

Make It Better

This year's ACTE NextLevel Postsecondary CTE fellows are putting their institutional improvement plans into action. From building structured pathways for new faculty to redesigning student intake processes and reimagining employer partnerships, each fellow shares a "make it better" plan tailored to their institution's needs. Along the way, they reflect on the lessons, big and small, that have shaped their thinking this year. Their stories continue on page 36.



MELISSA HIBBARD

**Program Director,
Allied Health - Online
Miller-Motte College**

The Expert-to-Educator Framework

CTE faces a unique challenge: preparing highly skilled industry professionals to become equally effective educators. While these instructors bring invaluable real-world expertise into the classroom, many begin teaching with little or no formal preparation in instructional practice, adult learning or online pedagogy. As a result, new faculty often feel isolated, overwhelmed, and underprepared despite being experts in their profession. Addressing this gap requires a shift in how institutions approach faculty development, not as a one-time onboarding event but as a comprehensive, continuous professional learning experience.

The Expert-to-Educator Framework addresses this need by transforming faculty development from a transactional onboarding process into an intentional model of professional growth. Rather than emphasizing compliance alone, the framework is built upon three intercon-

nected pillars: practical teaching skills, faculty community and continuous professional learning. Together, these pillars create a sustainable foundation that equips instructors with the knowledge, support and confidence needed to succeed in today's learning environments.

The program consists of a series of modular learning experiences that provide instructors with immediately applicable strategies for teaching and learning. Topics include creating engaging online classrooms, facilitating meaningful discussions, providing high-quality feedback, conducting purposeful student outreach, integrating instructional technology, promoting academic integrity, supporting diverse learners and applying effective instructional strategies for adult students. Professional learning extends beyond initial training through faculty learning cohorts, mentorship opportunities, and a gamified badge system that recognizes continued growth and encourages lifelong learning.

The impact will reach beyond faculty development to influence the entire student experience. When instructors are equipped with effective teaching strategies and supported through ongoing professional learning, they are better positioned to create engaging, consistent and supportive learning environments.

Stronger instructional practices can contribute to increased student engagement, improved persistence, and greater academic success while simultaneously strengthening faculty confidence, satisfaction, and retention.

Evaluation of the initiative focuses on measurable outcomes for both faculty and students. Faculty metrics include participation in professional development, badge completion, instructional observation scores, satisfaction and retention. Student outcomes include discussion participation, responsiveness to outreach efforts and course completion rates, among others. Collectively, these data provide meaningful evidence of the relationship between intentional faculty development and improved instructional quality.

Subject matter expertise alone does not produce exceptional teaching. Effective educators require instructional knowledge, practical tools, meaningful support, and opportunities for continuous growth. By investing intentionally in the development of CTE faculty, institutions can strengthen teaching effectiveness, cultivate a collaborative culture of professional learning, and ultimately improve student outcomes. When faculty succeed, students are better positioned to succeed as well.



MISTY G. HULL
Dean of Academic
Success for Allied Health
Community College of Aurora

Naming the Skills

A student in one of our programs recently used the open-response line on our new intake survey to tell us she was going through a divorce and facing financial concerns. She was afraid she would not secure enough aid to complete her credential in time. She is not an outlier. I lead a division where students are already building the skills employers want. What many of them lack is the language to name those skills, and sometimes the support to make it to graduation. This project addresses both.

The key idea is simple. Program learning outcomes are written in ac-

ademic language, but employers hire in a different language entirely. I led a skills mapping initiative across all of CCA's nearly 80 programs, translating each program's learning outcomes into plain-language industry skills at every credential level. The critical addition was naming what employers actually call each skill, the language a hiring manager would search for on job boards, so faculty could make that connection explicit in their assignments.

Within my own division, that framework grew into a broader pilot. I launched an intake survey for incoming Allied Health students that captures their employment goals, their confidence in their credential, and the barriers that could keep them from finishing. More than half named financial concerns as a barrier, and more than a third asked for a follow-up from an advisor. Those responses route directly to a program coordinator who connects each student with support, in-

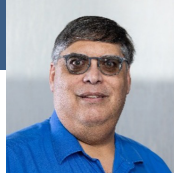
cluding the student above.

