

Building Infrastructure & Capacity Career Coach Programs

This model policy outlines requirements to establish a state Career Coach Program to build capacity at the local level. This policy rests on the belief that career development should be prioritized as a separate function of schools that supports the services provided by school counselors. Career Coaches can coordinate activities that go beyond paper-and-pencil requirements, including regular opportunities throughout the school year via dedicated coursework, coursework embedded in the curriculum, and through experiential activities such as those described in the Career Exploration Coursework, Programming, and Activity Requirements model policy. These positions can also function as a liaison between employers and school districts, providing a connection to working professionals who can offer real-world insight into careers of interest.

Section 1. Definitions

- (1) “Career coach” means a staff member whose function includes the provision of career advising and postsecondary planning services to students in middle and high school as part of the whole school advising program.
- (2) “Career development framework” means the state framework that outlines career development expectations for each grade band in grades K through 12 that include career awareness, exploration, and preparation.
- (3) “Career exploration activity” means any educational programming, activity, or event that provides early exposure to jobs and industries and creates links between what students learn in school and their emerging career interests.
 - (a) Career exploration experiences should be varied, personalized, real-world, and hands-on. Opportunities should be aligned to individual student interests, with clear connections to durable or professional skills, careers that are aligned to the changing future of workforce needs, and to upcoming transitions to high school.
 - (b) Career exploration activities may include without limitation activities designed to immerse students in experiences that provide an understanding of various

in-demand career fields including but not limited to field trips, guest speakers, community service, job-shadows, career fairs, interviews, research projects, project-based learning, internships, and work-based learning.

- (4) “Department” means the (*State*) Department of Education.
- (5) “Local Education Agency”, also referred to as “school district” means a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within (*State*) for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of (*State*).
- (6) “Postsecondary” means education, training, and career experiences beyond high school graduation, inclusive of 2- and 4-year colleges and universities, technical schools, bootcamps, programs that confer professional licenses, industry certifications or certificates, and short-term training programs as defined by (*state workforce agency*).
- (7) “Middle school” means a school consisting of grades five through eight (5-8) or any combination that includes grades five through eight (5-8). Middle schools serve children who are approximately 10-14 years of age.¹
- (8) “Middle school career exploration” means any activity that allows students to develop an awareness of all career fields as defined by (*national or state career frameworks*) and investigate their own interests and aptitudes related to careers.² Students gain a deeper understanding of career interests and related occupations to obtain the information needed to make connections between their education and career aspirations in order to make a plan for reaching their future goals.
- (9) “Whole School Advising” means an advising program that is coordinated and directed by a school counselor and delivered by all student-facing personnel within a school, including, but not limited to, school counselors, career coaches, administrators, educators, and work-based learning coordinators.

Section 2. The Career Coach Program and Purpose

- (1) The Career Coach Program is created for the purpose of providing additional capacity to school districts to provide career advising and postsecondary planning services to students in middle and high school.

¹ States can adjust this grade band to fit their middle grades definition


² States can use the National Career Clusters[®] Framework or state-specific career cluster frameworks as a guideline to introduce students to a variety of career paths.

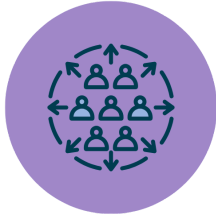
Section 3. Career Coach Qualifications

- (1) The department shall develop a program leading to a certificate in career development facilitation. The department shall award the certificate to any individual who
 - (a) Holds a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution of higher education;
 - (b) Has at least a five-year employment history; and
 - (c) Successfully completes the department's programmatic requirements.
- (2) The Department shall develop a program leading to a certificate in career development facilitation that prepares individuals to fulfill the responsibilities outlined in Section 4.

Section 4. Career Coach Role and Responsibilities

- (1) A career coach shall provide the following career advising and postsecondary planning activities to the assigned schools within their school district:
 - (a) Career exploration opportunities (as defined above) to students in grades 6-12.
 - (b) Sequential career development activities aligned to the (*State's*) Career Development Framework.
 - (c) Information on careers, career pathways, and educational requirements, including current career information aligned to in-demand industries in (*State*).
 - (d) Support to educators throughout the school with facilitating career exploration opportunities within their content area coursework.
 - (e) Student academic and planning facilitation with students in grades 6-12. This includes interest and skills assessments to assist individuals in making informed career planning decisions.
 - (f) Assistance to students with researching, applying for, visiting, and/or enrolling in education or training programs.
 - (g) Early outreach to students and their parents/caregivers with information about the importance of postsecondary education, including how to prepare, apply, and finance various postsecondary training options.

