BRINGING THE PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE TO LIFE IN CTE

5 REGIONAL CONVENINGS

4 GUIDING QUESTIONS

3 STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Findings from five regional conversations with New York State CTE stakeholders

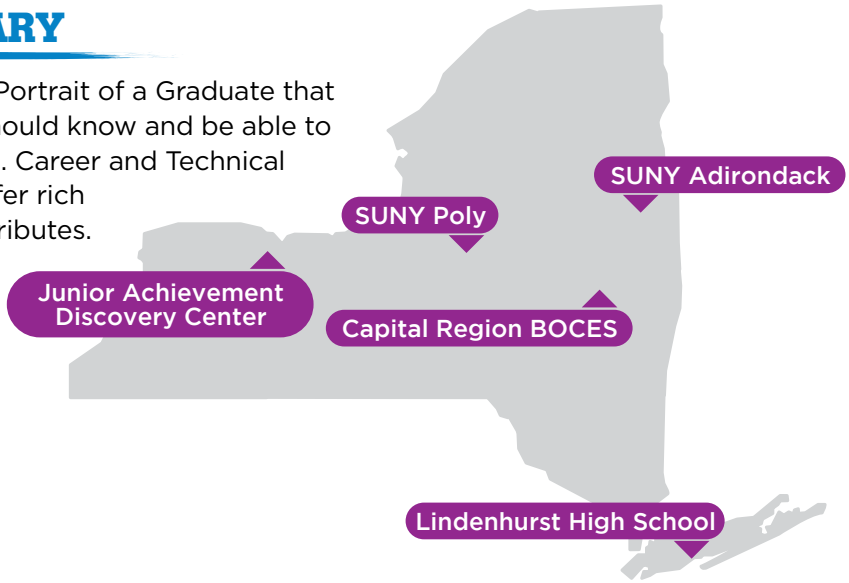
OCTOBER 2025

CTE | TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER OF NY

20 Prospect St., Suite 312
Ballston Spa, NY 12020
nyctecenter.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New York State has adopted a Portrait of a Graduate that describes what every learner should know and be able to do when they leave high school. Career and Technical Education programs already offer rich opportunities to build these attributes. This brief amplifies the voices of CTE practitioners and partners in order to highlight where the Portrait is already visible in CTE and to identify opportunities for continuous growth.



WHAT WE DID

The CTE Technical Assistance Center of New York (CTE TAC) hosted five Framing Tomorrow Regional Collaboration events in October 2025. Each event featured a world café* style activity with secondary CTE educators, postsecondary partners, and business and industry representatives. Mixed groups of stakeholders responded to four guiding questions about how the Portrait attributes already exist and the opportunities to expand upon them with students through CTE practices, partnerships, and priorities for CTE and industry. Written comments and group rankings were categorized and analyzed to identify statewide patterns that are practical and actionable for the field.

SUNY Poly Office of Workforce Development

FOUR CORE QUESTIONS

1. How do students and workers demonstrate the attributes described in the NYS Portrait of a Graduate?

2. What practices in CTE help students to develop the attributes described in the NYS Portrait of a Graduate? Discuss both general practices and specific examples of activities or projects.

3. How can enhanced partnership among secondary, postsecondary, and business/industry professionals contribute to the development of the attributes described in the NYS Portrait of a Graduate?

4. Which of the six attributes described in the NYS Portrait of a Graduate are the most important in CTE and the industries represented here today? Discuss their ranking.

**World café: A structured small group conversation process where participants rotate among tables or questions, building on one another's ideas to surface shared themes and possibilities.*

WHAT WE HEARD STATEWIDE

Students most visibly demonstrate Reflective and Future Focused, and Effective Communicator attributes.

Work-based learning and project-based learning are the primary engines for developing Portrait attributes in CTE.

Community-connected partnerships and active advisory councils are key for providing relevant experiences and feedback for students.

When groups ranked the six attributes based on what already exists in CTE programs, Critical Thinker and Effective Communicator most often ranked highest, with Reflective and Future Focused close behind.

WHAT NYS CTE CAN DO

- Strengthen reflection and goal setting within existing projects and work-based learning so that students can define what they are learning and plan for their futures.
- Use upcoming CTE program approval cycles, including the self study and the external review, to map where each Portrait attribute is taught, practiced, and documented, and to identify gaps to address.
- Work with advisory councils to connect the Portrait of a Graduate directly to local labor market needs and to design ongoing, community-connected experiences instead of one-time events.
- Coordinate with postsecondary and workforce partners so that dual enrollment, articulation agreements, and work-based learning opportunities give students repeated chances to practice the attributes that CTE practitioners, colleges, and employers value most.

