



Career & Technical Education Expert Review Team

Kent County Public Schools Post-Visit Report

Governor's Workforce Development Board
Career and Technical Education Committee

April 2026

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The Governor's Workforce Development Board is grateful to the CTE Expert Review Team (ERT) members that participated in the visit of this LEA's CTE programs, as well as central office and school leadership, staff, and students that contributed valuable insights during this CTE ERT visit.

FROM: Governor's Workforce Development Board CTE Committee

TO: Kent County Public Schools

DATE OF SUBMISSION: April 2026

DATE OF VISIT: October 08, 2025

SUBJECT: CTE Expert Review Team Post-Visit Report

PURPOSE: This report summarizes the key observations, strengths, and opportunities for growth identified during the CTE Expert Review Team's site visit. It is intended to provide actionable feedback and highlight promising practices to support continuous improvement of high-quality career-connected learning in accordance with state policy and the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* goals.

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Executive Summary

The *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* ("the *Blueprint*") established the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Committee within the Governor's Workforce Development Board (GWDB) to direct and coordinate the development of an integrated, globally competitive and aligned system for providing CTE to Maryland students in public schools, postsecondary institutions, and the workforce. As part of this effort, the *Blueprint* calls on the CTE Committee to establish, administer, and supervise Expert Review Teams (ERTs) to visit schools offering CTE pathways.¹ CTE ERTs are a key tool through which the state observes and tracks the progress of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in implementing CTE programs that align with the CTE Committee's framework and policies and the *Blueprint's* vision and goals.² In particular, the *Blueprint* and Joint CTE Vision statement sets a goal that by the School Year (SY) 2030-2031, 45% of high school graduates who are college and career ready (CCR) shall complete the high school level of a Registered Apprenticeship or another industry-recognized credential ("45% goal").³

This report reflects a visit during Phase 1 of the CTE ERT visits. The purpose of Phase 1 is to assess the current state of CTE across all 24 LEAs to identify systemic challenges and establish a baseline for statewide improvement.

This report summarizes observations and initial recommendations that the CTE ERT developed by reviewing the LEA's self-reported data and by conducting interviews, focus groups, school tours, and classroom visits during the CTE ERT visit. The CTE Committee staff, along with volunteer CTE ERT members, have collaborated on this report to provide observations and preliminary points of analysis to readers.

In this report, readers will find the purpose of the CTE ERT, an overview of the LEA, a summary of the CTE ERT visit, Strengths, Challenges, and External (SCE) analysis, and Potential Next Steps for the LEA to consider.

VISIT OVERVIEW

LEA: Kent County Public Schools (KCPS)
Date of Visit: October 8, 2025
School(s) Visited: Kent County High School

This CTE ERT visited Kent County Public Schools (KCPS), located in the Eastern Shore region of Maryland. KCPS offers 11 CTE programs at 1 comprehensive high school.

¹ Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 21-209 (2024). <https://bit.ly/3W0JoeU>

² For a list of policies issued to date, please visit www.gwdb.maryland.gov/policy/.

³ CTE Committee, Maryland State Board of Education, and Accountability and Implementation Board. (2025, December). *Career and Technical Education (CTE) Vision for Maryland's Future*. Maryland Governor's Workforce Development Board. www.gwdb.maryland.gov/ctecomm/ctecomm-jointvisionstatement2025.pdf

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Below is a summary of the observations and findings from this CTE ERT visit:

LEA's Progress Toward the Blueprint's 45% Goal for the School Year 2024-2025: (IRCs + HSLRA/Graduating Students)

45.5%

Internal Strengths

- Individualized Student Attention, Creative Problem-Solving, and Responding to Student Need
- High IRC Completion Rate Among Graduating Students
- Strong Culture of Collaboration within CTE and Beyond
- Internship Program Curriculum
- Supportive and Long-standing Principal and CTE Leadership
- School-Based Enterprises
- Awareness of KCPS's Unique Local Needs
- KCPS Legacy
- Career and School Counselors' Focus on Career Pathways

Internal Challenges

- Budget Challenges Due to Declining Enrollment and Rising Costs
- Disconnect with Enrollment Process and Course Expectations
- Limited Counselor Career Advising
- Interest and Retention Challenges Affecting Schedules
- English/Language Arts and Math Proficiency Hurdles
- Grading Policy
- Employee Retention Challenges
- Key Staff Have Difficult Workload
- Split Time of Career Counselor Across Middle and High Schools
- Student Behavioral Issues
- Misunderstanding of IRCs Being Equated to Workforce Readiness

External Factors

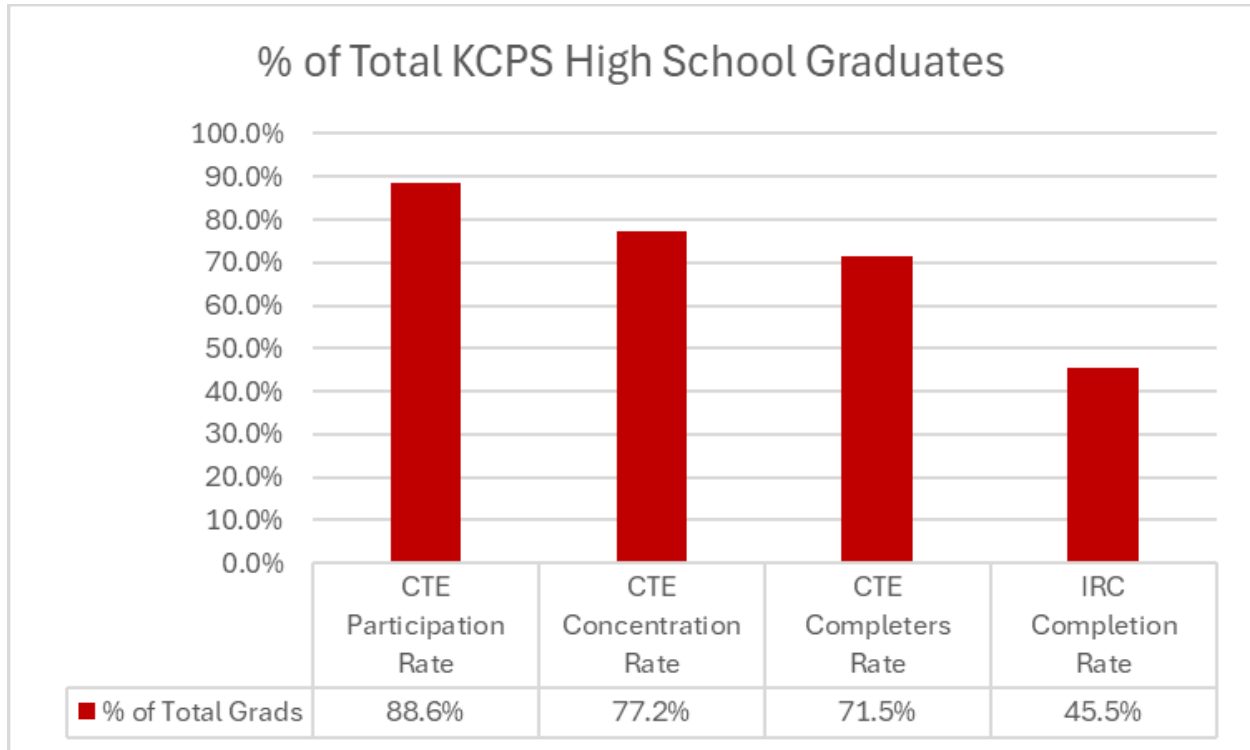
- Strength: Collaborative and Supportive Community
- Strength: Connections to Neighboring Eastern Shore LEAs
- Strength: Increased Marketing Focus
- Challenge: Transportation to Work-Based Learning Sites
- Challenge: Communication with Parents
- Challenge: Tension of Competing MSDE Goals by Small LEAs
- Challenge: Limited High School Level Registered Apprenticeships

Potential Next Steps

- Continue to Center CTE Teacher Voices in Decision-making
- Brainstorm Opportunity to Improve and Expand Use of Current Career Advising Resources
- Explore Regional Professional Learning Communities
- Consider Alternative Enrollment Models
- Consider Offering More Intentional Career Exploration Opportunities Early On
- Brainstorm Enhancements to LEA-Wide Grading Policy
- Create Transition Plans and Guidance for Those in Work-Based Learning Opportunities
- Consider More Intentional Messaging to Parents/Guardians
- Further Explore Industry Engagement and Work-Based Learning Opportunities:

- Continue to Increase Both IRC Attainment and Career Readiness
- Build Excitement Around CTE
- Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB)
- Explore Technical Assistance with MSDE, the Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor), and the CTE Committee in Meeting the Blueprint's 45% Goal.

Figure 1: LEA CTE Summary Data for KCPS in School Year 2024-2025



CTE Expert Review Team Background

PURPOSE

The *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* ("the *Blueprint*"), Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 21-209, established the Career and Technical (CTE) Committee as a unit within the Governor's Workforce Development Board (GWDB).⁴ The GWDB serves as the Governor's chief strategic and policy-making body for workforce development in the State of Maryland.⁵ The purpose of the CTE Committee is to direct and coordinate the development of an integrated, globally competitive and aligned system for providing CTE to Maryland students in public schools, postsecondary institutions, and the workforce. The CTE Committee aims to fundamentally reimagine and redesign career-connected learning and career pathways to ensure all of Maryland's students have real access to fulfilling and family-sustaining careers.

The *Blueprint* requires the CTE Committee to establish, administer, and supervise CTE Expert Review Teams (ERTs) to visit schools with CTE pathways.⁶ The CTE ERTs perform the following key functions through both qualitative and quantitative analysis:

1. **Monitoring:** determine whether Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are implementing CTE programs aligned to the *Blueprint's* vision and monitor progress toward reaching the statewide goal that by the School Year (SY) 2030-2031, 45% of public high school graduates who are college and career ready (CCR) will have completed the high school level of a Registered Apprenticeship or another industry-recognized credential.
2. **Assessment:** analyze and assess the progress of LEAs in implementing CTE programs that align with the *Blueprint's* CTE vision, Maryland's CTE Framework as established by the CTE Committee, and associated policies.
3. **Technical Assistance:** analyze trends, identify challenges and best practices, and provide technical assistance to address issues and uplift best practices.
4. **Post-Visit Reports:** summarize findings and develop recommendations to address challenges faced by schools, LEAs, and the State in implementing the *Blueprint*. Submit reports to the LEA, Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB), and the CTE Committee.
5. **Action:** summarize key findings and make recommendations to the CTE Committee on strategies to address challenges, including policy changes and technical assistance, within the CTE Committee's annual report or other avenues, as appropriate.
6. **Accountability:** Starting in Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26), the CTE Committee can make recommendations to the AIB on whether to withhold funds if an LEA is not making a

⁴ Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 21-209 (2024). <https://bit.ly/3W0JoeU>

⁵ Executive Order No. 01.01.2023.22. (2023). <https://tinyurl.com/execorder01012023>

⁶ Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 5-412 (2024). <https://tinyurl.com/5cb36cvy>

good faith effort to implement the *Blueprint* and is not demonstrating sufficient progress over time based on findings from CTE ERT visits.⁷

All of these functions build on each other, leading to a systemwide approach that is continuously improving the career-connected learning pathway for all students across Maryland.

On March 26, 2026, the AIB ratified a motion to amend the deployment strategy for CTE ERTs. This action was taken in accordance with Senate Bill 311 of the 2026 Maryland legislative session, which enacted a formal suspension of the ERT program. This suspension facilitates the development of a revised ERT implementation proposal by the AIB and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), which is due by November 1, 2026. Consequently, the AIB motion modifies the CTE ERT timeline, requiring the CTE Committee to conclude all Phase 1 visits by the end of the fall 2026 semester (i.e. visit all 24 LEAs). Phase 2 deployment will be deferred for the duration of the SY 2026-2027, during which time the CTE Committee will collaborate with the AIB and MSDE to identify and recommend an optimal, value-driven framework for the future operation of CTE ERTs.

CTE ERT APPROACH

The CTE ERT approach and plan is organized around two key principles: visits focused from an LEA-lense (rather than an individual school) as CTE strategies and programming is organized at an LEA level across the state; and a phased approach to completing and organizing visits over time. The CTE ERTs were organized with the following phased approach, which notes the pause in timelines of starting Phase 2 pursuant to the AIBs motion in March 2026:

Phase 1: Discovery (SY2024–2026)

- **Goal:** Establish a baseline of local strengths and systemic barriers to early implementation of the *Blueprint*.
- **Action:** Conduct field-level observations and collect data across all 24 LEAs to identify where technical assistance and state-level policy shifts are most needed.

