



Here's How Experts Suggest Schools Strengthen Career and Technical Programs

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Career and Technical Education is important for workforce and economic development. Here, we explore best practices to strengthen CTE programs.



County government -- as a funder and supporter of public education -- is uniquely situated to help prepare Maryland's learners for the modern workforce. Of growing importance are nontraditional educational and career pathways, like [career and technical education \(CTE\)](#).

In fact, a [survey](#) published in May 2022 by ECMC Group, a nonprofit corporation focused on higher education financial assistance, found that approximately 22% of teens said they were "more likely to attend a career and technical education college." This is up a whopping 10 percentage points from just two years ago.

CTE is of particular interest in Maryland, where legislative leadership and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future are prioritizing workforce development via alternative education outside of typical four-year institutions.

Tips for improving CTE programs

A [recent report](#) from K-12 Dive, an education reporting and policy analysis site, highlighted seven best practices suggested by education experts on how to strengthen local CTE programs.

- **Focus on the labor market:** "It's imperative to align CTE programs with the needs of the labor market. ... That, in turn, can build relationships with local community colleges and trade schools focused on serving the labor market, as well as business partners who are on the lookout for future employees."
- **Start small:** "It's best to start small and work on building an ongoing relationship with partners. ... Building a strong CTE program can be slow-going at first, but the returns are exponentially larger over time, because success stories entice new partners to come on board."
- **Align goals:** "School districts and post-secondary institutions should work closely to ensure they are serving students effectively." Of particular emphasis are opportunities for dual-enrollment between high schools and post-secondary schools, which not only offers savings and expedited education for students, but also a streamlined pipeline for skilled labor.
- **Create value and make it easy:** "It's important for local business partners to get value out of offering CTE student internships. ... Businesses also appreciate clear guidelines regarding the structure of internships and things like student workplace safety."
- **Get Creative:** "When businesses are reluctant to have students on-site, they can be enticed to come to the schools. ... Another hurdle can be transportation." Potential options for creative solutions include providing CTE students and apprentices with Uber rides if they are over 18 and gift cards for gas. "Additionally, the local public transit agency has a trainer

who can work individually with students in need of help getting comfortable with bus routes."

- **Piggyback on community events:** "Local events featuring trade professionals are a great avenue to make connections." School districts can partner with local events to provide experiences like mock interviews with local partner companies and hands-on activities that involve real equipment, public safety vehicles, recycling trucks and more.
- **Offer teachers externships:** "Schools can also use externships to help CTE teachers keep their skills up to date while enhancing business partnerships. ... And in turn, career programs get educators who know the latest skills and needs in their fields."

[Learn more about the experts' tips.](#)

[Read the May 2022 survey by ECMC Group.](#)