The following pages provide a brief overview of the methods, question-by-question findings, and a statewide action framework that CTE leaders can adapt locally.

BACKGROUND

In July 2025, the New York State Education Department adopted the Portrait of a Graduate for all NYS learners. Many of the six attributes already live at the heart of high-quality Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and the CTE TAC heard requests from the field for further explanation of how they could be implemented.

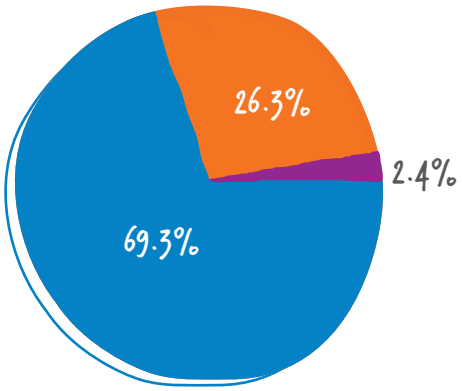
In response, the CTE Technical Assistance Center of New York designed the Fall 2025 series of Framing Tomorrow events to:

- Help CTE teachers and leaders understand the new Portrait of a Graduate.
- Explore how CTE classrooms, labs, and work-based learning experiences already contribute to student development of the six attributes.
- Identify practical opportunities to strengthen programs and partnerships so that the Portrait of a Graduate is intentionally woven into CTE programming.

Five events were held at 5 locations across New York State, representing diverse geographic regions and CTE content areas. Approximately 300 participants took part, including secondary CTE educators, postsecondary CTE professionals, and business and industry partners. These participants were grouped to ensure all three perspectives were shared with one another.

Small groups participated in a world café style activity, responding to four prompts about how Portrait of a Graduate attributes are demonstrated, what CTE practices develop them, how partnerships help, and which attributes matter most in CTE and the industries represented.

After each event, participants submitted evaluative feedback reporting their understanding of the Portrait of a Graduate attributes. As a result of this programming, a strong majority of participants **(69.3%) reported feeling "confident in [their] understanding of the six attributes."** An additional **26.3% left "somewhat more familiar with the six attributes,"** indicating a high level of success for the educational component of the event. Just 2.4% of the participants reported "needing more information."

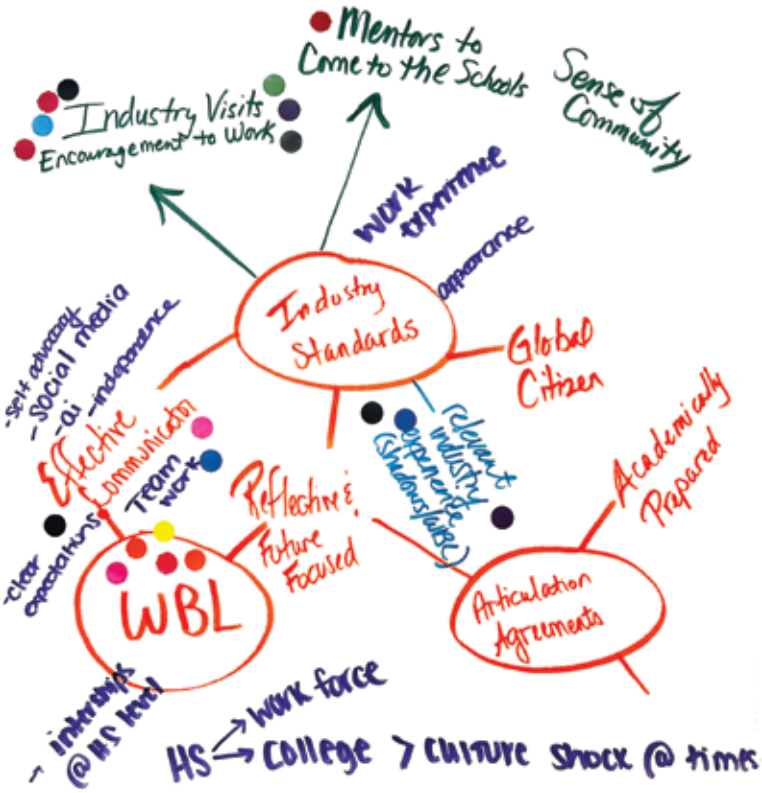


WHO THIS BRIEF IS FOR

- **CTE teachers and Work-Based Learning Coordinators** who design instruction, projects, and work-based learning.
- **BOCES and building/district level CTE administrators** who guide programs and advisory structures.
- **Postsecondary and business or industry partners** who sit on advisory committees or host students.

