



Establish a **Thriving** Career & Technical Education Program

5 Actions for Forward-Thinking Education Leaders

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Introduction

Career and Technical Education (CTE) equips students with the skills, knowledge, and training necessary to enter the workforce in [16 Career Clusters, with 79 job-specific pathways](#). These career clusters include many rapidly growing fields, such as health sciences, construction, and STEM. For example, [health sciences are expecting 13% growth](#) (and a staggering 2 million new jobs) between 2021 and 2031. If a student takes courses in health sciences before graduating, they can enter the workforce sooner and be fully prepared to do so—job opportunities will be waiting for them! CTE programs can introduce students to engaging, real-world coursework and prepare them to enter career fields that have the biggest workforce demands.

To be prepared to enter the workforce after graduation, skill building and career exploration must occur early in high school, and even as early as middle school! How are educators fitting in this kind of exploration alongside the currently expected academic coursework? CTE programs! CTE bridges the gap between education and industry, ensuring that students acquire both academic knowledge and relevant skills that are directly applicable to the workplace. These programs typically offer industry-recognized certifications or credentials that can enhance employability or better prepare students as they pursue further training in their chosen field.

As school leaders consider how to best prepare students for the future, starting a CTE program can feel like a massive undertaking. This guide offers a straightforward path toward implementing a CTE program that can help your community grow and your students thrive.

In this guide, we'll cover these actions that school leaders can take to build a Career and Technical Education program in their district or school.

ACTION:

Connect with your community to determine a direction for your program

Before diving headfirst into course descriptions and enrollment, consider which career clusters and pathways your CTE program will cover, starting with those that are relevant to your community. It's important to design a CTE program around local needs to ensure students in your particular community thrive after graduation. Reflect on careers that are prominent in your area and determine the skills and qualifications needed in those fields.

Tap into community resources by opening a conversation with leaders of local businesses and industries to get their guidance on workforce needs and demands. Forging partnerships with local businesses, industry associations, trade organizations, and professionals in relevant fields provides valuable insights into current industry trends, skills requirements, and potential job opportunities. Partnerships with these leaders can also lead to work-based learning opportunities, and guest speaker opportunities at your school.

Look to local community colleges or trade schools for further insight into their programs and how your program can complement theirs or help prepare students to enter these programs. These educational institutions may also be interested in collaborating with your district or school to create strategic, accelerated pathways directly into their programs.

While connecting with the community can help with choosing career fields, it can also inform the goals of the program. Gather a group of stakeholders like educators, industry and community leaders, parents, and even students, to form an advisory committee. Facilitate conversations with this committee to gather feedback and recommendations, then use this information to develop a clear vision for the CTE program and a strategic plan.

Take the next step: Create a survey to gather input from community members, parents, and educators on types of CTE programs they would like to see offered, potential career paths of interest, and if they are interested in serving on an advisory committee.



[Corporate Education Partnerships](#) connect schools with leaders of industry through career-focused content that can help students learn about a variety of fields. The [STEM Careers Coalition](#) and other high-quality content from leaders of industry are embedded in [Discovery Education Experience](#), and these resources can expose students to exciting career opportunities in the future.

ACTION:

Plan your program's curriculum and coursework pathway.

Building a CTE program is a great way to create new learning experiences, but it doesn't have to bring a full re-write of your current course catalog. Work closely with industry partners and advisory committees to identify industry standards, necessary technical skills, knowledge, and certifications you can use to anchor your program's coursework. Each Career Cluster also has their own [knowledge and skills statement and plan of study](#) created by Advance CTE.

Once your program goals are outlined, review your current course catalog to determine any courses that can infuse CTE content and meet the standards of your selected career cluster or your state's career-readiness standards. Some "traditional" courses can help build career-focused skills, such as the option to include graphic design curriculum into a Journalism course. The educators currently teaching some of these CTE-adjacent courses may have practical experience or an interest in helping students grow their career-prep skills. Reviewing your current course offerings and staff strengths should lead you to areas where new courses can be plugged in. There is also opportunity to infuse academic-based or transferable skills into each Career Cluster plan of study.

Once you've found an opportunity for new coursework, consult with local community colleges or technical schools who may offer similar courses to see if a potential partnership could be forged. Some CTE programs are established in conjunction with a post-secondary institution to offer students credits at these institutions, aid in certifications, and provide accelerated options.

A rigorous CTE program includes a balance of classroom instruction and hands-on training to provide students with practical experience. Lean on local industry experts and business leaders for guidance on how your program can potentially include work-based learning experiences such as internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and industry visits.

Take the next step: Evaluate your current course offerings and consider which courses could be revamped to include CTE content.



Once you've found areas of your curriculum that can include CTE content, that creates a whole new list of tasks—finding resources, creating lesson plans, and pacing your updated coursework. With high-quality, career-focused resources embedded in [Discovery Education Experience](#), your teachers can easily infuse activities built in partnership with leaders across a wide range of industries. Discovery Education also offers supplemental STEM programs, such as [Mystery Science](#) and [Pivot Interactives](#), that are easy to facilitate and engage students with real-world STEM learning. Students get a strong foundation of STEM skills that sets them up for success in future careers.

ACTION:

Find your funding and budget for its use

A critical part of any new school program is funding. CTE programs can come with a unique set of needs, such as new equipment, staffing, professional development, or even transportation costs to get students the opportunity to work on-the-job. Reflect on your school's current resources, curriculum, and classroom space to see if anything can be repurposed or used in your CTE course plans before turning to new funding.

As you reflect on your current resources, consider what low-cost or no-cost resources could be helpful for your program. High-quality, no-cost resources may be available from your district or from outside sources like [Advance CTE](#) or [Discovery Education's STEM Careers Coalition](#). To help with budgeting, start by finding resources that won't require additional funding.

