

Bridging the Gap

Cross-Sector Collaboration for Student Success

Highland Region Pathways to Success

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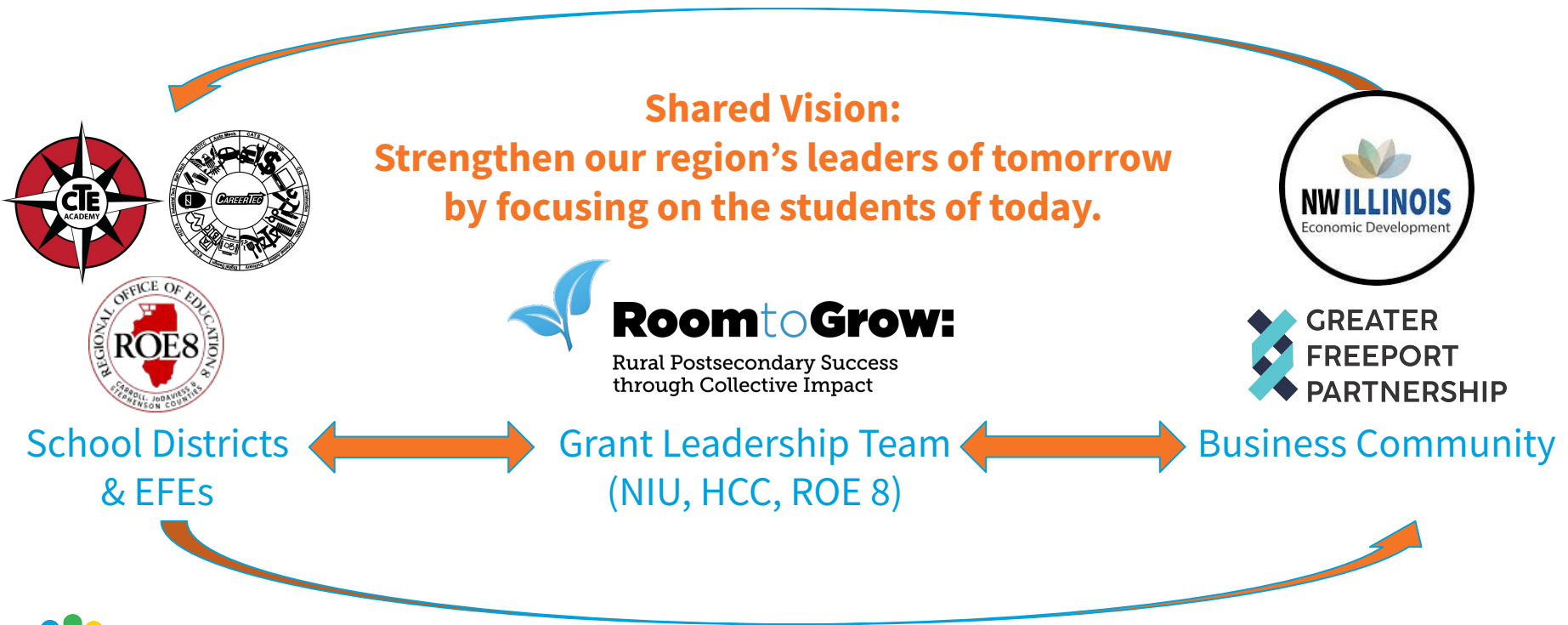
Room to Grow in Northwest Illinois

- 4-year federal grant 2024-2027
- Three northwestern-most counties in Illinois (64 mile width)
- Three goal areas:
 - CCPE expansion in priority areas (14 high schools, <3500 9-12 students)
 - Increased enrollment in priority area postsecondary programs (Highland CC)
 - Increased transfer in priority area postsecondary programs (NIU)



Northern Illinois
University

Listening and Responding - 2 Grant Years in 1



School Resource Toolkit



COLLEGE & CAREER PATHWAY ENDORSEMENTS
Explore, Excel, and Save

College and Career Pathway Endorsements (CCPE) are special credentials that can be earned by students who participate in career exploration activities, complete work-based learning, and demonstrate college-ready skills. CCPE require careful planning over multiple years.

CCPE STUDENT PROFILE

Pursuing a CCPE is a great idea for any student who wants to:

- understand different career paths with opportunities for exploration or full immersion
- experience authentic, hands-on learning connected to high-wage, high-demand jobs
- collaborate with like-minded students and learn from industry professionals
- jump ahead on college coursework compared to their peers
- earn a special designation on their diploma and transcript with possible perks at the college level

WHAT YOU'LL EXPERIENCE

Your high school career will integrate high school, college, and career preparation so you're ready to enter your chosen college pathway and/or career field with the confidence and skills to stand out.