HOW TO USE THIS BRIEF

- Use the findings and action ideas to spark conversations with advisory boards. Discuss how the development of Portrait of a Graduate attributes can be embedded in course content, work-based learning, and local program design.
- Compare the statewide themes to what you see in your own classrooms, programs, and regional partnerships.
- District, BOCES, and State leaders can draw on these insights when shaping guidance, PD, and graduation planning under the NY Inspires Plan.
- NYSED and curriculum leaders may use the CTE examples as models for how the Portrait of a Graduate attributes can be developed for traditional academic courses.



METHODS FOR ANALYSIS

The CTE TAC analyzed written responses using a consistent categorization approach that grouped ideas by attribute, practice, partnership, and action. Each of the five locations were considered equally in the analysis so that the findings reflect a statewide perspective.

At each event, participants could signal agreement with ideas generated at other tables. In the analysis, comments with at least one peer endorsement were noted as ideas that ranked highly.

FINDINGS BY QUESTIONS

1 How do students and workers demonstrate the attributes described in the NYS Portrait of a Graduate?

WHAT WE HEARD STATEWIDE

***Reflective and Future Focused* and *Effective Communicator* are the most visible attributes.** Stakeholders described students setting goals, reflecting on their progress, adjusting plans, and explaining their thinking to adults and peers.

Stakeholders notice mindset and professionalism as much as technical ability. Participants talked about students showing up on time, following through, taking feedback, and navigating next steps. Technical and academic skills were acknowledged as essential, but were often described as the foundation that allows students to demonstrate higher-level attributes in real settings.

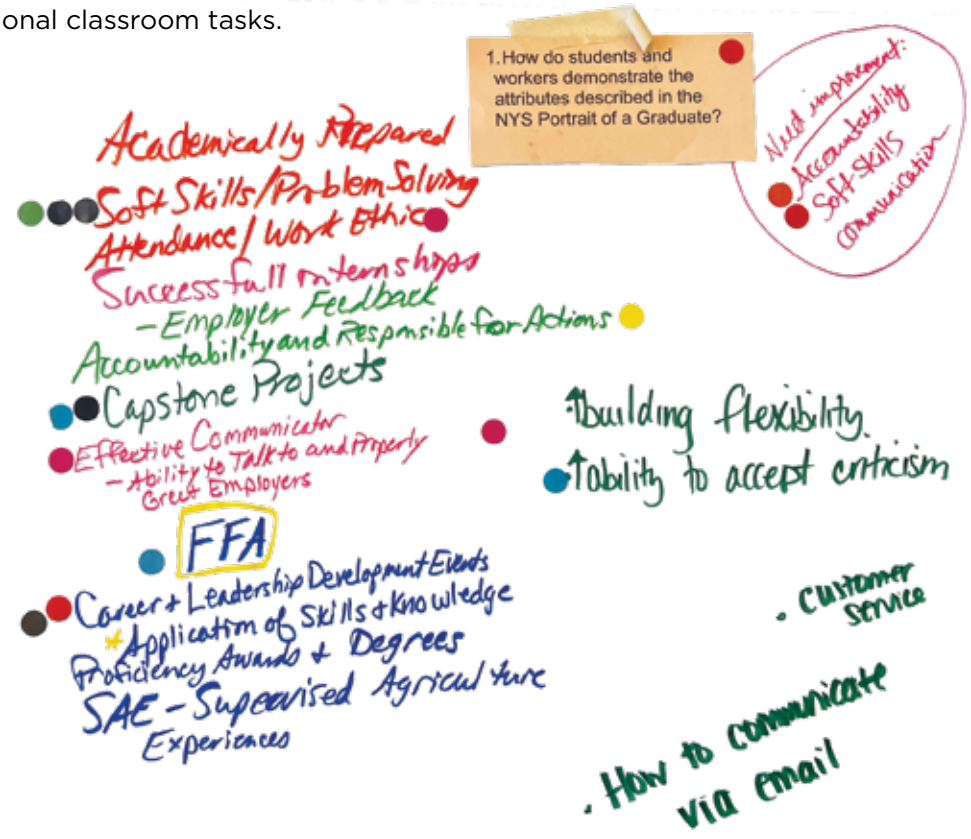
Community-connected experiences reveal attributes in action. When students interact with community partners, customers, or authentic audiences, participants see traits such as confidence, adaptability, and respect for diverse perspectives emerge more clearly than in traditional classroom tasks.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Stakeholders consistently framed the Portrait of a Graduate attributes as behaviors over time, rather than one-time achievements, and emphasized that reflection and communication help students make sense of both academic and technical learning.