Phase 2: Analyze & Assist

- **Goal:** Shift from observation to active alignment with the *Blueprint*, established policies, CTE Vision, and statewide CTE Framework.
- **Action:** Deploy targeted assistance and pursue policy or regulation changes to address common challenges.

Phase 3: Evaluate

⁷ Pursuant to Md. Code Ann., Educ. §5-405, the AIB may release withheld funds to a school or local school system upon recommendation from MSDE, the CTE Committee, or an Expert Review Team - or if the school/LEA demonstrates sufficient progress in implementation or to improve student performance. In determining whether to release or withhold additional funds, the AIB shall consider whether a public school or local school system has been responsive to the recommendations of MSDE, CTE Committee, an Expert Review Team, and the AIB's staff. <http://bit.ly/3OMwcJh>

- **Goal:** Evaluate progress toward *Blueprint* goals and analyze outcomes; additional purposes to be developed during Phase 2.
- **Action:** Direct intensive support to LEAs struggling with progress.

Given the pause in CTE ERT visits once Phase 1 visits to all 24 LEAs are completed by the fall semester of the SY 2026-2027, this approach and structure may be amended. The CTE Committee will work closely with the AIB, and MSDE, to analyze the optimal structure and timelines for CTE ERTs.

CTE ERT VISIT MEMBERS

The CTE ERT visits consist of members from various backgrounds and expertise, ensuring a variety of analysis of the LEA's CTE programming.⁸ The CTE ERT typically consists of 10-14 individuals for each visit. This group is then split into two teams during the visit. The CTE ERT core team members must include:

- CTE Committee staff (1-3);
- CTE teacher (1): represented by a teachers' organization that, for the purposes of collective bargaining, represents a majority of teachers in the State or in a local school system, preferably a representative from a neighboring LEA;
- School/LEA leadership (1): i.e., Principal, Assistant Principal, LEA Lead CTE Staff Designee, or Blueprint Implementation Coordinator, preferably a representative from a neighboring LEA; and
- Employer, trade union representative, and/or apprenticeship sponsor (1)

Teams also typically include representatives from the:

- CTE Committee member or their designee
- Local Workforce Development Board staff or board member
- Local community college
- State agencies responsible for implementing the *Blueprint*, inclusive of MSDE and AIB staff

CTE ERT VISIT STRUCTURE

Every CTE ERT visit during Phase 1 adheres to the following structure:

Pre-Visit Data Analysis and Dialogue:

- LEA completes a schedule for the day (Appendix B)
- LEA completes and submits brief with quantitative and qualitative data (Appendix A)
 - ERT members review in advance of orientation and training session
- Virtual orientation and training session for ERT visit members with LEA leadership, including:

⁸ GWDB CTE Committee. (July 1, 2024). CTE Committee Expert Review Team Deployment Plan School Year 2024-2025. https://gwdb.maryland.gov/ctecomm/ctecomm-ctedeploymentplan_draftsy24-25_62624.pdf

- Pre-recorded training providing an overview of CTE ERTs, roles and responsibilities during visits, and what to expect from the day
- Virtual orientation (within 1-week prior to the visit):
 - Overview of CTE in the LEA provided by the LEA Lead CTE staff
 - Review and discussion of LEA data brief
 - CTE enrollment practices, observed challenges, and any other information the LEA Lead CTE staff deems necessary

Full-Day District Visit:

- **Where:** typically two schools per day, depending on the LEA CTE structure. Visits typically include both a CTE Center and comprehensive high school with CTE programming.
- **What:** Guided school tour, CTE classroom visits, and focus groups at each school with:
 - Students
 - CTE teachers
 - Career coaches/counselors, and possibly school counselors or work-based learning coordinators as relevant in each LEA
 - LEA administrators/leadership (optional)

Post-Visit Debrief, Assessment, and Reporting:

- CTE ERT members submit their notes and a short survey on initial feedback
- Virtual debrief held with ERT members 1-week after visit to discuss observed strengths and challenges
- CTE ERT members review post-visit report to provide feedback
- Post-visit report provided to LEA with option for asynchronous or synchronous feedback
- Final post-visit report submitted to the CTE Committee, AIB, and LEA leadership

At every visit, the team engages in discussions with stakeholders to gain insights into the strengths and challenges of the CTE programming. These conversations reveal valuable information about how CTE supports students' post-graduation pathways and career goals, as well as areas where the LEA could enhance program access and resources. The focus groups in particular aim to uncover the experience these stakeholders have in CTE by asking consistent questions about professional development opportunities, their opinions on their experience in CTE classes, perspective on hurdles, etc. (Appendix C).

CTE ERT POST-VISIT REPORT

Following each visit, CTE Committee staff drafts a report to present observations and preliminary analyses. To ensure accuracy, drafts are shared with the CTE ERT members and LEA lead staff prior to publication. These reports integrate quantitative and qualitative findings from the LEA data brief, classroom observations, focus group recordings, team discussions, and all feedback received from CTE ERT team members either written or during the debrief.

Phase 1 reports include a summary of the visit, LEA background information, and a Strengths, Challenges, and External (SCE) analysis to guide potential next steps. The SCE analysis organizes observations into internal factors - strengths and challenges - and external factors that emerge during the visit. This framework allows LEAs to target internal improvements, and it provides an opportunity to share best practices with other LEAs. During Phase 1, the observations and next steps documented in the post-visit reports are preliminary and do not address every challenge observed, they are also not meant as a directive, but rather the intent is that LEAs utilize the findings as opportunities of improvement to explore.

CTE Expert Review Team Visit to Kent County Public Schools

CTE ERT VISIT MEMBERS

The CTE Expert Review Team visits consist of members from various backgrounds and expertise ensuring a variety of analysis of the LEA's CTE programming. The following is a list of members who joined this CTE ERT visit:

Name	Title
Shamara P. Bownes	Senior Director, GWDB-CTE
Dr. Carolanne Burkhardt	Curriculum Supervisor, Talbot County Public Schools
Sara Clark-De Reza	Director of Education Program, Washington College
Eric Cook	CTE Coordinator, Caroline County Public Schools
Ellen LaFrankie	Executive Director, Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board
Shirley Lake	Blueprint Coordinator/Career Navigator, Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board
Christine Lynch	Contractor, CityWorks DC
Jason Mullen	Dean for Workforce and Skilled Trades, Chesapeake College
Dr. Edrees Nawabi	Research Data Analyst, GWDB-CTE
Shana Payne	Director, Jobs for the Future
Gia Ristvey	CTE Teacher, Talbot County Public Schools
John Strickland	Assistant Principal, Talbot County Public Schools
Jackie Treiu	Apprenticeship Navigator, MD Labor
Georgeta Wainwright	Education and Compliance Manager, Delaware Elevator

CTE ERT VISIT OVERVIEW

During this visit, the CTE ERT visited Kent County High School (KCHS), Kent County's only high school. KCHS serves as Kent County Public Schools' comprehensive high school with CTE offerings. The CTE Expert Review Team (ERT) spent the entire day at KCHS, which houses 10 of KCPS's 11 CTE programs. Students interested in Maryland Fire and Rescue may enroll in the program in Centerville, MD, but must find their own transportation there.

LEA: Kent County Public Schools (KCPS)



Date of Visit: October 8, 2025
School(s) Visited: Kent County High School

About Kent County Public School System

Kent County Public Schools (KCPS), located in Maryland's Eastern Shore, enrolls 511 high school students, and has an 88.6% participation rate in CTE for graduating students. KCPS offers 11 CTE programs that cover a wide range of areas, from FM Broadcasting to Teacher Academy of Maryland. KCPS is in alignment with the Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) Plan's focus on building key sectors like Healthcare, Manufacturing, and Hospitality and Tourism.⁹ The Academy of Health Professions, Automotive Technologies, Food and Beverage Management, and Project Lead the Way – Engineering programs have the highest enrollment. This demonstrates the LEA's focus on developing a robust workforce targeting key sectors that are in-demand in this region.

KCPS has 10 of the 11 CTE programs at Kent County High School. Students interested in the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute at Centreville, MD in neighboring Queen Anne's County may enroll in that program, but must find their own transportation.

KCPS has 88.6% of graduating students participate in CTE and 77.2% of graduating students are CTE concentrators.

Students enrolled in CTE programs have the opportunity to earn industry-recognized credentials (IRC), and 45.5% of graduating students from the SY 2024-2025 completed an IRC; however, this rate comes from the previously approved MSDE IRC and technical skills assessment (TSA) list as the updated policy and approved IRCs by the CTE Committee does not go into effect until the SY 2025-2026.¹⁰ As such, the CTE IRC Policy published in December 2024 may impact this LEA's attainment rate for 2025 and beyond.¹¹

KCPS reports that they had 0% of graduating students participate in the high school level of a Registered Apprenticeship, aligned with the CTE Committee's Apprenticeship Policy issued December 2024. That said, KCPS had four graduating students, or 3.2% of graduating students, complete a youth apprenticeship.

One unique aspect at KCPS was their most recent college and career fair, which included 108 business and higher education vendors. Considering KCPS is the smallest LEA by enrollment with a graduating class of 123 students, recruiting 108 vendors is quite the accomplishment.

⁹ Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board. (2024). *Upper Shore area WIOA local plan 2024–2028*. https://e309779d-2e99-42a9-a238-0f571eedf726.filesusr.com/ugd/fdb3f6_8274d54de0784885a4c00424fdafba46.pdf

¹⁰ IRC completion data from the current *Blueprint*-aligned list will not be available until after the end of the SY 2025-2026.

¹¹ GWDB CTE Committee. (December 2024). Career and Technical Education: Industry-Recognized Credentials. <https://www.gwdb.maryland.gov/policy/gwdbcte2024commindustrycredentialpolicy.pdf>

CTE Expert Review Team Observations & Analysis

OVERVIEW OF ANALYSIS

The following report is organized around a Strengths, Challenges, External (SCE) approach. A SCE analysis is meant to organize the CTE ERT's observations and notes into internal factors - Strengths and Challenges - and External factors and influences. Although the CTE ERT does not currently have a focus group specifying external stakeholders, external factors come up in conversations, focus groups, the debrief, and orientation that must be documented. With a SCE Analysis, readers may use this section to target changes and best practices internally and better understand how external factors may influence CTE.

It is important to emphasize that the following observations reflect insights that were documented as of the date of the visit. As such, it is possible that observations noted below have been altered or addressed since the CTE ERT visit was conducted.

INDICATORS OF INTERNAL STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

Strength: Individualized Student Attention, Creative Problem-Solving, and Responding to Student Need

Throughout the CTE ERT visit, the CTE ERT noticed the strong commitment to student success and individualized support. In both the student and teacher focus groups, participants shared that students could participate in more than one CTE pathway. Both groups explained that unconventional learning opportunities are used to ensure students were meeting the requirements. For example, the use of Trojan Time, which is the daily unallocated time, can be utilized for asynchronous learning, additional support or guidance from CTE teachers, make-up lab work in the case where a student may have missed some class time, or even time for extracurriculars. More than one student in the focus groups shared they are part of two CTE pathways and successfully on track to complete both before graduating. The CTE Lead Designee explained that KCPS offers a dual-completer option for students interested in completing more than one CTE pathway, allowing students to gain hands-on experience and content knowledge in more than one career pathway of interest.

While it may be seen as challenging for teachers to teach outside of their content areas, teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting their students in Math and English/Language Arts (ELA) proficiency, areas where KCPS has targeted for improvement. The use of Dual Enrollment at both Chesapeake College and Washington College is also helpful in ensuring CTE students can advance in their more traditional academic classes without competing with CTE classes. The smaller CTE class sizes lend themselves to more individualized student attention and hands-on learning, both of which students greatly appreciated.

One CTE teacher shared that their goal is getting students to love school, and that this teacher's CTE program helps build students' passion for learning. CTE students also expressed their gratitude for CTE staff and their CTE teachers, noting their commitment to student success. Teachers were noted as flexible and committed. Regarding CTE teachers, one student said,

"They have been really good and say 'come to my class and I can catch you up or do it online'."

A KCPS student can explore multiple academic interests and does not need to stress about being behind or not being able to take AP classes, or multiple CTE pathways. One teacher explained their perspective on their commitment to students as "No is never a complete sentence, not no we cannot do that, more of how we can find a way to get it done." The Career Counselor expressed their ongoing commitment to exploring student interest and providing opportunities for career exploration, even if a student's career interest does not align to a CTE pathway. For example, if a student is interested in Cosmetology, while KCPS does not offer a Cosmetology pathway, the Career Counselor is committed to providing the student with alternative career exploration options such as field trips to local salons. Student needs and individualized support are at the forefront at KCPS.