Career Exploration Activities
Follow your curiosity, give your interests, and build your network with experiences like guest speakers, career fairs, and service teams in addition to online tools.

Career-Connected Coursework
Follow a program of study specific to the career that interests you. Including dual credit courses that can save you money on college and Career Technical Education (CTE) offerings that provide hands-on experience during the normal school day.

Professional Connections and Experience
During team-based challenge projects, receive mentoring from industry experts while solving real-world problems. During work-based learning, receive guidance from experienced professionals on the ins and outs of their industry.

YOUR OPTIONS

Agriculture CCPE **Education CCPE** **Health Science CCPE**

Meet with your counselor to learn more and create a plan!
NAME | EMAIL | OFFICE LOCATION

Communication Templates

GOING TO THE CAREER FAIR

Consider the following questions before participating in a career fair:

- Does my resume and portfolio accurately reflect my interests and skills?
- Do I have appropriate business cards prepared?
- Do I have a list of questions to ask?
- Do I have a list of potential employers to visit?

Use the chart below to keep notes about the opportunities you interest. Write briefly. This information you keep here will help you reflect later.

NAME: _____

| Opportunity Name | What is the organization's name? | What is the organization's address? | What is the organization's phone number? | What is the organization's website? | What is the organization's email address? | What is the organization's social media handles? | What is the organization's industry? | What is the organization's size? | What is the organization's location? | What is the organization's type of work? | What is the organization's culture? | What is the organization's values? | What is the organization's mission? | What is the organization's vision? | What is the organization's goals? | What is the organization's strategy? | What is the organization's products/services? | What is the organization's competitors? | What is the organization's strengths/weaknesses? | What is the organization's opportunities/threats? | |
|------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|---|--|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|---|--|---|--|
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Career Fair Student Materials

Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources (AFNR) Programs At-A-Glance

This resource provides an overview of programs available in agriculture, food, and natural resources. It includes information about AFNR careers, education, and training opportunities.

| Career Area | Highland Community College | | | | Northwestern College | | | | West Valley College | | | | Western Illinois University | | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|----------|----------|------|----------------------|----------|----------|------|---------------------|----------|----------|------|-----------------------------|----------|----------|------|
| | Program | Location | Duration | Cost | Program | Location | Duration | Cost | Program | Location | Duration | Cost | Program | Location | Duration | Cost |
| Agriculture | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Food Service | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Natural Resources | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Priority Areas At-A-Glance

Team-Based Challenge (TBC) Toolkit

Adapted from materials by the NU Illinois CTE Project and the Illinois Education and Career Success Network.

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Room + Grow!
Helping you grow your future.

Team-Based Challenge Manual





Community Partner Toolkit

College and Career Pathway Endorsements: The New Language of Career Education

Toolkit for Community Partner Organizations

WHAT

College and Career Pathway Endorsements (CCPEs) are special credentials that can be earned by high school students who:

- participate in career-oriented activities,
- complete coursework for college credit during high school,
- complete work-based learning in a career area of interest, and
- demonstrate college-and-career-ready skills.

CCPEs are recognized on students' high school diplomas and can lead to perks at postsecondary institutions and in the workforce.

Multiple types of engagement with community partners are required for students to earn CCPEs, and these types of engagement are professed in this toolkit.

WHO

Students who pursue CCPEs are students who want to:

- understand different career paths with opportunities for exploration or full immersion,
- experience hands-on learning connected to high-wage, high-demand jobs in our region,
- collaborate with like-minded students and learn from industry professionals, and
- jump ahead on college coursework compared to their peers.

WHEN

The Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act (2016, amended 2018) created the CCPE process for all public Illinois school districts. As of 2025, districts must offer at least 1 CCPE. In future years, the law increases.

The Highland Region Pathways to Success Leadership Community led by Stephenson, Ash Dalessio, and Carol County High Schools, Highland CC, MLL, and A Greater Region Partnership, and Northwest Illinois Economic Development is now actively seeking community partner engagement to help these initiatives run.

Use this toolkit to learn about and plan different opportunities for engagement in which students need your help today! To get in touch with a school near you, contact Andrew Martin, Highland Community College's Career Pathways Navigator at andrew.martin@highland.edu / (815) 569-3516.



