Five Practices for Tackling Systemic Inequality

Career and Technical Education (CTE) is a promising way to achieve skilled careers and economic empowerment. However, people from marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by systemic inequalities that limit their access to these life-changing programs. By committing to building a level playing field in CTE offerings, we can ensure everyone has equal access to these opportunities.

Here are five best practices to guide you in building welcoming admissions and recruitment for your CTE programs:

1. **Audit Your Policies and Practices:** Examine admissions criteria, course delivery methods, and institution culture with a critical eye. Recognize how existing practices, even unintentionally, might perpetuate disparities based on race, socioeconomic status, gender, or ability. Involve learners, families, and community stakeholders in this assessment to gain diverse perspectives.

2. **Embrace Diverse Voices and Learning Styles:** Move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach. Understand the cultural backgrounds and experiences of your learners. Integrate culturally relevant examples and resources into curriculum and instruction. Ensure your teaching methods cater to various learning styles and abilities. Celebrate unique backgrounds, not erase them.

3. **Build Pathways, Not Roadblocks:** Identify and address factors that disproportionately affect certain groups, such as lack of transportation, financial constraints, or limited English proficiency. Develop targeted outreach programs, scholarship opportunities, and transportation assistance—partner with community organizations to bridge logistical and informational gaps. Make participation in CTE programs truly accessible.

4. **Empower Instructors as Agents of Change:** Equip instructors with the knowledge and skills needed to champion inclusive classrooms. Offer regular professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy, implicit bias, and disability awareness—Foster collaboration among instructors to share best practices and address challenges collectively.

5. **Commit to Continuous Improvement:** Use data as a compass: track student participation, course completion rates, and career outcomes across demographics. Identify disparities and set specific goals for addressing them. Regularly refine policies and practices based on data and feedback from learners, families, and educators.

Eliminating systemic inequality in CTE is not an optional task; it's imperative. By putting in place some effective practices, we can break down the barriers separating students from different backgrounds and provide them with more enriching opportunities. Let's build bridges of opportunity and see the extraordinary potential of a truly welcoming CTE program unfold.

Resources: Leading for Equity: Opportunities for State Education Chiefs • Culturally Responsive Education: What Does It Look Like? • Practitioner Perspectives on Equity in Career and Technical Education