

CTE for All

Expanding Access to Career and Technical
Education in Rhode Island



Summer 2024



RIDE Rhode Island
Department
of Education

Reimagining Education

From Hope to Results

A vision for Rhode Island that embraces accountability, collaboration, and **high expectations for all.**

We are anchored in these principles:

Students Come First

All of our decisions serve all Rhode Island students.

Equity and Access Matter

We value diversity and recognize that all students are capable of learning and achieving.

Transparency is Key

We make information transparent and accessible so that our decisions can be driven by data.

Focus on Results

We are unwavering in our goals, but flexible in our approach.

WORLD-CLASS TALENT

- Attract, recruit and retain a highly-skilled workforce
- Put professional learning at the center of improvement
- Grow and diversify the educator pipeline
- Create flexible pathways into the profession
- Provide leadership development opportunities

EXCELLENCE IN LEARNING

- Set high expectations, high standards and quality curriculum
- Close equity gaps
- Build pathways aligned to student interests, needs, and careers
- Take a whole student approach and prioritize school culture
- Maintain 21st century learning environments

ENGAGED COMMUNITIES

- Establish governance structures that respond to families
- Elevate the student and community voice
- Create high-quality options for all Rhode Islanders
- Forge partnerships with community and industry
- Invite feedback and create responsive policies accordingly



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Serving Up Success in Central Falls

The city may only be one square mile, but Central Falls is thinking big with its student-run food truck. Procured through the Rhode Island Department of Education's Menu for Success Initiative in 2023, the food truck is more than a mobile kitchen; it's a transformative educational tool for the district's Transition program. By combining practical skills with real-world experience, 'A Taste of Central Falls' and its accompanying curriculum and opportunities prepare differently abled students age 18 to 22 for a future of independence and success.



'A Taste of Central Falls' food truck.

"CTE is for everybody," said Cristina Sanchez Serrano, CTE Director for Central Falls High School.

By working on the food truck, students gain hands-on experience in various



Student Damariz Sequen, Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green, and special education teacher Jennamarie O'Neill at RIDE's Menu for Success Student Food Truck Roundup on May 4, 2024.

aspects of the culinary and business world. Students, who are all ServSafe certified, also run RISE Café, an acronym for Rising Independent Student Entrepreneurs. The students increase their independence by practicing their cooking skills, learning and applying employability skills, and enhancing their communication and collaboration. The café has a full menu with a specialty item added every Friday. The students shop for and purchase the food, prepare the meals, deliver the food, and develop their financial literacy by making change for the staff. They practice job-specific skills in the retail field by collecting inventory, putting away the products, and stocking the shelves of the café storefront.

“We’re really trying to be innovative and think outside of the box to include everyone of all abilities,” said Briana Jones, Transition teacher at Central Falls High School. “They really get to learn the soft skills and the employability skills that they would need in the workplace on top of the culinary skills, the teamwork, and the collaboration.”

From menu design to inventory management, students like Isamar Marin Corjito take on various responsibilities throughout the school year. This exposure is crucial for personal development, as it helps them build confidence and competence that will benefit them in future employment.

“It’s amazing. You get a lot of experience,” said Corjito. “We love to share our culture and foods with everyone.”

Central Falls students in the Transition program have gone on to work for employers including Central Falls City Hall, the school district, and various businesses in the city and across Rhode Island.

“Central Falls School District believes ALL students should have access to and participate in our Career Technical Education pathways so that they can graduate college and career ready,” said Superintendent Dr. Stephanie Downey Toledo. “We are excited for this opportunity for the students who each have individualized education programs (IEPs) meaningfully engaging in CTE to confidently and

successfully transition into post-secondary and career opportunities.”

Across the state, career and technical education has proven to be a powerful mechanism for diverse learners to become college and career ready. Through the completion of CTE programs, students have entered the full range of occupations represented in the Rhode Island and national economy. According to RIDE data, roughly 25% of the approximate 12,000 CTE students in the 2022-2023 school year had an IEP, 504 Plan, or both.