Job Shadow Fact Sheet

WHAT AM I HELPING WITH?

Job shadowing is a career exploration activity that involves learning about a job through observation by spending a limited amount of time with a person who is at work. Students learn the realities of a job by walking through the day as a shadow of a competent worker. The experience provides opportunities for students to ask questions, to observe common job tasks, and to evaluate whether he/she likes the job based on firsthand observations.

HOW CAN I HELP?

Unlike other opportunities for engagement in this toolkit, there are no state-mandated requirements for how a job shadow host is required to engage with a school in order that engagement to "count" towards school metrics. Despite this, many schools are keen to partner with organizations for job shadowing to maximize students' exploration opportunities above and beyond the requirements set forth by the law, making community partner collaboration a major demand.

The best job shadow hosts are knowledgeable, confident, welcoming, and able to speak at a level appropriate for the student audience. See the reverse side of this fact sheet for keys to success as a job shadow host.

WHY SHOULD I HELP?

Community partners benefit from hosting job shadows because doing so:

- provides a unique opportunity to show off lesser-known aspects of your organization, including those in which you anticipate a shortage of qualified candidates in the future
- exposes home-grown potential future employees to your organization in a memorable way
- recruits and strengthens your organization's ability to effectively communicate with the next generation of workers
- efficiently affirms your organization's commitment to education and community involvement
- provides students a context for learning and fosters an understanding of how academic concepts and essential employability skills are applied in authentic settings

Job Shadow Keys to Success

BEFORE THE SHADOW

- In collaboration with the school district that is sourcing your shadow(s)...
 - agree on criteria that students must meet to qualify for job shadowing
 - develop evaluation forms for both shadows and members of your organization
 - establish available dates and times for shadows that work for both parties
 - comply with any district policies, including background checks, that may be necessary for outside adults to interact with students
 - establish key expectations for students
 - How should shadows be transported to/from your organization?
 - When and where should shadows arrive at your organization?
 - What should shadows wear at your organization?
 - What basic workplace etiquette is necessary?
 - What workplace safety precautions must be taken?
- Identify and coordinate colleagues who can host shadows
 - Prepare these individuals for shadows by discussing expectations and providing common topics and questions that shadows often want to learn about (ex: employee background, challenges and rewards of job, required education and training, etc.)
 - Include individual hosts as early as possible in planning efforts
 - Schools who want to partner with you want to do so because they have students with particular interests that they believe match your organization, so you should be able to identify relevant matching colleagues fairly early; schools do not want to partner with you just to place random students!

DURING THE SHADOW

- Welcome students to your organization, make relevant introductions, and provide a quick tour of relevant areas (a shadow does not necessarily need to see your entire organization if they are there to shadow a particular area)
- Connect the shadow with their host and provide a day-to-day overview
- Encourage the shadow to closely observe particular job tasks, providing perspectives and asking questions freely
 - There is no need for a shadow to be completely silent observer; they can be as hands-on as is allowed by your contract, organizational policies, and workplace safety laws
 - Keep in mind information privacy laws or other policies that may prevent you from sharing particular information with shadows

AFTER THE SHADOW

- Debrief with your team
- Provide feedback to school staff to improve their future job shadow
- Ask for feedback from the school/student(s) to improve your future job shadow
- Consider how your involvement should be publicized to promote your organization

Student Liability and Safety Overview

There are many misconceptions about students' ability to function in the workplace, particularly when it comes to hazardous occupations and insurance liability. The chart below addresses them. Note: This document is not official legal advice.

| Misconception | Reality |
|---------------|--|
| | The federal government reports data on 820 occupations. 813 of them have no restrictions for minors, and 7 of them are allowed with specific student career exemptions. That makes 98.9% of occupations safe for minors according to the United States government. |
| | There are 17 "Hazardous Occupations" that restrict minors under the age of 18. These occupations are fully described in legal bulletins and can be categorized according to whether or not they allow very specific student learner exemptions. |
| | The 18 Hazardous Occupations that are not allowable for minors are anything to do with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manufacturing operations that are not allowable for minors are anything to do with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driving or riding on a motor vehicle on a public road Mining Quarrying Forest fire handling, logging, tagging, and milling Radioactive substances and ionizing radiation Power driven hoisting apparatus Power driven bakery machinery Manufacturing of toxic, flammable, and kindred products Welding, demolition, and engineering |
| | The "Hazardous Occupations" that have very specific student learner exemptions are anything to do with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Power driven woodworking machinery Power driven metal forming, punching, and shearing machines Power driven meat processing machinery Bakers, confectioners, and sugar products machines Power driven circular saws, band saws, gullotine shears, chain saws, reciprocating saws, recip blenders, and drainage cutting disks Flaring operations and all work on or about a roof Trimming or rebar operation |
| | Don't get your work on those lists! That means the federal government considers it safe for minors with no restrictions. |
| | Workers compensation insurance rates are not calculated based on age of employees. Workers compensation rates are calculated on the job class of the employee. If a student job class is the same as an employee age 18 or older, their cost will be equal to anyone in that class. |
| | School districts generally carry workers compensation insurance, which covers students during school activities. An internship scheduled as part of a student's school program is a school activity. |
| | Insurance funds can require to be added to a school district's certificate of insurance as an "additional insured." Note: joining the certificate of insurance as an additional insured does not absolve an internship host of responsibility should they engage in dangerous conduct with the student worker. |

