



CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION



Since 2015, California policymakers have invested more than a billion dollars to support the expansion of Career and Technical Education (CTE) across the state. This investment aligns with complimentary reforms to the state's school accountability system aimed in part at expanding definitions of student and school success. These two simultaneous initiatives—increased funding and supportive policy—have allowed California districts and schools to expand CTE course offerings for students and generate meaningful partnerships with business and industry. The Merced Union High School District (MUHSD) provides a promising example for other districts interested in leveraging existing funding and policies to expand CTE in an equitable manner. Vital to MUHSD's push to expand CTE was leveraging funding available through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and setting clear goals for college and career readiness in its Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). The influx of state funding and policy changes was coupled with efforts to ensure all student groups have equitable access to CTE in MUHSD.

Addressing Issues of Access and Equity

MUHSD's push to expand CTE course offerings, particularly for student groups who have been underserved in public education, has required the district to address issues of equity that otherwise may have remained under the surface. According to district administrators, efforts to increase CTE access have required district and school leaders to think outside the box to implement equitable policies and practices. Crucial to these implementation efforts is the belief that access in and of itself is not enough. Access must be coupled with equitable support for students. This belief stems from the district's multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), which emphasizes providing all students with supportive opportunities to engage in relevant, real-world learning.

Specifically, MUHSD has expanded CTE access for students with special needs, English Learners, and other traditionally underserved student groups. As a result, CTE teachers are encountering equity issues they have not seen before, requiring them to alter their instruction by providing support and accommodations to ensure all students in their classrooms are successful. As one example, Atwater High School now offers agriculture CTE courses in Spanish for English Learners. As another example, MUHSD has promoted access to CTE for students at alternative and continuation schools by first ensuring they are informed about CTE opportunities and then providing them with district-funded transportation to access these opportunities. As MUHSD continues to increase access to CTE for all students, it is likely that schools and teachers will be presented with an expanding array of pressing equity issues to address.



A Clear Goal for College and Career Readiness

The first page of MUHSD's LCAP clearly states its main goal as a district. MUHSD's "number one goal is for students to be BOTH college and career ready." This goal requires students to "become innovators, creative and critical thinkers, collaborative teammates and effective communicators." CTE is key to MUHSD's vision, and is supported by the explicit declaration of goals and actions to pursue them outlined in MUHSD's LCAP. MUHSD's journey demonstrates that district leaders must be relentless in the pursuit of every opportunity afforded to them in their efforts to expand CTE, and that CTE provides new opportunities

to engage all students.

It is important to note that LCFF and associated LCAP have been just one set of structures used to expand CTE in MUHSD. Below is a partial list demonstrating the numerous strategies, structures, and resources through which MUHSD is expanding CTE course offerings:

- A clear vision for CTE articulated through LCAP goals and a CTE Master Plan
- Clear goals for increasing access to CTE for student groups who are underserved
- One million dollars of LCFF funding specific to implementing CTE pathways
- A graduation requirement that all students take at least two CTE courses
- A requirement that English Learners to take an elective in lieu of additional English courses
- Additional district resources, including a CTE resource booklet and CTE frameworks
- Technical review committees specific to each career pathway

- A partnership with Fresno Pacific University to train CTE teachers
- Labor market research to determine the most in demand industries in the Merced area
- District administrator-led “CTE Roadshows” designed to market MUHSD CTE programs to industry partners
- A ninth-grade CTE interest plan with an accompanying survey
- Soliciting stakeholder input on MUHSD’s CTE Master Plan

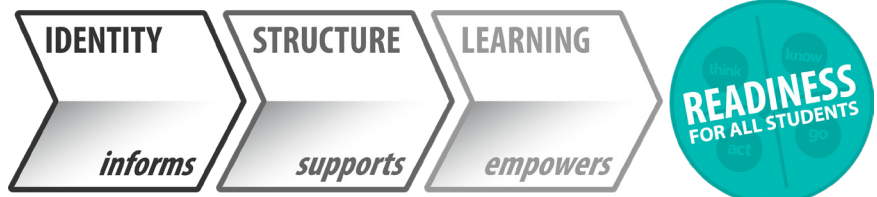
The partial list above aligns to organizational theory and what we refer to as The Inflexion Approach (see callout box). MUHSD’s goals for expanding access to CTE are consistent with its identity as a district promoting deeper learning through hands-on learning experiences and educational equity. Moreover, the selected organizational structures described in the list above help ensure that MUHSD’s stated goals are implemented and sustained at the student-level.

Leveraging Local Control to Improve Equity

The ongoing work in MUHSD presents a promising model for other districts hoping to expand definitions of student success and promoting equity through CTE. Key to this process is the ability of MUHSD to articulate its goals for college and career readiness in its LCAP and to support those goals through LCFF funding, one of several organizational structures supporting the expansion of CTE access. The focus on promoting equity by expanding CTE access has required MUHSD to identify and address issues that may prevent some students from accessing and succeeding in CTE coursework. When state-level policy is effective it pushes district administrators, school leaders, and teachers to identify and address issues that prevent student groups traditionally underserved in public education from accessing deeper learning opportunities that improve their college and career readiness. We see evidence of this type of necessary tension in MUHSD through efforts to expand CTE.

The Inflexion Approach entails setting clear goals for college and career readiness consistent with a district’s identity and then designing or redesigning supporting organizational structures (e.g., systems, policies, processes) that promote coherency between the district’s goals and the learning that happens in the classroom. It is rooted in the work of Peter Senge and Michael Fullan and was developed by Inflexion’s Executive Director, Dr. Matt Coleman.

THE **inflexion** APPROACH



The Inflexion Approach highlights four elements critical for making quality decisions to create learning environments that prepare students for life after high school. For more information, visit <https://www.inflexion.org/>