DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE REGIONAL COLLABORATIONS:

A research report on best practices for supporting the education-to-workforce pipeline

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ANALYTICS WITH ANSWERS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary 3

Purpose and Scope of Research Report 4

- Introduction 4
- Summary of CTE TAC Regional Collaboration Project 4
- Using This Resource 6

Elements of Effective Regional Collaboration 7

- Summary Overview 7
- Element 1: Engage Stakeholders 8
- Element 2: Prioritize Resources 10
- Element 3: Implement Work-based Learning 11
- Element 4: Promote Educational Support for Career Readiness 13
- Element 5: Offer Engaging Options and Incentives 15

Summary and Next Steps 17

Appendices 18

- Appendix A: Regional Collaboration Self-Assessment Rubric 18
- Appendix B: References 19

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Effective workforce collaborations are built together, not apart.

When regional partners embrace collaborative practices, they strengthen the career pathways available so job seekers thrive as employers' needs are met. Research shows effective regional collaborations frequently engage all relevant stakeholders to improve accessibility to essential resources, relevant work experiences, and diverse career pathways.

Seeking to increase regional collaboration among secondary, post-secondary career and technical education programs, and business and industry across New York state, the Career and Technical Education Technical Assistance Center (CTE TAC) of New York tasked Alla Breve Consulting in 2022 to identify key indicators established in research and form an evaluative rubric to assess regional collaborations across the state. Between 2022 and 2024, Alla Breve developed and piloted an evaluative rubric that was deployed for all workforce regions in New York state, excluding New York City. The final rubric, which informs the companion Regional Collaboration Self-Assessment Guide, centers on five research-based elements of effective regional collaborations.

These five elements include:

1. Stakeholder Engagement
2. Shared Prioritization of Resources
3. Work-Based Learning Implementation
4. Promotion of Educational Supports for Career Readiness
5. Engaging Options and Incentives Offered

Through open-source data review and original data collection, results revealed workforce development boards (WDBs) across New York state operate in alignment with most rubric elements, although the degree of implementation varies based on context.

This research report details each element to provide NYSED, regional leaders, including WDBs, advisory councils, school and BOCES administrators, and CTE TAC Regional Field Associates, greater insight into research-informed approaches for strengthening regional collaborations that enhance education-to-workforce efforts in their region.

PURPOSE & SCOPE OF RESEARCH REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Estimated Reading Time: 10 minutes

Collaborative partnerships happen when stakeholders are intentionally committed to working together. Rooted in trust and respect, collaborative partnerships are cultivated with genuine communication, cooperation, and coordination. For regional collaborations, this is especially true as educational institutions, businesses, community and social service organizations, and local and state government agencies work together to address the dynamic, ever-changing landscape for job seekers and employers.

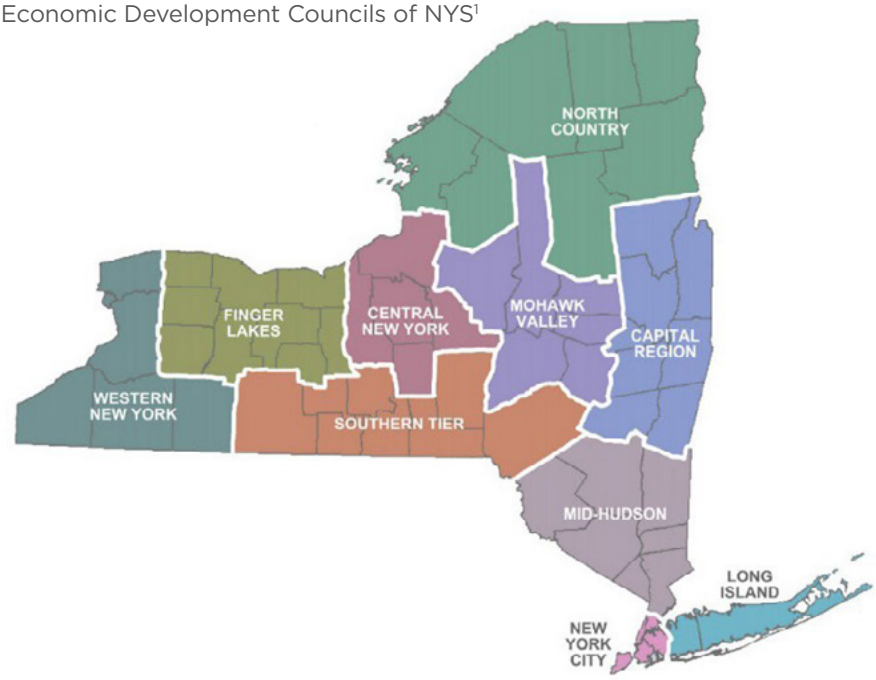
These collaborative arrangements are as unique as the communities they serve, yet established research identifies five elements that appear most often in successful regional collaborations. While all elements are not necessarily required for a regional collaboration to be successful, the cumulative benefits of these elements enhance collaborations to actualize their greatest impact on their served communities.