This is not only about naming career skills. It is about building a holistic student journey, one where students receive the support they need to remain enrolled.

If my hypothesis holds true, the student who wrote us that note will become the proof of concept. This project started as a way to translate what students learn into the language employers already use, so they would recognize their own qualifications and apply with confidence. But she taught me that naming a skill only matters if a student is still enrolled to use it. That is the connection this project is now built to make, for her and for every student like her who might otherwise fall through unnoticed.

We're always learning!

“A strong mentor can change the shape of a project, and of a career.”



RUDOLPH CHAVEZ
Perkins CTE Coordinator
College of Southern Nevada

In Compliance

Meaningful change relies on updating grant policies and procedures to ensure compliance for federal grants. My role is to work with our office staff, pre- and post-award, on a smooth and compliant grant process for the institution.

We're always learning!

This year, I have learned how to collaborate with others to improve Perkins implementation at the College of Southern Nevada.



KIMBERLY LEA
Dean of Workforce Education
Palm Beach State College

Intentional Job Design Through Employer Engagement

As the dean of workforce education at Palm Beach State College, I have learned that successful workforce education begins long before students enter the classroom. It begins with employers. Rather than designing programs based on historical practices or assumptions, colleges must partner with industry to identify the knowledge, skills and abilities required for today's jobs — and for those emerging tomorrow. Intentional job design through employer engagement ensures that educational programs remain relevant, responsive and aligned with regional workforce needs.

The pace of technological change has accelerated across nearly every industry.

Meaningful partnerships involve employers as co-creators of curriculum, validators of competencies, providers of work-based learning opportunities, and advocates for student success. Through structured engagement models like the business and industry leadership teams at Palm Beach State College, employers help identify the competencies that matter most and continuously validate whether instructional content reflects current workplace expectations. This collaborative approach creates stronger alignment between education and employment while increasing employer confidence in graduates.

Intentional job design also benefits students. When employers actively shape learning experiences, students gain access to authentic projects, internships, apprenticeships, industry-recognized credentials and networking opportunities that improve both confidence and employability. Faculty also benefit by maintaining current knowledge of industry practices and emerging technologies. Ultimately, employers become long-term strategic partners instead of occasional advisors.

1. Build relationships before requesting support.

Successful partnerships begin with trust. Visit employers, tour facilities, attend

industry association meetings and seek to understand business challenges before asking employers to serve on committees or provide resources.

2. Create structured opportunities for ongoing engagement.

Replace annual advisory meetings with recurring, focused conversations throughout the year. Quarterly competency reviews, curriculum validation sessions, and employer roundtables provide timely feedback that keeps programs responsive to changing workforce needs.

3. Demonstrate the value of the partnership.

Employers are more likely to remain engaged when they see measurable outcomes. Share graduate placement rates, credential attainment, internship success stories and examples of curriculum improvements that resulted directly from employer recommendations.

Intentional employer engagement is no longer optional for workforce education. It is a strategic necessity. When education and industry work together as equal partners, students graduate with relevant skills, employers gain a stronger talent pipeline, and communities are more prepared to meet economic demands.



VANCE MILLER
Director of Adult Education
York County
School of Technology

What Is 'Better'?

Adult and continuing education programs are uniquely positioned to serve both learners and industry, yet there is often a disconnect between training and rapidly evolving workforce needs. Businesses

struggle to keep employees up to date without dedicating internal resources, while education providers may lag behind real-time industry changes.

My goal would be to position York County School of Technology as a dynamic workforce partner by creating direct pipelines between education and employment, ensuring training remains current, responsive, and aligned with industry demands.

"Better" means becoming a proactive, industry-integrated training hub wherein:

- Programs are continuously updated based on real-time employer feedback.

- Adult learners transition seamlessly into employment.
- Employers rely on us as their primary training partner.
- Customized, short-term training solutions are readily available.
- Industry and education collaborate regularly, not reactively.

I would like to be in a position to offer apprenticeship-type training but in a short-term fashion. This way companies are not losing their employees for long periods of time, and the employee is getting trained in what is needed at that time.