COMMENTS FROM THE FIELD

Participants noted that students who can talk about their goals, explain what they have learned, and adjust when things do not go as planned are "the ones who stand out on the job."



2 What practices in CTE help students to develop the attributes described in the NYS Portrait of a Graduate?

WHAT WE HEARD STATEWIDE

Work-based learning (WBL) and project-based learning (PBL) are the primary engines for attribute development. Stakeholders pointed to WBL and PBL as the most powerful ways to build the Portrait of a Graduate attributes, especially when students are responsible for real tasks and real outcomes.

Employability skills and career exploration are at the core of these experiences. Participants highlighted resume and interview preparation, workplace communication, career counseling, and reflection on career interests as critical supports that help students become reflective, future-focused, and effective communicators.

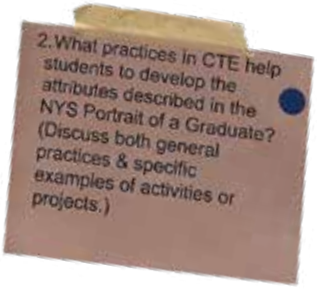
These practices align with NYSED program approval expectations. Stakeholders described practices that are already required elements of NYSED approved CTE programs, including a rigorous technical and academic curriculum, quality WBL opportunities, and use of tools such as the employability profiles to document student growth.

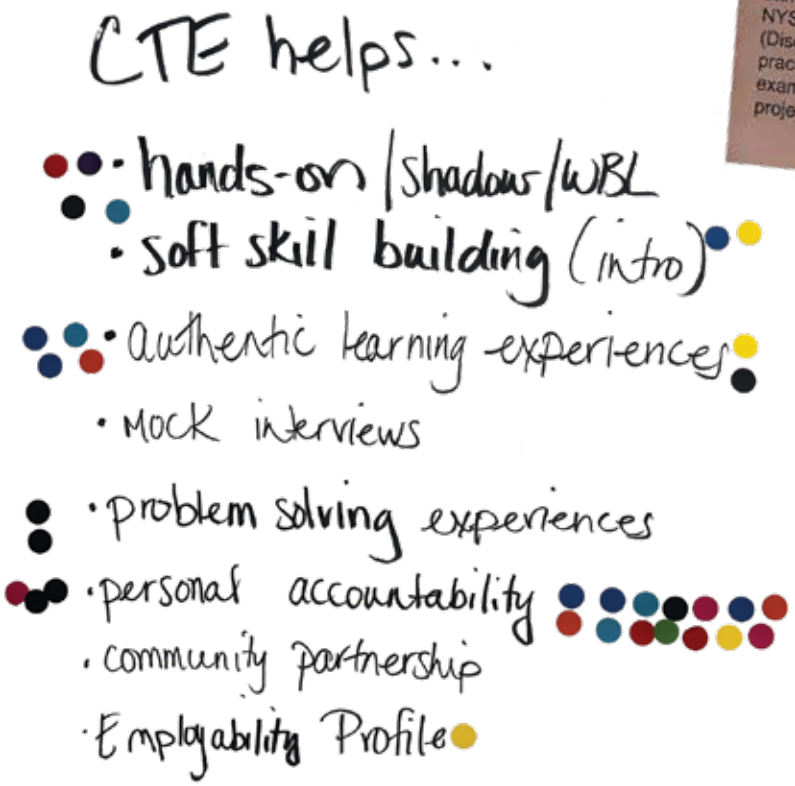
KEY TAKEAWAY

Many noted that these practices can translate beyond CTE classrooms. Projects, reflection, and structured career exploration were described as approaches that academic teachers could also use to help students demonstrate Portrait attributes.