SUMMARY OF THE CTE TAC REGIONAL COLLABORATION PROJECT

In 2022, the Career and Technical Education Technical Assistance Center (CTE TAC) of New York commissioned Alla Breve Educational Consulting (Alla Breve) to develop processes that could be replicated in and across New York state to foster increased regional collaboration among secondary, post-secondary CTE programs, and business and industry through the development of protocols, processes, and tools.

The first of these tools was a Decision Matrix designed to assess each region's (Figure 1) existing evidence of regional collaboration across multiple indicators such as dual enrollment agreements, P-Tech sites, etc. Through consultation with the CTE TAC and New York State Education Department, and by reviewing statewide data and existing regional planning documents, it was determined that the Decision Matrix could evolve into a rubric for regional self-assessment in career and technical education collaboration. In addition, for the purposes of this project, New York City was excluded.

Figure 1: Regional Economic Development Councils of NYS[1]



[1] Map from 2019 REDC Guidebook (p2): https://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2019-04/2019REDCGuidebook.pdf

Alla Breve created the initial rubric-based assessment tool, Regional Collaboration Self-Assessment Rubric (Appendix A), integrating research on best practices on workforce/CTE collaboration around the country. The rubric was refined by reviewing New York State (NYS) Department of Labor Workforce Development plans from regions across the state.

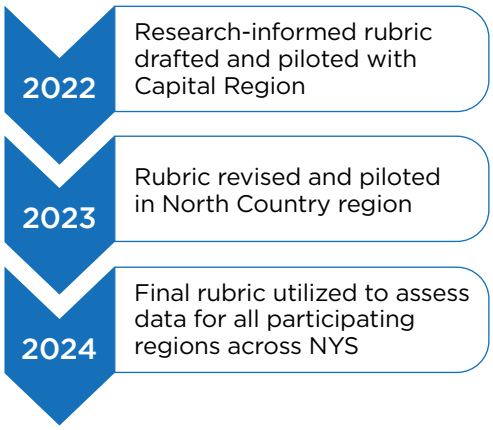
The rubric focuses on the five following elements of Regional Collaboration Best Practices:

1. Stakeholder Engagement
2. Shared Prioritization of Resources
3. Work-Based Learning Implementation
4. Promotion of Educational Supports for Career Readiness
5. Engaging Options and Incentives Offered.

YEAR 1 PILOT (2022-2023)

In 2022, Alla Breve began a multiphase approach for developing a self-assessment rubric that would document areas in which regions were leading and areas which could be strengthened through collaboration efforts. Alla Breve researchers reviewed existing literature on regional career and technical education collaboration, existing regional plans and results of the Decision Matrix to develop a rubric for regional collaboration. As a proof of concept, one region that had evidence of significant regional partnerships based on the Decision Matrix was selected as the pilot for an application of the preliminary rubric.

Figure 2: CTE TAC Regional Collaboration Self-Assessment Project Timeline



Alla Breve met with contacts in the pilot region who were responsible for workforce initiatives and economic development, including those in secondary and post-secondary education and across nonprofit, government, and industry. After initial meetings to discuss the project scope, Alla Breve distributed a survey to the regional contacts that collected feedback on the rubric parameters and conducted focus groups in the capital region to gauge strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to regional collaboration.

Preliminary findings supported the self-assessment tool's validity and reliability for measuring the five elements of effective regional collaborations. Informed by findings, the rubric was deployed in the next phase of testing with a region that was different from the initial pilot region.

[1] Map from 2019 REDC Guidebook (p2): https://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2019-04/2019REDCGuidebook.pdf

YEAR 2 (2023-2024)

In 2023, Alla Breve expanded its rubric evaluation by assessing collaboration efforts in a less urban/suburban region through document review, focus groups, observation, and surveys. Alla Breve met with contacts in the North Country region who are responsible for workforce initiatives and economic development, including those in secondary and post-secondary education and across nonprofit, government, and business sectors. Built upon the application of the rubric in two geographically and demographically different regions, the regional self-assessment rubric to measure career and technical education collaboration efforts was finalized and ready for statewide application.

YEAR 3 (2023-2024)

In 2024, Alla Breve expanded regional evaluations to include the remaining upstate regions. Alla Breve conducted open-source data review of local and regional documents, and 14 of the 26 eligible workforce boards within the regions participated in original data collection procedures (electronic surveys, focus groups). Applying the Regional Collaboration Self-Assessment Rubric, Alla Breve evaluated each region using the data collected and shared assessment reports with regional leaders.

With support from the CTE TAC leadership and Regional Field Associates, Alla Breve developed a Regional Collaboration Self-Assessment Guide detailing how regions can replicate data collection and self-evaluation procedures conducted by Alla Breve between 2022 and 2024. Additionally, regions received an assessment report detailing how well their regional collaborations align with the rubric elements.

USING THIS RESOURCE

This research report is designed to inform regional leaders, including workforce development boards, advisory councils, school and BOCES administrators, and Regional Field Associates of the CTE TAC about the research basis for the rubric and the companion Regional Collaboration Self-Assessment Guide.[2] The following section details the components of each element (see adjacent infographic[3]) and how, collectively, they enhance regional collaboration efforts.

