



# IMPROVING STUDENT PATHWAYS

## *The Essential Role of the Business Community*

July 2019

ExcelinEd has engaged on career and technical education (CTE) with a range of business groups, including regional and local chamber officials. Their passion for helping local schools and postsecondary institutions develop pathways that lead to in-demand, middle and higher wage occupations is a clear reminder that business and industry are vital to the *what*, *how* and *why* of robust student pathways.

### THE WHAT

Policymakers and educators at the K-12 and postsecondary levels need business and industry voices to help inform which pathways and occupations are in-demand now—and which ones will be in-demand 5-10 years from now. While this may seem obvious, it's certainly not easy.

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The *what* often means change, such as transforming pathways where students cut hair, prepare food or learn basic first aid into opportunities for learners to program machines, manage teams and businesses or practice more advanced medical procedures.

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Business and industry can also provide the much-needed external cover and pressure to make these hard changes in schools, districts and postsecondary programs.

On the employer side, the business community needs to ensure that the signals to education systems are clear and unequivocal when it comes to desired competencies and [credentials](#).

### THE HOW

While schools and two-year colleges have long managed the coursework and training students pursue in career pathways, educators are typically the last to learn about updates in industry practices, technology and required competencies.

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Strong business and industry partnerships can provide regular reviews and updates to curricula and pedagogy, access to the latest equipment and processes as well as experiences in work-based learning.

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Talk to any principal or dean, and they will tell you about their challenges to identify, hire and retain industry professionals as CTE teachers.

A critical piece of business and industry's role is to help retrain or upskill existing teachers—to ensure they know *how* to best prepare students for career success and advancement over time.

### THE WHY

The business community can also communicate *why* it is essential to develop high-quality CTE pathways. And the answer is not just “jobs.” The most forward-looking business leaders want a well-trained workforce that can do more than just fill open positions. These leaders are looking for a workforce that possesses the knowledge and skills to adapt and grow over time.

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CTE is not a jobs program; it is a sequence of rigorous education and training that can help provide a lifetime of economic mobility for families and build long-term prosperity for states, regions and cities.

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High-quality CTE includes postsecondary study and attainment, rigorous coursework and relevant occupational experiences. Put simply, it is an integral investment in talent, the future and possibility. One of the business community's key responsibilities is to continually remind and cajole education system leaders of this fact. CTE must aim higher than low-skill, low-paying and dead-end pathways.

### What's Next?

As many business leaders have shared, developing and sustaining [cross-sector partnerships](#) that include education systems and the business community is hard work. Yet high-quality CTE programs require them—particularly if schools and postsecondary institutions are going to get the *what*, *how* and *why* of student pathways right.

Learn more at [ExcelinEd.org/CTE](https://www.excelined.org/cte).