

Pathways, Not Pitfalls: Career-Connected Learning For All

A Report from the National Cross-Partisan
Education Policy Network Career-Connected
Learning Working Group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America faces an urgent challenge: high school academic achievement is declining.¹ Student disengagement, chronic absenteeism, and lack of motivation are early warning signs and contributors—and they’re climbing too.² Too many young people can’t see how their education connects to their future, so they disengage, and their academic outcomes suffer. This lack of clarity extends beyond students to parents, caregivers, and families, and reflects a broader uncertainty among educators, policymakers, and state leaders about the purpose and promise of education.³

At the same time, the field has wrestled with a false choice: either prioritize traditional academic rigor or prepare students for careers. **This is a dangerous myth.** The students who succeed are those who master interdisciplinary core skills along with contemporary skills required for modern work.⁴

Career-Connected Learning (CCL) doesn’t trade off with academics—it strengthens them. When students see how algebra connects to construction, writing skills matter in healthcare, and biology applies to agriculture, they develop a deeper understanding of academic concepts and see a clearer purpose for their learning. High-quality CCL can increase student engagement, academic achievement, college preparation, and workforce readiness.⁵

CCL provides the relevance that engages students while building the [durable skills](#) that every career requires, whether that path leads to a PhD, professional certification, corporate role, or skilled trade. And as globalization and rapid technological advancements transform the future of work, these skills will become increasingly imperative.⁶

This is not about tracking students into predetermined careers. We must ensure students graduate with both strong academic foundations and clear pathways to economic opportunity. In today’s fast-evolving economy, every young person deserves a supported transition from school to a fulfilling career.

We invite education leaders, employers, policymakers, and communities to join us in making career-connected learning accessible to all students as the bridge that makes academics meaningful, strengthens K-12 connections to economic development, and equips the next generation with the skills to thrive.

1 Miller, C. C., Paris, F., and Mervosh, S. (2026) “Why U.S. Test Scores Are in a ‘Generation-Long Decline.’” Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University. <https://cepr.harvard.edu/news/2026/05/why-us-test-scores-are-generation-long-decline>

2 Winthrop, R., Shoukry, Y., and Nitkin, D. (2025) *The Disengagement Gap: Why Student Engagement Isn’t What Parents Expect*. The Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/REPORT_The-Disengagement-Gap_FINAL.pdf

3 Hendron, J. G. (2025) “2025 Poll Results.” *PDK International*. <https://pdkpoll.org/2025-poll-results/>

4 OECD. (2019) *OECD Learning Compass 2030: A Series of Concept Notes*. OECD Publishing. <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/future-of-education-and-skills-2030.html>

5 Lindsay, J., Hughes, K., Dougherty, S. M., Reese, K., and Joshi, M. (2024) “What We Know About the Impact of Career and Technical Education: A Systematic Review of the Research.” Career and Technical Education Research Network. <https://ctereachnetwork.org/resources/2024-systematic-review>

6 Burning Glass Institute. (2025) *Which Skills Matter Now? A Data-Driven Framework for K-12 in the Age of AI*. Burning Glass Institute. <https://www.burningglassinstitute.org/research/whichskillsmatternow>

WHAT IS CAREER-CONNECTED LEARNING?

Career-connected learning (CCL) is gaining momentum nationwide, but the term means different things depending on who's using it. A cross-partisan definition and understanding is needed to unlock CCL's full potential and deliver on its promise to students.

Career Connected Learning (CCL) is an education model that blends academic instruction with hands-on experiences tied to real career pathways. The continuum includes:

- **Career awareness and exploration** (elementary/middle school): Exposure to diverse occupations, debunking stereotypes, understanding connection of school to careers
- **Career preparation** (high school): Industry-recognized credentials, dual enrollment, advanced coursework in career pathways
- **Career training** (high school/postsecondary): Registered apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, intensive technical training
- **Work-based learning** (across continuum): Job shadows, internships, apprenticeships, clinical experiences, cooperative education

Quality CCL integrates academic rigor with real-world application, provides work experiences and skilled mentorship, ensures student agency, and creates pathways to economic mobility.⁷

BUSTING THE FALSE DICHOTOMY

Some fear that career-connected learning means lowering academic standards, tracking students into vocational programs, or letting businesses dictate curriculum. This demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of what quality CCL is and illustrates how the traditional paradigm of “college or career” has limited the field's and public view of what is possible.