[2] https://nyctecenter.org/images/2.SelfAssessmentGuide2_FINAL.pdf
[3] https://nyctecenter.org/planning/regional-collaboration

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE REGIONAL COLLABORATIONS

SUMMARY OVERVIEW

Estimated Reading Time: 10 minutes

The following explanations and related resources are provided to equip regional leaders, including workforce development boards, advisory councils, school and BOCES administrators, and Regional Field Associates of the CTE TAC, with a deeper understanding of the rubric elements along with practical strategies and ideas for developing these elements further in their respective communities.

While the following rubric elements are interrelated and are most effective in combination, it is important for regional leaders to determine which elements to prioritize over time while strengthening regional collaborations. It is important to emphasize that regional collaborations can thrive and succeed with fewer than five elements in place; however, imagine what could be achieved if all elements were in place?

Organization of this Section

Rubric elements are presented in a semi-structured sequence, with engaging stakeholders (Element 1) representing a foundational component of collaborative partnerships, including inclusive engagement, frequent communication, and shared knowledge of priorities and needs that resources, services, and programs should focus on.

With a collaborative partnership started, prioritizing efforts (Element 2) represents information gathering systems and centralized hubs for resource allocation to efficiently deploy resources, services, and programs to adaptively address the needs of job seekers and employers.

With collaborative practices and centralized resource-sharing arrangements in place, the semi-sequential approach fans out into different pathways for enhancing education-to-workforce efforts, including implementing work-based learning opportunities (Element 3), promoting educational support for career readiness (Element 4), and offering engaging options and incentives to students (Element 5).

Five Elements of Effective Regional Collaborations

1. Engage Stakeholders.

This element highlights how regional partners build cross-sector connections to identify needs and coordinate efforts. When employers lead discussions to assess the education to workforce pipeline on a regular basis, regional entities are able to clarify roles and contributions toward career and technical skills development activities that meet regional needs.

2. Prioritize Resources.

In this element, sharing and prioritizing resources to improve efficiency and effectiveness are the key themes. Centralized data collection allows partners to share economic trends and job demands, while regional clearinghouses increase shared awareness of resources available. Acquiring funding and resource pooling at the regional level can help meet workforce needs more efficiently.

3. Implement Work-Based Learning.

This element focuses on how work-based learning opportunities provide multiple benefits for K12 students as well as general job seekers. It is important to recognize differences between K12 students and students in higher education, as each will have specific needs and challenges regarding workforce development.

4. Promote Educational Support For Career Readiness.

Expanding career and technical education resources for educators is the focus of this element, as it enhances their awareness and understanding of workforce trends. By offering work-based learning experiences for teachers (and even administrators) and providing educators with industry data, education partners will be more prepared to support students for multiple postsecondary pathways.

5. Offer Engaging Options and Incentives.

In this element, the focus is on innovative ways to incentivize participation in career and technical education programs and engage learners. Students should have various options for career readiness opportunities, including apprenticeships, internships, and job shadowing. Incentives include opportunities like earning college credit for career-based degree programs and experiencing virtual solutions for work-based learning and mentoring.

ELEMENT 1: ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

Estimated Reading Time: 10 minutes

Collaborative partnerships begin with engagement and inclusion of all relevant stakeholders. To effectively address workforce development, employer-led efforts are prioritized in the region and skill gaps and priorities are collectively identified. Formal meetings among relevant stakeholders are held on a regular basis, which strengthens and sustains effective workforce development efforts.

Definition and explanation

More than any other form of education, career and technical education requires external engagement.[4] Educators, industry, government, job training providers, and chambers of commerce all have important roles to play in cross-sector collaboration.[5] Effective regional collaboration that informs career education and training programming should have significant employer input, engagement, and leadership. Employers know what skills are in demand and what technologies are used. They can provide work experience/exposure through internships, shadowing, workplace tours, apprenticeships, and certifications. Teachers and administrators, too, can benefit from industry site visits, shadowing, and other opportunities to see what skills their students might need and how they can connect lessons to career applications.[6]

There are many ways regional collaborations might harness the expertise of industry, including by surveying businesses, setting up a mentoring program, or having business partners contribute time, resources, and services toward the program.[7] Conveners can also solicit "participant profiles" from businesses, asking stakeholders to give a base description of the knowledge and skills needed for workers in their role/industry, thus contributing to the development of cutting-edge CTE curriculum.[8]

Convening agencies should hold cross-sector meetings regularly, and depending on the size of the region, attempt to meet with local representatives in their localities, such as through "stakeholder engagement meetings" to build trust and relationships between conveners and their local partners. For example, Colorado state agencies have held meetings with over 280 stakeholders when creating the state's career and technical education plan, helping bring local input to the plan and create buy-in among local partners.[9] Similarly, Nebraska planners used "listening tours" where state representatives would visit localities to hear their thoughts,

[4] Mezera, D., & Suffren, Q. (2018). Building Cross-Sector Partnerships to Support Career and Technical Education Pathways: A Playbook for State Policymakers. ExcelinED.

[5] Burgess, P., & Williams, D. R. (1997). Best Practices in Workforce Development: A chamber of commerce perspective. The Urban Center Online, 4.17.98.

