

CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION: An Underutilized Pathway to Success for High School Students

June 30, 2026



SUMMARY

Who will repair the broken refrigerator, fix leaking pipes, weld steel girders for large buildings, manage a neighborhood restaurant, or give a protective flu shot? How will greatly needed individuals obtain the required skills to perform such vital jobs? The answer to both questions is Career & Technical Education (CTE).

Career & Technical Education programs provide a pathway to meaningful employment for tens of thousands of people in Sacramento County. By advancing the county's economy with essential workers in such industries as health care, construction, agriculture and hospitality, everyone benefits. Developing the skills of these future workers through CTE expansion is impeded by underfunding and administrative shortcomings.

Since the 1960's, efforts have increased to establish educational curricula that prepare high school graduates for post-secondary education or for the jobs of the future that may not require a college degree. CTE administrators today face major logistical challenges and minimal budgets. A recent study estimated over one million jobs requiring "some college" were unfilled in California. The Grand Jury found, however, school districts in Sacramento County presently dedicate only about 2% of their overall budgets to CTE.

This vital program can continue contributing significantly to California's growth and social stability. To be successful, CTE's challenges require visibility and attention. For these reasons, the Grand Jury investigated Career & Technical Education programs in Sacramento County and presents this report.

GLOSSARY

Career & Technical Education (CTE) - A program of study that involves a multiyear sequence of courses that integrates core academic knowledge with technical and occupational knowledge to provide students with a pathway to postsecondary education and careers. California Department of Education (cde.ca.gov/ci/ct/)

Joint Powers Agency - A legal entity formed when two or more public agencies (cities, counties, school districts, or state agencies) contract to jointly exercise common powers.

Local Educational Agency (LEA) - A public board of education or authority, such as a school district, county office of education, or charter school, responsible for managing public elementary and secondary schools within the State.

Non-degree program - An educational pathway that provides specialized knowledge or skills without culminating in a formal academic degree. Such a program may include certificates, diplomas, workshops or enrichment courses.

Perkins Act(s) – The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins Act) is the primary federal law providing funding to support career and technical education (CTE) programs in secondary and postsecondary institutions.

UC/CSU - California's public universities, consisting of the University of California (10 campuses), emphasizing research, theory, and selective admissions, and the California State University (23 campuses), focusing on hands-on, career-oriented education.

Vocational education – Organized educational programs offering a sequence of courses which are directly related to the preparation of individuals in paid or unpaid employment in current or emerging occupations requiring other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree. (1990 Perkins Act).

BACKGROUND

Full, meaningful employment is a critical social and economic goal for California and the nation. This requires an education system that rapidly adapts and prepares a workforce for jobs in emerging and evolving technologies. These jobs will demand skills generally not taught in current educational programs. In a time when unemployment is increasing and “good” job openings seem to be shrinking, the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) estimated that in 2025, as many as 1.5 million jobs requiring “some college” were unfilled in California. According to the PPIC, this is due primarily to a shortfall of workers possessing the qualifications needed to fill those vacancies.

Educational institutions are the obvious choice for preparing workers with the complex skills needed to fill today's and tomorrow's CTE related job vacancies. The crucial role of K-12 schools in training workforces for the present and future has been well documented for over 100 years.

In 1963, Congress passed the Vocational Education Act to “offer new and expanded vocational education programs to bring job training into harmony with the industrial, economic, and social realities of today and the needs for tomorrow.” Recognizing the importance of skills training in high schools, the Perkins Act of 1984 sought to expand and modernize vocational education. Although a far cry from today's vision of CTE, it was enacted to bring vocational education into equality with college preparation as a pathway to success.

The Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 required all states to provide a career technical education program plan which combined academic, technical and career education to prepare students for post-secondary education as well as the non-degreed workplace. California wrote the “2008-2012 California State Plan for Career Technical Education” to address this. That document became the foundation of CTE in the State and its blueprint for the future.

These laws and subsequent plans defined CTE in high schools as a part of a fully integrated academic program leading to either college or non-degreed career opportunities. Students opting for a working career after high school graduation would receive the skills needed to function effectively in today’s complex work environment, just as college-bound students would be prepared to follow that path.

A January 2025 release by the Association for Career and Technical Education noted the following:

- 30% of jobs in California will require more than a simple high school education but less than a four-year degree by 2031;
- Over 675,000 California students enrolled in CTE during the 2022-2023 school year with over 205,000 sub-baccalaureate credentials in CTE fields awarded;
- A four-year high school graduation rate of 99.1% for CTE students vs. an 89% graduation rate for general education.

The above is only a small sampling of a considerable body of research into the long-term impact of CTE.

The State of California strongly believes in the importance of CTE as evidenced by the Governor’s Office *Master Plan for Career Technical Education* in conjunction with its 2025 annual budget request. This blueprint for CTE expansion identified numerous key initiatives to enhance the scope and effectiveness of CTE. That budget proposal requested over \$200 million specifically for CTE-related activities, of which only \$45 million was approved by the Legislature.

