# Championing High-Quality Data

**Across the country, close to 3.5 million students are enrolled in postsecondary Career Technical Education (CTE) programs. Increasingly, learners are valuing career-connected education after high school that will lead to good jobs with family-sustaining wages. According to ECMC Group's November 2021 Question The Quo Education Pulse Survey, most Gen Z learners are focused on skills-based, career-connected education.[1]**

Seventy-three percent of respondents reported that an important factor in their post-high school plans is having a direct path to a career. Fifty-eight percent believe that a skills-based education makes sense in today's world. Employers agree: According to an Advance CTE survey of employers, 55 percent rated job-specific and soft skills as very important when hiring a recent high school or college graduate.[2] In comparison, 33 percent of respondents rated academic degrees as very important.
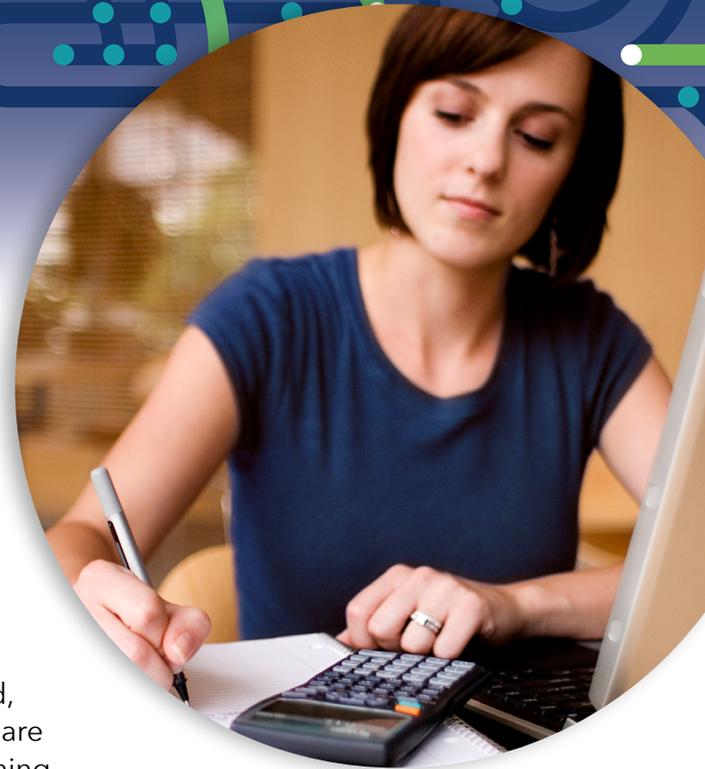
In kind, states are designing education and workforce development agendas that strengthen career pathways and career-connected education systems. Such agendas have considerable value for unifying states around common goals, enacting policy and targeting and aligning resources.

Without Limits: A Shared Vision for the Future of Career Technical Education calls on states to establish shared, statewide goals for a cohesive career preparation ecosystem.[3] This vision recognizes that aligning data and metrics to statewide goals enables greater coherence across education and workforce systems. The data and metrics should include actionable program- and student-level data to gauge progress and design interventions to support student success.

With support from ECMC Foundation, Advance CTE launched the Advancing Postsecondary CTE Data Quality Initiative (PDI) in 2020 and is working with a

group of states to improve postsecondary CTE data quality and use. Alabama, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida and Oregon were selected to form a cohort focused on improving the quality of data collected on postsecondary CTE programs and using data to improve CTE program offerings, strengthen outcomes equitably across learner groups and special populations, and align the interests of learners with industry and programmatic needs.

This series of briefs will draw on lessons learned from the initiative to highlight strategies for state leaders to build and strengthen their postsecondary CTE data ecosystems. This brief, the first in the series, addresses the importance of a unifying vision for education and workforce that draws upon and regularly uses postsecondary CTE data to measure progress and guide state policy and practice.

## STRATEGY ONE
## Recognize postsecondary CTE data as a key aspect of shared, statewide education and workforce development goals

Setting a statewide agenda for education and workforce development, and generating alignment and buy-in toward those goals, requires strong leadership. States that have had success are those with a unifying goal, shared ownership of that goal, and a plan to achieve it. Among those states are two PDI participants: Alabama and Florida.

In **Alabama**, Governor Kay Ivey set the SuccessPlus credential attainment goal in 2018 based on recommendations from an inter-agency working group led by the Alabama Workforce Council. The goal charges Alabama with adding 500,000 workforce-ready employees to the labor market by 2025. CTE is well integrated in the state's attainment goal. The Alabama Workforce Council Statewide Educational Attainment Committee's recommendations acknowledge CTE as an asset that strengthens the pipeline from high school through postsecondary education and to careers through

Alabama's SuccessPlus prioritizes assessment and continuous improvement, identifying five metrics to monitor progress:

- Postsecondary education attainment rate;
- College and career readiness;
- Participation in work-based learning;
- Enrollment and completion for all levels of education and training by population, race/ethnicity, gender and workforce region; and
- Employment and workforce participation rate.



work-based learning, career exploration and coaching, technical-skill credentialing and more.[4]

With SuccessPlus as a north star, Alabama's CTE leaders can set a strategy for implementing the state's goal. In its 2020 Combined State Plan, in which the state's Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) plan is submitted with its Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) plan, Alabama doubles down on creating "a strong workforce development system that is centered on competency-based career pathways into the middle class."[5]

In 2019, Governor Ron DeSantis committed to making **Florida** number one in workforce education by 2030 through executive order.[6] This vision centers CTE and identifies a clear role for postsecondary CTE, including directing significant investments in workforce apprenticeships and other industry-specific learning opportunities.