[6] CTE Technical Assistance Center of New York [CTE TAC]. (n.d.). Nine Strategies for Business/Education Collaboration: Common Sense Approaches for Exceptional Results.

[7] CTE TAC, n.d.

[8] Mezera & Suffren, 2018, p. 7

[9] AdvanceCTE, 2021, p. 3

building relationships and trust.[10]

Convening agencies should create efforts that match with the needs and resources of local employers. The wrong approach is to make a goal then look for employers to execute it. Instead, make the partnerships first, then craft a strategy cooperatively.[11]

Examples of Engagement

Regional collaborations are well-established and practiced in many communities across the United States, although their form and function range. Below are examples of inclusive engagement with career and technical education stakeholders that has strengthened regional collaborations:

- Between 2016 and 2018, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) hosted privately funded listening tours for state leaders to speak with businesses and education leaders of each region to learn what was working and not working for career and technical education at the local and regional level. These discussions cultivated shared knowledge while also building mutual understanding and trust among state and local leaders. New work-based learning opportunities emerged from the discussions, and participants' information was added to NDE's database for future partnership opportunities.[12]
- To ensure their state plan would serve local partners rather than being a top-down approach, the Colorado Community College System Office conducted numerous stakeholder engagement meetings attended by two hundred eighty stakeholders ranging from parents and community organizations to representatives from economic development agencies and education institutions.[13]

To summarize, regions can effectively engage education, industry, government, and community partners to identify and address workforce development needs, as noted in the table below.

Regional leaders have all of the following in place	Examples of engaging stakeholders
• Employer-led regional efforts	• Industry partners involved in convening cross-sector discussions about workforce needs
• Identification of regional workforce skills gaps and priorities	• Frequent circulation of labor market data and trends that exist in the region
• Formal collaboration across sectors	• Cooperative agreements for service delivery and programming
• Regularly scheduled cross-sectional meetings	• Monthly meetings with education, industry, and community partners

[10] AdvanceCTE, 2021, p. 4

[11] CTE TAC, n.d.

[12] Nebraska Department of Education. (n.d.). reVISION. https://www.education.ne.gov/nce/revision/

[13] Colorado Community College System. (n.d.). CTE vision. http://coloradostateplan.com/cte-strategic-vision/

ELEMENT 2: PRIORITIZE RESOURCES

Estimated Reading Time: 10 minutes

Centralized information- and resource-sharing arrangements enable regional partners to leverage their strengths together to provide quality, comprehensive programming and services that effectively meet workforce needs in an efficient way.

Definition and explanation

The goals of regional collaboration should be determined through stakeholder engagement, bringing together existing employers, educators, government, and community to determine skills gaps and strategic priorities. Collaboration is crucial for defining goals, and indeed goal definition can be used to foster such collaboration among stakeholders by helping build a shared vision and common definition of terms.[14]

Achieving these plans requires a shared prioritization of resources. The various stakeholders involved in regional collaboration should ideally collaborate on how resources are used. This avoids duplication of efforts, and it requires that stakeholders make collective decisions. Such collaboration is aided by having a common system of data collection, agreed measures of progress toward success, and a centralized source for monitoring data.

A common source of data allows regions to recognize strategic challenges to their economies and help collaborators respond appropriately. Career and technical education is needed to manage the economic dynamics of changing demographics, which can alter a region's workforce, and changing technology which can displace or create new jobs.[15] Skills gaps and priorities require understanding both economic changes affecting the demand for workers in a region as well as demographic changes affecting the supply. On the demand side, targeting specific industries is a common strategy.

A convening agency or one of its partners should be responsible for data collection. Data should be collected on economic trends, demand for jobs, existing resources for workforce development, and existing workforce size and skills. It should be analyzed for gaps between supply and demand, both now and into the future, and so too should resources to address these gaps be monitored.[16] Nebraska, for instance, has a data-driven evaluation that allows Perkins V funding to be used to address performance gaps identified.[17]

Examples of Prioritizing Resources

Expectedly, regions prioritize and organize resources differently based upon the structures and policies of partnering institutions, organizations, and agencies. Below are examples of regional collaborations to share information to effectively prioritize resources:

- Nebraska Department of Education's CTE reVISION process, launched in 2012, is a data-driven approach for strengthening career and technical education programming by building up local capacities and analyzing ways to constructively transform CTE programs. Through the reVISION process, secondary and postsecondary education partners evaluate student enrollment and performance data to identify gaps and strategize opportunities for improvement. Nebraska CTE staff provide assistance and oversee utilization of Perkins funds to support CTE program improvements under the reVISION process.[18]
- Supporting the Tennessee Pathways program which strives to equip "at least 55 percent of Tennesseans with a college degree or certificate by 2025", the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) and Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) formed an inter-agency agreement to fund regional coordinators across the state to provide technical assistance to postsecondary and industry partners to strengthen education-to-employment efforts.

[14] AdvanceCTE, 2021

[15] Burgess & Williams, 1997, p. 1

[16] Burgess & Williams, 1997, p. 21-22

[17] AdvanceCTE, 2021, p. 5-6

[18] https://www.education.ne.gov/nce/revision/

To summarize, regions can effectively collaborate to maximize and prioritize available resources in a number of ways, as noted in the table below.