COMMENTS FROM THE FIELD

Participants emphasized that structured reflection, career planning, and employability documents help students connect their day-to-day CTE experiences to long-term goals.





3 How can enhanced partnership among secondary, postsecondary, and business/industry professionals contribute to the development of the attributes described in the NYS Portrait of a Graduate?

WHAT WE HEARD STATEWIDE

Community-connected partnerships are where attributes come to life. Stakeholders highlighted community-facing programs, school-based enterprises, and client projects where students interact directly with community members. In these settings, attributes such as *Effective Communicator*, *Critical Thinker*, and *Reflective and Future Focused* are visible in how students listen, respond to feedback, and adjust plans in real time.

Advisory boards are key connectors, not just compliance. Many groups described representatives on advisory councils as vital to shaping relevant projects, validating skills, and opening doors to WBL experiences. When advisory boards are active and diverse, they help align programs with local and regional workforce needs.

Partners also support educator learning. Stakeholders pointed to examples where industry or postsecondary partners hosted teacher visits, shared emerging technologies, or co-designed experiences. These relationships help teachers stay current and better embed Portrait attributes into instruction.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Partnerships that are ongoing, community connected, and tied to WBL placements and advisory work were seen as the most powerful for building Portrait attributes at scale, especially *Critical Thinker* and *Effective Communicator*.

COMMENTS FROM THE FIELD

Stakeholders described that when community members and employers are "in the room and in the work," students rise to the occasion and demonstrate professionalism, problem solving, and communication that are harder to see in isolated classroom tasks.

PARTNERSHIP BARRIERS

Participants noted that partnership capacity is uneven, and that time, coordination, and communication structures can limit how often partners are engaged beyond minimum requirements. They also pointed out that some programs lack clear processes for moving from "guest speaker" to deeper collaboration.

SUNY Poly Office of Workforce Development

4 Which of the six attributes described in the NYS Portrait of a Graduate are the most important in CTE and the industries represented here today?

WHAT WE HEARD STATEWIDE

***Critical Thinker* and *Effective Communicator* emerged as top priorities.** Across group rankings, these two attributes most often appeared in the first or second position. Stakeholders from all sectors consistently framed them as core to being employable, promotable, and adaptable across industries.

***Reflective and Future Focused* is a close companion.** While not ranked first as often, this attribute was frequently placed in the upper half of rankings and discussed as essential for navigating career changes, setting goals, and adjusting pathways over time.

***Academically Prepared* and *Global Citizen* were described as foundational.** These attributes rarely appeared in the top two ranking slots, but participants talked about them as baseline expectations.

Groups emphasized interdependence even while ranking. Many groups noted that all six attributes work together and that different roles or industries may emphasize different combinations. Rankings were used to signal priority, not to dismiss the importance of any attribute.

