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Contact: DPI Media Line, (608) 266-3559, media.inquiries@dpi.wi.gov

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Every Wisconsin student should have access to career-building opportunities

*A guest editorial for publication by State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly
highlighting Career and Technical Education Month*

Imagine you walk into a Wisconsin high school— you see students scurrying around a student-run café, hear the hum of a hydroponic grow station for salad greens, and the noticeable buzz of power tools from the school auto shop. You might see students collecting fresh eggs from the school chicken coop or practicing CPR on mannequins. These scenes aren't out of the ordinary in many of our schools - they're the pulse of career and technical education programs shaping the future for our students and communities.

But here's the reality: Not every Wisconsin high school has the ability to offer these opportunities.

While some schools have been able to invest in CTE innovation and programming, others lack resources or support to provide students with hands-on experiences. The gap in access to CTE programming is a significant issue, one that prevents many students from exploring potential career paths and building the technical skills needed to thrive in today's workforce.

[February is Career and Technical Education Month](#), and it's the perfect time to recognize the transformative impact CTE programs have for Wisconsin students. Yet we must also acknowledge the need for equitable access to these critical programs across the state.

Schools offering CTE programs aren't just teaching technical skills; they're fueling students' imaginations, inspiring future careers, and helping equip them with real-world experience. This should be a reality for every student, not just those in certain districts.

According to [a 2022 report by Advance CTE](#), Wisconsin is one of just six states that do not have some type of dedicated funding for the development of CTE programs in public schools.

These opportunities are much more than just an alternative to traditional education - they are crucial in preparing students for successful careers and a brighter future. When students see a direct link between their academics and future job opportunities, they are more engaged and motivated to learn.

(more)

To ensure all students have the opportunity to thrive, we must invest in expanding and improving access to CTE programs statewide, especially in schools lacking these offerings.

[My 2025-27 biennial budget request](#) includes targeted funding aimed at growing CTE programming across the state, providing more students with access to these life-changing opportunities. We also need to invest in Career and Technical student Organizations, which gives students a chance to connect with industry professionals, gain valuable leadership skills, and explore career pathways. My budget provides funding to those CTSOs - DECA, FCCLA, HOSA, FBLA, FFA and SkillsUSA - so that they, too, can expand their footprint and get more students involved.

As we celebrate CTE Month, let's also celebrate the educators, students, and industry partners who have formed partnerships and help these programs thrive. Their dedication fosters innovation builds confidence among students, and ensures all students - regardless of where they live - have the tools to succeed in the career they choose.

Together, we're building a stronger future for Wisconsin's workforce and communities.

Let's continue to invest in these programs so that every student across Wisconsin can experience the transformative power of career and technical education.

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NOTE: An official photo of Dr. Underly [is available on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's website](#). This guest editorial is available online on the DPI's news release webpage.