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- (h) Connecting students to enrichment and acceleration opportunities, early college programs, advanced placement classes, academic and career and technical education (CTE), and concurrent-credit enrollment in alignment with and in service of their larger postsecondary and career goals.
 - (i) Any other duties that support the (*State's*) career development framework.
- (2) A career coach may only spend time conducting career advising and postsecondary planning activities outlined in this section.
- (3) A career coach shall work at the direction and under the supervision of the school district counseling staff.



Building Infrastructure & Capacity

Funding Mechanisms for Middle School Career Exploration

In order to build capacity to deliver career exploration opportunities to middle school students throughout your state, there must be a reliable stream of funding that districts can draw from to ensure those experiences are high-quality, hands-on, experiential, and support the larger vision of the state's workforce development goals. These funds can allow for professional development for educators and school advising teams, materials supports such as platforms and instructional materials, and experiential career-connected learning opportunities such as field trips.

States have different funding mechanisms to support their initiatives, and can incorporate middle school career exploration with one of the following approaches:

- (1) State Funding Formula:** Most states have a weighted per-pupil funding calculation to dedicate funding to certain coursework and support specific activities.³ These funding sources are typically weighted based on different educational needs and special programming. States can use this formula to determine an additional weight to middle schools for the purposes of facilitating career exploration activities.

State Examples:

- **Idaho:** Through the Idaho [Advanced Opportunities Program](#), the state provides \$4,625 per student for students enrolled in a public school who want to take certain coursework while in grades 7-12 including career technical education workforce training. The funds are allocated from the state's educational support program, ensuring students can access resources that enhance their academic and career readiness.
- **Maryland:** The state increased per pupil spending by 9% in 2019 as part of the [Blueprint for Maryland's Future](#), which included increased funding to support low-income students by 32%. The target per pupil amount included costs associated with implementation, including career counseling.

- (2) Categorical Funding:** States can earmark sections of their budget toward various activities that support career exploration in middle school. These funds can be awarded

³ Education Commission of the States: [State Education Funding Formulas And Grade Weighting](#)

to their departments of education to distribute to districts to build capacity or directly fund career exploration activities. Alternatively, these dollars can help build capacity at each department to provide support to districts as they implement the policies geared toward career exploration in middle schools. Funding appropriated for middle school career exploration efforts should be recurring to provide districts and schools with a reliable source of financial support to facilitate high-quality activities.

State Examples:

- **Alabama:** The Department of Education set aside Career and Technical Education (CTE) [career coach allocations](#) for FY 2025 to support career coach positions which help districts implement career development activities.
- **Colorado:** The General Assembly created the [Colorado career advisor training program](#) and appropriated \$1 million in state funds to the Colorado Department of Education to advance meaningful career conversations. The funds were used to expand training in career conversations and build a tool to support the ICAP process.
- **Ohio:** In 2025, Ohio appropriated \$16,325,000 in a line item for [Career-Technical Education Enhancements](#) to support career awareness and exploration. Districts can use these funds for the delivery of career awareness programs to students in grades K-12, the provision of a common, consistent curriculum to students, assisting teachers in providing a career development curriculum to students, developing a career development plan for each student, and the provision of opportunities for students to engage in activities, such as career fairs, hands-on experiences, and job shadowing, across all career pathways at each grade level.

(3) Grant Funding: States can create competitive grant programs that districts can apply for to implement career exploration activities in middle schools. These grant programs can be operated through state agencies and awarded to districts, intermediaries, or regional support offices to assist districts in providing high-quality career development experiences, thereby building capacity at the local level.

State Examples:

- **Arkansas:** Arkansas's [Career Coach Program](#) is funded through state funds to support career coach and career coach supervisor positions. This grant is available to institutions of higher education, education cooperatives, or non-profit organizations who can support districts through this program. These positions are part of a larger team that supports districts in providing career counseling services to students in grades 7-12.
- **Pennsylvania:** The Department of Labor and Industry issues [Business Education Partnership Grants](#) through their workforce boards that provide career-related experiences and exposure to students. These career-related experiences include durable skills development, internships, career mentoring, and career tours.