Strength: High IRC Completion Rate Among Graduating Students

Kent County Public Schools (KCPS) is one of few LEAs nearing *Blueprint's* "45% Goal" for IRC attainment. As of SY 2024-2025, IRC attainment for Kent County was at 45.5%. This correlates to the strong perception of CTE programs within the school and the dedication of students and staff to earning the IRCs. By offering 10 of their 11 programs onsite in the one school building, promoting CTE early and often in counseling and career counseling conversations, and allowing students to self-select their desired programming, CTE programs are accessible to all students. Participation rates are 88.6% out of 511 Kent County High School students in the school and CTE completion rates are 71.5%. While the current IRC attainment is predictive for SY 2024-2025, KCPS administrators anticipate an increase in key performance indicators this school year. To increase IRC rates and meet student interest, KCPS strategically applied for the consideration of additional IRCs for approval, such as a Certified Radio Operator certification through the Broadcasting program last year. In addition, three programs (Computer Science, Engineering, and Curriculum for Agricultural Sciences Education (CASE)), will offer IRCs for the first time in Spring 2026 as referenced in the LEA Brief. It is worth noting that KCPS has not yet revised these calculations to align with the new IRC policy approved starting in SY 2025-2026, so projections may change.

The students expressed a love of learning and appreciated the smaller class sizes with more hands-on activities. As one student remarked, "I look forward to coming to school." In addition, the CTE ERT observed that many of the 11th graders in the focus groups appreciated the ability to explore CTE pathway options and the 12th graders were clear on their desired interest. The culture of CTE within the school is strong and students uplifted the love for the CTE teachers multiple times throughout the ERT visit. Both of which help support their high CTE participation rates and IRC attainment.

Strength: Strong Culture of Collaboration within CTE and Beyond

Collaboration was apparent as a core strength of KCPS. There was evidence of collaboration within the CTE programs and beyond. The CTE teachers collaborated with each other and across CTE programs. For example, the CTE Lead Designee highlighted instances such as the computer science students designing computer applications for the Food and Beverage Management students, engineering students partially designed and cut out model food trucks for a culinary project, and construction and engineering students working together on a variety of projects. Within the teacher focus groups, teachers demonstrated they knew each other well and could speak about the other CTE programs. Teachers also expressed positive sentiments about the leadership of the CTE Lead Designee within the CTE programs, and the commitment and collaboration of the Career Counselor. The Career Counselor is a former CTE teacher and their previous relationships are helpful in maintaining collaboration going forward. In the LEA Brief, the CTE Lead Designee reports that CTE teacher retention remains high compared to teacher retention rates outside of the CTE department. KCPS invested heavily in teacher retention through the MD Leads grant and has continued some of those strategies through the Teacher Collaborative grant. These strategies include mentoring, sponsored attendance at educational conferences, and stipends for professional development and curriculum writing.

The Career Counselor and the Counseling department also work collaboratively. It is a best practice for the two entities to work together, but KCPS has instituted infrastructure to ensure ongoing collaboration, such as meeting weekly and providing aligned support for students. They are also working closely with the Next Gen Scholars representative and the Community in Schools Coordinator to further align and offer coordinated and complimentary support to students.

Modeled by CTE staff and leadership, there is also evidence of student collaboration. When students delivered the school tour to the CTE ERT, both student tour guides were well-versed in their public speaking skills and also in content knowledge within and across their CTE programs. The student tour guides also knew a lot of students across CTE programs. Many students could speak to multiple CTE pathways and programs. Outside of their own program, the tour guides explained multiple other programs in detail and were able to respond to most questions posed by the ERT. In addition, when a question arose during the student focus group on how to change a class, the students troubleshooted in real time, and collaborated together to share the best way to do so, leveraging the individual content expertise of each student and aligning in a positive and constructive manner. The collaborative culture within the CTE programs and beyond, to include across CTE programs, across students, and across the counseling departments, is a strength within KCPS.

Strength: Internship Program Curriculum

In SY 2024-2025, KCPS considered internships as work-release, but with the work of the Career Counselor, this year, internships are considered a “class”. While this “class” is still pass/fail, it is more skills-based and includes an accompanying curriculum. This updated curriculum includes meaningful modules such as resume-building and other soft skills relevant for employment. Anticipating that some students may prefer a year-long internship,

the Career Counselor purposefully designed the curriculum to build off of each module and the curriculum can be applied across two semesters. The dedication to skill development, work experience, and student interest is exemplary and KCPS modeled their internship program off of the successful Queen Anne's County's program. In SY 2024-2025, 39 out of 123, or 32%, of graduating students participated in work-based learning. By creating a curriculum that develops soft skills and workforce readiness, the newly modified KCPS internship program is a strength as it supports student preparation for the workforce and helps prepare them for "real-world careers" where IRC attainment may not adequately address all of those skills.

Strength: Supportive and Long-standing Principal and CTE Leadership

Long-standing leadership buy-in is a strength of KCPS. The current principal has been in their position for the last five years and expressed a long-term commitment to KCPS in the leadership focus group. The principal is a lifelong resident of Kent County and a graduate of KCPS. The CTE ERT observed the principal's support for CTE and the principal explicitly expressed that support more than once throughout the conversation. The principal also demonstrates this commitment through their buy-in of the CTE strategic plan and investment of Perkins funding towards CTE program improvements such as a completion of the facilities study, review of CTE instructional materials and pedagogy study, equipment purchases, and curriculum development. The principal support is further realized through the expressed commitment to ongoing community engagement through vendor follow-ups to the college and career fair with specific "asks" around supporting CTE.

The CTE ERT observed the strong support of the CTE Lead Designee across both CTE teacher and the Career Counselor focus groups. Teachers in the focus group explicitly named this individual as a strong advocate for the CTE staff. One teacher mentioned,

"[the CTE Lead Designee] is usually always advocating for what we want!"

The commitment and consistency of the principal and CTE leadership are assets to KCPS and CTE programming. Further examples include the expediency of email response and timely, clear, communication by the CTE Lead Designee to CTE staff. Both were mentioned in the CTE teacher focus group. This individual was highlighted as the exception to the overarching communication challenges named in the school. The CTE ERT was impressed with how much this individual achieved for the CTE department over the last few years and the vision for CTE in the upcoming school years. The CTE department staffing model within the broader school allows for the CTE Lead Designee to focus on CTE programming and *Blueprint* implementation, which is likely a supporting factor to KCPS's success since splitting CTE responsibilities with other school-based responsibilities can be challenging as demonstrated in other Maryland LEAs. This allocation of responsibilities lends itself well to a supportive leader as the CTE Lead Designee can dedicate their time to advancing and improving CTE programming. The commitment and consistency of the principal and CTE leadership are assets to KCPS and CTE programming.

Strength: School-Based Enterprises

School-based enterprises are a strength of KCPS and are core drivers of revenue within the CTE programs. Each CTE program is funded locally with several programs such as Food and Beverage Management, CASE, Construction, and Broadcasting having their own in-house accounts that accrue funds through sales and services. The Broadcasting program is able to offset a significant portion of the program's operating costs through sponsorships and donations from local community connections. Food and Beverage supports school and other community events through catering opportunities, with their Christmas Dinner being their hallmark event. The CASE program sells a variety of plants like succulents to the local community and other programs bring in revenue through various initiatives, with the Poinsettia and Plant sale as their core annual offering. The school-based enterprises are an asset to KCPS because they offer a simulated workplace experience in a learning environment.

Strength: Awareness of KCPS's Unique Local Needs

Throughout the CTE ERT site visit, the unique situation at KCPS as Maryland's smallest school district came up several times. Many teachers lived in the community for years, attended Kent County High School (KCHS) themselves, and also knew students' families outside of the school. Broadcasting, for example, has been running the local radio station for over a decade and the current CTE teacher is a graduate from the program. Whether it was as a student or as a teacher, most of the teachers the CTE ERT spoke to had a great deal of experience in smaller schools. This experience has helped prepare these teachers to understand and fulfill the roles and responsibilities that teachers must accomplish in a smaller LEA, like KCPS. For instance, one teacher brought up how important it is to establish relationships with parents. Another teacher added that the benefit of a smaller high school is that teachers may adapt to their students' individualized needs with greater effectiveness because their class sizes are smaller. One focus group participant summarized by explaining that when a school is as small as KCHS, teachers and staff always know exactly where each individual is supposed to be at any given time. While KCPS teachers seem to have strong industry knowledge and expertise, KCPS teachers' awareness of Kent County's unique local context as Maryland's smallest school district by enrollment is a strength.

Strength: KCPS Legacy

In a related strength, another topic that came up several times throughout the CTE ERT visit was legacy. As previously noted, several teachers graduated from Kent County High School (KCHS), have previously lived in Kent County or in the Eastern Shore, or come from communities with similar contexts as Kent County. In addition to teachers having a strong understanding of Kent County's unique context, students were aware of KCPS's longstanding legacy. When asking about knowledge of CTE programs and how students were connected to them, multiple students in the focus groups shared that their parents or grandparents were aware of the programming from personal experience or had graduated from the program themselves. There was a perceived strong demonstration of legacy and commitment to CTE within and outside of the classroom throughout the CTE ERT visit. KCPS leverages legacy to the advantage of the LEA and the CTE programs.

Strength: Career and School Counselors' Focus on Career Pathways

The CTE ERT observed how career and school counselors mentor students to identify their career goals and help them create a plan to get there. Students, teachers, and counselors told the CTE ERT about how students identify what career they want to pursue as opposed to guiding students' exploration through various CTE programs. In a few other LEAs that have similar contexts as KCPS, the CTE ERT has observed exploration was a higher priority, but that this emphasis on exploration may be a reason for lower CTE student retention rates. While the CTE ERT learned that KCPS used to put more emphasis on CTE exploration and has now shifted that exploration to middle school, KCPS's CTE participation and completion data provides a window into the impact of this focus on career pathways over career exploration. At KCPS, the emphasis seems to be on career pathways instead of exploration, which may be an important factor for why KCPS has been able to have 88 graduating students complete their CTE program out of 109 graduating students who participate in CTE, meaning 80.7% of students who enroll in CTE complete their CTE program, and overall, 71% of all of their graduates were CTE completers in the SY 2024-2025.

Career Exploration in Middle School: KCPS's Career Counselor has developed a sequence for middle school students to scaffold a focus on career pathways. In 6th grade, students focus on understanding themselves by identifying their learning preferences and personality traits. Building on this foundation, 7th grade emphasizes connecting self-awareness to career development and understanding potential career fits. By 8th grade, students expand into broader career exploration, examining the 16 career clusters and beginning to set pathways toward careers that align with their interests and strengths. Furthermore, nearly all students in 8th grade are enrolled for one quarter in a course called Managing Your Future. This is a 45-day course designed to help students explore their interests, skills, and potential career paths while building real-world readiness for life after high school. The course emphasizes financial literacy, including budgeting, banking, and understanding postsecondary costs, alongside goal setting using SMART goals. Students develop essential transferrable skills, practice interviewing, and complete a final Career Transition Portfolio, culminating in a "Game of L.I.F.E." simulation.

Overall, the CTE ERT observed that the career and school counselors' emphasis on career pathways was a strength and may be an important factor for why KCPS has one of the highest CTE student retention rates in the state, which has conventionally been a challenge for comprehensive high schools.

Challenge: Budget Challenges Due to Declining Enrollment and Rising Costs

The CTE ERT observed the effect of significant challenges from recent budget cuts due to declining enrollment numbers. CTE teachers expressed concerns that budget cuts reduced teaching staff across the entire building by 11%. This led to existing teachers taking on additional work, including CTE teachers teaching outside of their content areas or offering multiple classes simultaneously. KCPS administration is asking CTE teachers to provide English-Language Arts (ELA) and Math support to students with limited additional resources.

One student noted that budget cuts affected staffing, subsequently limiting her ability to take AP Literature due to lessened class availability.