CCL IS NOT:

- A replacement for academic rigor
- Vocational tracking that limits students' options
- Business interests determining what schools teach
- Only for students “not going to college”
- Hyper-focused on learning trades
- A way to lower expectations

⁷ National Center on Education and the Economy. (2025) *Developing Agency for Life and Work*. National Center on Education and the Economy. <https://ncee.org/developing-agency-for-life-and-work/>

CCL IS:

- Academic content made relevant through real-world application
- Preparation for all career pathways—including those requiring advanced degrees
- Durable skills that build upon and strengthen academic mastery
- Early exploration that helps students make informed choices
- A strategy that improves overall student achievement
- Equally important for future CEOs, teachers, skilled tradespeople, and even the jobs we can't yet imagine

Informed by the science of learning and development, high-quality CCL provides relationship-driven, growth-focused, meaningful, and real-world learning experiences that, when paired with clear pathways and robust mentorship, can have significant impact on students, particularly those from underserved backgrounds.⁸

The National Center on Education and the Economy identifies top-performing education systems around the world, and in all cases, the pattern of core academic mastery with real-world application is continuous.⁹ A student exploring a STEM internship gains a reason to master the math and science behind it; a student drawn to journalism, law, or business discovers why writing matters; a student tracing how policy shapes their community deepens their grasp of history and civics. Quality CCL is built to make those connections visible.

THE URGENCY: WHY CAREER-CONNECTED LEARNING NOW?

The American schooling system was designed for a past era in which a high school diploma was sufficient to secure a middle-class life. Today's reality is much different.

The Numbers Tell the Story:

- According to Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce, by 2031, 72 percent of U.S. jobs will require postsecondary education or training.¹⁰
- As of 2026, fewer than 50 percent of Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous young adults aged 25-34 have earned a postsecondary degree, per College Board data.¹¹

8 National Urban League & UnidosUS. (2025). *A Community-Based Approach to Career Pathways Navigation*. National Urban League; UnidosUS. https://nul.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/unidosus_nul_acommunitybasedapproachto_careerpathwaysnavigation.pdf

9 National Center on Education and the Economy. (2024). *NCEE Blueprint: Designing Systems That Work*. National Center on Education and the Economy. <https://ncee.org/blueprint/>

10 Carnevale, A. P., Smith, N., Van Der Werf, M., and Quinn, M. C. (2023) *After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031*. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/Projections2031/>

11 Pender, M., Ma, J., Hu, X., and Edwards, A. (2026) *Education Pays 2026: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society*. College Board. <https://research.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/education-pays-2026-full-report.pdf>

- RAND Corporation research finds that 1 in 7 young people in the U.S. are neither working nor enrolled in education within one year of high school graduation.¹²
- In a 2022 Association for Talent Development industry survey, 82% of employers reported a skills gap, with critical shortages in communication (53%), critical thinking (65%), and managerial skills (55%).¹³

These numbers signal a serious disconnect between classroom and career, and a generation at risk of disengagement from both education and economic opportunity.

FOUR URGENT RISKS DEMAND ACTION:

1. Declining Academic Outcomes for High School Students

High school academic achievement is declining across the country, one of the most urgent challenges facing our education system.¹⁴ Student disengagement, lack of motivation and persistence, and chronic absenteeism are early warning signs of poor academic outcomes.¹⁵ When students can't see how their education connects to the world around them or their future, they are likely to disengage, which can undermine their grades, graduation rates, and postsecondary success.¹⁶

Career-connected learning is a powerful strategy to reverse this trend by providing relevant, applied, and engaging learning.¹⁷ Students who participate in quality CCL, particularly those with early exploration beginning in middle school, show promising results including measurable gains across subjects, improved attendance, increased persistence, and stronger college and career readiness outcomes.¹⁸

CCL addresses the academic achievement crisis by increasing interaction and helping students see the “why” behind what they’re learning while maintaining and elevating academic rigor.