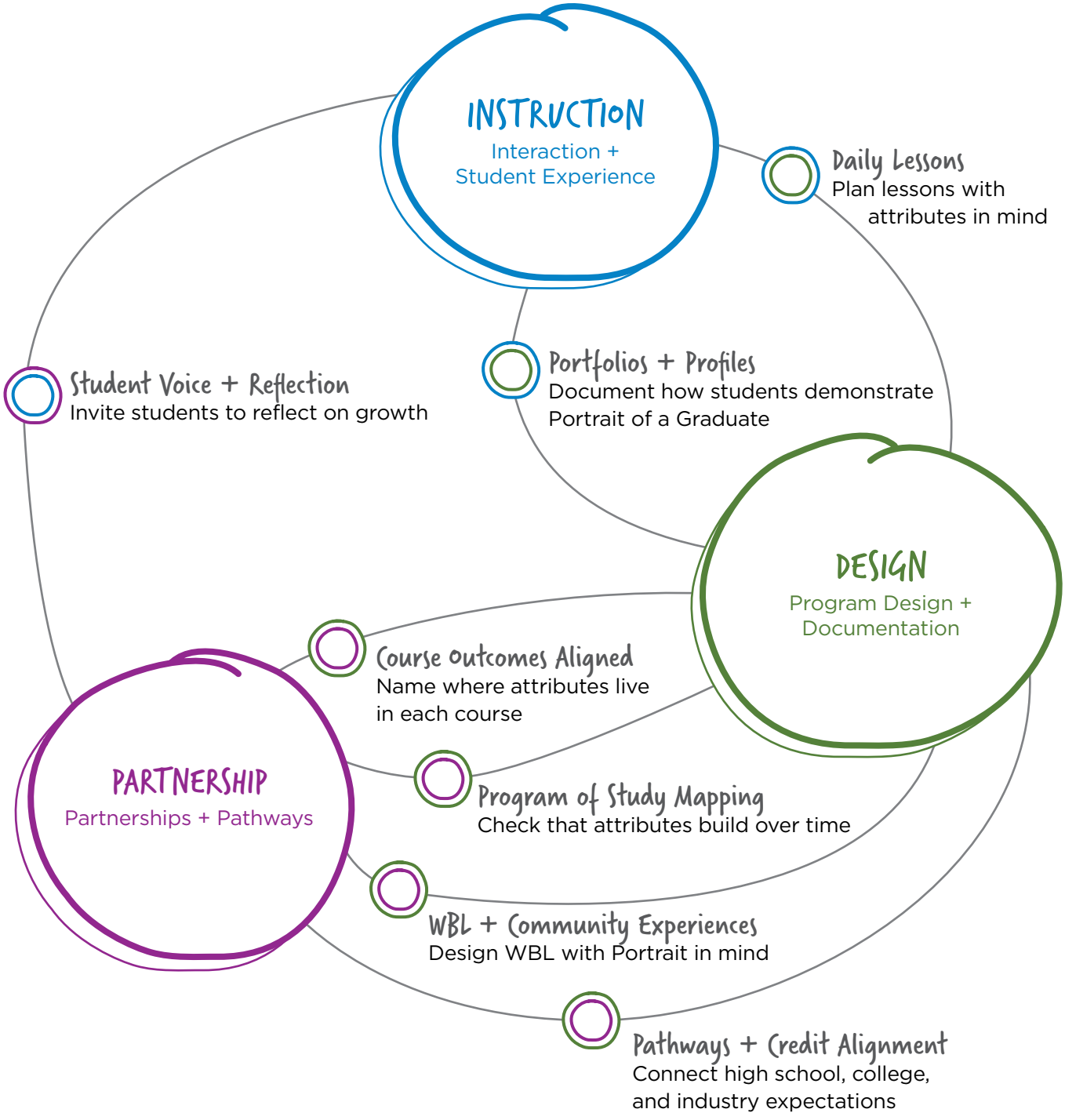
FROM INSIGHT TO ACTION

Focus Area 1: **Instruction and Student Experience**

Focus Area 2: **Program Design and Documentation**

Focus Area 3: **Partnerships and Pathways**

Local and regional leaders can strengthen the alignment between the NYS Portrait of a Graduate and NYSED-approved CTE programs by selecting and adapting options from the short menu derived from the world café insights. These actions are designed to be mixed and matched, rather than implemented simultaneously.



INSTRUCTION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE

What NYS CTE can do:

- In every program, ensure that at least one project-based learning or work-based learning experience requires students to articulate their thought process and decisions. This explanation should be delivered to a real-world audience such as advisory members, employers, or families.
- Integrate critical thinking, communication, and future planning alongside technical and academic criteria into employability profiles so teachers and students share a common Portrait language.
- Encourage teachers to surface both academic and technical skills inside real tasks so students see that literacy, numeracy, and technical competence are the foundation for demonstrating higher level attributes.
- Have students within their CTE classroom conduct their own ranking of the Portrait of a Graduate attributes as a mechanism for deeper understanding and critical thinking of how they align with professional aspirations.

PROGRAM DESIGN AND DOCUMENTATION

What NYS CTE can do:

- Map where each of the six attributes currently show up across courses, projects, credentials, and work-based learning, then identify one gap to address in the next improvement cycle.
- Align existing tools such as student portfolios, employability profiles, and performance assessments with Portrait language so evidence of the attributes is captured, not only technical and academic outcomes.
- Use required self-study and external review processes to ask focused questions about how well the program supports Portrait attributes and how that shows up in data, such as work-based learning evaluations, credential attainment, or student reflections.
- When updating curriculum or adding new experiences, check that changes are explicitly connected to one or more Portrait attributes.