Beyond higher graduation rates and earning power, CTE programs contribute in other ways to communities across the state. According to the October 2025 report, *Early Insights from the Golden State Pathways Program*, issued by the Public Policy Institute

of California, local education agencies (LEAs) that received implementation grants enrolled nearly half (46%) of the state’s 9th–12th graders in CTE programs. As per the report, an estimated “532,200 high school students participate in the program,” representing 60% of students enrolled in these LEAs and nearly 28% of the state’s high school students. These schools “serve more diverse students than the statewide average,” with students of “low-income (67% among grantees vs. 61% statewide) and Latino (60% vs. 57% statewide).”

Recognizing the pressing need for post-secondary education relevant to careers in a rapidly changing job market, the California Legislature enacted the Golden State Pathways Program Grant Act (GSPP) in 2022-2023, with a proposed investment of \$500 million. Its main objectives were:

1. Achieve a goal of 70% post-secondary education
2. Create a smooth transition from high school to post-secondary education
3. Align education with workforce need

Per the Lumina Foundation, in 2024, 54.9% of California adults aged 25-64 had completed a two- or four-year college program. In Sacramento County, this rate was 44.2% ([Educational Attainment | Stronger Nation](#))

For decades, CTE programs in California and across the country demonstrated the ability to add enormous value to the communities they serve. Between 2017-2024, five California county grand juries found CTE to be of significant investigative interest. Their reports (see Appendix below) were both complimentary of the programs examined and consistent in their recommendations of potential improvement opportunities.

The 2025-2026 Sacramento County Grand Jury shares the belief CTE programs are a vital element to the well-being of the entire region. Students, businesses, government institutions, and the community at-large share in the benefits of well-designed and efficiently managed CTE programs that help provide the skills needed by current and future workers.

METHODOLOGY

During its investigation, the Grand Jury obtained information from multiple sources, including:

- County, State and Federal government documents, government statutes;
- Interviews with personnel from various Sacramento County school districts and the Sacramento County Office of Education;
- Internet content, website research, and relevant public publications & papers.

DISCUSSION

The Case for CTE in Sacramento County

CTE is a strategically targeted series of educational pathways and courses designed to teach specific skills. The program works to prepare students for further postsecondary education or teach individuals the skills necessary to meet current workplace needs if college is not the preferred post-graduation goal. Programs actively research job market needs and identify areas of the greatest potential benefit to students, employers and the community as a whole.

The benefits of CTE programs are clear. Data reported in *From Vocational Education to Career-Technical Education: A Capsule History and Summary of Research* by David Stern, University of California, Berkeley, reviewed the historical trends in post-high school career opportunity training from the 1980's to today. This data points to higher graduation rates, enhanced employability, and better earning power over time.

Beyond higher graduation rates and earning power, CTE programs contribute in other ways to communities across the state. According to the October 2025 report, *Early Insights from the Golden State Pathways Program*, issued by the Public Policy Institute of California, local education agencies (LEAs) that received implementation grants enrolled nearly half (46%) of the state's 9th–12th graders in CTE programs. As per the report, an estimated “532,200 high school students participate in the program”, representing 60% of students enrolled in these LEAs and nearly 28% of the state's high school students. These schools, “serve more diverse students than the statewide average,” with students of “low-income (67% among grantees vs. 61% statewide) and Latino (60% vs. 57% statewide)”. CTE has a clear, positive impact on individuals, communities, businesses, and institutions.

In 2025, only about 50% of the graduating high school class statewide was four-year college-ready, including satisfying the UC/CSU entry requirements, despite an overall

graduation rate of 91.5%. For Sacramento County, these values were 51.7% and 89%, respectively (CDE California School Dashboard and System of Support). The current general education model, with its four-year college focus, fails to prepare potentially half of current high school students for direct entry into the postsecondary education population. Moreover, even when classified as college-ready, large numbers of graduates choose not to pursue a CTE path.

How great is the missed opportunity? In 2025, only 22.8% of the Sacramento County high school graduates completed at least one CTE pathway (compiled from CDE California School Dashboard and System of Support). To make a meaningful impact, CTE pathways must effectively prepare the thousands of young men and women graduating from high school who choose not to attend four-year colleges.

CTE Enrollment – A Program in Demand

The California Department of Education currently identifies 16 CTE industry sectors. Each sector has multiple pathways and each unique pathway has a set of three courses: introduction, concentrator, and capstone. None of the school districts in Sacramento County offers instruction in all sectors and pathways. Each district tailors its programs based on a needs analysis. The number of courses also varies according to local demand and resource availability. Statewide, in 2023-2024, there were over 59,000 courses distributed across a wide array of industry sectors, as identified in the following table.