MICHAEL L. PATE
Professor and Graduate
Program Director
Utah State University

From Classroom to Career,
and Back Again

Meaningful change in Utah's CTE system means moving beyond theoretical alignment to create a self-sustaining pipeline that links classroom learning directly to economic mobility. It requires

addressing instructor shortages by building structured pathways that integrate industry-recognized credentials and smooth student transitions from secondary education into the workforce. At Utah State University, this transformation is driven by a collaborative effort between community partners and the USU Career and Technical Education Teaching Academy.

My role will be to build critical bridges between Utah State University, the Utah State Board of Education and local employers. Essential efforts will be to secure sustainable funding — leveraging mechanisms like Perkins V — to scale 40-hour industry externships for high school CTE teachers.

By championing an industry and education dynamic feedback loop, USU will help ensure CTE curriculum remains responsive to emerging skill gaps, empowering practitioners to drive true industry alignment.

We're always learning!

“Through the leadership seminar series, I've learned how my perspective can keep me from seeing the potential for growth. This program has reset my hope and energy to lead with a student-centered, data-guided and mission-driven mindset.”

LEARN MORE

The NextLevel Postsecondary CTE Leaders Fellowship is a yearlong experience that transforms CTE professionals into stronger, more effective leaders. **NextLevelCTE.org**

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Make It Better

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More from this year's ACTE NextLevel Postsecondary CTE fellows on the plans shaping their institutions.



RENATO FREITAS
Program Coordinator, How I
Reach Employment (HIRE)
Fort Myers Technical College

Bridging the Postsecondary Transition Gap

Every year, thousands of neurodivergent students face what educators call the transition cliff. While the K–12 system provides legally mandated structures, these services often prioritize classroom compliance over long-term employability. When these individuals transition to postsecondary institutions, they acquire exceptional technical trade skills. But a systemic gap remains. Educational systems and local industries operate in silos, leaving an incredibly dedicated yet untapped talent pool disconnected from employers who face chronic labor shortages.

The "workforce with unique ability" pipeline is a strategic initiative designed to turn this disjointed transition into a cohesive, sustainable career path. By constructing a formalized pipeline between Fort Myers Technical College and regional

industry partners, this project aims to shatter the barriers of employer hesitancy.

The project operates across three distinct phases. First, we assemble a dedicated task force of transition coordinators, regional employers, and community vocational resources to map high-vacancy, entry-level corporate roles that align with our students' technical training. Second, we launch employer "lunch and learn" events to cultivate corporate disability confidence while bringing students on-site for job shadowing. Finally, we execute supported internships backed by external job coaches, resulting in accommodated interviews for permanent positions.

For FMTC, this initiative elevates our CTE programming from a model focused merely on completion to one dedicated to long-term economic self-sufficiency. It embeds neurodiversity awareness directly into local business cultures, transforming regional hiring practices and turning corporate partners into advocates for inclusive workforce development.

To ensure strict accountability and continuous improvement, the project will track three critical performance indicators:

- Partnership scale: Securing formal commitments from at least five major local employer partners during the pilot phase.

- Employment conversion: Placing a pilot cohort of 8–10 students into structured internships, aiming for a minimum 75% conversion rate into permanent roles.
- Longitudinal retention: Tracking job retention at the 90-day, one-year and five-year milestones through structured, monthly workplace health checks.

Ultimately, this Make It Better plan positions postsecondary CTE as the vital connective tissue that transforms students with unique abilities into independent, career-ready professionals, permanently strengthening the local economy.

We're always learning!

“The strongest framework for change is a bridge built from both the heart and the brain. Developing this plan taught me that advocacy for students with disabilities cannot rely solely on the moral argument of ‘doing the right thing.’ To truly transform systems, we must pair deep human empathy with a rigorous operational structure.”