“By focusing on the strengths and abilities of students, CTE programs provide opportunities for differently-abled students to excel in areas where they might struggle in a conventional academic setting,” said Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green. “Our vision of ‘CTE for All’ is about opening doors for every student in Rhode Island. Together, we can create a system that not only meets the needs of our students but also drives Rhode Island forward.”



Isamar Marin Corjito at RIDE's inaugural Menu for Success Student Food Truck Roundup.

Due to systemic barriers, differently-abled students face a range of obstacles when it comes to accessing and successfully completing this coursework. Challenges include accessibility and accommodations, attitudes and stereotypes, teacher capacity and confidence with instruction, and policy and administrative challenges. In the fall of 2022, RIDE surveyed CTE teachers statewide to understand the level to which these educators believed they had the ability to effectively teach students with IEPs or 504 plans. The results were overwhelmingly clear: CTE teachers both wanted and needed targeted and specific professional learning aimed at boosting their skills and knowledge in delivering instruction to these students.

professional development series culminating with peer observations this spring. From Biomedical Science to Construction Technology, the participating educators represent every career cluster in Rhode Island CTE.

“My experience in the CTE equity PD was extremely rewarding and positive. I learned so many strategies and techniques to bring back to my classroom including the P3 (Positive Personal Profile), leadership style tasks and an abundance of resources on how to support differently abled students in CTE classes (and all classes),” said Smithfield High School science and teacher preparation teacher Liz Russillo.



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EDUCATION COMMISSIONER ANGÉLICA INFANTE-GREEN

To help move the needle, RIDE in 2023 launched the third round of CTE Equity grants, with this program specifically focused on expanding CTE access and instruction for differently-abled students. This winter, 49 CTE teachers from 29 local education agencies (LEAs) began a comprehensive

Russillo, who is also chair of the science department and 2020 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year, said one of the best components of the professional development was the opportunity to collaborate and even visit other educators teaching in the same pathway.



Smithfield High School educator and 2020 Teacher of the Year Liz Russillo with her students.

“Learning first hand from other educators in the same pathway is so incredibly valuable. I am bringing back the resources and the P3 to my classroom and school community so that they can be sure to look at the positive attributes of all learners,” said Russillo. “My message to fellow educators regarding expanding access and instruction within CTE to differently abled students is very simple: DO IT! Working in this program highlights the skills that all students can bring to the classroom and how we can celebrate and learn from our differently abled students.”

As part of the training series, educators will submit work products as evidence of skill and knowledge attainment. Due to the program's success, RIDE is offering a summer extension opportunity for the

educators to create a deliverable to implement with their students in the fall. These same educators also have the opportunity to embark on a ‘phase 2’ of the training which will involve a direct partnership with a special educator from their school. And finally, a second cohort of CTE teachers will participate in this professional learning in the spring of 2025. The professional development program also provides generous stipends to educators and funding for substitute coverage.

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EDUCATOR LIZ RUSSILLO

EMPOWERING THROUGH EXPERIENCE: CTE FOR ALL

“Through investments like the CTE Equity Grants, RIDE is sending a clear message that we believe in all students and are dedicated to providing the opportunities they need to succeed,” said Commissioner Infante-Green. “We also recognize that our educators are the foundation of this transformative effort, and we are committed to supporting them. By equipping our teachers with the tools and training they need, we ensure that they can deliver high-quality, inclusive education that empowers every student to thrive in their chosen career paths.”

As ‘Taste of Central Falls’ continues to serve up delicious dishes, the student-operated food truck and culinary program serves as a powerful testament to the potential of every student when given the right opportunities and support.

This innovative program is not just feeding the community; it is nurturing the next generation of skilled, confident, and independent young adults, truly embodying Rhode Island’s vision of ‘CTE for All.’



Special education and Transitions program teacher Briana Jones at the Menu for Success Student Food Truck Roundup on May 4, 2024.



Victor Benitez, Luis Santana, and Alejandro Torres in ‘A Taste of Central Falls’ student food truck.



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