In addition, the CTE Lead Designee and LEA leadership expressed concerns over necessary capital improvements. They expressed appreciation for additional Perkins funding to help with equipment, but capital improvements limited their ability to leverage the funds. For example, the Food and Beverage Management program is lacking a fully-functioning kitchen and needs to be completely overhauled before students can utilize it. They are putting new kitchen equipment into an old building, and as a prerequisite, had to make some foundational changes to the building for the new equipment to be properly fitted. New equipment is helpful, but can only go so far when major capital improvements are necessary in the near future. One student expressed frustration to the CTE ERT that they signed up for the Food and Beverage Management program and all they have done so far is book work, explaining that their expectations have not been met and they are thinking about signing up for a different CTE program. Students also expressed concerns that some of the programs have very outdated equipment and that was limiting their learning potential. Related to budget cuts limiting class offerings, the CTE Lead Designee explained that the recent investment in computers for the Computer Science program remain unused as KCPS did not offer the program this year due to staffing changes due to budget cuts.

Challenge: Disconnect with Enrollment Process and Course Expectations

While student access to CTE programs is a strength, the current enrollment process is a challenge. As described in the LEA brief, the current enrollment process begins in the 9th grade when students visit CTE classrooms and meet with the Career Counselor to select their three priorities for CTE programs. 9th graders complete course selection through an online form in the spring and then meet individually with their counselor to enroll in their selected CTE program, if the master schedule permits. In both teacher focus groups, CTE teachers expressed that students are not ready for many of the CTE courses. During the Career Counselor focus group, one participant explained that they advise each student based on career interest and send a slip of paper to school counselors for scheduling. One participant expressed frustration that the career exploration work did not appear to be considered in class selection decisions for students as many students were taking classes outside of their career pathway interests. Related to course selection, an individual in the Career Counselor focus group expressed,

“I could have a conversation with a student, then they go to a different counselor and they tell them something different, then there’s a dropoff. I don’t know how a student ended up there.”

This disconnect has created a challenge for students to stay on track with the career pathway of which they are interested in and is likely inadvertently impacting CTE retention.

As a prerequisite to enrollment, the Career Counselor explained that career exploration occurs over a handful of touchpoints to include exposure from some middle school engagement, the CTE “tour”/rotation day of all the CTE programs during freshman year, and

a conversation with the Career Counselor, which often includes some type of career assessment. This limited engagement also creates challenges as many students are opting into classes without a full understanding of what CTE courses entail and believing they will have an interest in a class that does not match their expectations once the course begins. A student's post graduate plans can be disconnected from course selection due to a student's misunderstanding of CTE class expectations.

There is no formal vetting or prioritization process for how school counselors place students into CTE classes. Counselors are doing their best to make schedules work; however, CTE teachers expressed that an application process or more intentional vetting could help ensure that students are both interested and prepared for the classes. Both Counselors and CTE leadership shared that the grading policy inadvertently encourages students that barely passed the first CTE class in a pathway to continue onto the next CTE class (more information about the grading policy can be found later in this report). The school has not put anything systemically in place to prevent students from continuing coursework, even though the passing grade does not necessarily demonstrate competency. During the school counselor focus group, school counselors explained that they are unable to tell a student they cannot take the next level course if a student passed the previous level. Some students in the focus group expressed frustration with classmates participating in CTE just because their friends were in the class and did not really have much interest in the subject matter. The focus group students felt that those students were "wasting everyone's time" and doing a disservice to those that truly wanted to be there. The current CTE enrollment process presents many challenges including the disconnect around course expectations from both a student interest and student proficiency perspective.

Challenge: Limited Counselor Career Advising

A similar and related challenge to the enrollment process is the limited career counseling and advising throughout a student's academic journey. As mentioned above, the current CTE enrollment process starts in 9th grade when students visit CTE classrooms and meet with the career counselor to select their three priorities for CTE programs. 9th graders complete course selection through an online form in the spring and then meet individually with their counselor to enroll in their selected CTE program, if the master schedule permits. CTE teachers expressed concerns that CTE classes are perceived by students as electives, and often, students are enrolled with limited interest in the content area. Student focus groups affirmed that sentiment, explaining that many students are often in classes that do not necessarily want to be in the class or are there because of their friends. Further demonstrating the challenges with CTE advising, a participant in the career counselor focus group explained, "A lot of students will start something and want to jump to something else. A lot of the time, CTE is treated as filler." It can be assumed that school counselors are the ones making final decisions on course selection for students, but KCPS faces a challenging situation LEAs across the State have to deal with: figuring out the right balance between career exploration and commitment to a career pathway.

The school counselors expressed their desire to meet student interest, but the Career Counselor explained that student interest is frequently misaligned to previous career-

focused conversations with the Career Counselor, or did not necessarily make sense from a career-connected learning perspective. The CTE ERT observed that it appeared that the school counselors take the student's interest for face-value without additional consideration for past conversations or career advising. Counselors were placing students into classes without additional conversations around why expectations around student interest changed or without full consideration of class expectations for a student to be successful. During conversations with KCPS teachers and staff, one participant noted concerns about career-level outcomes for students,

“These students are not the quality that they should be. We’ve got programs that seem to pass along because our grading policy is horrendous. It looks great on paper, but not great in practice.”

A Career Counselor focus group participant raised concerns around the level of student preparedness for the CTE courses in which they are enrolled.

Similar to neighboring counties like Talbot County, where the only schools offering CTE are comprehensive high schools, there appears to be a fundamental friction between career exploration opportunities and career pathways. The CTE ERT observed that CTE is so integrated into the school that CTE courses are often seen as electives as opposed to a career pathway. Throughout the visit, the CTE ERT observed that there is an ongoing conflict between career exploration and career pathways, where the students are leveraging CTE classes more as electives with their friends rather than career pathway options. This has resulted in many students enrolling in entry-level CTE courses and later switching career pathways. There are disconnects with the career advising for students in both CTE pathway selection and class choices.

Challenge: Interest and Retention Challenges Affecting Scheduling

Challenges with the enrollment process and career advising were at the forefront of many conversations throughout the CTE ERT visit and as a result are causing hurdles related to scheduling due to their effect on student interest and retention. Both counselors and teachers expressed the challenges with completers and attrition from the entry-level courses. Scheduling and sequencing becomes much more challenging when classes are often singletons, meaning classes are only offered once a school year, and courses decrease from 16-20 students originally enrolled in the pathway to sometimes only 4 students at the end of the CTE program pathway. Offering a class for 4 students becomes very challenging when comparing it to all the other necessary courses in the school year and limitations due to budget cuts. The CTE ERT observed the following as a result of challenges resulting from hurdles related to student interest and retention:

Teachers Teaching Courses Simultaneously or Outside of Content Areas: Key concerns included having select teachers teach two classes at the same time with differing content areas to ensure classes are being offered for students to complete pathways. For example, Carpentry I and Technical Education require different preps, but the teacher is expected to teach both at the same time. Not only is it logistically

challenging from a teaching and safety perspective, it can send mixed messages to students on which classes appear most valued within the school. As expressed during teacher focus groups, many CTE teachers were teaching outside of their content areas and teaching core subjects, limiting the availability of CTE classes. While this level of commitment to students is admirable, this led to limited availability of specific CTE classes due to staff capacity and additional strain on resources as many CTE teachers are responsible for balancing a challenging workload.

Course Sequencing: In another example, teachers cited the importance of the timing and sequencing of certain classes when finalizing the master schedule being necessary. Counselors were relying on scheduling software to help create schedules without holistic consideration for students' career interest. In Broadcasting, teaching two course-levels in the same program concurrently was ideal so students could always be on air. This year, the schedule consists of two beginner-level courses, which require a few weeks of preparation before going live "on air". In other examples, teachers explained that the course sequencing for specific CTE pathways do not make sense and need adjusting. Teacher focus groups revealed there was concern about course-sequences that led to students learning advanced skills before foundational knowledge, creating a challenge for both students and CTE teachers.

There are multiple challenges with CTE courses at KCPS including teachers being asked to teach courses concurrently or outside of their content area and not intentional course sequencing.

Challenge: English/Language Arts and Math Proficiency Hurdles

Multiple CTE teachers also shared that a level of proficiency in English/Language Arts (ELA) and Math are necessary for success in specific CTE classes. For example, Broadcasting requires strong writing skills and Carpentry leverages a lot of math. CTE Teachers explained they are seeing many students entering their CTE courses requiring additional support in Math and ELA, limiting a student's ability to get the most out of their CTE classes and taking away from their potential success in the CTE subject. This level of remediation also takes time and attention away from peers in the class. Teachers cannot teach CTE-level courses without some of the foundational core content. KCPS's most recent NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) scores in Math are at 16.3% students measuring proficiency suggesting many students are not prepared to enter CTE courses with proficiency in Math.¹² Students are unlikely to successfully advance in courses without foundational content knowledge in core subjects. The ELA and Math proficiency hurdles are a challenge for CTE programming, making it particularly difficult for some students to complete a CTE program and earn an IRC.

Challenge: Grading Policy

Related to students being ill-prepared for CTE classes, several KCPS stakeholders brought up the current grading policy as a challenge. Current policy states that turning in an assignment

¹² Maryland State Department of Education. (2025). *Kent County High School 2025 school report card*. Maryland School Report Card. <https://tinyurl.com/3e24cjdc>

without completing any of the work provides a student with a 40% (the previous year policy stated 50%). Turning in a handful of assignments with minimal knowledge application can result in a passing grade, even if it does not demonstrate any actual content mastery. A participant in the Career Counselor focus group suggested that this policy is unintentionally incentivizing students to do the bare minimum to pass. The CTE ERT's conversations with KCPS stakeholders suggested that this policy does not adequately prepare a student for the workforce and is not aligned to industry expectations as the bare minimum would likely result in termination. This policy may also be why students are entering the CTE classrooms without foundational content knowledge related to Math and ELA as noted above. KCPS's proficiency rates are stated on MSDE's website and are low, particularly in Math. That said, KCPS's IRC attainment and completion rates appear to be high despite CTE teachers' concerns around content mastery and student understanding of foundational subjects. This disconnect suggests that students appear college and career ready on paper, but not necessarily prepared for the realities of college and the workforce post-graduation. The grading policy is a challenge as it is encouraging students to continue to advance without the ability to either comprehend or apply subject knowledge.

Challenge: Employee Retention Challenges

The CTE ERT observed multiple references of employee retention challenges with both staff and administrative positions. To address staffing gaps due to declining enrollment and its subsequent impact on the budget for staffing, KCPS relies heavily on grant-funded positions. School counselors highlighted these positions, like a former social worker, as temporary relief, but not long-term solutions. For example, school counselors shared that many staff positions were only available for a few years because of the term-limited external sources of funding, like the Student Support Coach (this is the final year), which helped in the short-term, but often resulted in understaffing in the long-term, with existing staff absorbing the duties of additional positions. The school counselors explained that the inconsistency of staffing positions leads to the department constantly needing to "reinvent itself" and shifting focus away from long-term student support. The ongoing budget crises due to declining enrollment and rising costs present significant challenges for KCPS and are impacting staff retention.

Multiple teachers noted that outside of CTE, administrative turnover was high; specifically Kent County High School (KCHS) had 6 principals and 17 Assistant Principals in 10 years. While not directly related to workload and capacity challenges, the ongoing administrative turnover provides instability and inconsistency, which affects school-wide staffing, leads to vacant positions, and likely results in existing staff taking on additional duties. CTE teachers noted that administrative turnover has created challenges of inconsistency in dealing with students' behavioral challenges, explaining that different administrators handle behavioral challenges differently. This inconsistency in leadership has added a challenge to KCPS, but the current principal has been at KCHS for five years in that role and has brought consistency to the role, which is a strength. Overall, Kent County High School's teacher retention rate is at

79%, which is 13 percentage points lower than the State's teacher retention rate at 92%.¹³ Outside of CTE, employee retention remains a challenge for KCPS.