FELITA L. COBB-MURPHY
Associate Director for CTE
Illinois Community College Board

Meaningful Change

I envision a higher education and community college system where meaningful change creates lasting opportunities for every learner. I believe that when we lead with purpose, embrace innovation and invest in people, we can build systems that support generational

growth and transform lives. Through this fellowship and beyond, I will continue to be a change agent — professionally and personally — while maintaining a forward-thinking mindset that inspires collaboration, creates opportunity and reflects the kind of positive change I hope to see in our institutions and communities.

We're always learning!

“My voice matters. I have come to recognize the important role I play in creating educational opportunities that positively impact current and future generations.”



MARYANN REID
Program Director
Purpose to Path

Redefining Workforce Success

What if the greatest workforce challenge isn't a skills gap, but a purpose gap? Career and technical education has an opportunity to move beyond traditional metrics like enrollment, completion and placement. While technical training remains essential, students are seeking purpose, belonging, mentorship and meaningful direction. Faith-based CTE is helping define the next generation of educational metrics by focusing on the whole person.

Values-based education teaches character traits such as integrity, perseverance, and responsibility, and the source of those values can vary and often reflects changing

cultural perspectives. With this in mind, I launched a pilot program to learn more.

The Purpose to Path electrician pre-apprenticeship pilot ran in June and July of 2026 with a group of 18- to 24-year-olds. The pilot demonstrated how small, scalable cohorts can strengthen workforce development through mentorship, employer engagement, character formation and purpose-centered learning. This approach introduces new metrics such as student transformation, social capital, entrepreneurship, regional transformation, professional development and community impact. These measures better reflect what employers, students and communities value in an AI-driven market where technical skills alone are not enough anymore.

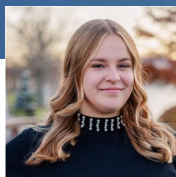
Early pilot outcomes reinforce this approach. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of students reported significant professional growth through increased skills and confidence. Ninety-eight percent (98%) said they had never personally known an em-

ployer in their community before participating and now had meaningful employer relationships. All participants received mentorship and direct employer contacts, and 27% received invitations to interview within 24 hours of graduation. These findings show students don't need more information; they need direction.

As I look ahead, important questions remain: What are new metrics we can use to measure student success? What do students need to launch their lives — not just their careers? How can we redefine traditional measures such as enrollment, retention, and completion to include transformation, relationships, and long-term impact?

From what I learned, the greatest measure of success may be the relationships students build within their communities, where employers can witness students in action before their first day on the job. Purpose to Path offers a new model that can meet the needs of today's employers while strengthening individuals, families and communities.

Make It Better



MICHELLE SLICZNIAK
Operations Manager for CTE
Harper College

We Help Each Other

Meaningful change means supporting more students and helping them successfully enter the workforce through the

work we accomplish together. To achieve this goal, I collaborate with colleagues across institutions and within my department, keep students at the center of every decision I make, and lead with kindness, professionalism, and a willingness to support both staff and students as they seek guidance and assistance.

We're always learning!

“I have learned that without collaboration, end goals cannot be met. We all help each other achieve our goals.”



JOY PAK
Operations Manager for Business
and Social Science Division
Harper College

Making Career Pathways Visible

Across Illinois, thousands of adult learners enroll at community colleges each year with the goal of improving their lives through education and meaningful employment. They bring determination and valuable life experiences, but many face significant barriers along the way that make career advancement difficult. These barriers include work schedules, caregiving responsibilities, financial challenges, transportation issues, limited access to technology, and gaps in academic or English language proficiency. The opportunities may exist, but the pathway is not always visible.

Many adults have the motivation and ability to succeed but need clearer guidance and stronger institutional support to transition into credentials that lead to high-wage careers.

One promising solution is to strengthen the connection between adult education and workforce credential programs by creating a structured career pathway that includes career bridge workshops, English instruction, coordinated referrals and data-informed continuous improvement. Rather than expecting students to navigate multiple offices, websites and program requirements independently, colleges can create structured pathways that guide learners from initial interest to enrollment and completion.

Equally important is providing contextualized, careers-related English instruction that prepares multilingual learners for both college and the workplace. Instructions focused on technical vocabulary, workplace communication and academic expectations can build confidence before students begin credential coursework. Faculty can further support student success by incorporating inclusive teaching practices, such as clear assignment directions, vocabulary previews, structured check-ins, and timely referrals to tutoring, advising, and student support services.