Total number of CTE courses by industry sector taught in California during 2023-2024

CTE Industry Sector	Number of Courses Offered	Percent of Total
Agriculture and Natural Resources	6,661	11.3
Arts, Media, and Entertainment	13,530	22.9
Building and Construction Trades	2,790	4.7
Business and Finance	3,010	5.1
Education, Child Development, Family Services	2,190	3.7
Energy and Utilities	279	0.5
Engineering and Architecture	2,755	4.7
Fashion and Interior Design	889	1.5
Health Science and Medical Technology	7,373	12.5
Hospitality, Tourism, and Recreation	4,041	6.8
Information and Communication Technologies	4,251	7.2
Manufacturing and Product Development	1,640	2.8
Marketing, Sales, and Service	1,353	2.3
Multiple Industry Sectors	3,721	6.3
Public Services	2,251	3.8
Transportation	2,373	4.0
TOTAL	59,107	100.0

Source: Legislative Analyst's Office CTE Report

The key to assessing CTE is answering questions that lie at the core of the concept. What are the job skills in high demand today that also pay high wages? Do Sacramento County CTE programs focus on the right areas? Do schools in the county fulfill the intended mission of CTE to prepare students for successful career outcomes?

CTE administrators interviewed by the Grand Jury stated there has been a significant increase in the share of CTE courses that fulfill the college preparatory coursework for freshman admission at the State's public universities. Furthermore, these same courses help prepare many students for non-degree professional certifications and licenses. All of these efforts contribute strongly to meaningful career paths for thousands of students every year.

While the focus of CTE education is preparation for successful movement into post-secondary education and readiness for "high wage, high demand" jobs, it is important to note that the community benefits as well. Stable, financially rewarding jobs promote engaged citizenship, societal stability, a stronger tax base, and lower crime rates. CTE is a stepping stone to numerous individual and collective social gains. As such, it deserves strong recognition for its contributions and continued support by educational and governmental institutions.

Filling Vital Positions.

California faces a severe shortage of workers for jobs that do not require a 4-year college degree. The Public Policy Institute of California estimates as many as 1.5 million positions not requiring a four-year college degree were unfilled in the State as of 2025. This has a significant impact on many different industries, affecting millions of consumers. It also indicates a significant opportunity for high school graduates seeking meaningful career paths. The following two tables list some of the High Demand/High Growth jobs in the Sacramento County area, projected growth rates, and compensation levels.

Sacramento Priority Occupations – Anticipated Growth and 2025 Salary Level in Greater Sacramento

Skill/Occupation	2024-2029 5 Year Projected Job Growth	Entry Level Hourly Earnings
Electricians	13%	\$27.17
Medical Assistants	12%	\$22.78
LPN/LVN	10%	\$35.62
Registered Nurses	9%	\$62.91
Police Officers	9%	\$42.38
General & Operations Managers	7%	\$38.41
Plumbers, Pipefitters, Steamfitters	7%	\$23.71
Medical Secretaries/Admin Assistants	7%	\$21.88
Construction Supervisors	6%	\$35.41
Admin Service Managers	4%	\$41.77

(Source: Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research)

High-Paying Careers Not Requiring a College Degree
 (Source: SkillPointe Foundation 2026)

<u>Career</u>	<u>Median Salary</u>		<u>Career</u>	<u>Median Salary</u>
1. Nuclear Technician	\$84,482		11. Cardiovascular Tech	\$58,469
2. Power Plant Operator	\$84,287		12. Industrial Engr Tech	\$57,497
3. Dental Hygienist	\$77,306		13. Electrician	\$56,763
4. MRI Tech	\$74,655		14. Plumber	\$56,117
5. Electronics/Electrical Engr Tech	\$67,439		15. Heavy Equipment Mechanic	\$55,452
6. Aircraft Mechanic	\$66,728		16. Industrial Mechanic	\$55,413
7. Police Officer	\$65,646		17. Pipefitter/Steamfitter	\$55,162
8. Diagnostic Sonographer	\$62,923		18. Civil Engr Tech	\$53,887
9. Radiology Tech	\$61,910		19. Graphic Designer	\$53,572
10. Real Estate Appraiser	\$58,582		20. IT Support Tech	\$52,941

Best Practices for Successful CTE Programs

CTE programs exist in virtually every state in the country. Massachusetts, Texas, California, New York, and Washington often top the list of “Best CTE Programs” (US Dept of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, Advance CTE). Massachusetts is often cited for overall program value, although it enrolls fewer students than some of the other highly rated states.

Factors that make Massachusetts among the best for learning opportunities are:

- Strong state-level support and funding
- Integrated academic and technical curriculum
- Industry partnerships & work-based learning

- Accountability & continuous improvement
- High-quality teacher preparation
- Accessibility and equity focus

Sacramento County school districts diligently pursue these success factors even with generally limited budgets. However, beyond occasional, local professional meetings, there is little evidence districts or the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) actively search for Best Practice examples outside the County or State. The failure to investigate other CTE centers of excellence denies them potentially valuable avenues for program improvement, whether from innovative ideas or solutions to problems.