2. Unequal Access to Opportunities

Students from low-income and historically underserved communities lack early exposure to career pathways, professional networks, and work-based learning experiences that their more affluent peers

12 Wenger, J. W., and Bonds, S. (2026) *Mapping Disconnection Among American Youth: How Place Shapes Opportunity*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4847-1.html

13 Association for Talent Development. (2022) *Bridging the Skills Gap*. ATD. https://www.gpstrategies.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/192109-GP_ATD-Bridging-the-Skills-Gap-RR-Final-x.pdf

14 Dewey, D. C., Fahle, E., Kane, T. J., Reardon, S., and Staiger, D. O. (2026) *From Learning Recession to Learning Recovery: Understanding the Sources of U.S. K-12 Improvement*. Education Scorecard. https://educationscorecard.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Education_Scorecard_May_2026_Report.pdf

15 Mervosh, S., and Paris, F. (2024) “Why School Absences Have ‘Exploded’ Almost Everywhere.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/03/29/us/chronic-absences.html>

16 National Center for Education Equity and Development. (2025) “Chronic Absenteeism, Engagement, and a Sense of Belonging.” National Center for Education Equity and Development. <https://nceed.morgan.edu/chronic-absenteeism-engagement-and-a-sense-of-belonging/>

17 U.S. Department of Education. (2025) “Fact Sheet: Bolstering Student Attendance, Engagement, and Success Through Career-Connected Learning.” U.S. Department of Education. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED665666>

18 Pathway2Careers. (2026) *Career Exploration in Middle School: Research, Standards, and State Models*. Pathway2Careers. <https://47377131.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/47377131/Career%20Exploration%20in%20Middle%20School.pdf>

access more readily.¹⁹ Quality CCL levels the playing field by providing intentional opportunities for all students to explore careers, build professional skills, and develop the networks that open doors. This exposure and exploration can – and should – begin as early as elementary school. It also benefits students regardless of the path they choose, whether that’s medicine, education, technology, skilled trades, or any other career.

3. Economic Underperformance and Skills Gaps

A generation without career-ready skills underperforms economically, which reduces individual income potential, overall productivity, and economic stability. Employers across industries consistently cite shortages in these [durable skills](#) as a major workforce challenge.

These skills are essential for early-career and long-term success across industries and roles, but are not automatically acquired through traditional classroom instruction alone.²⁰ Students need real-world applications, feedback from professionals, and opportunities to refine these essential competencies in authentic contexts at every stage of the learner journey.²¹

Evidence suggests that access to high-quality career-connected learning is associated with higher employment rates, increased earnings over time, and greater economic mobility.²² With rapid advances in technology revolutionizing career pathways, our education systems must build durable skillsets that allow students to navigate the workforce as continuous learners, adapting to emerging jobs, fields, and societal needs.

4. Regional Talent Drain

Communities across rural, suburban, and urban areas that neglect career-connected learning risk weakening their ability to develop and retain the next generation of talent. When young people do not see clear career pathways in their own communities, they may look elsewhere for opportunities. Recent survey data from Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation shows that rural Gen Z young people are less likely than their urban peers to perceive strong local opportunities, including access to good jobs (49 % vs. 68%) and internships (38% vs. 55%) in their communities. Roughly 77% of Gen Z adults - rural and urban alike - say they would relocate if given the opportunity. However, rural young people are more likely to prefer staying in their home state or region when they do move, underscoring that talent mobility is widespread but perceptions of local opportunity are uneven and shape where they choose to build their futures. This is as much an economic development imperative as an education one.²³

Quality CCL connects students to local and regional economies, helping them understand opportunities close to home while also preparing them to succeed wherever they choose to go.

19 Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. (2024) “Equitable Career Pathways and Workforce Development Initiatives: Are We Truly Serving Learners from Low-Income Backgrounds?” The Pell Institute. <https://www.pellinstitute.org/news-impact/blog/equitable-career-pathways-and-workforce-development-initiatives-are-we-truly-serving-learners-from-low-income-backgrounds/>

20 Schief, A. (2023) “Young Professionals Durable Skills Interview Trends.” America Succeeds. <https://americasucceeds.org/young-professionals-durable-skills-interview-trends>

21 Wood, J. H. (2025) “Career-Connected Learning: Engaging Students by Teaching Real-World Skills.” The 74. <https://www.the74million.org/article/career-connected-learning-engaging-students-by-teaching-real-world-skills/>