Regional leaders have all of the following in place	Examples of prioritizing resources
• Formal, centralized system to collect data on workforce needs	• A database of regional workforce employment trends and CTE program enrollment data
• Regional public-facing clearinghouse of resources	• Central repository of regional resources that any partner can access
• Shared funding (acquisition and distribution)	• Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for using equipment obtained through regional grant funding

ELEMENT 3: IMPLEMENT WORK-BASED LEARNING

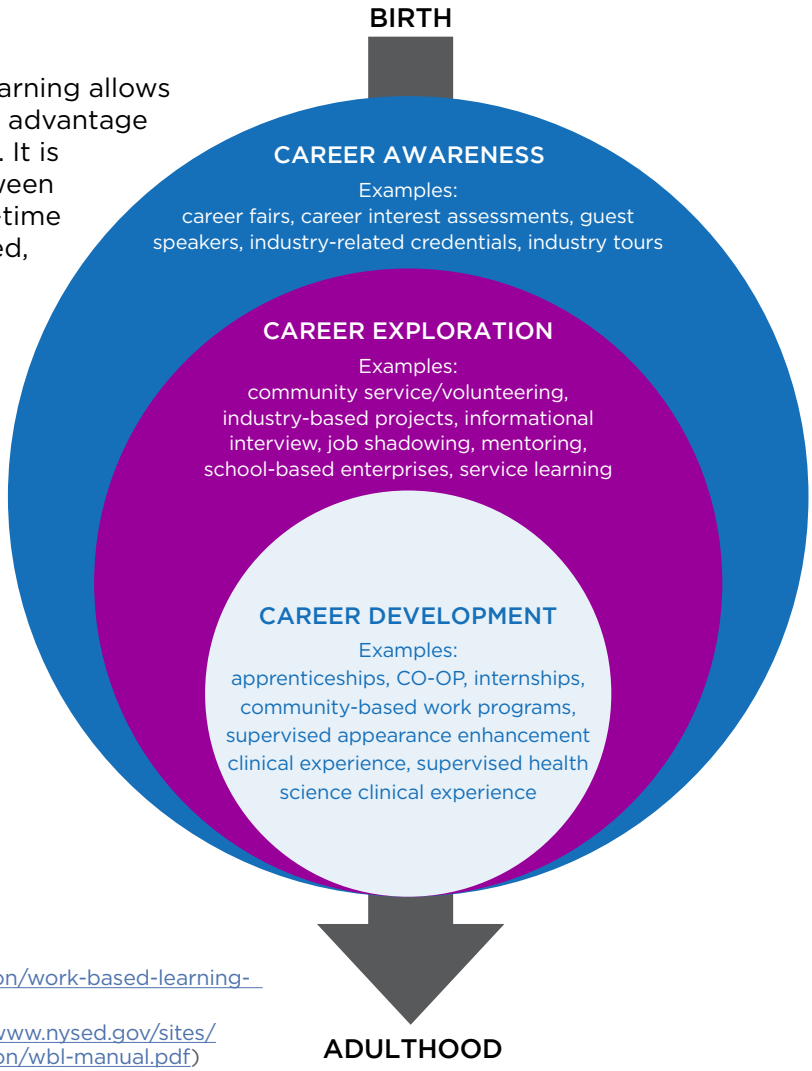
Estimated Reading Time: 10 minutes

Work-based learning opportunities are invaluable for broadening awareness and exploration of career pathways, as well as enhancing development of essential and industry-specific skill sets. These opportunities ideally satisfy graduation requirements while also converting work experience into industry-recognized credentials for greater employability.

Definition and explanation

Effective collaboration in work-based learning allows students and workers of all ages to take advantage of opportunities to advance their career. It is important to recognize differences between those who are currently employed, first-time job seekers, unemployed, underemployed, students in K-12, and students in higher education, as each will have specific needs and challenges regarding workforce development.[20] So too do other demographic factors create diverse needs in the workforce.

While these needs are diverse, in general K12 students need awareness of careers and the academic pathways available to them. Similar to the New York State Education Department's (NYSED) Framework for Work-Based Learning,[21] aligning curriculum to promote career and technical education includes creating career awareness, fostering career exploration, providing knowledge for career preparation, and building skills through career training.[22]



[20] Burgess & Williams, 1997

[21] https://www.nysed.gov/career-technical-education/work-based-learning-wbl-programs

[22] NYSED's Work-Based Learning Manual (https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/career-technical-education/wbl-manual.pdf) outlines WBL categories in NYS.

Raising awareness of careers and necessary skills among students is therefore fundamental to effective career and technical education. An example of a program to raise career awareness and exploration is ClimbHI in Hawaii, which provides job and career information for students through job shadowing and workplace visits.[23]

Well-designed work-based learning implementation may combine apprenticeships, graduation requirements, and curriculum alignment. For example, Northeast Tennessee's Work Ethic Diploma — developed a diploma curriculum for colleges and universities that would guarantee a job interview with partnering employers.[24]

Career readiness begins with an effective educational curriculum and continues into the workforce, but K12 students are not the only ones that should benefit from learning opportunities. Those who are underemployed need awareness of their pathways to upskill or switch industries. Everyone needs motivation and support to make a career that sustains their family and wellbeing. Implementing pathways and programs for these different groups requires planning and coordination to identify skills gaps and ways to educate workers to fill them. Effective collaboration is always a key facilitator in making these programs available, visible, accessible, and supportive for learners no matter who they are.