External Partnerships

Consistently identified as one of the most important elements of successful CTE programs is external partnerships. Key elements of this include apprenticeships, connections with community colleges, employer advisory boards, and employer certification programs. Several CTE administrators identified the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) Power Academy training in electrical skills and the California Strong Workforce Program as highly effective external partnerships.

All districts dedicate a measure of effort to establishing meaningful collaborations with non-school entities. The results of those efforts vary with available outreach resources, which are often quite limited. According to CTE administrators interviewed, participation in County school districts generally involves only modest numbers of students.

It is noteworthy that all districts have lengthy lists of external contacts. Such engagement often involves guest speakers or site tours. In-depth involvement, however, is infrequent. The more extensive the partnership, i.e., hands-on participation between students and outside organizations, the more impactful the relationship.

Another valuable external relationship frequently cited by CTE administrators is collaboration with community colleges, which also offer CTE programs on their own campuses. There are numerous examples of shared classrooms and instructional resources made available to high school students. College teachers often play a critical role in course instruction both at the college and district schools. Sacramento County

community colleges work with school districts to construct dual-degree programs allowing students to earn college credits along with their high school CTE credits.

High Quality, Highly Engaged Instructors

It is generally acknowledged one of the most important elements of successful CTE programs is experienced instructors. CTE administrators interviewed stated identification, hiring, and retention of qualified CTE instructors are significant challenges throughout Sacramento County school districts. Methods for meeting these challenges are widely understood but are not coordinated through information-sharing and collective strategy. County-wide collaboration will make available a broader spectrum of hiring techniques, methodologies, and potentially, hiring opportunities. SCOE does not participate in candidate searches or in best instructor hiring practices due to limited resources, creating a need for inter-district collaboration.

Early Identification of Problematic Students

All schools have populations of students falling behind their peers. Several CTE administrators acknowledged efforts at early identification of at-risk students but indicated lack of resources prevented deployment of a more effective mechanism. Timely intervention helps lower the failure rate. According to interviews with two CTE administrators, their districts experience success through early identification of at-risk CTE students (at the middle school level or even earlier) and begin corrective action. The engagement of teachers and student counselors is key to achieving this success. Teachers and counselors are frequently the first to recognize inappropriate student behavior, and inadequate academic performance could jeopardize the student's success in a CTE program. The teachers and counselors are also best positioned to initiate efforts to bring the student back on track.

Soft Skills Training

Interviews with multiple CTE administrators emphasized the importance of soft-skill training, noting such training is not generally available elsewhere. Typical soft skills instruction involves interview skills, face-to-face interaction, on-the-job employer expectations, and resume writing. These elements provide essential lessons in interpersonal skills valued in the real world and are an important component of the entire CTE curriculum. These skills help ensure student success beyond just job-

specific, technical education lessons. According to CTE administrators, the most successful soft-skill learning takes place when such training is included in standard course content.

Active Superintendent Involvement

Consistently identified as a key factor in the success of CTE programs in Sacramento County, California, and throughout the United States, is active support from district superintendents. Local district CTE administrators generally give high marks to their school superintendents for the support they provide to programs.

Program Awareness and Student Engagement

Awareness of CTE pathways and course offerings among students and parents varies widely across schools and districts. Limited resources and a lingering bias toward college preparation over career paths hamper broader understanding and acceptance of CTE offerings and benefits. Recommending CTE pathways to non-college bound students is an outdated fear that “tracking” still persists. Different districts take different approaches to “awareness campaigns.” There is no significant knowledge sharing among districts or coordination with SCOE regarding program awareness techniques.

According to CTE administrators interviewed, counselors often have large student loads and are not always familiar with the all the advantages of CTE programs to students. This results in students often lacking complete information about career training opportunities that may fit their long-range plans far better than a four-year college degree path.

CTE Revenue Sources

Funding for CTE programs comes from a variety of sources, mostly State and Federal grants that individual districts must apply for annually. The original, and most significant Federal contribution is the Perkins grant. Most, but not all, districts take full advantage of this. A mix of State funds makes up the balance of most CTE budgets. The grant application process is lengthy and time-consuming. Although the Districts have become skilled at the process of grant writing, small CTE administrative staffs do not always have time to pursue all potential grant opportunities. Additional support from partner companies is occasionally sought. According to CTE administrators, such local partner

support is usually small, targeted, and nonmonetary. Further, according to CTE administrators interviewed, such industry resource opportunities are very limited.

Since 2021, the State provided a total of \$950 million for various one-time CTE initiatives, including the following (California State Assembly Budget Subcommittee - [sub-3-april-8-final-v2.pdf](#)):

- \$500 million for a competitive grant program intended to improve college and career readiness.
- \$250 million for a competitive grant program to support regional collaboratives. Each collaborative must include at least one school district, one community college district, and one CSU or UC campus.