When you have narrowed down your needs, it's time to find your funding! A variety of sources, including local, state, and federal grants, private foundations, and partnerships with industry sponsors, can help create and sustain CTE programs. Collaborate with these stakeholders that can contribute financial resources, underwrite expenses, or offer in-kind support.

Schools need appropriate facilities and equipment to support the hands-on training component of the CTE program. This could include specialized labs, workshops, or other industry-specific spaces. The equipment should reflect current industry standards and technologies to ensure students are learning with up-to-date tools, but it doesn't all have to come together at once. Take small steps to introduce your students to CTE content and prioritize top needs to pull your program together over time.

Representing a range of industry sectors, the STEM Careers Coalition prepares 10 million students for the future of work by 2025 by providing equitable access to digital content and experiences that engage students in instruction, build foundational STEM knowledge, and develop the critical skills students need for college and career success.



- STEM Careers Coalition Named Best Career Readiness Solution from Excellence in Equity Awards

Take the next step: Make a list of equipment your school currently has (computers, kitchen space, etc.) that could lend itself to a hands-on CTE learning experience for your students.

Reviewing education funding opportunities can be overwhelming (and tedious), but Discovery Education helps districts and schools break down different federal funding options available and can advise potential areas for grant writing. With guidance on funding from the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act and Title IV funding, both of which could help you gather the resources to create a strong CTE program, [Discovery Education makes it simple](#) to find new curriculum resources that will help prepare your students for the future.

ACTION:

Prepare your staff through professional learning and inform them of new opportunities

Your teachers will be on the front lines of this program, so ensuring they are prepared to lead students in career-prep coursework is a major part of your program's success. Teachers will need a clear understanding of the content and how to engage students in career-focused learning. Help your teachers navigate a new teaching landscape if they are involved in your CTE program and help them grow as the program grows!

Schools must have qualified instructors who possess expertise in the specific career fields covered by the CTE program. These instructors should have relevant industry experience and a passion for teaching and mentoring students. But that doesn't mean other educators can't be trained! Have interested faculty consider doing their own professional learning in a specific trade, shadowing someone in the industry, or going behind the scenes at a local business. Hands-on learning is for educators, too!

Professional learning will be essential for teachers getting involved in a new program. Provide training and resources to help teachers stay updated on industry trends, instructional techniques, and emerging technologies. Encourage partnerships with industry professionals to facilitate knowledge sharing and mentorship of your teachers so they can, in turn, mentor your students.

Professional Learning has been designed to support our teachers with...wonderful opportunities to engage content specific topics around our student's needs. The training is personable and collaborative, offering our teachers options on supplementing our curriculum with high-quality resources aligned to the state standards.



- Eugene Montano, Director of Secondary Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, Delaware

Take the next step: Gather some teacher leaders from your school to help build an informational professional development session on what CTE is and how it could benefit your students.



Professional learning can take many forms, and Discovery Education is here to help! Our PL sessions are unique to your school's needs, high-quality, and flexible to cover a wide range of topics, such as new teacher support or content-focused to help your teacher strengthen their CTE knowledge. Whether it's connecting with other educators, learning on-demand, or a live session, [Discovery Education Professional Learning](#) gives educators confidence to inspire students to become lifelong learners.

ACTION:

Spread the word amongst your students, their caregivers, and your community

Like any new idea, a new CTE program needs to be shared! Raise awareness about your new program and its benefits within the community through information sessions, open houses, career fairs, and other events to showcase the opportunities and pathways available through CTE. Use your advisory committee to help spread the word about the program through their various industry, family, and school-based channels. Industry leaders may also have employees interested in mentoring younger students or visiting your school, which could help garner interest in the program.

To fully build the program, schools will need to not only recruit students for the CTE program, but also provide support services to ensure their success. Support services can include career counseling, academic advising, mentoring, and guidance on post-secondary education options. You can also create a school-based mentoring program by encouraging successful CTE students to help mentor younger students along the way.

Over time, engage with local media to highlight success stories, partnerships, and the positive impact of the program on students and the community. Continue to support and recruit students to help solidify your CTE program as a rigorous, helpful step students can take in their educational journey!

We know educators are always looking for fun and relatable ways to connect what they teach to the real world. We also know that students love to explore their career interests through ‘real life’ examples.



- Amy Nakamoto, Discovery Education General Manager of Corporate Education Partnerships

Take the next step: Create a profile of what a successful CTE graduate would be—what kind of skills would they have? What kind of connections would they build? Use this profile to help communicate the value of your program to interested parties.



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Career and Technical Education plays a crucial role in preparing students for the workforce, providing them with practical skills, and offering career pathways in various industries. It can help communities meet the demands of the job market and equip students with the tools they need to succeed in their chosen career paths. Building one of these programs requires focused effort and collaboration from many parts of the community, but a well-organized program can help make a significant difference for students' futures.

Once your program is underway, establish an ongoing process for evaluating its effectiveness and help ensure the program remains relevant, responsive to industry needs, and provides positive outcomes for students:

- Collect data on student outcomes, industry partnerships, and program performance to identify areas for improvement.
- Stay connected with students, industry partners, and community members to determine the program's impact.
- Stay up to date with industry trends and labor market demands to adjust the curriculum and offerings accordingly.

By taking action and creating a program that is aligned with local workforce needs, school leaders can create a robust and effective Career and Technical Education program that prepares students for meaningful careers and strengthens the local economy.

Ready to start a partnership with DE?

Contact us today.

[Discoveryeducation.com](https://discoveryeducation.com)