
- Provides a positive atmosphere. Young people today come from a variety of backgrounds; not all of which are desirable or healthy. In many cases, a CTSO may be the only nurturing and positive environment the young person will experience.

- Develops a sense of community and volunteerism. Community improvement and development is a hallmark characteristic of each and every CTSO. Through participation in these activities, members learn they are part of a larger community.
- Improves communication and decision making skills. Public speaking and participation in meetings is an integral part of each CTSO program. In these activities students learn to think on their feet and make quick decisions.
- Cultivates new friends and develops respect for others. There is no doubt that part of a CTSO is social development and awareness; many life-long friendships have developed through CTSO activities.
- Promotes career awareness. By participating in CTSO activities, members become aware of new career opportunities that they may have not even known existed prior to their becoming involved with a CTE organization.
- Develops an appreciation and understanding for cultural diversity. By participating in CTSO activities, members are exposed to a wide range of cultures and peoples in a variety of environments.
- Develops skills and responsibilities associated with being a role model and mentor. There are countless opportunities for CTSO members to interact with alumni as well as younger students in promoting CTE and their own CTSO.
- Offers opportunities to earn scholarships, awards and other forms of recognition. Through participation in CTSO activities, members often are awarded scholarships and other prizes for their efforts.
- Fosters a sense of belonging. It is human nature to want to be accepted, and young people are acutely aware of this – they want to belong, to fit in. CTSOs provide a positive alternative to other groups, such as gangs.
- Offer opportunities to travel. Many young people, even in this day and age, go on their first real trip or first overnight trip away from home while participating in CTSO activities. In some cases, there may even be opportunities for international travel!
- Reinforce workplace basics:
 - Learning to learn: CTSOs encourage student-led learning and experimentation requiring members to absorb, process and apply new information quickly and effectively. The more capable young people are of learning on their own, the greater their value to an employer.
 - Reading, writing and computation: For members, operating student-led CTSO chapters, participating in financial leadership activities and being involved in state and national conferences/competitive events, CTSO programs provide an assortment of opportunities to practice and refine reading, writing and computational skills.

- Communicating effectively: CTSOs encourage the refinement of speaking, listening and feedback skills.
- Creative thinking and problem-solving: Through chapter management activities, CTSO members practice and refine their problem-solving skills in groups. By learning to work effectively in a CTSO chapter, members, when employees, are better able to solve productivity problems.
- Personal management: CTSOs improve personal management skills, including: heightened self-esteem; goal-setting; goal achievement; and career direction, education and training analysis. CTSOs provide situations to practice and refine skills that can be applied successfully in the workplace to resolve problems and foster innovation.
- Group effectiveness: Employment statistics show that the “team approach” results in higher productivity, product quality and increased quality of work life. For this reason CTSOs provide “group-oriented” activities to develop and refine interpersonal, negotiating and team building skills. By being able to work effectively as a member of a group, career and technical students will achieve the flexibility and adaptability that America’s work force must have to remain competitive globally.

You are encouraged to contact the state advisor of the CTSO that best matches your program’s needs. Each advisor is more than willing to help you develop, grow and sustain your chapter. Colorado’s CTSO state advisors are:

- **DECA** - Everett Vaughan, State Advisor -- 303-595-1576 // Email: everett.vaughan@cccs.edu
- **FBLA** - Deborah Ramirez, State Advisor -- 303-595-1583 // Email: deborah.ramirez@cccs.edu
- **FCCLA** - Patti Krattenmaker, State Advisor -- 303-595-1581 // Email: patti.krattenmaker@cccs.edu
- **National FFA** - Kenton Ochsner, State Advisor -- 303-595-1562 // Email: kenton.ochsner@cccs.edu
- **HOSA** - Jennifer Staley, State Advisor -- 720.858.2752 // Email: jennifer.staley@cccs.edu
- **SkillsUSA** and **TSA** - Tony Raymond, State Advisor -- Phone: 720-858-2794 // Email: tony.raymond@cccs.edu