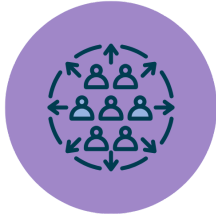
- **Washington:** Washington established a [Career Connected Learning Grant Program](#) to advance the state’s vision for a statewide system for career connected learning. The program is administered through their employment security department. These funds can support regional career connected learning and work-integrated learning networks in both rural and urban areas, as well as career connected learning program intermediaries working within and across regions who partner with multiple employers, labor partners, and educational institutions; work with K-12 and postsecondary career representatives to develop curricula for new and innovative programs; and scale existing career awareness and exploration, career preparation, and endorsed career launch programs.

(4) **Dedicated Federal Dollars:** States have a few avenues to direct an amount of their federal funding to advance middle school career exploration in their state. These include Perkins dollars, which are allowable to support CTE beginning in the 5th grade, and various sections of ESSA through Title I and Title IV. States should specify allowable expenditures in their Perkins Plans and ESSA Plans to encourage districts to dedicate dollars toward activities that support career awareness and exploration in middle school.

Examples:

- **Perkins V:** The Strengthening Career and Technical Education Act recently removed restrictions to support CTE to learners below 7th grade, defining middle school as grades 5-8. States can now use their Perkins dollars to support the expansion of CTE and career exposure opportunities as early as 5th grade.⁴ New Jersey established the [Middle Grades Career Awareness and Exploration Grant](#) using Perkins V dollars to cultivate the development of innovative career awareness and exploration programs focused on engaging career-focused instruction and unique experiences for students in the middle grades.
- **Title IV, Part A:** The [Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants](#) in this section can be used for “Well-Rounded Educational Opportunities” which includes college and career counseling. [Arizona](#) and [Pennsylvania](#) use these funds in part for this purpose.
- **Title IV, Part B:** [21st Century Community Learning Centers](#) provide academic enrichment and support a well-rounded education, including a broad array of additional services, programs, and activities during non-school hours or periods when school is not in session, such as before and after school, weekends, summer, or during school breaks. SEAs can use these funds to support relevant and engaging learning experiences such as student apprenticeships, career exploration opportunities, project-based learning, community field trips, and service-learning opportunities. The [District of Columbia](#) uses these funds in part to support career exploration.

⁴ Advance CTE, [Perkins V Opens Access to Middle Grades](#)



Building Infrastructure & Capacity Intermediary Support for Middle School Career Exploration

This model policy outlines requirements for states to partner with intermediaries and community-based organizations that can help districts and schools facilitate career development activities. These organizations can help build the capacity of districts and schools, who often struggle with competing priorities, leaving career planning and development susceptible to minimal implementation. Through these partnerships, states can begin to scale high-quality career exploration activities for middle school students.

Be it enacted by the (governing body) of (state):

Section 1. Definitions

- (1) “Career development framework” means the state framework that outlines career development expectations for each grade band in grades K through 12 that include career awareness, exploration, and preparation.
- (2) “Career exploration activity” means any educational programming, activity, or event that provides early exposure to jobs and industries and creates links between what students learn in school and their emerging career interests.
 - (a) Career exploration experiences should be varied, personalized, real-world, and hands-on. Opportunities should be aligned to individual student interests, with clear connections to durable or professional skills, careers that are aligned to the changing future of workforce needs, and to upcoming transitions to high school.
 - (b) Career exploration activities may include without limitation activities designed to immerse students in experiences that provide an understanding of various in-demand career fields including but not limited to field trips, guest speakers, community service, job-shadows, career fairs, interviews, research projects, project-based learning, internships, and work-based learning.
- (3) “Individual Career and Academic Plan” or “ICAP” means a plan that is developed by the student in collaboration with their parents/caregivers and school personnel that is

reviewed and updated annually beginning in the fifth grade.⁵ The plan should guide students' educational and career pathway choices, such as course selection, activity participation, and postsecondary planning, to prepare students for success after high school, and should adapt to the student's changing interests, goals or career aspirations, as needed.

