

LEARNS

Early Career Exposure
Work Group
Meeting 2

LEARNS Act

LEARNS stands for Literacy, Empowerment, Accountability, Readiness, Networking, and Safety. On Jan. 11, 2023, Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed the LEARNS Executive Order, which calls for the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) to conduct an analysis of key aspects of the state's education system and produce corresponding reports.

On March 8, 2023, the LEARNS Act was signed into law, signaling the start of the largest overhaul of education in the state's history.

After completing these analyses called for in the LEARNS Executive Order, **ADE is eager to engage stakeholders as implementation of the LEARNS commitments begins.**



L E A R N S

Roughly six in 10 jobs in Arkansas require advanced credentials beyond a high school diploma, but less than half of the state's workers meet these requirements.

Every Arkansas student deserves opportunities to graduate on a path toward prosperity.

READINESS

Ensure students in Arkansas have a strong pathway to the workforce.

- Build career-ready pathways to a diploma:** Develop processes and requirements for career-ready pathways to ensure they lead to high-wage, high-growth careers for all graduates.
- Ensure Student Success Plans are aligned with career-ready pathways:** Create a template for Student Success Plans—a personalized education plan intended to assist students with achieving readiness for college, career, and community engagement—that aligns with career-ready pathways and provide guidance and support for districts on how to implement them.
- Conduct an annual audit of the state's career pathways:** Engage third-party experts to conduct an annual audit of the state's career pathways to ensure they reflect high skill, high wage, high demand jobs in Arkansas. The first of these audits is due July 10, 2023.

Findings & Recommendations

Findings & Recommendations: CTE Program Quality

- **Finding:** CTE completers have low rates of early postsecondary credit and industry credential attainment and postsecondary matriculation, suggesting that too many CTE pathways are “dead ends” and do not articulate or transition seamlessly to postsecondary credential programs.
- ◆ **Recommendation:** Ensure that every CTE program of study articulates to a postsecondary credential CTE program. All students enrolled in CTE programs of study should have access to early postsecondary credit offerings aligned to a postsecondary credential.
- ◆ **Recommendation:** Establish statewide articulation agreements across 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities to ensure college credits earned in K-12 or at one institution transfer and count toward a degree at another. Include technical credit (CTE) and valued industry credentials under the agreements to help students earn more quickly a postsecondary credential.

Postsecondary Articulation in Leading States

Both **Colorado** and **Florida** have established robust statewide articulation agreements across their community and technical colleges and 4-year universities. As part of its agreement, **Florida** offers college credit for valued industry credentials earned by students. **Colorado's** agreement ensures that dual and concurrent enrollment credit can be applied to a CTE program or are transferable via “guaranteed transfer pathways.”

Findings & Recommendations: CTE Program Alignment

- **Finding:** There is significant directional misalignment between the most completed programs of study and high demand, high skill, higher wage occupations or industry sectors.
 - ◆ **Recommendation:** Strengthen alignment between programs of study and H3 occupations. This may include making changes to existing programs of study, creating new programs of study to address gaps between labor market needs and offerings, or phasing out legacy programs that are not projected to grow or meet H3 occupation expectations.
 - ◆ **Recommendation:** Consider ways to support school and district transitions to higher value programs through financial incentives or grants. Incentives should be aligned with those programs of study that provide the greatest ROI for students, communities and state/regional economies.

CTE Program Alignment in Leading States

Indiana prioritizes state and regional labor market data to develop and update CTE pathways offerings. It takes its lead from the Governor's Workforce Cabinet, which includes statewide and regional employers and business associations as key members. The Cabinet recently spearheaded efforts to design the state's "Next Level" CTE programs of study that are aligned to both occupational demand and postsecondary credential programs.

Findings & Recommendations: CTE Program Quality *and* Alignment

- **Finding:** The state's current funding system does not prioritize CTE programs in general, nor does it provide any incentive for pathway quality and alignment or student outcomes more broadly. CTE leaders in the state also noted sustainable funding for CTE as one of their top challenges.
 - ◆ Prioritize direct funding of CTE and tier such funds based on the ROI of specific pathways to students, communities and state/regional economic priorities.
 - ◆ Consider incentive funding for schools and districts that ensure students earn postsecondary and industry credentials in a high quality CTE pathway.

CTE Funding in Leading States

Both **Texas** and **Tennessee** fund CTE directly through a weighted and/or tiered system that heavily prioritizes pathways aligned with high demand, high skill, and higher wage occupations. They also provide outcomes bonuses to schools who graduate students that have met a combination of high quality indicators such as early postsecondary credit and industry and postsecondary credential attainment.

Findings & Recommendations: Outcomes Measurement and Return on Investment

- **Finding:** The state does not routinely link CTE, higher education, and workforce data. Not having linked, longitudinal data makes it difficult to determine the outcomes that the state's CTE and other workforce programming are achieving or the return on those investments.
 - ◆ **Recommendation:** Annually link CTE, higher education, and workforce data and work with third party experts to evaluate outcomes and estimate ROI.

- **Finding:** CTE stakeholders, including families with students, have limited ability to explore various programs of study, their alignment with higher education and workforce, or the potential outcomes of those programs.
 - ◆ **Recommendation:** Develop and annually update interactive, web-based materials/dashboards that allow stakeholders to explore CTE and workforce programs of study and their potential outcomes.

Findings & Recommendations: Data

- **Finding:** The state's current definition of "CTE concentrator" is too broad in scope and does not reflect the intent of the federal Perkins V act. As a result the data for concentrators is inflated and not a valid reflection of concentration in a program of study.
 - ◆ **Recommendation:** Change the existing definition from: "Students who enroll in a minimum of two (2) units of credit in a CTE program area" so that it is "Students who enroll in a minimum of two (2) *sequential* units of credit in a CTE program of study." Update data collection to capture the sequence within a program of study.

- **Finding:** The number of students completing work-based learning courses is very low and may not reflect actual work-based learning activities in schools and districts.
 - ◆ **Recommendation:** Require schools and districts to accurately report work-based learning completions as a course. This may require additional technical assistance or education about why this is needed and a critical outcome.

Early Career Awareness

What is the current reality of Early Career Awareness in grades (6-8)

- Field Tips
- Guest Speakers
- Community Service
- Dedicated Curricula
- Other activities

Early Career Awareness Examples

- [Career Exploration in Middle School](#)
- [Indiana Middle School Career Exploration Guide](#)
- [Broadening the Path: Design Principles for Middle Grades CTE](#)

Early Career Awareness

What is the current reality of Early Career Awareness in grades (6-8)

- Field Tips
- Guest Speakers
- Community Service
- Dedicated Curricula
- Other activities

Early Career Awareness

- Draft Activities

Next Steps

- Complete Doodle poll for October meeting.
- Review Guidance Document and Draft Rules shared in coming weeks.
- Provide feedback on guidance document and draft rules.