The Language of Education

Fact Sheets

How-Tos

Liability and Safety
Guidance



“Speed Dating” Collaboration



Room to Grow: Collaboration Speed Dating Guide

- How It Works
- 6 minutes per round – Districts rotate, community partners stay.
 - Listen, share, ask questions, and record highlights in your snapshot boxes below.

- Conversation Prompts
- What opportunities or events do you already offer for students or the community?
 - What upcoming initiatives or priorities are you focusing on this year?
 - What do you wish schools or businesses to better understand about your work?
 - What's one realistic next step for collaboration after today?

| Round | Partners | Key Ideas | Opportunities | Follow-Up Needed |
|-------|----------|-----------|---------------|------------------|
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | | | | |
| 3 | | | | |
| 4 | | | | |
| 5 | | | | |
| 6 | | | | |

Shared Norms for CCPE Currency



Highland Region Pathways to Success District Website Guidance

Highland Region Pathways to Success school districts are encouraged to demonstrate their pride in preparing students for postsecondary education and the workforce through College and Career Pathway Endorsements by establishing an online landing page for their community to learn from.

Much like the PaCE Framework and other student-centered initiatives, CCPEs should be shown off as beacons of success for a school district and deserve to appear prominently online so that all stakeholders can see and understand the great work being done in the district.

As of Spring 2025, Highland Region Pathways to Success schools combined for 43 state-approved CCPEs. However, it is difficult to find information about these opportunities on school/district websites. We should cherish the opportunity to brag about our students' hard work.

To simplify your creation process, recommendations for online content are below.



LOCATION

We recommend that districts add, include, or revise a webpage with a name such as "College and Career Readiness." This page could then have separate sections or complete tabs for the PaCE Framework and CCPEs. This page should be easily accessible so that the district's accomplishments are simple to find. Ideally, the "College and Career Readiness" page can be accessed with just one click from the district or individual school website.

PaCE FRAMEWORK EXPLANATORY CONTENT

Beginning July 1, 2025, Illinois law states that each district's PaCE Framework be "prominently displayed" online. However, to support broad understanding among students, guardians, and other community members, a brief explanation should accompany a district's PaCE Framework. A sample explanation that you can customize is below:

The Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) Framework demonstrates all of the college and career readiness activities (insert school name) students engage in during high school. The Framework is organized by academic year and shows three categories of activities: Career Exploration and Development, Postsecondary Education Exploration, Preparation, and Selection, and Financial Aid and Literacy. (insert school name) students, families, business partners, and community members can use the PaCE Framework to understand the deliberate preparation our students receive for life after high school beyond their academic coursework. We are proud of the hard work that grows our diligent students to productive and capable alumni!

Models for Celebration

CCPE Currency Exemplar: Belvidere CUSD 100

EXEMPLAR: CUSD 100 offers a special incentive such that "any student who earns a Pathway Endorsement and subsequently obtains a degree, certification, or licensure in the same field will be guaranteed an interview for any related District 100 position they apply for." This incentive applies to all types of CCPEs offered by the district, not just the education pathway. Information technology CCPE earners, for example, can also benefit from this incentive.

GENESIS: CUSD 100's Director of Student Services & Career Readiness recognized that CCPEs need more incentives beyond recognition at graduation. The Director approached the Superintendent and Director of Human Resources, and the three had a conversation about how to grow their own employee pipeline. The end result is the quoted statement above, which is advertised to students while in high school and posted online.