Examples of Work-Based Learning

Work-based learning involves a range of experiential activities that states regulate according to varied standards. These experiences can be stand-alone or scaffolded over time to enhance cumulative skill development. The following examples illustrate programs designed to help students develop essential skills needed for employment:

- Inspired by the Labor and Education Alignment Program (LEAP) grant awarded to Tennessee College of Applied Technology Morristown, Tennessee high school seniors can participate in the "Work Ethic Distinction" program to earn points to receive a workforce readiness credential. Students with the Work Ethic Distinction receive preference for job interviews with partnering employers if they are qualified.[25]
- Launched in 2021, Hawaii's ClimbHI Bridge online portal connects learners with real-life, work-based learning opportunities to inspire students to finish high school and pursue post-education and/or career pathway opportunities. As of 2023, 240 schools and 440 businesses participate on the web-based portal, providing virtual opportunities for students to connect and learn about their post-graduation pathways.[26]
- The Biotech Education Program of Baltimore City Community College introduces high school students to biotech's applied and theoretical aspects. After graduation, students continue with internships at the community college, gaining practical experience before pursuing a bachelor's degree.[27]

[23] AdvanceCTE, 2021, p. 8
[24] AdvanceCTE, 2021, p. 7
[25] Tennessee Work Ethic Distinction. (n.d.). Home. https://tnworkethic.com/
[26] ClimbHI. (n.d.). ClimbHI Bridge. https://climbhi.org/portals/
[27] https://www.bccc.edu/Page/1320

To summarize, regions can effectively collaborate to implement a number of work-based learning opportunities for students, as noted in the table below.

Regional leaders have all of the following in place	Examples of work-based learning implementation
• Apprenticeships are available and have participation by students	• Apprenticeships, on-the-job training (OJT), and shadowing opportunities for students
• Work-based learning contributes to graduation requirements, credit acquisition, and/or factor into student GPA and honors programs	• Education and industry partnerships provide K-12 students learning experiences that satisfy graduation and credentialing guidelines (see NYSED's Work-Based Learning Programs here)
• Curriculum is aligned to promote career awareness, exploration, preparation, and training for students	• Guest speakers, job fairs and interactive career workshops to increase student awareness in CTE-related industries

ELEMENT 4: PROMOTE EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT FOR CAREER READINESS

Estimated Reading Time: 10 minutes

To enrich the career and technical education experiences of students, educators should be resourced and supported in acquiring real-world, first-hand experiences in career and technical education fields. In doing so, educators become valuable sources of experience and insight for students interested in career and technical education.

Definition and explanation

The basic role for educational institutions is to provide training and education that help job seekers develop those skills. This includes both K12 educators as well as colleges and universities. Educators do not always see themselves as a core component of workforce development despite the vital role they play,[28] so it is important to engage with them in all phases of career and technical education.

Job training providers are also educators, although they may operate outside of the K12 and college setting. They likely have a direct mission to improve workforce development, often around a specific industry or skillset. While all in the education sector, different institutions will have different priorities, so regional collaborations might seek to align institutions around a "K-16" model of career training, together with businesses. [28]

To promote career readiness, educators themselves need opportunities to learn about workforce needs. Regional collaborations to advance understanding of school-to-work connections should foster these opportunities in the form of teacher externships and work-based professional learning opportunities in the region. Providing educators access to workforce data can allow for educators to incorporate regional workforce gaps and priorities into lessons that ready their students for careers.

[28] Burgess & Williams, 1997, p. 3
[29] Burgess & Williams, 1997, p. 12

Examples of Educator Support

Developing the capacities of educators by providing externships and professional work-based learning enriches the career awareness and exploration of their students. While educator-focused career and technical education programs are less frequently found, the following examples demonstrate effective approaches:

- As demonstrated in Berkeley's Biotech Education program,[30] as well as Ohio's Medina County Career Center,[31] and the Tarrant To & Through (T3) Partnership in Texas,[32] employers and educators work together in designing curricula and arranging intern and apprentice opportunities to prepare students for employment. Furthermore, teachers spend time in the workplace to better understand the workforce expectations for their students.
- In partnership with NYSED, NYSDOL launched the first Educator Career Development Ambassador Program in 2023 to support grade 6-12 teachers, librarians, and counselors in creating workforce-informed curriculum. Based on first year success, the program's capacity doubled from 30 to 60 participants, reflecting strong interest from K12 educators and staff in integrating career awareness and development into their lessons and curriculum.[33]

To summarize, regions can effectively collaborate to promote educational support for career readiness in a number of ways, as noted in the table below.