22 Commission on Purposeful Pathways. (2026) *A Launchpad for Life: A Vision for Purposeful Pathways for All Students*. Education First. <https://www.education-first.com/insights/our-resources/commission-on-purposeful-pathways/>

23 Gallup and Walton Family Foundation. 2025. “Fewer Jobs and College Options May Push Rural Gen Zers to Move.” <https://news.gallup.com/poll/656876/fewer-jobs-college-options-may-push-rural-gen-zers-move.aspx>

DESIGNING HIGH-QUALITY CAREER-CONNECTED LEARNING

High-quality career-connected learning starts with academic proficiency. Students must master core subjects such as mathematics, literacy, science, history, and the arts. There are no shortcuts here. Strong academic foundations are non-negotiable.

Quality CCL goes further by connecting that academic foundation to real-world application and intentionally developing the durable skills every career requires.

Academic Foundation

- Rigorous curriculum aligned to college and career readiness standards
- Clear pathways to all forms of postsecondary education (community college, four-year universities, industry-driven certificates, apprenticeships)
- Emphasis on core competencies across all subject areas
- High expectations for all students

Real-World Application

- Work-based learning experiences embedded in diploma requirements: internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, mentorship programs
- Industry-driven curriculum aligned to local and regional workforce needs
- Dual enrollment opportunities to earn early college credit and experience
- Career exploration starting in elementary grades to build awareness early
- Credentialing opportunities in high-demand fields

Durable Skills Development

Quality CCL intentionally develops and validates skills essential for success in any career.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- Communication and collaboration
- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Adaptability and self-direction
- Digital literacy and technological fluency
- Professional workplace skills

Navigation and Support

- Data-driven and individualized career pathway advising for students and families
- Connections to mentors and professional networks outside of the school setting
- Support for navigating postsecondary transitions
- Attention to equity and access at every stage

THREE CORE PRINCIPLES

STUDENT-CENTERED:

Designed around students' needs, interests, and goals. Students have agency in deciding what and how they learn, exploring options before committing to pathways.

EQUITY-DRIVEN:

Ensures all students, especially those from underrepresented communities, receive the opportunities, resources, and support they need to succeed. Quality CCL actively disrupts inequitable patterns of access.

SCALABLE:

Evidence-based models adaptable to diverse contexts and designed to expand without compromising quality. What works in one community can inform practice in others.

THE BENEFITS OF CAREER-CONNECTED LEARNING

FOR STUDENTS:

- Increases overall academic achievement when learning becomes relevant and purposeful
- Strengthens engagement, attendance, and persistence in school
- Builds confidence and motivation through real-world exposure and success
- Develops durable skills essential for any career pathway
- Opens doors to all postsecondary options instead of one predetermined track
- Builds professional networks and social capital typically unavailable through family connections
- Strengthens economic mobility and long-term career prospects
- Helps students make informed decisions about their futures

FOR EDUCATORS AND SCHOOLS:

- Addresses chronic absenteeism and student disengagement
- Makes academic content more relevant and engaging
- Strengthens partnerships with local employers and community organizations
- Improves college and career readiness outcomes
- Ensures access to opportunity

FOR EMPLOYERS:

- Cultivates a diverse, skilled local talent pipeline
- Bridges critical durable skills gaps
- Builds stronger connections with education institutions and the next generation of workers
- Contributes to community economic development

FOR COMMUNITIES AND THE NATION:

- Enhances economic competitiveness and productivity
- Reduces inequities in education and employment outcomes
- Strengthens civic engagement and community ties
- Develops talent across all regions—rural, urban, and suburban
- Prepares young people to navigate a rapidly changing workforce

BRIGHT SPOT: NORTH KANSAS CITY SCHOOLS

Career-Connected Learning at Scale

In March 2026, the Aspen Cross-Partisan Policy Leaders Network Career-Connected Learning Working Group visited North Kansas City Schools (NKC) for a three-day experiential site visit hosted by ConnectED. This was an up-close look at one of the country's most compelling examples of student-centered career pathways at scale. North Kansas City Schools is the second largest district in Missouri, serving roughly 22,000 students. NKC redesigned all four of their comprehensive high schools towards a pathway model to better address the drastic 70 to 32 percent “engagement cliff” of their students during the transition from elementary to secondary school. Working group members toured campuses, sat in on student and teacher panels, and met with district leaders to see what it looks like when a district closes the gap between classroom and career for every student, beyond those just on a college-bound or CTE track.