Challenge: Key Staff Have Difficult Workload

The CTE ERT observed the extensive appreciation and dedication of both the CTE Lead Designee and the Career Counselor received from KCPS stakeholders. They both were uplifted as pivotal in why CTE programs at Kent County High School are as successful as they are despite the hurdles they face. Teachers, students, and counselors all expressed gratitude for their commitment to students, staff, and the programs; however, the two individuals are responsible for doing “multiple jobs” and expectations for their roles do not appear sustainable in the long-run. For example, KCPS originally hired the Career Counselor for the high school and now is expected to also support all middle schoolers. This individual's caseload nearly doubled and is now close to 1,000 students. While a caseload of 1,000 students is common within other LEAs, KCPS is Maryland's smallest LEA and therefore receives the smallest *Blueprint* career counseling allocation, but they are doing what they can with limited funding. With the expansion of their role, this individual's availability to meet with students was cut in half this school year. This individual has also taken on additional responsibilities, such as rolling out a new model of internship class and expanding staff usage of existing career-interest platforms. The Career Counselor is also managing KCPS's work-based learning and is the Apprenticeship Coordinator for KCPS. In addition, there is a strong desire to leverage data in decision-making, but KCPS does not have the resources to employ a data specialist. One individual is collecting and analyzing the data as an additional part of their role. The Lead CTE Designee is responsible for all CTE curriculum, Perkins funding, and many other less formally defined responsibilities, which will continue to be increasingly difficult to sustain as funding and resources are cut. Both the Career Counselor and Lead CTE Designee bring teaching experience to their roles and lend their expertise to KCPS's CTE teachers as well. For instance, the CTE Lead Designee shared that they understand why teachers will want to focus on their highest-performing students, but they coach KCPS teachers to work hard so all students make it to “the finish line” and complete their CTE program. While key positions have absorbed additional duties with recent budget cuts, the workload seems high and unsustainable.

Challenge: Split Time of Career Counselor Across Middle and High Schools

While the Career Counselor splitting time between the middle and high schools can be attributed to the budget concerns previously mentioned, the Career Counselor is forced to split their time between KCPS's two middle schools and Kent County High School. Last year, the middle schools had their own career counselor, who retired at the end of the school year without plans to refill the position due to ongoing budget concerns. In Kent County, career counselors are employed through the Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board. The position is not prioritized to be filled and support for the middle schools was reassigned to the high school Career Counselor. The CTE Lead Designee, the Career Counselor, and school counselors all noted how that has taken a toll on their availability for students. The increased

¹³ Maryland State Department of Education. (2025). *Educator dashboard*. <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DEE/educator-dashboard.aspx>

caseload, coupled with mandatory meetings make it much more challenging for students at the high school to access them. While students did not directly share that same sentiment, the counselors noted that the Career Counselor is no longer offering QR codes to set up individual meetings this school year because of this individual's additional obligations. Considering KCPS is Maryland's smallest LEA, they receive the smallest *Blueprint* career counseling allocation, but KCPS is doing an admirable job considering their situation. It is admirable to see this level of dedication from the Career Counselor, but this Career Counselor's workload is challenging and unsustainable in the long-term.

Challenge: Student Behavioral Issues

Within a teacher focus group, CTE teachers named student behavior as a challenge. It should be noted that student behavioral issues have become more prominent since the start of the COVID pandemic and is a common hurdle for districts across the country. As with KCPS teachers expressing concerns with teaching remedial skills within their CTE classes taking up large portions of their time, addressing behavioral issues was also named as a core and time-intensive challenge within their CTE classes. During the teacher focus group, the CTE ERT learned that some students are placed into CTE courses because staff do not know where else to put these students. Teachers agreed that they do not have the capacity to teach students who do not want to be there and try to focus on the students that are there, but that sometimes, students would express frustration with working with a student who does not want to be there. As one teacher explained,

"I know students don't want to come back because they don't want to be in an environment where they have to share with undisciplined students. Once it's ruined for that student, they just say they'll focus on something else."

One teacher suggested that a risk assessment of pairing select students could alleviate some concerns suggesting that student behavior is a systemic issue. KCPS is facing a hurdle with student behavioral issues, but this challenge may be directly connected to some of the scheduling and ELA and Math proficiency hurdles KCPS is currently facing.

Challenge: Misunderstanding of IRCs Being Equated to Workforce Readiness

While IRC completion rates, in general, were trending very positive, not all programs were equally successful. Furthermore, both CTE teachers and the Career Counselor claimed that IRC rates do not directly translate into workforce readiness.¹⁴ IRC passing rates are lower for Food and Beverage Management IRCs as compared to other programs. In addition, CTE teachers expressed challenges with the Student Learning Objectives in the Spring being focused solely on IRC completion rather than subject matter content. In particular with CTE pathways that tend to be more general, such as Agricultural Sciences, IRCs do not always align directly with student interest and are less aligned to longer term student career goals. Furthermore, in the focus group, CTE teachers raised the concerns of using only IRCs as a way to demonstrate proficiency, that a student's progress is more than just one test. Another

¹⁴ While this may be the teachers' and the Career Counselor's perspective, the IRC policy includes several required criteria to ensure approved IRCs are aligned with workforce needs.

teacher emphasized low Math and ELA scores but student success in the class is related to IRC attainment, so there is no opportunity to demonstrate progress in the interim. This was a frequent topic of conversation, specifically that KCPS is tasking teachers with teaching students to pass IRC assessments and a participant in the career counselor focus group believes many students who have IRCs are not prepared to enter the workforce.

As described above, the grading policy and the enhancements to the internship curriculum, content mastery or soft skills are not explicitly being emphasized when the focus is on IRC attainment, which results in strong IRC rates, but not necessarily a readiness for employment. CTE teachers, the Career Counselors, and the CTE Lead Designee all described students as unprepared for the workforce, but it should be noted that the CTE ERT remarked several times that the students they interacted with had a clear understanding for the skills they need to be successful in the field they want to enter. Even though it is a small sample size, the students the CTE ERT interacted with demonstrated strong communication skills, the ability to adapt while maintaining effectiveness, and metacognition, which is the ability to reflect on one's own thinking process and adapt it for different contexts, all of which are key transferable skills. While there is a tension between IRC completion and workforce readiness among teachers, staff, and administrators, the small sample of students the CTE ERT interacted with demonstrated the type of transferable skills that would signal some workforce readiness. Additionally, it should be noted that within the *Blueprint's* 45% goal, the high school level of a Registered Apprenticeship is the gold standard. As the IRC policy defines, an industry-recognized credential (IRC) is a formal validation of an individual's skills and/or competencies that align with state or regional in-demand occupations and is recognized by industry and employers. IRCs measure specific skills and knowledge in an occupation, and must be coupled with the hands-on application of putting the theory into practice, preferably through work-based learning, along with the development of essential soft skills for true workforce readiness.

INDICATORS OF EXTERNAL FACTORS AND INFLUENCES

External Strength: Collaborative and Supportive Community

KCPS is smaller in terms of population size, compared to many of its peer LEAs; however, the size of the LEA lends itself to a close-knit community which can be seen as an asset. Many community members are long-standing residents and many employers have direct connections with student's families. As previously mentioned, Kent County High School appears to have a legacy that spans at least three generations of graduates. CTE teachers mentioned examples of personal connections they are leveraging to support their students and represent industry voices within the classroom. CTE teachers and KCPS leadership noted that "everyone knows each other" and the connections are longstanding and personal. The small size also means that administration often knows and has known many of the families for years and those connections can pay off in terms of sponsorships, support, and employment opportunities outside of the classrooms.

Many parents and teacher peers are business owners or are well-connected in the community. One CTE teacher expressed the benefits of being a smaller, close-knit school where they have relationships with most students,

"Our size is a strength. We have a good idea of what's going on with our students throughout the day. A school that might have 3,000 students, it'll be hard to track them."

Both teachers and students expressed an ability to connect with each other and form relationships across programs. The close-knit community within and surrounding KCPS is an external asset.

External Strength: Connections to Neighboring Eastern Shore LEAs

KCPS has strong connections with neighboring LEAs, Cecil County Public Schools and Queen Anne's County Public Schools. The CTE Lead Designee is a former employee of Cecil County Public Schools and often leverages their relationships there as inspiration for CTE work at KCPS. In addition, the Career Counselor noted in the focus group that they are "learning a lot from Queen Anne's" County. For example, the Career Counselor designed the internship class based on learning and feedback from the work-based learning course offerings at Queen Anne's County. CTE ERTs have observed it as a common and useful strategy to collaborate with LEAs in their region because they understand their unique local contexts, which may lead to useful collaborations to overcome common challenges. A strength of KCPS is the connections to the neighboring LEAs and their ongoing collaborative efforts to overcome common hurdles.

External Strength: Increased Marketing Focus

A strength of KCPS is its increased marketing efforts to support the CTE programming. In the pre-visit orientation, the CTE Lead Designee provided an overview of the strategic vision for CTE over the next few years. This strategic vision includes four key areas: 1: deepen student

engagement, 2. increase industry credential attainment, 3. amplify industry experiences, and 4. launch community engagement. As demonstrated with the attendance and participation of 108 vendors, including employers and colleges at last school year's college and career fair, the school's commitment to increasing public awareness of and increasing community engagement for CTE programming is working. The strong showing of employers demonstrated the commitment of the community and the success of recent marketing outreach. Being the smallest county in Maryland in terms of population size, attendance of 108 vendors including 6 local institutions of higher education is a very strong showing and indicator of LEA support by the local community.

During the pre-visit orientation, CTE Leadership noted that there was a public perception that the skilled trades are no longer being offered at KCHS. While data does not explicitly measure that perception, the high turnout of employers at the college and career fair coupled with the ongoing social media presence to include student and program spotlights suggests they are actively working to change that misconception.

In addition, the recent CTE video and increased presence of social media is helping to further establish the identity of the CTE program outside of just the school. Positive messaging within the school was also front and center with posters such as "You Belong Here" in CTE classes and the "opportunities board" for potential jobs.

Another marketing strength is the development of the CTE website for KCPS and its accompanying external messaging. In the pre-visit orientation, the KCPS CTE Lead Designee explained that prior to SY 2024-2025, KCPS did not have a CTE website. The CTE website now outlines all CTE programs, what courses a student needs to complete to complete the CTE program, program certifications, beneficial outcomes, higher education institutions where credits are articulated, and community support for that program. The CTE ERT observed KCPS's commitment to marketing and community engagement as a commendable strength.

External Challenge: Transportation to Work-Based Learning Sites

Transportation was named as a barrier and there are limited funds to support transportation as some CTE programs, such as Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI), require independent transportation. For a student to participate in MFRI, the student needs to find their own transportation and travel to a neighboring county. It is worth noting that MFRI, while KCPS offers it, has very low participation rates and lack of transportation may be one of the leading contributing factors. Students mentioned Welding as another program needing transportation support. While it is no longer a CTE program offered through KCPS, one student shared that it is offered at Chesapeake College, but KCPS does not provide transportation for students to the campus.

There is also not any systemic support for transportation to off-site work-based learning or student internships. There was also mention of the potential of additional off-site career exploration opportunities but cost of transportation was named by the Career Counselor as a barrier. The Career Counselor mentioned researching a van to alleviate transportation

concerns as buses for handfuls of students were cost prohibitive. As mentioned on the KCPS website, late buses are also available for students Monday through Thursday for any student participating in extracurricular activities; however, this does not explicitly address work-based learning opportunities. Transportation to work-based learning sites remains a hurdle as KCPS reaches *the Blueprint's* goal.

External Challenge: Communication with Parents

Additionally, the Career Counselor uplifted communication to and from parents as a challenge, noting that parents had little engagement in the career conversations occurring with students. Counselors only noted passive and mass communication with parents, such as videos or email blasts rather than tailored communications. Both career and school counselors told the CTE ERT they were actively trying to make information more accessible for parents and exploring ways to keep a consistent stream of communication. There was also a theme of communication challenges from the Central Office to the rest of the school to include parents. Ultimately, the CTE ERT identified communication with parents as a hurdle KCPS is experiencing.

External Challenge: Tension of Competing MSDE Goals by Small LEAs

KCPS strives to meet all of the MSDE goals and those outlined in the *Blueprint*; however, they are struggling to prioritize all goals with the limited resources KCPS has available. In particular, the CTE Lead Designee named the ongoing challenge of meeting both CTE completer goals and Advanced Placement (AP) course completion goals related to MSDE/*the Blueprint* noting that both goals require a significant amount of dedicated resources to accomplish them that KCPS simply does not have. With CTE staff stretched thin and teaching both core content and CTE classes, they have limited capacity to address both focus areas goals related to CTE and AP completion. The trend in declining enrollment is decreasing KCPS's budget on an annual basis, further limiting the available resources to educate students. The declining budget is directly affecting staffing and limiting the ability to address all *Blueprint* goals simultaneously. The sense from focus group participants is that the *Blueprint* does not accommodate LEAs that are the size of Kent County, as prioritizing all goals simultaneously is challenging for such a small LEA.