Substantial Federal funding is available from Perkins grants (US Department of Education)

- US total for Perkins V 2025 - \$1,416,378,478
- California total for Perkins V 2025 - \$142,790,738

California also provides considerable funding to state school districts. Statistics from: *Ongoing K-12 Career & Technical Education (CTE) Programs (2024-25)*
 (Source: LAO CTE Report)

Career Technical Education Incentive Grant	\$300,000,000
K-12 Strong Workforce Program	\$150,000,000
California Partnership Academies	\$ 21,000,000
Career Technical Education Initiative	\$ 15,000,000
Agricultural CTE Incentive Grant	\$ 6,000,000
Specialized Secondary Programs	\$ 5,000,000
TOTAL	\$497,000,000

The *California Master Plan for Career Education*, the aspirational study completed by the California Department of Education in 2025, identified the following areas the State prioritized for CTE throughout all school districts. Recommendations include the creation of, and funding for:

- Career Passport;
- Skills-based certification;
- Integration of schools, community colleges and UC/CSU;
- Regional programs;
- Addressing opportunity for youth;
- State-wide database of jobs available and forecast for the future;
- Student awareness of the opportunity to experience career paths through courses;
- Public-private partnerships.

The State 2025-2026 fiscal budget requested funding for implementation of the Master Plan. The enacted 2025-2026 budget only included a one-time targeted funding of \$25 million for Career Passport, a digital tool that shows a person's job readiness, education, and prior learning. There was also \$15 million in one-time funding and \$5 million in ongoing funding for the Credit for Prior Learning Initiative.

In 1988, California passed a constitutional amendment creating a legal obligation to fund public school education. One aspect of the law established a formula for calculating minimum funding levels for K-14 education, including CTE. Actual levels depend highly on the State's overall fiscal health. There is no guaranteed funding for CTE. Notwithstanding, California's commitment to CTE is strong as evidenced by approximately \$200 million allocated in recent years to support statewide CTE initiatives and district programs (as identified in the *Master Plan for Career Technical Education*).

CTE Expenditures

School districts in Sacramento County uniformly report student demand for placement in CTE pathways/courses exceeds availability. As courses evolve and student awareness

increases, those requests become greater each year. With such a high demand in CTE courses and massive funding dedicated to education in Sacramento, one would hope significant amounts of budgetary support would be available to CTE programs. This is not the case. The following table includes 2025-26 CTE spending in four major Sacramento County school districts. Direct spending on CTE programs is, with one exception, approximately 2% of total annual high school revenues, despite CTE course enrollment being between 23% to 32% of total high school student population.

CTE budget as a percent of revenue in four large Sacramento County school districts for 2025-2026 is shown below:

	Elk Grove	Folsom-Cordova	Sacramento City	San Juan
Adopted School District Total General Revenue (in millions)	\$1,054,009,408	\$345,113,439	\$692,657,010	\$671,145,438
CTE Budget (in millions)	\$7,000,000	\$3,100,000	\$7,557,017	\$6,674,580
CTE Budget as % of Total General Revenue	0.66%	0.90%	1.09%	0.99%
CTE Budget as % of High School General Revenue	1.92%	2.61%	2.86%	2.79%
CTE Enrollment as % of High School Enrollment	31.1%	32.3%	25.5%	23.6%

Source: CDE and respective school districts

Districts allocate CTE funds depending on their individual priorities. Spending generally covers some or all of the costs of program administration, instructor and staff salaries/benefits, and capital investment necessary for setup and continuation of courses. Grand Jury analysis suggests, however, a disproportionately small amount of funding dedicated to CTE limits the program's ability to fully meet the need. Under current State and Federal budget constraints, a significant expansion of CTE efforts is

extremely challenging, despite the clear individual and societal benefits of such programs.

CTE Program Structure

CTE programs offer a great diversity of student pathways. Anticipated future educational and employment skill needs drive the options. Total direct revenue supporting CTE programs is limited in every district in Sacramento County. This includes formula funding based on students' attendance in CTE. The Public Policy Institute of California estimates 30% of all 9-12 students in the State of California participated in the Golden State Pathways Program in 2023-2024. These programs are designed to serve a large population, although in reality, enrollment in CTE courses in Sacramento County is currently less than 25%. Given limited revenue, program development must be keenly focused to operate most effectively in support of such a large percentage of students seeking enrollment in CTE.

All schools work diligently to assess the career opportunities identified in their immediate communities. The best available and most accurate job opportunity information enables superior CTE program structure and pathway/course development. Although there is some information sharing between districts, the sources, collection, and evaluation of such data is largely unique to each district. Opportunities for more accurate and informative jobs data are available through greater constructive collaboration between SCOE and school districts on this matter.

