



## OPPORTUNITY AMERICA

# CTE CHARTER SCHOOLS TWO SESSIONS

In June 2017, Opportunity America organized two sessions at the 2017 National Charter Schools Conference. The focus: charter schools experimenting with or devoted to career and technical education.

Most CTE charter schools are new. They are still relatively few in number. But Opportunity America believes their double-barreled approach – organized as charters and focused on career education – is poised to take off, adding an important new dimension to the charter school movement and spurring much needed growth in CTE.

Once one of the most disparaged forms of education in the U.S, what used to be called vocational education, now renamed and reimagined as career and technical education, has emerged in the past decade as one of the most promising approaches to equipping students for the future. Decades of effort have taught educators a sobering lesson: preparing low-income, less academically engaged learners for college is an uphill battle, and the percentage who succeed remains disappointingly low. CTE offers an alternative way to engage students in learning, make academic curriculum seem more relevant to their lives and teach how rewarding it can be to focus and succeed, all while equipping them with the skills they need to excel in the workplace – in high-demand, high-paying jobs.

Still, for all these advantages, many charter educators have been slow to see the appeal of CTE. The charter movement has traditionally been focused on college access: getting students from families that often had no exposure to higher education into and through four-year colleges. This remains a critical mission, but the movement is evolving, diversifying its aims and methods – and Opportunity America believes charter schools are uniquely positioned to deliver on the promise of CTE.

Charters are less rule-bound and more flexible than other CTE schools. It's often easier for them to partner with employers, integrate academic offerings and career education, experiment with the rhythm of the school day and create opportunities for work-based learning. Charter educators are natural innovators, experienced at starting schools and growing school networks. Bringing the two approaches together could be an unbeatable combination – using the unique advantages of charter schools to boost the power of CTE.

The question at the heart of the Opportunity America project: what can or should be done to help this new trend take off and grow?

In spring 2017, OA explored this question at two convenings – a public panel of experts and an inward-facing peer-to-peer roundtable with educators on the cutting edge of the new movement.



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# A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN CTE CHARTER SCHOOLS

Opportunity America convened a panel at the 2017 National Charter Schools Conference to discuss career and technical education charter schools. Policy experts, school administrators and an employer partner explored the promise of CTE charters and the challenges confronting charter educators launching CTE programs. In the audience: some 100 charter school educators from across the country.

**MODERATOR** Tamar Jacoby president, Opportunity America



*"We're here to talk about the intersection of two educational worlds – CTE schools and charter schools. We think charter schools are uniquely positioned to deliver on the promise of career and technical education. They're less rule-bound. They're more flexible. It's often easier for them to partner with employers and create opportunities for work-based learning."*

**Michael Petrilli** president, Thomas B. Fordham Institute

*"The charter movement has traditionally said, 'Bachelor degree or bust.' But we as a country are not that good at getting low-income and working-class kids through college . . . The challenge now is that we don't have enough CTE – not enough offerings or seats. But getting to scale is something the charter school movement knows something about. We know how to start schools. We know how to grow networks of schools."*



**Kristin Kearns-Jordan** chief executive officer, Urban Assembly, New York City



*"The traditional district bureaucracy can make a CTE educator crazy. I know – I run a network of district schools. Red tape and state-level CTE rules get in the way of innovating and doing things for kids . . . Charter educators are used to breaking the rules – not having rules or navigating around rules or pretending they don't exist. That's going to be really healthy for CTE charters."*

**Tori Stephens-Shauger** executive director and principal, ACE Leadership High School, Albuquerque, NM

*"We cofounded our school with the Associated General Contractors of New Mexico and their members, and they shape every aspect of what we do. They help us design curriculum. They provide professional development for teachers. They evaluate our students' projects. They help me understand the industry and what it needs – so I know what I'm aiming for and can prepare kids for the industry."*



**Yves Samake** executive chef, Ritz Carlton Hotels



*"As an employer, I do this for business reasons. I have a shortage of cooks. Partnering with a school is one of the best ways I have to find cooks . . . . Personally, I came up this way, doing what the French call a stage, on-site in a kitchen – and it made me who I am. It taught me to always aim higher and want to get better. That's the opportunity we want to give these students."*



Opportunity America is a Washington-based nonprofit promoting economic mobility – work, skills, careers, ownership and entrepreneurship for poor and working Americans. The organization's principal activities are research, policy development, dissemination of policy ideas and working to build consensus around policy proposals.