A coordinated referral process is another essential piece. Adult education instructors and staff often know when a student is ready to take the next step, but that readiness can diminish if the handoff is informal or unclear. A streamlined referral system connecting students directly with admissions, advising, financial aid, and program faculty creates a smoother transition and increases the likelihood that students will enroll, persist, and complete their programs. For the institution, this model strengthens collaboration, creating a more coordinated and equitable approach to helping learners transition.

Continuous improvement depends on meaningful data. Tracking class participation, referrals, advising appointments, applications, enrollment, retention, completion and student feedback enables colleges to evaluate the effectiveness of the pathway and identify opportunities for improvement. These measures align closely with Illinois adult education priorities related to postsecondary transitions, credential attainment and employment outcomes, allowing the model to be repeated, refined and scaled for each term.



JENNIFER CURTIS

**Project Manager
Chandler-Gilbert
Community College**

Building a High-Value Micro-Credential Playbook

One of the most rewarding parts of my work at Chandler-Gilbert Community College is seeing students discover a pathway to a career they never thought was possible. I have also seen the frustration of students who are eager to begin training but face long waitlists or educational pathways that cannot respond quickly enough to changing workforce demands. Those experiences have shaped my vision for improving workforce education and inspired my plan.

Community colleges play a critical role in preparing students for high-demand careers, but today's workforce is changing faster than traditional educational models were designed to accommodate.

While degree and certificate programs remain essential, many students need shorter, more flexible opportunities

to build marketable skills and enter the workforce sooner. At the same time, employers need qualified talent now, not several years from now. With the opening of the Future48 Aerospace & Defense Workforce Accelerator, Chandler-Gilbert CC has an opportunity to rethink how we prepare students for one of Arizona's fastest-growing industries. Our Aircraft Maintenance Technology program has a waiting list of more than 100 students. Rather than asking them to wait, I believe we can create additional entry points that allow students to begin building valuable skills immediately and secure a job.

My plan focuses on developing a practical framework for designing workforce-responsive credentials that can be replicated across programs. Instead of creating stand-alone courses, the playbook combines labor market data, employer feedback, curriculum design, student support, marketing and stackable credential pathways into a single planning model. The goal is to create credentials that are valuable to both students and employers while providing clear pathways into certificates and degree programs.

The first pilot will focus on aerospace as we plan to implement short, credit-bearing micro-credentials in areas such as precision measurement and avionics. Employers will help identify workforce needs, review curriculum,

participate in instruction where appropriate, and create direct connections to employment opportunities. Their involvement ensures that what students learn reflects the skills employers are actively seeking. As the project manager, my role is to bring these partners together around a shared vision while creating a process that is sustainable, data-informed and scalable.

Although the project begins with aerospace, I see it as a model that can support high-value micro-credentials across disciplines. More importantly, I hope it helps create a culture in which workforce programs can adapt quickly to changing industry needs while giving students more flexible pathways to meaningful careers.

We're always learning!

“One of the most important lessons I have learned this year is the value of introducing career exploration early in a student's educational journey. Providing K-12 students with meaningful exposure to a variety of career fields helps them better understand the opportunities available and connect their interests and strengths to potential career paths.”



TYLER LOVE
Professor and Director of CTE
Teacher Preparation Programs
The University of Maryland
Eastern Shore in Baltimore

High-Quality CTE Teacher & Counselor Preparation

Educator and career counselor preparation is integral to high-quality CTE instruction and career-connected learning. Since 2021, Maryland legislation has required that all secondary students have access to individualized career counseling; this is not a novel concept. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Dr. Donald Maley (University of Maryland) advocated for industrial arts and technology education courses as a vehicle to develop students' career awareness, career exploration and occupational orientation. Additionally, Dr. Robert Lent (University of Maryland) has published extensively on the benefits of career counseling for over four decades.

What distinguishes current efforts from those of Maley and Lent is legisla-

tive support — now codified and backed by state funding. Despite this mandate, Maryland has not established any requirements for P-12 career counselors. Consequently, there are a wide range of hiring, preparation and implementation models being applied with varying results among Maryland's 24 school systems.