PARTNERSHIPS AND PATHWAYS

What NYS CTE can do:

- Work with advisory councils to move at least a few activities from one-time guest speaking toward ongoing client projects, school based enterprises, or structured work-based learning placements where attributes can be observed over time.
- Invite business, industry, and postsecondary partners to name which attributes they value most, then ask them to provide structured feedback on those attributes during student presentations, clinics, or work-based learning.
- Coordinate with postsecondary and workforce partners so that dual enrollment, articulation agreements, and work-based learning experiences give students chances to practice the same attributes those partners expect in first year students and new hires.
- Review communication and scheduling structures so that partnership activities are planned early, repeated over time, and accessible across programs, rather than being isolated to a single teacher or course.

YOUR ROLE

Secondary CTE Leaders and Teachers

- Reflect on where the six Portrait of a Graduate attributes are already visible in courses, projects, work-based learning, and student interactions with partners, and identify where there are gaps.
- In preparation for the NYSED program approval cycle, consider how self study conversations, external reviews, and advisory discussions can include specific questions about how well the program supports and documents Portrait attributes.
- Develop a shared, student-friendly way to talk about the attributes so that classroom language, advisory conversations, and communication with families and partners use consistent terms.

Postsecondary and Industry Partners

- Reflect on how current engagements with CTE programs, such as advisory councils, work based learning placements, and client projects, already help students practice Portrait attributes.
- When hosting students or reviewing student work, offer feedback that names specific attributes you see in action and highlights the behaviors that matter most for success in your setting.
- Use upcoming advisory meetings to co-design or adjust at least one community connected experience or placement where partners can observe student growth in multiple attributes over time.

UTILIZING THE PROGRAM APPROVAL CYCLE

- Share this brief with advisory councils and other stakeholder groups and invite them to react to the statewide patterns, adding local examples of where the attributes are already strong and where there is room to grow.
- Identify when each approved program is scheduled for re-approval and use that window to bring the world café findings/CTE Cluster responses and the Portrait of a Graduate explicitly into local planning.
    - Select one or two high leverage actions and decide how they will show up in self study work, advisory agendas, curriculum revisions, or work-based learning planning.

BRINGING PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE TO LIFE BY CTE CONTENT AREA

During the Framing Tomorrow sessions, educators in each content area also selected one concrete way to bring the Portrait of a Graduate into their daily work. Their reflections show what the Portrait attributes can look like in their career clusters.

Advanced Manufacturing

Educators sketched a full road map from early interest to career success, using the Portrait attributes to connect technical competency and safety with habits like resilience, teachability, and teamwork.

Agriculture

Educators framed a "fork in the road" between labor and technology careers, using Portrait attributes to help students reflect on their strengths, stay open to change, and choose a future ready path.

Arts, Entertainment, and Design

Educators state the Portrait attributes are apparent through critique and reflection routines that push students to communicate ideas clearly, wrestle with complex topics, and see their work in a global context.

Business

Educators centered the Portrait on "soft skills" by naming communication, teamwork, self sufficiency, and initiative as the core mindsets that make students employable in any business setting.

Construction

Educators tied the Portrait to very concrete expectations like punctuality, work ethic, initiative, and safety, while also naming technology and interviews as places where critical thinking and communication are essential attributes .

Digital Technology

Educators used the Portrait to tackle AI head on, emphasizing critical thinking, project based learning, and digital literacy so students learn to use AI tools wisely rather than let tools do the thinking for them.

Education

Educators placed "*Academically Prepared*" at the center and showed how communication, critical thinking, interpersonal skills, and lifelong learning all grow together when students take ownership of their learning.

Healthcare and Human Services

Educators state the Portrait is a bridge between classroom and clinic, where communication, self management, professional image, and licensure readiness show up through internships and job-specific training.

Hospitality, Tourism, and Culinary

Educators highlighted multitasking, cross functional teamwork, adaptability, and accountability as the Portrait traits that keep guests safe, service smooth, and teams ready for rapid change.

Supply Chain & Transportation

Educators state the Portrait comes alive in scenarios that demand critical thinking and clear communication, positioning students for leadership by tying technical skills to accountability, global awareness, and growth mindset.