The executive order tasked the commissioner of education with auditing the state CTE system with an eye toward program offerings and CTE student outcome indicators, such as academic achievement, college readiness, postsecondary enrollment, credential attainment and attainment of industry certifications.

This priority is reinforced in Florida's Perkins V plan, which includes an implementation goal to "engage industry partners to drive innovation and work-based learning opportunities."[7] To address challenges with employer recruitment and coordination, the state plan proposes a work-based learning portal that enables the collection of data on and analysis of state-wide work-based learning opportunities.

A plan to achieve state education and workforce goals should articulate a clear role for postsecondary CTE, draw on relevant data, and identify key indicators to monitor progress toward goals. By prioritizing postsecondary CTE data at the state level, leaders promote a culture of data that guides program development and continuous improvement.

## STRATEGY TWO
## Build postsecondary CTE data systems and routines to monitor program-level implementation of state goals

While establishing a vision and setting goals help states enact policy and target resources, implementation requires partner agencies, systems and organizations to build processes

and programs for reaching them. In Alabama and Florida, use of new postsecondary CTE data elements, data management processes and data routines is central.

The Florida Department of Education annually reviews college readiness, postsecondary enrollment and credential attainment, among other CTE indicators. However, the state is improving its data system by building and investing in an education and workforce data platform called the Education Meets Opportunity Dashboard (EMOP).

**The goals of the EMOP are to:**

- Isolate and understand the impact of workforce programs;

- Disaggregate learner outcomes by demographic details; and

- Measure the state's return on investment.[8]

Through the PDI, Florida is working to strengthen data aligned to its state goals by collecting new data on the postsecondary work-based learning opportunities that are available to its residents. Florida is exploring options to make this information available in the EMOP to increase work-based learning data transparency, spurring increased participation by employers and individuals alike.

Meanwhile, Alabama convened the Committee on Credentialing and Career Pathways (ACCCP), which is co-chaired by the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) chancellor and the state superintendent of education. The committee is tasked with creating a list of in-demand occupations, creating competency models for each in-demand occupation, and identifying aligned credentials of value.

Through the PDI, ACCS is creating education pathways aligned to the in-demand occupations identified by the ACCP. Alabama is doing so by generating and evaluating data on postsecondary CTE programs of study competencies. This data will enable competencies to be matched across occupations and education programs to demonstrate career pathways. Ultimately, this information will be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that

CTE participants and concentrators are trained for employment in high-wage, in-demand jobs to meet the SuccessPlus goal.

## Conclusion

Meeting and monitoring progress toward state goals may require building new data infrastructure, routines and elements. Alabama and Florida, having recognized the investment in high-quality data, including postsecondary CTE data, will enable the programmatic improvements necessary for each state to achieve their goals.

High-quality postsecondary CTE data is also crucial to ensuring that policies, programs and practices are supporting learners to reach their education and career goals. The second brief in this series will discuss centering the learner experience to improve data collection and use.

## About

Advance CTE's Advancing Postsecondary CTE Data Quality Initiative (PDI) is exploring how state leaders can cultivate high-quality postsecondary data ecosystems that can assist postsecondary institutions in offering career pathways that meet learner interests and are aligned to a good career.

Through the PDI, Advance CTE is working with the Alabama Community College System, Delaware Department of Education, University of the District of Columbia Community College, Florida Department of Education, and Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission to develop and implement comprehensive action plans to improve the quality and use of postsecondary CTE data. Focus areas for grantees include improving data collection, developing local capacity to use data effectively, improving reporting and communication, identifying opportunity gaps and improving data linkages.

## Notes

[1] ECMC Foundation. (2021). *Question The Quo Education Pulse Survey.* https://www.ecmcgroup.org/news/group/four-year-college-has-lost-its-luster-among-teens-less-than-half-considering-a-four-year-degree-or-believe-one-is-necessary-for-success

[2] Advance CTE. (2021). *Shifting the skills conversation: Employer attitudes and outcomes of Career Technical Education.* https://careertech.org/resource/employer-attitudes-CTE

[3] Advance CTE. (2021). *Without limits: A shared vision for the future of Career Technical Education.* https://cte.careertech.org/sites/default/files/CTEWithoutLimits_Vision_2021.pdf

[4] Alabama Works! (2018). *Preparing Alabama's workforce for opportunities and growth.* https://alabamaworks.com/wp-content/uploads/2018-12-27-AWC-Attainment-Report_final.pdf

[5] State of Alabama. (2020). *State of Alabama's 2020 combined plan for WIOA (2020 combined plan).* https://s3.amazonaws.com/PCRN/docs/stateplan/AL_2020_State_Plan.pdf

[6] Exec. Order No. 19-31 (2019). https://www.flgov.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/EO-19-31.pdf

[7] Florida Department of Education. (2020). *Florida's state plan for the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V).* https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/18815/urlt/FloridaStatePlanPerkinsV.pdf

[8] Florida Department of Education. (2021). Florida College System legislative update [PowerPoint slides]. https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/5592/urlt/President-Leg-Webinar-2021.pdf