- (4) "Intermediary" means any organization that connects education systems and employers to design and deliver career exploration programming that creates opportunities for students to engage in the world of work.
- (5) "Local Education Agency", also referred to as "school district" means a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within (*State*) for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of (*State*).
- (6) "Middle school" means a school consisting of grades five through eight (5-8) or any combination that includes grades five through eight (5-8). Middle schools serve children who are approximately 10-14 years of age.⁶
- (7) "Middle school career exploration" means any activity that allows students to develop an awareness of all career fields as defined by (*national or state career frameworks*) and investigate their own interests and aptitudes related to careers.⁷ Students gain a deeper understanding of career interests and related occupations to obtain the information needed to make connections between their education and career aspirations in order to make a plan for reaching their future goals.
- (8) "Network" means the Statewide Career Readiness Intermediary Network, as outlined in this (*state law, rule, or regulation*).
- (9) "Postsecondary" means education, training, and career experiences beyond high school graduation, inclusive of 2- and 4-year colleges and universities, technical schools, bootcamps, programs that confer professional licenses, industry certifications or certificates, and short-term training programs as defined by (*state workforce agency*).
- (10) "Work-Based Learning" means a hands-on experience that allows students to immerse themselves within an occupation of interest to them, helping them gain experience and networks that ultimately help them navigate their career journey. Work-based learning

⁵ States can use the starting grade that best meets their definition for middle school.

⁶ States can adjust this grade band to fit their middle grades definition

⁷ States can use the National Career Clusters[®] Framework or state-specific career cluster frameworks as a guideline to introduce students to a variety of career paths.

may include, but is not limited to, internships, co-ops, apprenticeships, school-based enterprises, practicums, and clinical opportunities. These experiences should support the expectations set forth in the (*State's*) Career Development Framework.

Section 2. Statewide Career Readiness Intermediary Network

- (1) A Statewide Career Readiness Intermediary Network is established in the (*State Workforce Agency*). The purpose of the program shall be to help students progress through the expectations outlined in the (*State's*) Career Development Framework. The network shall help districts and schools coordinate career development activities and facilitate cooperation and collaboration between businesses and entities within the state system of education and to offer relevant, work-based learning activities to students.
- (2) The program shall do all of the following:
 - (a) Prepare middle school students to make informed decisions about their educational and career pathways.
 - (b) Prepare students in grades 6-12 to make informed postsecondary education and career decisions.
 - (c) Provide communication and coordination in order to build and sustain relationships between employers and local youth, the state system of education, and the community at large.
 - (d) Connect students to career opportunities within the state, creating economic capital for the state using a skilled and available workforce.
 - (e) Provide a one-stop contact point for information useful to both educators and employers, including information related to internships, job shadowing experiences, and other work-based learning opportunities for students including those related to high-wage, high-demand occupations in (*State*).
 - (f) Integrate services provided through the program with other career exploration-related activities, which may include but are not limited to students' individual and academic planning (ICAP) processes.
 - (g) Facilitate the attainment of portable credentials of value to employers such as the national career readiness certificate, where appropriate.
 - (h) Develop work-based learning capacity with employers. This includes designing a broad array of work-based learning experiences beyond place-based internships

and apprenticeships, such as employer designed challenges, virtual internships, and simulated work experiences.

- (i) Provide core services, which may include student job shadowing, student internships, and teacher or student tours.
- (3) In order to carry out the requirements of this network, the (*State Workforce Agency*) shall do the following:
- (a) Coordinate with (*State Education Agency*), district Career Coaches, and postsecondary institutions to implement the (*State's*) Career Development Framework.
 - (b) Publish and maintain on its website:
 - (i) a list of intermediaries and community-based organizations, organized by region, that schools and districts may reach out to for support in implementing the (*State's*) Career Development Framework.
 - (ii) a current database, organized by region, of employer champions for work-based learning and career readiness systems and programs. Each employer must consent to its designation as a champion and its information being published in the database.
 - (iii) an inventory of resources available to support school districts in implementing the (*State's*) Career Development Framework, including sector-specific resources.
 - (iv) Contact information for district Career Coaches that employers and families may reach out to for assistance with supporting individual student career development and schoolwide career exploration activities.
 - (c) Publish an annual report detailing the activities of the state and districts to support local implementation of the (*State's*) Career Development Framework. This report shall be available on the (*State Workforce Agency's*) website and submitted to the Secretary of Education and State Board of the (*State Education Agency*) by June 30 annually to inform ongoing improvements and assess needs for successful implementation of the (*State's*) Career Development Framework. The report shall outline activities by district to ensure uniform implementation of the requirements set forth in this (*state law, rule, or regulation*).