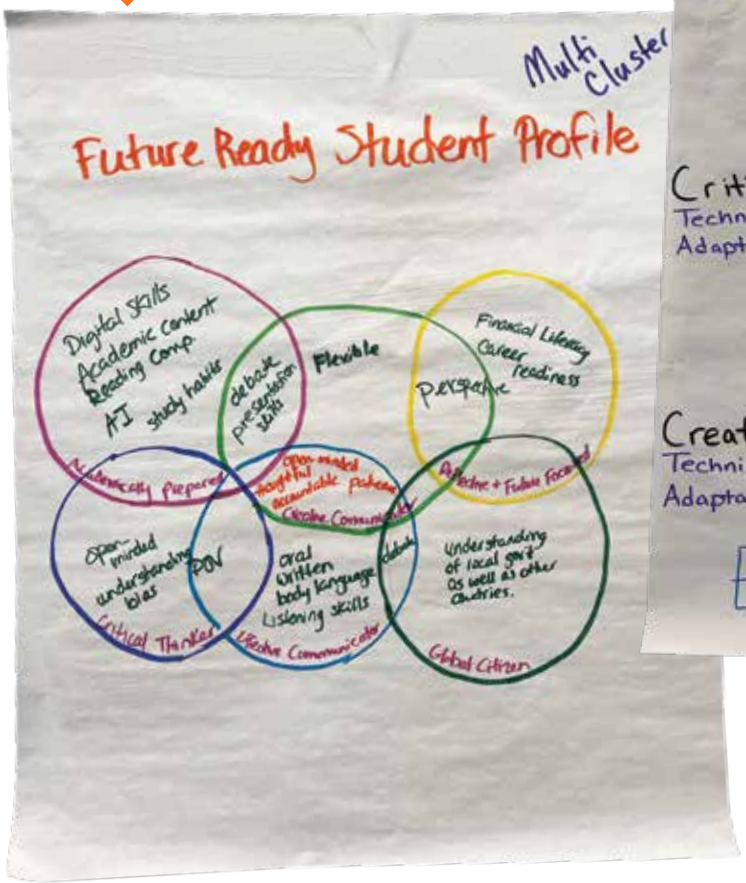
WBL, Counselors, and Complementary Clusters

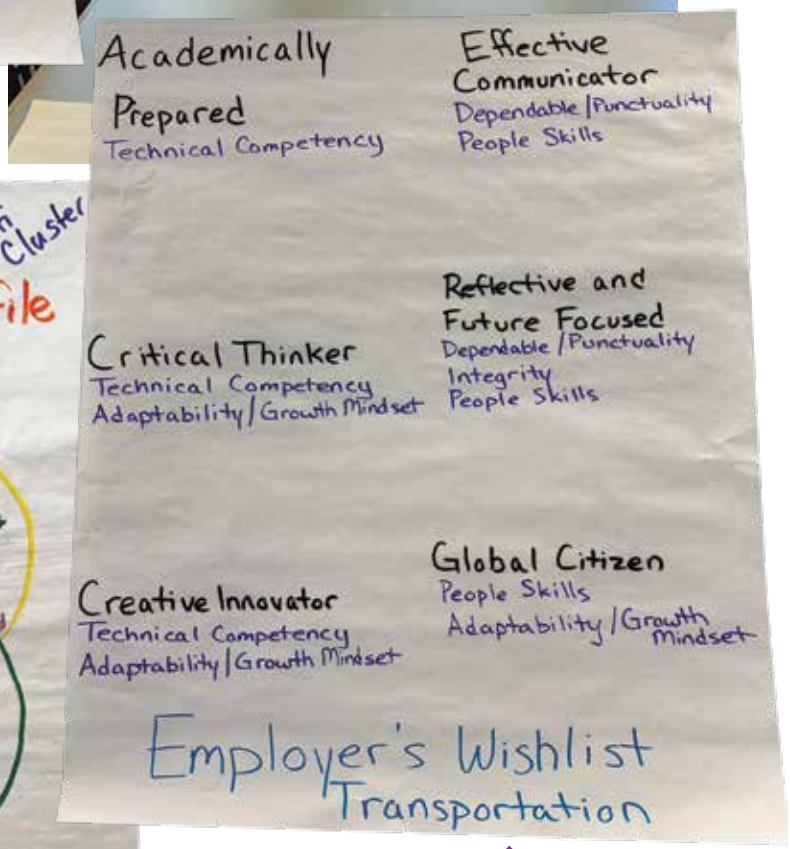
Educators use work based learning and counseling to build future focused students who can communicate clearly, advocate for themselves, and turn employer feedback into growth.

Hospitality, Tourism, Culinary

Work-Based Learning

Multi-Cluster





Transportation

CTE | TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER OF NY

20 Prospect St., Suite 312
Ballston Spa, NY 12020
nyctecenter.org