Sacramento County districts lack a systematic mechanism to evaluate CTE courses, instructors, and program outcomes. Union contracts often restrict CTE administrators' ability to evaluate CTE teachers' performance. This limits the assessment of a number of key CTE success factors but not all. The lack of regular assessment reduces the ability of schools, districts, and SCOE to produce meaningful, timely dashboard data and identify comprehensive, continuous improvement plans. Nevertheless, all district CTE administrators with whom the Grand Jury spoke demonstrate awareness of the need for program assessment and continuous improvement. Every district noted regular efforts to evaluate its programs and to seek ways to improve CTE outcomes while acknowledging limitations in their methodologies.

The California Department of Education has defined Twelve Elements of High-Quality Pathways (see Appendix) to facilitate the evaluation of CTE programs. An annual

assessment of these critical factors enables districts and SCOE to objectively measure program effectiveness. Several districts noted this evaluation mechanism but adoption appears inconsistent. Few districts indicate consistent use of an organized “continuous improvement” mechanism with respect to their CTE programs. The use of an organized process for evaluation and identification of corrective actions is a universal practice throughout government and industry. Its absence related to CTE makes systematic evaluation and change more difficult. While the use of the Twelve Elements is recommended (not mandated), the State encourages its use. SCOE does not appear to require it from districts.

Regional CTE Hub

At present, no district in Sacramento County has a facility dedicated solely to CTE education. Individual schools establish pathways and courses. Space and resources limit pathway and course offerings. A single facility dedicated to CTE would afford more students greater access to more programs. Massachusetts and North Carolina deploy such concentration of resources with considerable success. A Northern California example of a centralized CTE offering is the Silicon Valley Career Technical Education that provides 28 courses to students from 40 high schools in Santa Clara County.

Folsom-Cordova Unified School District has this strategy under consideration with realizations not guaranteed and implementation several years away, at best. Other Sacramento County school district CTE administrators indicate positive interest in such a setup but there are many challenges. The concentration of resources is expensive. Transportation to and from such a site is complicated. Classroom logistics are potentially complex. However, none of these barriers has prevented successful implementation in other locales.

Transportation

Sacramento County high schools work diligently to offer a number of well-resourced CTE pathways and courses. Many of school districts in the county offer only one to three CTE pathways in their high schools due to various limitations, primarily budget. The curriculum mix in schools varies widely, driven by available resources and assessed demand within a particular school. Some schools offer only one or two of the three-course sequence in a pathway. This requires the student to travel to another school within the district or to a school outside the home district to complete the

pathway sequence. Frequently, a particular pathway offering is unavailable in most of a district's schools and, therefore, unavailable to students attending these schools.

Lack of transportation to alternative sites, other than a student's home school, to participate in desired offerings is a barrier to greater program engagement. Limited transportation resources inhibit inter-district as well as intra-district student transfer and opportunity. While no school has extra funds for additional transportation services to students, school districts have the option of fully utilizing no-cost student travel service offered by the Sacramento Regional Transit District. There is little evidence of CTE programs including the free transit pass option when informing students about CTE.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

F1. The Grand Jury finds Sacramento County School Districts' CTE programs offer a significant alternative to four-year college pathways and provide potentially substantial benefits to as many as half of the student population in Sacramento County.

F2. The Grand Jury finds CTE programs are actively supported by the highest levels of administration within Sacramento County school districts.

F3. The Grand Jury finds Sacramento County school districts accomplish a great deal with limited local and state revenue for CTE programs.

F4. Funding:

F4a. The Grand Jury finds the total revenue from all sources for CTE is disproportionately low in school budgets, generally less than 2% which severely restricts school districts' ability to implement CTE programs to their maximum potential. (R4)

F4b. The Grand Jury finds a significant amount of revenue for CTE programs, at both State and Federal levels, is derived from competitive grants. This requires school districts to develop a resource-intensive and time-consuming grant writing program. (R4)

F4c. The Grand Jury finds there are varying levels of financial and in-kind support for CTE programs from local industries and trade groups. These programs are critical to providing the trained workforce needed by local businesses. Without

extensive efforts to secure non-governmental resources CTE programs miss support and critical external relationship opportunities. (R4)

R4. The Grand Jury recommends, the following with respect to CTE funding:

R4a. SCOE create and continuously update a database of all grant opportunities and assist districts in the preparation and submission of applications to all available grants. This database to be available to all districts by June 30, 2027.

R4b. All districts aggressively pursue funding from all identifiable sources, including local and industry partners. This effort must be a fully integrated element of each district's CTE administrative procedures to augment state and federal funding. A formal plan to identify and seek support should be in place by June 30, 2027.