PROBLEM: While CUSD 100 has not been offering CCPEs long enough to put this incentive into practice yet, they are already recognizing difficulty in keeping all involved parties on the same page. The Director of Student Services & Career Readiness maintains a running list of all CCPE graduates and shares this list at hiring season, hoping that principals will use it to match names from applications as applicable.

TO OFFER THE SAME INCENTIVE IN YOUR DISTRICT, what would need to be done?

- Who are the district-level players that need to be involved?
- How can your job application process clearly prompt CCPE graduates to include that information?
- How can CCPE graduates be internally tracked and verified after a period of years?

TO OFFER THE SAME INCENTIVE ACROSS ALL SCHOOLS IN OUR LEADERSHIP COMMUNITY, what would need to be done?

- Who are the district-level players that need to be involved?
- How can each school's job application process clearly prompt CCPE graduates to include that information?
- How can each school's CCPE graduates be internally tracked and verified after a period of years?
- How can each school verify CCPE graduates from one another?



Models for Growth

Data Celebrations

100%

Partner high schools meeting state PaCE requirements

(July 2025)

100%

Partner high schools exceeding state CCPE requirements

(SY 2031)

+59%

Rate of increase in CCPEs earned

(Class of 2025 vs. Class of 2024)

+29%

Rate of increase in CCPEs offered

(SY 2026-2027 vs. SY 2024-2025)

+2

Partner high schools implementing approved Transitional English courses

(SY 2026-2027 vs. SY 2025-2026)

1st

Headcount of partner high school students at 2025 HCC Career Fair

(Fall 2025 ranked vs. last decade)

1st

Headcount of HCC dual credit students

(Fall 2025 ranked vs. last decade)

1st

Headcount of total HCC students

(Fall 2025 ranked vs. last decade)

Future Collaboration

Access to Opportunity:

- Dual credit clarity and consistency
- Expansion of Transitional instruction
- Regional activity calendar

CCPE Currency:

- Graduation cords
- Guaranteed interview initiative
- Summer pathway to Highland
- Tuition waiver

Community Partner Development:

- Expansion of Challenge Mindset
- Individual recruiting and education

Transfer to NIU:

- One Click College Admit
- Program mapping
- Transfer peer mentoring
- Travel reimbursement

From Turf Wars to Talent Pipelines How Vermilion County Built a Unified Education–Workforce Partnership

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“Alignment is not natural —
it is built through trust, structure, and
persistence.”

Three Organizations. One Workforce Ecosystem

Vermilion Advantage

Business & Industry Voice
Workforce Needs
Economic Development

Danville Area

Community College

Credentials & Training
Dual Credit
Adult Workforce Pipeline

VVEDS

K-12 Career Pathways
Student Exposure
Talent Development

The Reality in 2012

- Industry believed schools were not preparing students for local careers
- Schools believed industry wanted cheap labor
- Partnerships were transactional
- Trust was low. Collaboration was minimal.

We Tried... But Were Not Yet Aligned

- Career labs
- Tours of industry
- Industry-based career counselors
- Classroom speakers
- Career Network initiative
- Cooperation is not the same as alignment.

Then COVID Hit

- Communication slowed
- Priorities shifted to crisis response
- Leadership changes created instability
- Existing fault lines widened

The breakthrough wasn't comfort
— it was honesty.

The Breaking Point

- All three entities finally came into the same room
- Grievances were aired
- Hard truths were spoken
- A cease-fire was called
- We realized we didn't have a workforce problem — we had an alignment problem.



Our Partnership Timeline

2012 — High tension, low trust

Early Programs — Limited engagement

COVID — Partnerships fracture

Grievance Meeting — Hard reset

Education–Workforce Committee formed

Jodie hired to lead alignment

Today — Unified pathway vision

Leadership Changed Everything

- Partnerships do not run themselves
- We hired a dedicated leader to own the work — Jodie
- Momentum began replacing skepticism
- The work became bigger than any single leader

Where We Are Today

- A shared working plan across all three organizations
- Stronger industry engagement
- Intentional pathway design
- Aligned postsecondary connections
- We plan together — not separately.

Lessons Learned

- Alignment is harder than innovation
- Goodwill is not a system
- Someone must wake up every day owning the partnership
- Conflict is not failure — avoiding it is
- Keep students at the center of every decision

Every student deserves a pathway
— not just a plan.

Our North Star

- Career Pathway Endorsement for Every Student
- Not as a slogan — as a system
- And this partnership is how we get there.

Let's Talk

- What alignment challenges are you seeing in your region?
- Where are your partnerships thriving?
- Where are they stuck?