Recognizing these gaps, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore's CTE programs office developed the first and only state-approved career-connected learning preparation certificate programs, focused on the intersection of WBL and career counseling. These stackable undergraduate and graduate certificate programs have helped foster a collaborative statewide network for developing essential career counseling skills and sharing of resources. Given the documented benefits of career-connected learning for all P-12 students, and positive outcomes found to be associated with rigorous educator preparation programs, a coherent research-based preparation program for career counselors is warranted.

In some Maryland jurisdictions, local workforce boards, the mayor's office or other outside agencies have been tasked

with hiring career counselors to work in the school systems. Individuals not employed by the school system or who are not licensed educators often do not qualify for tuition reimbursement or professional development funding. This can hinder access to high-quality preparation opportunities. UMES aims to address this barrier without compromising the quality of preparation. With external funding support, we plan to provide an intensive, face-to-face, short-term training experience that will quickly enhance career counselors' foundational knowledge, practices, shared resources and professional networks to enter the field with increased confidence. Based on existing literature, it is plausible to predict that this will improve career counselors' sense of community and self-efficacy, as well as retention and student outcomes.

We're always learning!

“CTE can look drastically different among states or even among different institutions. I have really enjoyed learning about the innovative and inspirational work of CTE colleagues from around the country.”



KRISTIN HEATHCOCK
Dean of Associate in Science
Degree Programs
Hillsborough College

Continuous Growth

Community colleges are often tasked with balancing innovation and sustainability across a portfolio of workforce programs. Shortly after becoming the dean overseeing workforce programs at my campus, I was charged with launching a new financial technology program. The opportunity seemed straightforward: Strong industry demand, enthusiastic partners and growing student interest created a clear pathway to success.

At the same time, I began reviewing the health of the other programs in my division. Some had steady enrollment, others were growing, and one faced significant challenges. Our aquaculture program serves highly dedicated students, benefits from strong industry engagement, and enjoys partnerships with local universities, but

enrollment has steadily declined, and career salaries in the field remain relatively low. Rather than viewing these challenges as reasons to discontinue the program, we chose to view them as an opportunity to reimagine it. This effort has become the focus of my “make it better” plan.

Florida’s abundant freshwater and marine resources provide a natural foundation for workforce development in water-related industries. Working closely with faculty — whose expertise and passion have been instrumental — we began exploring how the program might evolve to better align with emerging workforce needs. Identifying workforce demand is not always as simple as filling existing job openings. In this case, our challenge is to anticipate future opportunities and determine where education can create value.

Our goal is ambitious: to transform a declining program into one that addresses emerging workforce needs and attracts a new generation of students. The process includes:

- Engaging industry and community
- Identifying regional and statewide workforce needs

- Developing curriculum aligned with those needs
- Securing institutional and state approvals
- Recruiting faculty with relevant expertise
- Launching and continuously refining the new program

This work is not the responsibility of a single individual. It requires collaboration among faculty, administrators, industry partners and community members. While the outcome is still being shaped, the process itself has reinforced an important lesson: Workforce programs must continually evolve to remain relevant. Sometimes making things better means building something entirely new from the strengths of what already exists.

We’re always learning!

“I have learned the importance of addressing issues as they arise rather than waiting until they fester.”



DANNY FISHER
Dean of Manufacturing,
Technology, and Trades
GateWay Community College

Tomorrow's Tech

In my role, I have the privilege of leading workforce education programs that prepare students for careers in advanced manufacturing, skilled trades and the rapidly growing semiconductor industry. As Arizona experiences unprecedented investment in semiconductor manufacturing, community colleges have a unique opportunity to partner with employers to develop innovative training models that respond directly to workforce needs.

I believe education has a responsibility to evolve as industries evolve.

Since 2020, more than \$210 billion in semiconductor investments have been announced across Arizona, including TSMC’s historic \$165 billion investment in Phoenix, along with major expansions from Intel, Amkor and other industry leaders. These investments are expected to create tens of thousands of high-quality jobs.