Top Takeaways

- All pathways require both strong academic foundations and career-connected skills.
- Career readiness can be a viable strategy to address the student “engagement cliff”.
- A shared “Portrait of a Graduate” built with input from students, families, teachers, and employers, became the North Star guiding every redesign decision.
- All four comprehensive high schools reorganized into four similar career-themed “Schools of,” cohorting students and teachers into smaller learning communities.
- District leadership drove change directly, grounded in Guskey’s model of teacher change and a public “growth mindset” culture.
- A thorough coordination structure with school-level facilitators to support the district-wide lead made it possible to manage industry partnerships with consistency.
- Strategic and systematic braiding and blending of dollars across local, state, federal, and philanthropic funding sources that maintains long-term sustainability.
- A cultural norm of districtwide data usage that is shared and acted upon at the classroom, school leadership, and district levels.
- Regional and/or national intermediary organizations play a central role in keeping the work on track, setting benchmarks, and holding external accountability.
- Pathways are woven into existing reforms (AVID, performance-based grading) rather than treated as standalone initiatives competing for attention.

Practices to Replicate

- The “Schools of” model: similar career themes offered at every high school to promote accessibility of preferred pathways.
- Career-pathway cohorting of students and teachers.
- A district PK-12 College & Career Readiness Continuum that maps specific, age-appropriate career-awareness experiences to each grade level (example in Appendix).
- School-based, student-run businesses (e.g., coffee shop, credit union) as authentic work-based learning experiences and cross-sector collaboration opportunities.
- A Student Pathway Ambassadors program, giving students leadership roles tied to the learning model.
- Reorganized teacher planning time so grade-level instructors across subjects meet regularly to check in on shared student’s overall well-being and academic progress.
- Designing interdisciplinary projects that break down traditional subject-area boundaries, allowing students to see how math, science, ELA, social studies, and the arts connect to the same real-world problem.
- Teacher externships that ensure technical instructors are current on workplace practice.
- A two-tier, fully district-wide industry governance structure: an overarching Industry Executive Council (IEC) that sets big-picture strategy for the Pathways program and introduces future career options to students and teachers as the model evolves, plus Pathway Advisory Boards (PABs) for each “School of” theme that gives employers stake in shaping and updating that specific pathway’s curriculum and coursework, with students serving on the pathway-level boards directly alongside industry co-chairs across all four high schools.
- Built-in flexibility: pathways are theme-based rather than locked tracks permitting students to switch or opt-in to traditional regional career centers or early college options.
- A multilingual mentor program pairing high school students with multilingual elementary students.
- A “continuous improvement” culture that treats pathway initiatives as works in progress with room for experimentation.

SPOTLIGHT: THE FUTURE READY LAB

A hands-on STEAM space where students design, build, and program real animatronics – built in partnership with Garner Holt Productions, the company behind hundreds of Disney Park animatronics. Every NKC 5th grader gets access as part of the district’s career continuum, with rollout complete across all district schools. Students have used it for projects including a World Cup animatronics showcase, American history presentations, and general engineering and design exploration. Students leave elementary school with a tangible, memorable introduction to STEAM careers years before they pick a high school pathway.



ADDRESSING COMMON CONCERNS

As we advocate for career-connected learning, we must address legitimate questions and misconceptions directly:

“Won’t this water down academics?”

Quality CCL requires strong academic foundations. Many jobs across sectors require proficiency in mathematics, science, literacy, history, and analytics. As such, it is critical for the industry partners to inform academics and join forces with the education sector to provide real-world context, work-based learning opportunities, mentorship, and insight into skills needed for career success. Educators, school administrators, district and state leaders maintain oversight of learning objectives, instructional materials, and student progress. By leveraging and incorporating the entire community surrounding young people through career-connected learning, the academic experience is enriched, student engagement and motivation are increased, and schools build social trust.

“Isn’t this vocational tracking that limits students’ options?”