External Challenge: Limited High School Level Registered Apprenticeships

As of SY 2024-2025, KCPS had 7 Youth Apprenticeships (YAs) with 4 completers. The success of establishing high school level Registered Apprenticeships (HSLRAs) is limited as there are currently no HSLRAs available in Kent County. KCPS is experiencing less interest from the student perspective than originally anticipated. In some cases, students do not like the youth apprenticeship experience and it has prevented KCPS from seeing a greater interest in HSLRAs. This, coupled with the high expectations of the employers not matching student expectations has led to challenges in increasing the number of HSLRAs across the LEA. CTE ERT members also reported feedback from local employers that they are concerned with the expense of HSLRAs, suggesting that cost is also a reason why some employers are limiting student opportunities. As mentioned in the LEA Brief, the RA program for one of the largest local employers is too competitive for a student to enter the program directly. CTE ERT

members reported that the region is experiencing layoffs, particularly manufacturing-related employers. This has led to local and regional competition, further limiting opportunities for HSLRAs. Finding HSLRAs in Kent County is an ongoing challenge for KCPS.

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS

Although the CTE ERT has presented its observations in this report, these observations and Potential Next Steps are preliminary. The purposes of Phase 1 of the CTE ERT are to establish a baseline for progress toward *Blueprint* goals across Maryland and identify key challenges. The Potential Next Steps are areas that this LEA may look for improvement in and something the CTE ERT will look at more closely as the CTE Committee transitions into Phase 2 in the SY 2026-2027. These Potential Next Steps are not a directive, but opportunities of improvement to explore. They are meant to be the beginning of a conversation that will continue into Phase 2, and for this reason, these Potential Next Steps do not comprehensively address the challenges the CTE ERT notes in this report.

Continue to Center CTE Teacher Voices in Decision-making

Across other LEAs, a best practice is incorporating teacher voices into decision-making, particularly CTE teacher voices, as they are the ones, outside of students, most directly impacted by CTE decisions rolled out by the Central Office within the LEA. KCPS has proven that they incorporate teacher voices into decision-making and the CTE ERT recommends KCPS continue to center CTE teacher perspectives. This can help alleviate some of the disconnects with communication from the Central Office, the scheduling and enrollment challenges, and some of the workload hurdles as well. For example, scheduling challenges may continue for a variety of reasons; however, it would be helpful to consider teacher voices in brainstorming creative solutions together, while still considering the full scope of external constraints. Teachers may have proposed an alternative and realistic solution to addressing scheduling concerns that do not result in having two unrelated classes being taught simultaneously. When teachers have more input in decision-making that impacts them, it is possible that their overall buy-in for CTE increases, and likely that student experience is better incorporated in decisions. Because teachers have a strong sense of students' day-to-day experience, their perspective is invaluable when it comes to decision-making. KCPS leadership have faced nuanced challenges with budget, retention, and several other factors, but continuing to incorporate teacher perspectives in more decision-making will benefit all KCPS stakeholders.

Brainstorm Opportunity to Improve and Expand Use of Current Career Advising Resources

KCPS already has many career-planning and advising resources it can build upon and further align to better support its students and staff, such as existing software platforms and professional development opportunities.¹⁵ For example:

Develop Proficiency in Current Platforms: Enrollment concerns and scheduling challenges were prominent themes that the CTE ERT observed. There were several references to how current scheduling challenges hinder student success. While the collaboration between the career counselors and school counselors should be

¹⁵ In January 2026, the CTE Committee published the [“Career Counseling Best Practices Report”](#), which may be a useful resource for KCPS to review.

applauded, there are likely opportunities to better align class selection choices to career preferences and leverage developing proficiency in current platforms like Naviance and Power School. Developing proficiency in these platforms may lead to opportunities to improve scheduling and better align students' career interests. Fortunately, school counselors, the career counselor, and CTE leadership are keenly aware of this challenge and are actively taking steps towards mitigating the challenges. For example, school counselors and the career counselors received Power School training, and are already advancing towards leveraging its full capacity. It is recommended to expand learning opportunities for staff overall, with a special focus on maximizing proficiency in both scheduling and career development software. By further exploring how to integrate both Naviance and Power School, along with overarching professional development, there is a greater likelihood that students most interested in CTE classes will be prioritized, that scheduling sequencing for CTE classes can be more intentional and that teachers can avoid some of the other expressed concerns. Knowing that KCPS staff time is limited, it should be noted that MSDE recently collected the platforms being used for career counseling in February 2026. As there are multiple other LEAs using Naviance and Power School for career counseling, it may be possible to inquire whether KCPS school counselors could join another LEAs training program for this software. Allegany, Anne Arundel, Cecil, Caroline, Dorchester, Garrett, Queen Anne's, Talbot, and Washington Counties all use Naviance and Anne Arundel, Calvert, Caroline, Dorchester, Frederick, Garrett, Somerset, and Talbot Counties all use PowerSchool as well.

Consider "Career Champions" Model: Adding additional staff is challenging due to budget constraints, however the difficult workload of the career counselor can be remedied by leveraging existing resources and deploying "Career Champions". Similar to what is offered in Montgomery County where Career Coaches also face high caseloads of 1000+ students, the Career Coaches are assisted by 10 "Career Champions" in each high school, who are existing staff who facilitate Career Coaching work and integrate career advising into core classes and programs, while they receive a modest stipend for their work from the Local Workforce Development Board. KCPS could consider choosing 5-10 teachers to operate as "Career Champions" and help support KCPS's career advising, ideally alleviating and spreading out some of the difficult workload.

Professional Development for Teachers and Staff on Career Planning and HSLRA Benefits: By further offering professional development in career planning, all staff can better understand and center a student's career pathway and support them in their learning journey. Even providing a centralized system with notes related to a student's career interest and academic history can help improve communication across counselors and encourage greater alignment to a student's goals. The professional development may also explore ways for students to obtain IRCs before 12th grade (such as in Automotive) or avoiding students waiting over a year to enroll in the subsequent CTE course. This professional development opportunity can also support exploration of the core and flex model. The CTE Lead Designee explained that professional development for teachers was more focused on core subjects rather than

CTE focus, so expanding professional development for teachers in their CTE subjects is beneficial, as well. KCPS can also explore integrating career advising into core classes to ensure a greater understanding and alignment of a student's career interests across the school system, and longer-term, career advising can be integrated throughout curriculum and counseling.

Professional Development on Career and Technical Student Organizations: FAA is offered at Kent County High School; however other CTSOs were not as apparent. CTSOs offer increased opportunities for students to develop their technical skills, leadership opportunities, and both career and academic preparedness. KCPS should explore offering CTSOs as another area of opportunity and offer support and training for teachers if interested in leading it. While CTE staff may feel stretched thin, improving scheduling, providing them with professional development and ensuring they feel heard and supported may increase the likelihood of a teacher willing to take on leading a CTSO.

KCPS should consider enhancing opportunities for career advising and exploring opportunities to integrate career advising more effectively across the curriculum.

Explore Regional Professional Learning Communities

Building off of the already strong relationships between Cecil County Public Schools and Queen Anne's County Public Schools, KCPS can explore developing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) with neighboring counties, particularly for CTE teachers in similar subject areas. KCPS teachers shared with the CTE ERT that their professional development is targeted toward core content areas and regional PLCs may be a useful alternative for KCPS's CTE teachers to collaborate with peers. This is an opportunity where CTE teachers from similar-size counties experiencing similar external constraints can learn from each other, share strategies, analyze data, and set common goals to advance student outcomes. Since peer subject teachers are not readily available in one's own LEA, this is a great alternative for teachers to improve their practice with input from peers with similar expertise and experience. This can be done across the Eastern Shore and expand multiple subject areas. Within the PLCs, there are opportunities to explore other regional models that could support students that are interested in visual arts and music pathways that KCPS does not currently offer. The potential creation for an Upper Shore PLC should be explored because teachers want more relevant opportunities to collaborate with their peers.

Consider Alternative Enrollment Models

Many of the challenges KCPS is encountering relates to the current CTE enrollment model, suggesting that KCPS should consider alternative models that will better serve the student population. When exploring alternative models, KCPS should explore if specific competition or foundational knowledge prerequisites would best suit the students as well as the alignment that CTE programs have against the students' long term professional goals. Support for special populations should also be considered. It is helpful to explore why special populations are not currently engaging in CTE and KCPS should collect additional data as to why that is the case. It is worth exploring a specific and formalized vetting process for CTE

that helps address challenges due to unprepared or less interested students. It may also be worth exploring what corequisites may look like in KCPS, as other LEA representatives have noted corequisites provide real-time help for students who struggle connecting core content areas to CTE curriculum. The alternative enrollment models can also put a greater emphasis on career advising to mitigate some of the challenges related to students in classes outside of their original career interests.

Consider Offering More Intentional Career Exploration Opportunities Early On

To mitigate some of the disconnect with student interest and expectations on CTE classes, KCPS can explore offering a more robust Career Exploration Course freshman year. Right now, most of the exposure comes from some middle school engagement, the CTE “tour”/rotation day of all the CTE programs during freshman year, and a conversation with the Career Counselor. Other counties on the Eastern Shore, such as Wicomico and Somerset Counties, are offering a career exploration course allowing students to explore multiple CTE pathway options before committing to one. Wicomico’s A-TEX (Applied Technology Exploration) program offers students hands-on classroom and laboratory experience in four potential pathways over the course of a semester. The subsequent class provides an additional deep dive into one program of study, developing foundational skills and ultimately leading into the selection of a Maryland Approved CTE Completer program¹⁶. This focus on more intentionally exploring options in the 9th grade puts a greater emphasis on ensuring only those interested in completing the specific CTE program will be in the required courses. This may potentially alleviate some of the challenges teachers are encountering with engagement and students are facing dealing with peers disrupting the class due to lack of interest. There are opportunities to consider more intentional and robust career exploration opportunities.

Brainstorm Enhancements to LEA-Wide Grading Policy

As described above, the current grading policy is creating multiple challenges; therefore, it would be helpful to brainstorm how different policies, particularly within CTE courses, may be more aligned to employer expectations and better prepare students for life after high school graduation. KCPS can explore new grading policies that are better aligned to workforce readiness and industry recommendations. Perhaps, it may be useful to collaborate with Program Advisory Committees (PACs) to help determine what an effective grading policy would look like that benefits all of KCPS’s stakeholders.

Create Transition Plans and Guidance for Those in Work-Based Learning Opportunities

While this year is the first year that the work-release is being transformed into more of a structured class, this is an opportunity to refine and iterate the changes to ensure they are meeting both the goals of the school and the students. The program is currently pass/fail, but there are opportunities to continue to look at learnings within Queen Anne’s County, as well as reflect upon this year’s offerings to refine and adapt next year. That will likely also include

¹⁶ Mardela Middle and High School. ATEX/CTE. Wicomico County Public Schools.

<https://sites.google.com/wcboe.org/mardelaschoolcounseling/scheduling/atextcte>

considering offering a grade to further align expectations to the work place as “pass/fail” does not necessarily translate directly into one’s experience at a job site. These work-based learning opportunities should also integrate into the student’s learning plans and be aligned to post-secondary career planning goals, as well as be part of regular career advising. KCPS should consider creating some sort of transition plan and guidance for work-based learning opportunities.

Consider More Intentional Messaging to Parents/Guardians

Parents were also named as an undermessaging group and that most parent engagement includes robocalls, mass emails, or relying on students to pass on communication. Building off of the recent messaging campaigns around CTE, this is a prime opportunity to help leverage the existing tools, such as Naviance, to include parents in more targeted communication and help parents fully understand the depth and breadth of what CTE has to offer. The CTE ERT has observed how effective more personalized communication can be, especially when communicating with students and their families. In addition, intentional marketing around HSLRAs can help communicate the importance of these opportunities and also spread the word amongst parents who can also serve as potential employers. More intentional engagement and communication with parents is a recommendation for KCPS going forward.

Further Explore Industry Engagement and Work-Based Learning Opportunities:

Building off of the great success of the recent marketing push and messaging across the school is an opportunity for continued external engagement and more targeted communication. The great turnout of the college and career fair provides an opportunity for follow-up and intentional engagement for partnerships. As the principal shared, there is a plan for outreach going forward and the LEA has the opportunity to capitalize on the follow-up to include offering potential employment opportunities, curriculum reviews, or sponsorship, beyond just career exposure. As the principal uplifted, this is an opportunity to further leverage the Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board to support ongoing partnership and engagement. As mentioned in the pre-visit orientation, industry experts noted the need for multilingual employees in the CNA/GNA positions, so industry voices can also assist in identifying opportunities to support special populations of students as well, particularly areas of opportunity for multilingual learners. The strong community connections and legacies can also help support longer-term solutions to the workload and budget challenges as corporate sponsorship or volunteer opportunities to offset some of the financial and capacity burdens such as transportation costs. There are opportunities to further engage industry in the future as KCPS has established a great deal of community interest, as is evident in KCHS’s college and career fair.