F5. The Grand Jury finds each school district develops its own locally relevant database of critical "high demand, high wage" job availability, both current and anticipated. Failure to adopt a County-wide, systematic approach to data collection leads to inefficiency, duplication of effort, and encumbers rapid assessment of future program direction. (R5)

R5. The Grand Jury recommends SCOE, in collaboration with school districts, develop a comprehensive list of current and projected high-demand/high-growth job statistic sources for CTE program planning. This analysis is to be completed and published by June 30, 2027. (F5)

F6. Program Execution

- F6a. The Grand Jury finds school districts, in collaboration with SCOE, meet periodically to discuss ways to advance CTE goals and improve local programs but there is little evidence of systematic investigation into Best Practices across the State and little or no research into Best Practices in other states. Failure to explore these CTE centers of excellence around the country denies Sacramento County of potentially significant improvement ideas. (R6)
- F6b. The Grand Jury finds partnerships with local businesses, community colleges, and other organizations are one of the most critical factors contributing to the success of CTE programs. Varying levels of success in

developing such collaborations is reflected in the effectiveness of different CTE programs. (R6)

- F6c. The Grand Jury finds a diverse approach to CTE instructor identification, hiring, and retention practices among the school districts in the County with limited involvement with SCOE. The absence of collaborative information sharing and active mutual support in this critical aspect leads to inefficiency and elongated efforts to fill vacant instructor positions. (R6)

R6. The Grand Jury recommends districts, in collaboration with SCOE, develop formal plans, based on an analysis of Best Practices from within Sacramento County, other California counties and other states throughout the U.S. to enhance CTE program effectiveness. Areas of focus should include, but not be limited to:

- Expansion of external partnerships
- Instructor candidate identification, recruitment, and retention practices
- Increased coordination with SCOE and other local CTE programs
- Greater engagement with the California Strong Workforce Program
- Collaboration in the construction of a countywide industry board
- Emphasis on developing more dual enrollment programs with local community colleges
- Identification of additional internships leading to apprenticeships

This plan should be completed and in place by the beginning of 2027-2028 school year. (F6a, b, c)

F7. The Grand Jury finds, in some districts, there is inadequate awareness among students and parents of CTE programs and the potential benefits of completing a CTE course of study. Diminished appreciation of CTE contributes to lower enrollment in some CTE pathways and courses. (R7)

R7. The Grand Jury recommends districts review their CTE awareness efforts to ensure all tools for increased awareness are effectively used. Awareness efforts

should encompass a full range of communication methods that engage student populations, parents, community colleges and business partners. This review should be completed by the beginning of the 2027-2028 school year. (F7)

- F8.** The Grand Jury finds there is inconsistent effort in identification of, and intervention with, students who are experiencing educational difficulties in CTE pathways. Effective and timely counseling by CTE staff of students exhibiting signs of disengagement lowers drop-out rate, increases funding received from the State and increases graduation rates. (R8)
- R8.** The Grand Jury recommends each school district define and adopt a methodology for early and continuous assessment of students enrolled in CTE programs to identify students experiencing challenges. This methodology is to be developed and in place by the beginning of the 2027-2028 school year. (F8)
- F9.** The Grand Jury finds soft skills training benefits students at interviews and/or other non-school interactions but integration into CTE courses is inconsistent. Lack of these skills is highly detrimental to students as they interact in new and challenging people-related circumstances outside the school setting. (R9)
- R9.** The Grand Jury recommends all districts that do not provide soft skills training develop and implement such training into CTE course curricula. This effort should be in place by the beginning of the 2027-2028 school year. (F9)
- F10.** The Grand Jury finds a lack of organized inter/intra-school district transportation services. This presents a significant barrier to greater participation in CTE course enrollment and efficient utilization of limited resources. (R11)
- R10.** The Grand Jury recommends school districts and SCOE, in collaboration with Sacramento Regional Transit District (RT), develop intra- and inter-district student transportation services to CTE facilities within the County. An analysis of Regional Transit transportation services to be completed by the beginning of the 2027-2028 school year. (F10)
- F11.** The Grand Jury finds limited examples of formalized continuous improvement processes in district CTE programs. The absence of a systematic mechanism for identification and implementation of improvement opportunities makes such efforts

less effective and more difficult to explain to decision makers and others interested in the CTE programs. (R11)

- R11.** The Grand Jury recommends school district CTE administrators and SCOE collaborate on the development of a methodology for the evaluation of CTE pathway success. The California Department of Education Twelve Elements of High-Quality Pathways should be used as a baseline. Implementation should be completed by the beginning of the 2027-2028 school year. (F11)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933(a) and (c) and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows. From the following “governing body” as specified in Penal Code section 933(c) within 90 days, for all Findings and Recommendations:

Board of Education
Sacramento County Office of Education
c/o Mariana Corona Sabeniano, President
PO Box 269003
Sacramento, CA 95826-9003

Board of Education
Center Joint Unified School District
c/o Howard Ballin, President
8408 Watt Avenue
Antelope, CA 95843

Board of Education
Elk Grove Unified School District
c/o Beth Albiani, President
9510 Florin Road
Elk Grove, CA 95624