Regional leaders have all of the following in place	Examples of promoting educational support for career readiness
• Teacher externships are available and utilized by educators	• Educators can take a sabbatical to explore careers available within a local industry
• Work-based professional learning opportunities in region for all educators	• Professional development programs support educators in learning general and industry-specific workforce information
• Educator access to workforce data	• Industry, community, and government partners regularly share labor and workforce data with education partners to enhance curriculum

[30] https://summerspringboard.com/campus/uc-berkeley-summer-program/
[31] https://mcjvs.edu/?page_id=9563
[32] https://t3partnership.org/
[33] https://dol.ny.gov/teacher-ambassador-program

ELEMENT 5: OFFER ENGAGING OPTIONS AND INCENTIVES

Estimated Reading Time: 10 minutes

Using innovative technologies and articulation agreements for degree acquisition are effective ways to boost youth engagement with CTE opportunities and career pathways. Technology-enabled simulations, such as virtual and augmented reality, present fun and unique "first-hand" experiences in careers, while articulation agreements help students graduate high school or college, while simultaneously satisfying certification requirements for industry-recognized credentials.

Definition and explanation

The final best practice focuses on innovative ways to incentivize participation in career and technical education programs and engage learners. Students should have various options for career readiness opportunities, including apprenticeships, internships, and mentoring. Beyond that, incentives and support should encourage students to take advantage of these opportunities. This includes providing dual enrollment options in career and technical education areas, so students earn college credit for career-based degree programs and offering virtual options for work-based learning, internships, and mentoring. Articulation agreements among educational institutions are essential for making these opportunities available and accessible to students.[34]

Providing alternate structures to instructional experiences such as work site simulations, virtual/augmented reality, or online mentoring, allows for additional exposure to careers as demonstrated by the ClimbHI Bridge project. Schools in rural Colorado altered their schedules to accommodate more job-based learning, including switching to block scheduling and even four-day school weeks.[35]

Examples of Innovative Practices Regarding Dual-Enrollment Articulations

Advances in education standards and policies present new opportunities for learners to earn industry-recognized credentials (e.g., micro-credentials, certification credits) and maximize their career and technical education through dual-enrollment opportunities. While the policies and procedures for forming articulations are varied and complex, the examples below demonstrate pathways forward:

- The Kentucky Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (KY FAME) program, which was recognized in 2013 as the "Best Career Program in the U.S." by the U.S. Department of Labor's National Career Pathway Network, allows enrolled participants to earn an associate degree in two years while completing 1,800 hours of paid on-the-job training. During that time, participants receive weekly instruction on a Kentucky Community and Technical College system campus and apprentice with various businesses. Upon completion of the program, students earn an industry-recognized Advanced Manufacturing Technician credential.[36]
- The Associate of Occupational Studies degree in Applied Business Studies at Jefferson Community College in New York allows BOCES students with pre-existing career and technical education skills and/or credits to transfer up to 20 credit hours of prior learning experience including professional learning credits from military service.[37]

[34] CTE TAC of NY maintains an Articulation Agreement Database (https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WyezwRKcITEx1b5btHMrGZolH9q_m-5ktdYPkxb3IfM/edit?gid=2048575538#gid=2048575538)

[35] Heyward & Weiner, 2022 Heyward, G., & Weiner, S. M. (2022). Developing Homegrown Talent: Eight rural school districts are using career-connected learning to contribute to the local communities' workforce. School Administrator, 79(1), 1–1

[36] https://fame-usa.com/fame-program-locations/kentucky-fame/

[37] https://sunyjefferson.edu/academics/programs/applied-business-aos.php

To summarize, regions can effectively collaborate to provide a number of engaging options and incentives for students, as noted in the table below.

Regional leaders have all of the following in place	Examples of promoting engaging options and incentives
• Virtual solutions, including simulations, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and online mentoring	• Students can experience CTE programs using VR prior to enrolling at a BOCES to make informed decisions for their field(s) of interest. Mentoring of students through online meeting platforms provides greater accessibility and opportunities to engage with industry leaders
• CTE-related dual enrollment	• Dual-enrollment programs and articulation agreements among educational institutions allow students to earn college credits in CTE fields while in high school

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USING THE REGIONAL COLLABORATION SELF-ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

As demonstrated in research and the rubric elements, collaboration is essential for any effective partnership. For regional education and workforce partners, it starts with communication and engagement of all relevant stakeholders to ensure all workforce needs, priorities, and opportunities are commonly understood and kept up to date.

Regional partnerships begin to flourish when resources are collectively harnessed to strengthen education-to-workforce pathways. By enhancing work-based learning opportunities, providing state-of-the-art technology, and streamlining articulation agreements for dual-enrollment opportunities, career education and training becomes more accessible for learners and job seekers. Additionally, collaborations between education and workforce partners present more learning opportunities for educators to gain firsthand experience and relevant career and technical education content so they can encourage career pathways among learners.

As evidenced in research, regional collaborations are about more than providing career programs and services. They're about improving education-to-workforce opportunities and building career pathways so people can thrive while enjoying the work they do with confidence. In doing so, job seekers fulfill pivotal roles that meet the workforce needs of their community.