Continue to Increase Both IRC Attainment and Career Readiness

Kent County already has strong IRC attainment rates; however, they should continue to explore how to improve IRC attainment rates for the programs that have lower attainment rates, such as Prostart through Food and Beverage Management. The CTE ERT acknowledges that the fundamental challenge is that CTE teachers have long been

prioritizing workforce readiness, but now they are being told to prioritize IRCs and those are not always in alignment. The CTE Committee is confident MSDE's new CTE programs of study ready for implementation by SY 2027-2028 will help alleviate this challenge. In the meantime, KCPS can analyze best practices to replicate when reviewing why other programs, such as Automotive Service Excellence (Automotive Technologies) or NCCER Core plus Level I (Carpentry), have such high attainment rates. The IRC attainment rates and process should also be revisited to account for the CTE IRC Policy, which will begin implementation SY 2026-2027. In collaboration with MSDE, KCPS can also explore how AP Studio Art Class can support IRC rates and student career goals, even though it is outside of a current CTE pathway. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to look to industry and local employers to ensure students are effectively being prepared for the workforce rather than just preparing to pass an IRC exam. During the focus groups, CTE Teachers also noted the importance of the Program Advisory Committees (PACs). One teacher expressed the appreciation of the PAC dinners at Chesapeake College being helpful in providing industry connection. KCPS has established connections with industry partners and can also look to their PACs to collaborate on how to ensure students are prepared for the workforce. IRC attainment and Career Readiness can both be increased in parallel in upcoming years through a variety of strategies.

Continue to Build Excitement Around CTE

Student interest and behavior were noted as challenges that may arise in CTE classes, so KCPS should explore ways to foster excitement around learning and CTE. Building excitement around CTE and continuing to improve CTE marketing may help mitigate some of the difficulties KCPS is encountering. In multiple conversations, especially with students, there was a fondness for a goat that previously lived on school premises. The goat was part of their CASE program and challenges on the weekend compromised the goat's safety. The goat was intentionally rehomed. The LEA should consider how to reoffer something like "Billy the goat" as the goat was something that became part of the school's identity and provided additional hands-on learning opportunities for students. Something like the goat helped provide a level of excitement and identity for CTE programs, which can be challenging to create in a comprehensive high school. While the goat itself does not necessarily need to be returned, something offering a similar level of excitement could support ongoing CTE engagement efforts, support better identifying student career interest and support the implementation of the CTE strategic plan at KCPS.

Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB)

LEA CTE connection to the LWDB is critical in ensuring progress toward achieving the *Blueprint's* 45% goal. The CTE ERT suggests further exploring how the Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board (USWIB) can provide potential work experience sites and partnerships in addition to other resources within the community. In addition to Kent County, USWIB serves Caroline, Dorchester, Queen Anne's, and Talbot Counties, which can potentially lead to some inter-county collaboration.

Explore Technical Assistance with MSDE, the Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor), and the CTE Committee in Meeting the Blueprint's 45% Goal.

In order to achieve the *Blueprint's* 45% goal with more than just IRCs, establishing and expanding RAs should be one of KCPS's priorities. KCPS should explore closer collaboration with MD Labor's Apprenticeship Navigators on what opportunities are available for high school students in the county. KCPS should work with MD Labor's Apprenticeship Navigators to ensure employers understand scheduling options for students, as well as accessing available incentives such as grants and tax credits.¹⁷

- **Examples of Best Practices:**

- Several LEAs employ interns and youth apprentices and may consider working with MD Labor to become Registered Apprenticeship sponsors in order to convert these WBL opportunities to high school level Registered Apprenticeships.
- Washington County Public Schools, which was a pilot district for setting up youth apprenticeship programs, puts on a career fair with over 1,000 attendees who get to see students' work from their CTSOs, from classwork, and from their youth apprenticeship.
- Somerset County Public Schools approved a new policy to allow students to leave school early for an apprenticeship or employment: "Co-Operative Work" is for students who have time in their schedule to be employed at any part-time employer and "Directive Work" is for students who finished their CTE programs and are working in a related field.

At the time of the visit, KCPS's IRC completion rate of 45% is laudable and one of the highest among CTE ERT visits to date; however, it should be noted that all LEAs' true IRC attainment rate was difficult to quantify given it is based on a prior approved IRC list. Nevertheless, KCPS can seek technical assistance from MSDE and similar LEAs in strategies to further expand IRC attainment.

- **Examples of Best Practices:**

- Dorchester County Public Schools conducts annual audits to evaluate which programs to expand, sunset, or start, which has created a responsive system that adapts to evolving students' needs and interests and industry trends.
- Somerset County Public Schools had posters in the hallways of the CTE Center identifying IRCs tied to various programs and the IRCs' benefits in the industry.
- Worcester County Public Schools administrators conduct a thorough data analysis of Labor Market Information before the start of the school year with all the administrators, staff, and teachers so they can analyze what jobs, skills, and IRCs are in-demand regionally.

The CTE Committee recognizes that policies defining the 45% goal were not issued until December 2024, and this CTE ERT visit took place in October 2025, so all of those implementing this work and the partnerships required are still in the early stages of

¹⁷ Maryland Department of Labor. (2026). *Current solicitations*. <https://tinyurl.com/b95w6exy>

development. Exploring technical assistance with MSDE, MD Labor, and the CTE Committee will prove to be a useful addition to meeting the 45% goal.

Conclusion

This Phase I visit to Kent County Public Schools (KCPS) was conducted to assess progress in strengthening CTE program quality, alignment to labor market demand, student access and equity, and *Blueprint* implementation of state policy priorities. The visit provided an opportunity to engage with leadership, educators, students, and partners to better understand current practices, celebrate successes, and identify areas for continued growth. The CTE Committee appreciates the transparency, preparation, and collaboration demonstrated throughout the visit process.

The CTE Committee commends KCPS for its clear commitment to advancing high-quality CTE programs and for the strengths observed during the visit. At the same time, the CTE Committee recognizes that challenges remain. Some of these reflect broader external factors - including evolving policy requirements, workforce dynamics, resource constraints, data system transitions, and shifting student needs - that influence local implementation. Continued focus on strategic alignment, program quality, and equitable student outcomes will be essential as the system moves forward.

As implementation of CTE ERT Phase 2 is currently paused, the CTE Committee will be taking insights from Phase 1 visits to inform a longer-term strategy for the CTE ERT program. The CTE Committee will be working closely with the AIB, MSDE, and relevant stakeholders to make an informed recommendation regarding the structure and timelines for resuming CTE ERT visits in future school years.

We look forward to continued partnership as KCPS advances this important work and we encourage KCPS to reach out to CTE Committee staff for any questions or technical assistance.

Appendix Guide

- A. LEA Brief
- B. School Visit Agenda
- C. Focus Group Protocol and Interview Questions
- D. Glossary and Acronym Guide



Appendix A | LEA Data Brief

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY (LEA) BRIEF

CTE Expert Review Team Visit

Kent County Public Schools

Tom Porter, Supervisor of CTE

Comprehensive high schools with cte - Kent County High School

LEA CTE Center(s) - n/a

CTE ERT visit: 10/08/25 to Kent County High School

LEA CTE ENROLLMENT, PARTICIPATION and COMPLETION RATES

SY 2025-2026	Kent CPS	Kent CHS
Total Enrollment (# of all HS students)	511	511
Total Enrollment (# of all graduating students)	123	123
CTE Participation Rate ¹⁸ (% of all graduating students)	88.6%	88.6%
CTE Concentration Rate ¹⁹ (% of all graduating students)	77.2%	77.2%
CTE Completers Rate ²⁰ (% of all graduating students)	71.5%	71.5%
IRC Completion Rate ²¹ (% of all graduating students)	45.5%	45.5%
Work-Based Learning Participants ^{22, 23} (# of all graduating students)	39	39
Dual Enrollment Participants ²⁴ (# of all graduating students)	32	32
Dual Enrollment Completers ²⁵ (# of all graduating students)	30	30
Apprenticeship Participants (# of all HS students)	RA: 0 YA: 7	RA: 0 YA: 7
Apprenticeship Participants (# of all graduating students)	RA: 0 YA: 6	RA: 0 YA: 6
Apprenticeship Completers (# of graduating students)	RA: 0 YA: 4	RA: 0 YA: 4
Progress Towards 45% Goal²⁶	45.5%	45.5%

¹⁸ CTE Participants are students completing not less than one credit in a MSDE-approved CTE program of study.

¹⁹ CTE Concentrators are students who have completed at least two courses and are enrolled in a third course in a single MSDE-approved CTE program of study.

LEA CTE OFFERINGS

CTE Program Enrollment

Program Name	Total Enrollment	Overenrolled or Underenrolled?	Number of Students on Waitlist
Teacher Academy of Maryland	44	NA	NA
PLTW Engineering	62	NA	NA
IT Computer Science	37	Underenrolled	NA
Academy of Health Professions	50	NA	NA
Food and Beverage Management	46	NA	NA
Agricultural Sciences (CASE)	30	NA	NA
Automotive Technologies	53	Overenrolled	NA

²⁰ CTE Completers are students who meet all requirements in a state-approved CTE program of study, typically three or four courses.

²¹ Defined as the percentage of all graduating students who have earned an IRC ([as defined by the CTE Committee](#))

²² Participation is defined as the number of all high school students or all graduating students who have participated in the high school portion of a registered apprenticeship (RA) or an AMP youth apprenticeship (YA). Completion is defined as the number of all graduating students who have completed the high school level of a Registered Apprenticeship (RA) or have completed both an AMP youth apprenticeship (YA) and an IRC (YA completers who don't earn an IRC will not count towards 45% goal).

²³ Work-based learning includes internships, job shadowing, and other job-based experiences.

²⁴ Participation is defined as the number of all graduating students participating in dual enrollment (does not count towards the 45% goal unless they earn an IRC).

²⁵ Dual enrollment completers is defined as the number of all graduating students who earned college credit through dual enrollment.

²⁶ This metric is calculated by adding together the Apprenticeship Completion Rate (RA completers plus YA completers who also earn an IRC) and the IRC Completion Rate (based on draft guidance from the [CTE Committee](#)), divided by the total number of graduating students.

Construction Trades Carpentry	29	NA	NA
FM Broadcasting	46	NA	NA
MD Fire Rescue Institute	0	Underenrolled	NA
Apprenticeship Maryland	4	Underenrolled	NA

Progress Towards the 45% Goal:

What progress are you projecting towards the 45% goal for your district in the 2025-2026 SY?

By SY 2026-2027?

By SY 2030-2031?

KCPS has met the 45% goal and expects to exceed it in SY 2025-2026. Three programs (Computer Science, Engineering, and CASE) will offer IRCs for the first time in Spring 2026.

What are your plans for expanding Registered Apprenticeships in your LEA?

KCPS has engaged with the three businesses who have registered apprenticeships (Dixon Valve, Bramble Construction, and Pinder Electrical). Bramble and Pinder would not register for youth apprenticeship and have never held an apprentice through their registered apprenticeship program. Dixon Valve shared that their registered apprenticeship program is so competitive that it would not be realistic for a high school graduate to enter it. However, we do have a youth apprentice at Dixon Valve.

Program Plans for Future

Are there any new programs you plan on adding to your current programming within the next 2 school years?

Why are you adding/not adding the program(s)?

We are not planning to add any programs due to declining enrollment and rising costs.

Are there any current programs you plan on expanding upon within the next 2 school years?

Why are you expanding upon the program(s)?

We are seeking to expand our IT Computer Science program. This program was approved by MSDE for the 2025-2026 school year.

Are there any programs you are taking away within the next 2 school years?

Why are you taking away the program(s)?

Any decisions to take away programs will be based on budgetary constraints resulting from declining enrollment and rising costs. KCPS does not plan to eliminate any programs due to lack of student interest or misalignment with industry demands.

Enrollment Practices

How do students enroll in programs?

Students begin learning about CTE programs as early as elementary school. In 9th grade, students visit CTE classrooms and meet with the career counselor to select their three priorities for CTE programs. 9th graders complete course selection through an online form in the spring and then meet individually with their counselor to enroll in their selected CTE program, if the master schedule permits.

Are all CTE programs offered to all students?

Yes.

Can a student participate in a CTE program at another school?

With the exception of MD Fire Rescue Institute in Centerville and programs at Chesapeake College, students are only permitted to participate in CTE programs at Kent County High School.

