



CTE Director Playbook

Unlocking Career Success



This playbook provides ways in which Career & Technical Education (CTE) Directors and their teams can blur the lines between high school, postsecondary education, and the workforce. CTE Directors can play a significant role to Raise the Bar for student success by developing an *education-to-workforce system* that focuses on Unlocking Career Success.

Step 1

Link Students and Systems

Step 2

Align Resources

Step 3

Strengthen Partnerships

Link students, schools, and employers

Local CTE Directors often support educators, schools, and central office staff to scale the four keys to Unlocking Career Success, including dual or concurrent enrollment, work-based learning, industry credentials, and student advisement, and embed student and employer voice within the local education system. Connecting school operational routines, staff professional learning models, and other student supports is necessary to ensure high-quality career and technical education exists for every student. When linking students, schools, and employers, consider how to:



Connect education and workforce needs by aligning the school system strategic plan to state and local workforce needs and to related goals for career and college readiness, and by ensuring that federal or state CTE requirements, like the Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment are used to improve CTE program quality and student equity.



Help students prepare for high school by creating middle school CTE programs that link academic and technical instruction, support students to explore and develop their career interests and related employability skills and help students and their families to enroll in high-quality CTE programs that propel their futures.



Help students prepare for postsecondary education and careers by ensuring that student and educator voices are reflected in the implementation of career-connected learning and that there are opportunities for every student to pursue high-quality CTE programs that embed the four keys to Unlocking Career Success.

Tools to link students, schools, and employers:

Start in Middle School

CTE directors can support engagement with CTE starting in middle school. New Jersey's Middle Grades Career Awareness and Exploration Program provides grants to develop innovative career awareness and exploration programs in the middle grades.

Support Career Exploration

CTE Directors can also utilize other resources that help students identify career interests like Career Conversation Starters to guide career conversations with students and parents, developed by the American School Counselor Association, or the ASVAB Career Exploration Program, which provides no-cost planning tools to help students to make informed decisions based on their unique skills. Advance CTE also published the Student Interest Survey for Career Clusters®, which can help students to identify career clusters of interest, which are broader occupational groupings and may be helpful to assisting students with choosing between multiple career pathway programs.



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Tools to link students, schools, and employers (continued):

Share the Value of Career-Connected Learning

Develop and share resources that clearly communicate the value of career-connected learning and dispel common misconceptions. In Illinois, [Mundelein High School's Pathways Handbook](#) explains to students and families what CTE pathways are, why they matter, and other helpful tools. In Georgia, the Department of Education uses an [infographic](#) to help communicate the difference between vocational education and modern career, technical, and agricultural education. In Minnesota, the [Academies of Shakopee](#) provides a library of videos and other public engagement tools for high school career academies to empower students to explore careers without limiting options.

Focus on CTE Quality

Local CTE Directors should also have an eye towards aligned and high quality CTE implementation across the grade span. These efforts can be supported through evidence-based frameworks like [ACTE's High Quality CTE Framework](#) and the [Linked Learning Alliance School Model](#) that integrate rigorous academics with high-quality CTE, work-based learning, and student supports. The [P-TECH](#) model provides a framework to reimagine high school within a four- to six-year time frame to enable students to graduate with a high school degree, associate degree, and work-based learning experience.



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Align human and fiscal resources

There are multiple funding sources that local educational agencies can use to implement career-connected learning. Federal funds, including Perkins and ESEA formula funds, as well as discretionary grants can be leveraged to support local CTE programs and to implement each of the four keys to Unlocking Career Success. State and philanthropic funds may also be available for local initiatives. When aligning resources to support career-connected learning, consider how to:



Create a funding plan that includes federal, state, and local resources supporting the four keys to Unlocking Career Success, considers how these funds can be braided, and supports a plan to incorporate philanthropic, private, employer, or community-based funds that can be leveraged to support student and school system needs.



Braid financial resources to better leverage federal and state funds across the P12, postsecondary, and workforce systems to create and scale career pathways and to provide wrap-around and transition services for youth, which can include flexibilities in Perkins and other federal funding (e.g., see guidance on ARP, Apprenticeship, and Educator Preparation).



Link financial investments with student opportunity such as by negotiating a bulk cost model to support dual or concurrent enrollment programs at scale to help students pursue their postsecondary and career goals or by using free or low-cost resources like shared labor market data to support federal or state CTE program requirements.

Tools to align resources to support career-connected learning:

Utilize Available Data

Leverage low- or no-cost supports to align career-connected learning to in-demand careers in communities and to support the implementation of the Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment. Maryland's Department of Labor provides labor market information via the LMI Dashboard to support education and workforce development communities to make data-driven decisions. Wisconomy is a Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development tool that provides labor market data and visualizations to inform the alignment of education programs and workforce needs.

Braid Funding

Federal funds, including Perkins WIOA, and ESEA funds, as well as discretionary grants can be leveraged to support a CTE Director's vision. Wisconsin's Guide to Implementing Career-Based Learning Experiences describes work-based learning experiences that school districts may offer as part of their academic and career planning programming that utilizes these different funding streams.

Review Staffing Models

In Pennsylvania, the River Valley School District shares a joint employee with Penn College who serves as both the STEAM Academy Director and Executive Director of CTE Partnerships at the college. National partners like CompTIA Apprenticeships for Tech program can be leveraged to expand staff capacity, by working with local school systems to provide high school students with apprenticeship opportunities through its cybersecurity program.



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Build and strengthen partnerships

CTE programs require coordination across local education agencies and partnerships with employers and community-based organizations. Partnerships with intermediary organizations, public and private partnerships, and cross-agency teams improve opportunities for youth and support career pathways. When building and strengthening community and employer partnerships, consider how to:



Engage state and local workforce development boards to leverage and embed services offered through in-school and out-of-school youth programs under WIOA within the local education agency, as well as ways in which the school system can support the implementation of these programs.



Build strategic partnerships to expand the four keys to Unlocking Career Success, which can include partnerships with community and technical colleges to expand dual or concurrent enrollment programs in academic and career-focused coursework, eliminate remedial education courses, and expand industry credential programs.



Support intermediary organizations to build the capacity of the local education agency to engage employers and community-based organizations, to scale work-based learning opportunities, create or expand youth apprenticeship programs, and to support student career navigation and coaching.

Tools to establish a unified vision for career-connected learning:

Focus on Employer Engagement

Tools like the Advance CTE's Advancing Industry Engagement report can help to explain the essential role that business and industry can play in CTE and how to leverage WIOA sector strategies. The ColoradoStatePlan.com website provides guides and case studies to support the development of strong partnerships with employers. CTE Directors can leverage technology platforms like SmartFutures or Pathful to virtually connect students to business and industry mentors, and develop direct relationships with employers to support their students.

Leverage Intermediaries

Intermediaries can support employer engagement, scale student participation in work-based learning, and support curriculum development and industry credential alignment. In Oklahoma CareerTech schools partner with Express Employment Professionals to remove legal barriers for employers to participate in work-based learning. Express Employment Professionals is the actual employer of record for the student placement and covers the required workers' compensation insurance and liability.



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