NEXT STEPS

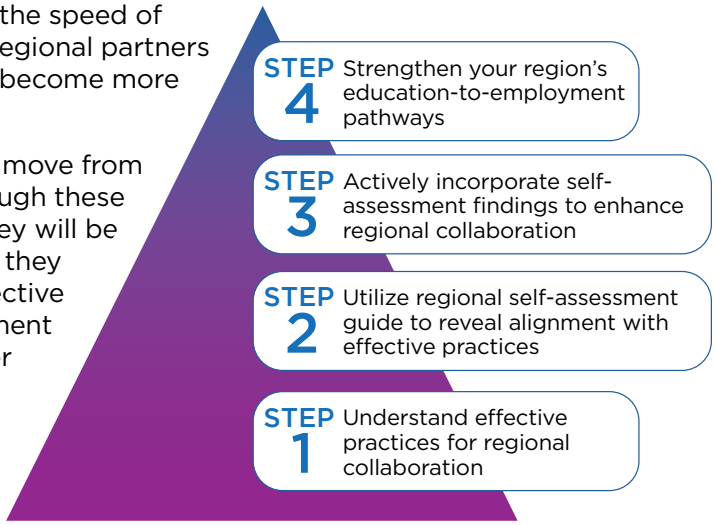
Equipped with a deeper understanding of the five elements of effective regional collaboration, it becomes time to shift that knowledge into informed planning and action.

Now, it is important to emphasize from the outset that strengthening regional collaborations, like any relationship, does not follow a procedural, formulaic approach. This research report's companion document, the Regional Self-Assessment Guide, provides helpful tools, tips, and implementation ideas for regional leaders to use in strengthening regional collaboration efforts.

Before hopping straight into the Regional Self-Assessment Guide, it is important to recognize each region is uniquely composed of stakeholders with their own respective strengths, resources, perspectives, experiences, and objectives. While some regions with strong, long-standing partnerships may find it effortless to proceed with each of the rubric elements in the Regional Self-Assessment Guide, other regions may need to incrementally pace their efforts toward assessing and (re)aligning with each rubric element.

Therefore, it is important for regional leaders utilizing the Regional Self-Assessment Guide to do so strategically and transparently with their partners. Communicate frequently and often and move at the speed of trust. As relationships and collaboration among regional partners improves, education-to-workforce opportunities become more effective and abundant.

As summarized in Figure 3, your community can move from knowledge to informed planning and action through these steps. At the same time, each community's journey will be different because progression is based on where they start. By combining a clear understanding of effective regional collaboration practices with self-assessment insights, regional leaders and partners can further strengthen education-to-workforce pathways in their respective regions which, in turn, better prepare learners and job seekers to address current and emergent workforce needs, both local and global.



APPENDICES

Appendix A: Regional Collaboration Self-Assessment Rubric

Engage stakeholders	☐ Regional Leader	☐ In Place	☐ In Development	☐ Not Started

Regional leaders have all of the following in place:

- Employer led regional efforts
- Identification of regional workforce skills gaps and priorities
- Formal collaboration across sectors
- Regularly scheduled cross-sectional meetings

Questions to consider:

- Does your region speak with one voice?
- How are regional workforce skills gaps and priorities identified?
- How often do CTE stakeholders meet?
- Does collaboration involve partners from all of the following:
  - Industry, Nonprofit, Public Sector?
  - K-12, Higher Education, Job Training Providers?
  - Economic Development Agencies?

Prioritize resources	☐ Regional Leader	☐ In Place	☐ In Development	☐ Not Started

Regional leaders have all of the following in place:

- Formalized/centralized system to collect data on workforce needs
- Regional public facing clearinghouse of resources
- Shared funding (acquisition and distribution)

Questions to consider:

- Do stakeholders maximize their collective resources?
- Are there any duplicated efforts?

Implement work-based learning	☐ Regional Leader	☐ In Place	☐ In Development	☐ Not Started

Regional leaders have all of the following in place:

- Apprenticeships (are available, have participation)
- Graduation requirement/credit bearing/factor into GPA or honors
- Curriculum alignment: Career awareness • Career exploration • Career preparation • Career training

Questions to consider:

- Are non-CTE students exposed to career readiness pathways?
- Does career awareness, exploration, preparation, and training span K12, higher education, and industry?
- Are employers engaged in the design and implementation of CTE programs and graduation requirements?

Promote educational support for career readiness	☐ Regional Leader	☐ In Place	☐ In Development	☐ Not Started

Regional leaders have all of the following in place:

- Teacher externships (available, participation)
- Work-based professional learning, opportunities in region (not just CTE teachers)
- Educator access to workforce data

Questions to consider:

- Are work-based learning opportunities encouraged for all educators? (i.e., not just CTE educators)
- Can educators access data and experiences to inform career readiness instruction?

Offer engaging options and incentives	☐ Regional Leader	☐ In Place	☐ In Development	☐ Not Started

Regional leaders have all of the following in place:

- Virtual solutions — simulations, VR/AR, online mentoring
- CTE-related Dual Enrollment

Questions to consider:

- Are internships, learning, mentoring, teacher externships, and other opportunities available virtually?
- Are dual enrollment programs only for college preparatory courses?
- Do students have options and incentives in career readiness (apprenticeships, internships, and mentoring)?

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