Meeting this demand requires more than expanding educational programs; it requires unprecedented collaboration between industry, education and government. My plan focuses on establishing the SEMI Equipment Technician Certification as Arizona’s common, industry-recognized credential for semiconductor equipment technicians. By aligning community colleges, employers, workforce partners and state agencies around a shared certification, we can provide employers with confidence in graduates’ skills while giving students a portable credential that supports career mobility.

This work is anchored by the Future48 Semiconductor Workforce Accelerator on GateWay Community College’s Central

City Campus. Developed through a partnership between the Arizona Commerce Authority and Maricopa Community Colleges, the \$20 million accelerator features a full-scale mock semiconductor cleanroom, industry-standard equipment, and hands-on training environments designed with input from leading semiconductor manufacturers. The accelerator will serve as a regional hub for technician training, certification testing, faculty development, employer engagement and industry collaboration, creating a scalable model that can be replicated nationwide.

Collaboration has become the hallmark of Arizona’s workforce strategy. Success will be measured through certification adoption, employer participation, student certification pass rates, program completion, employment outcomes and employer satisfaction. Together, we can build a stronger semiconductor workforce and create a model for collaboration that benefits students, employers and communities across the nation.

Make It Better



RACHEL YAGER

Founder & CEO, FortuneTimes Group; Chief Innovation Officer, RapidPathway

Charting the Course: Meaningful Change in CTE

Meaningful change in CTE is not just about better coursework; it is about fundamentally redefining the transition from the classroom to the career. For the CTE community, meaningful change looks like a seamless, supported journey where students build a professional identity before they even graduate.

As the edtech innovator behind a “make it better” plan, I act as an architect of this transition. I help educators to move beyond passive instruction to build the infrastructure that guides, tracks and accelerates student success. My plan centers on the RapidPathway Student GPS, a platform designed to accelerate CTE pathways through strategic Guidance, Planning and Support (GPS). The core of this plan is an integrated academic and career

learning framework. Rather than a static curriculum, this provides students with a dynamic road map toward self-discovery, rigorous goal-setting and professional preparation. By leveraging data, the plan enables early, actionable insights, helping students navigate the complex terrain between high school, college and the workforce with clarity.

The impact of this approach is twofold. For students, it transforms the waiting room experience of high school into a period of active identity formation. Through behavioral nudges — like automated triggers for early transfer credit approval — we encourage habitual progress. Students begin to shift their mindsets from completing courses to building careers.

For administrations, this plan shifts the operational burden, providing leadership with critical, data-driven insights. By visualizing where students are along their road map, administrators can make strategic decisions in pathway design and ensure better cross-institutional alignment, ultimately strengthening the entire program ecosystem.

To validate the efficacy of the Student GPS, I am tracking three primary outcomes that serve as indicators of meaningful progress:

- 1. Student engagement:** We are monitoring interaction levels with professional identity resources to gauge early career development and active participation.
- 2. Early transfer credit approval rates:** We are utilizing early transfer credit approvals as a primary proxy for student persistence and commitment to the pathway.
- 3. Institutional alignment:** We are measuring improvements in connectivity between high schools, colleges and hiring partners.

Meaningful change is not an accident; it is the result of design. I am helping to engineer a future where every CTE student has a clear, actionable and supported path to their professional potential. My role is to bridge the gap between intent and outcome, ensuring that CTE programs are as dynamic as the careers.

We're always learning!

“I discovered that the most sustainable way to foster long-term growth is to embed new processes into existing routines.”

LEARN MORE

The NextLevel Postsecondary CTE Leaders Fellowship is a yearlong experience that transforms CTE professionals into stronger, more effective leaders. Learn more about the program. **NextLevelCTE.org**

Techniques

OCTOBER 2026

CONNECTING EDUCATION AND CAREERS

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IS THERE AN INSTRUCTION MANUAL?

- The Blueprint for CTE Lesson Planning
- How One Ag Program Redefined Student Success
- Boosting CTE Engagement Among Gen Alpha
- Make It Better: Featuring ACTE's Next Level Postsecondary CTE Fellows



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