Quality CCL opens pathways to all careers, from teaching to skilled trades to entrepreneurship. Students explore multiple options and build transferable skills that serve them regardless of which career path they ultimately choose.

This is about expanding options instead of narrowing them. Students who participate in CCL are more likely to pursue postsecondary education.

“What about students planning to attend four-year colleges?”

Professional workplace behaviors are essential for college success and career advancement regardless of degree level. Leaders in every industry recognize that technical knowledge alone isn’t efficient; graduates and professionals need the interpersonal and adaptive skills that CCL develops.²⁴

Furthermore, exploring career options before college helps students make more informed decisions about majors and career paths, reducing costly major changes and improving college completion rates.

“How is this different from old-school vocational education?”

Traditional vocational education often tracked students (disproportionately low-income students and students of color) into narrow technical training separate from academic coursework, limiting their postsecondary options.²⁵

²⁴ America Succeeds. (2025). Durable by Design: An Update on the High Demand for Durable Skills. America Succeeds. <https://americasucceeds.org/portfolio/the-high-demand-for-durable-skills>; World Economic Forum. (2025). The Future of Jobs Report 2025. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/>.

²⁵ Hodge, E., Dougherty, S., & Burris, C. (2020). Tracking and the Future of Career and Technical Education: How Efforts to Connect School and Work Can Avoid the Past Mistakes of Vocational Education. National Education Policy Center. <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/cte>.

Quality CCL is fundamentally different:

- Integrated with rigorous academics
- Available to ALL students
- Focused on exploration and broad skill development over narrow job training
- Opens pathways to ALL forms of postsecondary education
- Emphasizes durable skills that transfer across careers
- Designed with equity as a core principle

“Why are we adding one more thing for educators to do?”

High-quality career connected learning is not an additional standard or curricula. It is a systematic approach that retains academic rigor and deepens the learning experience through hands-on, experiential, and career-related pedagogy. The knowledge and skills learned in school should be applicable to student’s futures and the outside world. CCL is an opportunity to make that aspiration a reality.

OUR PATH FORWARD

To that end, we seek to:

1. **Advance Cross-Partisan Policy Solutions** that expand career-connected learning opportunities at federal, state, and local levels
2. **Expand Partnerships** across education, workforce development, employers, and community organizations
3. **Share Promising Practices** and learn from communities implementing quality CCL
4. **Invest in Educator Capacity** to design and deliver integrated academic and career-connected learning
5. **Center Equity** in all program design, ensuring historically underserved students have full access
6. **Engage Young People** as partners in designing the systems meant to serve them
7. **Build Public Awareness** of CCL’s benefits for students, communities, and the economy
8. **Track and Share Evidence** of impact on both academic achievement and career outcomes

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

In the coming years, we envision an educational system where:

- Every student has access to quality career-connected learning
- Academic achievement gaps narrow and chronic absenteeism declines through relevant, purposeful learning
- Students graduate with both academic foundations and durable skills to pursue postsecondary pathways
- Employers and communities—rural, urban, and suburban—recruit, retain, and develop talent for economic vitality
- Education, workforce, and industry partnerships are the norm rather than exception

This vision is achievable, and it starts with all of us committing to pathways, not pitfalls, for every young person in America.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT THE NATIONAL CROSS-PARTISAN EDUCATION POLICY NETWORK

The National Cross-Partisan Education Policy Network brought together leaders across the political spectrum to identify common ground on education policy and practice. Recognizing that meaningful progress requires collaboration beyond partisan divides, the network established working groups focused on critical education challenges where cross-sector, cross-ideological solutions are possible.

The Career-Connected Learning Working Group included a diverse coalition of policymakers, experts, and leaders from education advocacy organizations, school systems, workforce development, think tanks, and philanthropy. Despite diverse perspectives on many education issues, members found strong alignment around the urgent need for a cross-partisan definition of career-connected learning and expanding access to high-quality career-connected learning opportunities for all students.

The network was convened by the Aspen Institute Education & Society Program, which works to improve education outcomes by informing, influencing, inspiring, and catalyzing education leaders across policy and practice, with an emphasis on achieving excellence for all students. Its vision is that the United States education system affords every student the opportunities and experiences they need to lead, contribute, and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

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