Board of Education
Folsom-Cordova Unified School District
c/o Jennifer Laret, President
1965 Birkmont Drive
Rancho Cordova, CA 95742-6407

Board of Trustees
Natomas Unified School District
1901 Arena Boulevard
Sacramento, CA 95834-1905
c/o Micah Grant, President

Board of Trustees
River Delta Unified School District
c/o Marcial Lamera, President
445 Montezuma Street
Rio Vista, CA 94571

Board of Education
Sacramento City Unified School District
c/o Tara Jeane, President
5735 47th Avenue
Sacramento, CA 95824

Board of Education
San Juan Unified School District
c/o Tanya Kravchuk, President
3738 Walnut Avenue
Carmichael, CA 95608

Board of Trustees
Galt Joint High School District
c/o Terry Parker, President
1018 C Street, Suite 210
Galt, CA 95632

Board of Trustees
Twin Rivers Unified School District
c/o Christine Jefferson, President
3222 Winona Way
North Highlands, CA 95660

INVITED RESPONSES

Michelle McIntosh, Director, Career Technical Education
Sacramento County Office of Education
P.O. Box 269003
Sacramento, CA 95826-9003

APPENDIX

12 Essential Elements of a High-Quality CTE Program Student-Centered Delivery of Services

- Equity
- Access
- Leadership at All Levels
- High-Quality, Integrated Curriculum and Instruction
- Skilled Instruction and Educational Leadership, Informed by Professional Learning
- Career Exploration and Student Supports
- Appropriate Use of Data and Continuous Improvement
- Cross-System Alignment
- Intentional Recruitment and Marketing
- Sustained Investments and Funding Through Mutual Agreements
- Strong Partnerships with Industry

Documents Publications and Websites:

- Stern, D. From Vocational Education to Career Technical Education: A Capsule History and Summary of Research. University of California, Berkeley
- What We Know About the Impact of Career and Technical Education: A Systematic Review of the Research by Institute of Educational Sciences; Career & Technical Network/CTE Research Network
- Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031 – Georgetown University
- Career and Technical Education: A Primer – Congressional Research Service February 3, 2026
- California's Master Plan for Career Education 2025
- High Quality CTE Framework Development - Association for Career & Technical Education 2018 Version

- Malkus, N. 2019. The Evolution of Career and Technical Education. 1982-2013. American Enterprise Institute
- <https://w.taskstream.com/ts/blunk1/Unit2-1917to1956.html/pvctcq00pvc4crc4c4c6cucqci>
- Department of Education: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED019402>
- Freeman, Edward Henry, "Analysis and State Comparisons of the Vocational Education Act of 1963" (1964). Plan B Papers. 382. https://thekeep.eiu.edu/plan_b/382
- Gardner, D. P., et al. 1983. A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. An Open Letter to the American People. A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education. Department of Education. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED226006>
- Carnevale, A. P., Cheah, B. and Wenzinger, E. 2021. The College Payoff: More Education Doesn't Always Mean More Earnings. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2021. cew.georgetown.edu/collegepayoff2021.
- California Department of Education: Career Technical Education (CTE) Course Code Definitions by Sector and Pathways 2025-26 Users Guide; May 2025
- Rodriguez, O., et. al. 2025. Early Insights from the Golden State Pathways Program. Public Policy Institute of California.
- <https://cte.ed.gov/legislation/perkins-v>
- <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Workforce-and-Economic-Development/Career-Education-Practices/Perkins-IV>
- Petek, G. 2025. Overview of K-12 Career Technical Education. Legislative Analyst's Office - 032525.
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, State Strategies for Financing Career and Technical Education. Washington, D.C., 2014.
- California Department of Education. 2008. 2008-2012 California State Plan for Career Technical Education.
- Governor's Office of California. (2023). Freedom to succeed: Career education executive order (N-11-23). Executive Order N-11-232024-25 Four Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate

Grand Jury Reports:

- San Diego County – Vocational Education Today: It’s Not Old-School Anymore (June 7, 2017)
- Nevada County - Career Technical Education: An Alternative to the Traditional College Prep Experience (2018-2019 Grand Jury Report)
- Marin County – The Status of Career Technical Education in Marin County (2019)
- Calaveras County - Pathways to the Future (June 30, 2024)
- San Mateo County - Education is Everyone’s Business School-Business Partnerships Make an Impact in County’s High Schools (June 26, 2023)

Statutes and Regulations:

- 1917 - Smith-Hughes Act (P.L. 64-347)
- 1963 - Vocational Education Act (P.L. 88-210)
- 1968 - Vocational Education Amendments (P.L. 90-576)
- 1984 - Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act (Perkins I; P.L. 98-524)
- 2006 - Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (Perkins IV; P.L. 109-270)
- 2018 - Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V; P.L. 115-224)
- 2025 - Golden State Pathways Program Act – California Education Code Sections 53020-53025

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.