Program Design

What are some best practices from CTE in your LEA that you think are worth sharing with other CTE programs across the state?

KCPS permits all 8th and 9th grade students to tour CTE classrooms as part of their commitment to increasing student awareness of CTE pathways.

KCPS has had success supporting students in completing multiple CTE pathways. This is due to the comprehensive nature of Kent County Public Schools. This also allows students to test out a CTE in 10th grade prior to committing to the pathway.

KCPS also expands student opportunities by having select CTE teachers teach electives such as welding, fine woodworking, and natural resources and ecology. These courses are electives and are not a part of the core CTE pathway.

LEA Support for Schools

What challenges are you facing as the LEA is reaching towards the 45% goal?

KCPS has reached the 45% goal.

How is CTE financial support structured within the LEA?

KCPS is in its second year of receiving \$250,000 annually through the Perkins V grant. Each CTE program is also funded locally. Several programs (Food and Beverage Management, Construction, Ag. Science, and FM Broadcasting)

have in-house accounts which accrue funds through sales and services. The FM Broadcasting program operates as a school-based enterprise. Our CTE Maintenance of Effort for FY25 is \$1,280,132.28, reflecting an increase of \$129,954.21 from FY24.

How is CTE staffing structured within the LEA?

All 9 CTE teachers are employees of KCPS and are supervised by the Principal of Kent County High School. There is one career counselor who is supervised by the Supervisor of Accountability and Career and Technical Education.

LEA Teachers

What are the requirements to be an instructor in this LEA?

The requirements vary depending on the position. For example, our Health Professions instructor is required to have an RN license. Generally, CTE instructors are required to have a Maryland teaching certification and/or an identified number of years experience in the industry they are teaching.

How are teachers recruited in this LEA?

KCPS utilizes traditional recruitment methods including online postings, job fairs, and word of mouth solicitations. Over a 5 year period, KCPS has had to hire three CTE instructors, one for PLTW Engineering, one for Health Professions (CNA/GNA), and one for Teacher Academy of Maryland. KCPS hired internally for Engineering and Teacher Academy, and the spouse of a current employer was hired for Health Professions.

How are teachers retained in this LEA?

KCPS invested heavily in teacher retention through the MD Leads grant and has continued some of those strategies through the Teacher Collaborative Grant. These strategies include mentoring, sponsored attendance at educational conferences, and stipends for professional development and curriculum writing. KCPS also incentivizes pursuit of the NBC, and 2/9 CTE teachers is currently pursuing NBC.

What difficulties do you face with recruitment and retention?

KCPS has experienced its highest levels of high school teacher retention among teachers in the CTE department. Over the past five years, KCPS has seen three teachers leave their positions, one to become our career counselor, one to become our ESOL teacher, and another due to retirement.

Overview of CTE Programs

Insert information on the CTE programs offered in your LEA, or attach a brochure or website link:

[KCPS CTE Website](#)

LEA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

2024-2025 SY	Maryland ²⁷	Kent CPS
District Student Demographics	278238	511
% Asian	7%	n/a
% American Indian / Alaska Native	<1%	n/a
% African American	33%	25%
% Hispanic	23%	13%
% Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	<1%	n/a
% Two or More Races	5%	7%
% White	32%	55%
% Students with Disabilities	11%	13%
# of Multi-Lingual Learners	11%	7%
% Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS)	49%	68%
Instructional Staff Per 1,000 Pupils	70.8	93.5

LEA TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS

2024-2025 ²⁸	Maryland ²⁹	Kent CPS
District Teacher Demographics	63,736	158
% Asian	0.20%	0.6%
% American Indian / Alaska Native	4.80%	0%
% African American	21.40%	8.9%
% Hispanic	4.90%	1.3%
% Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	0.50%	0%
% Two or More Races	1.70%	0.6%
% White	66.60%	88.6%

²⁷ This is the most recent information according to The Maryland Report Card reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/

²⁸ If KCPS has more updated Teacher Demographic data they can share with the CTE Committee staff, that would be great

²⁹ This is the most recent information according to the Educator Dashboard marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DEE/educator-dashboard.aspx

% Female	76.80%	79%
% Male	23.10%	21%
Average Length of Service (Years)	12.5 Years	10.6 years
New Hires (#)	5,317	18
Teacher Retention Rates (%)	90.60%	81.1%
National Board Certified Teachers	2,279	0

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Nearby Universities & Community Colleges

- Chesapeake College
- Washington College

Economic [Profile](#)

Kent County, founded in 1642, sits directly east of Baltimore and the Chesapeake Bay, with Washington DC 50 miles to the southwest and Philadelphia 60 miles to the northeast. The county is located within 90 minutes of three international airports and three major seaports. Route 301 links Maryland to Delaware, thus making Kent County a prime location for warehouse and distribution operations and commercial transportation. The county's private sector industries generate nearly a billion in gross regional product in 2022.

With its diverse business landscape, affordable land, and low cost of living, it is a great place for businesses and new residents. Kent County is one of only five counties in Maryland with no personal property tax. Investing in its open-access fiber broadband availability, encourages the growth of diverse businesses such as datacenters, call centers, cyber security, telemedicine, training, and education centers. The Chestertown Business Campus, a premier economic development project, offers opportunities to attract new and expanding businesses in the region.

Kent County is ideal for emerging technologies including environmental, aquaculture, and agriculture businesses, with over 134,000 acres of farmland, 265 miles of tidal shoreline, and proximity to federal labs and research centers. For more information, visit www.kentcounty.com/business

Full [profile](#)

Educational Attainment

Source: [2023 United States Census](#).

Label: Age By Educational Attainment	Estimate Total	Estimate %
Population 18 to 24 years	2,318	(X)
Less than high school graduate	183	7.9%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	686	29.6%
Some college or associate's degree	1,291	55.7%
Bachelor's degree or higher	158	6.8%
Population 25 years and over	13,934	(X)
Less than 9th grade	325	2.3%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	817	5.9%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	4,558	32.7%
Some college, no degree	2,073	14.9%
Associate's degree	877	6.3%
Bachelor's degree	2,770	19.9%
Graduate or professional degree	2,514	18.0%
High school graduate or higher	12,792	91.8%

Bachelor's degree or higher	5,284	37.9%
Population 25 to 34 years	1,988	(X)
High school graduate or higher	1,886	94.9%
Bachelor's degree or higher	788	39.6%
Population 35 to 44 years	1,725	(X)
High school graduate or higher	1,628	94.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher	709	41.1%
Population 45 to 64 years	5,043	(X)
High school graduate or higher	4,620	91.6%
Bachelor's degree or higher	1,605	31.8%
Population 65 years and over	5,178	(X)
High school graduate or higher	4,658	90.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher	2,182	42.1%

Leading Business Groups*

Company	Industry	Size Category
Angelica Nurseries Inc	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	250-499
Dixon Specialty Products	Wholesale Trade	100-249
Dixon Valve and Coupling	Manufacturing	250-499

Company LLC		
Echo Hill Camp	Accommodation and Food Services	100-249
Gillespie Precast LLC	Wholesale Trade	100-249
Heron Point	Health Care and Social Assistance	100-249
La Motte	Manufacturing	100-249
Redner's Warehouse Markets	Retail Trade	100-249
University-Maryland Shore Regional Health Medical Center	Health Care and Social Assistance	250-499
USA Fulfillment Inc.	Wholesale Trade	100-249

*[data in his table](#) comes from the Maryland Department of Labor, Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning

Appendix B | School Visit Agenda

LEA Visit Agenda

Kent County Public Schools

Visit Date: 10/08/2025 Time: 8am - 3:15pm	Location: Kent County High School 25301 Lambs Meadow Road Butlertown, MD. 21678	Arrival Time: 8am
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Time	Team 1 Activity	Time	Team 2 Activity
7:50-8:20am	Meet and Greet (Media Center)	7:50-8:20am	Meet and Greet (Media Center)
8:25-9:15am	Student Focus Group 1 (Room #702)	8:25-9:15am	Teacher Focus Group 1 (Media Center)
9:20-10:15am	School Tour & Discussion (Tour leaders: T.J., FM Broadcast, AND M.S., Ag. Science)	9:20-10:15am	School Counselor Focus Group (Media Center)
10:15-10:30am	Break (Room 702)	10:15-10:30am	Break (Media Center)
10:30 - 11:30am	LEA/School Leader Focus Group (Room #702)	10:30 - 11:30am	School Tour and Discussion (Tour leaders: T.J., FM Broadcast, AND M.S., Ag. Science)
11:30 - 12:15pm	Lunch Whole Group Tour Debrief (Media Center)	11:30 - 12:15pm	Lunch Whole Group Tour Debrief (Media Center)

12:15-1:15pm	Career Counselor Focus Group (Room 702)	12:15-1:15pm	Student Focus Group 2 (Media Center)
1:15-2:15pm	Teacher Focus Group 2 Room #702	1:15-2:15pm	Student Focus Group 3 (Media Center)
2:15-2:30pm	Break	2:15-2:30pm	Break
2:30-3:15 pm	End of Day Debrief & Gathering (Media Center)	2:30-3:15 pm	End of Day Debrief & Gathering (Media Center)

Facilitator/Recorder	John Strickland	Facilitator/Recorder	Shamara Bownes
Notes/Time	Edrees Nawabi	Notes/Time	Christine Lynch

Appendix C | Focus Group Protocol and Interview Questions

Focus Group Best Practices

To be read by CTE ERT before focus group or during Orientation

- Stay Focused. Focus groups are conversations with a purpose; remind both the CTE ERT and focus group participants what our purpose is. The CTE ERT is not here to provide our perspective, any solutions, assessments, or inform the LEA. Our role here is to make observations and collect our observations into a report identifying the state of CTE in Maryland and common challenges we can provide Technical Assistance for.
- Ask Questions and Be Curious. Focus groups run best when the CTE ERT focuses on asking questions and actively listening. If you need to, ask participants to repeat themselves. Ask follow-up questions. Be curious.
- Keep Track of Time. Time flies by in the focus groups, so the facilitator needs to have a ten-minute warning so both the CTE ERT and the participants know time is starting to run out. If the facilitator hasn't yet, move to the "Important Questions" with at least ten minutes left.
- Speak Up. The CTE ERT records focus groups (except students), but the range on the recorder isn't great, so we need folks to speak up. If there are announcements or bells going over the intercom, pause because the recorder and our transcription service won't be able to differentiate.
- Cut Any Cross-Talk. The CTE ERT should not be having conversations with each other during the focus group. It's not only disrespectful to focus group participants, but it also disrupts our transcription services.
- Create a Safer Space. Brief introductions and some light humor at the beginning of the focus group can ease participants to provide more authentic and honest reflections.
- Be Mindful of Non-Verbal Cues. So much is said before speaking, so please be intentional with non-verbal cues that may distract participants or make participants uncomfortable.
- Summarize and Validate Participants. We are here to observe and listen, so remember to validate participants' perspective with an accurate summary of what a few participants say.
- Convey Appreciation. Focus group participants take time out of their busy day to provide their perspective. Don't forget to thank them for their participation and explain how it will help improve CTE across the State.

Focus Group Reminders

To be used by team facilitator for focus group participants before starting

- We're here on behalf of the CTE Committee, committed to improving CTE programs in line with Maryland's goals outlined in the Blueprint.
- Our team represents a variety of different perspectives. Our members here today are teachers, administrators, school leaders, researchers, employers, local workforce board members, and CTE Committee staff and board members.

- Our purpose in this visit is to try to understand what is in place now in your LEA, including plans for expanding or strengthening existing programs and current challenges. We also want to identify any strong practices in place that we might be able to highlight statewide. These visits will also inform the CTE Committee's development of the statewide CTE framework.
- We are not here to “assess” or grade CTE programming or CTE teachers in schools or LEAs. We are here to observe, not judge.
- After the visit, CTE Committee staff will draft a LEA report summarizing what we saw and heard, including our understanding of the LEA's CTE strategy, current strengths and challenges, and suggestions to help the LEA reach its goals.
- We look forward to hearing about your experiences and your thoughts on what's working and where we can support CTE here in your LEA.
- We would like to record this session (except student groups) to capture your thoughts accurately—does that work for you all? To be clear, this recording is only for note-taking purposes; we ensure confidentiality meaning no names will be cited in our reports.
- Your contributions today will help us improve CTE programs both here and statewide. Any questions before we start?

Questions for CTE Teachers

Instructions for focus group lead: Please start by asking everyone to introduce themselves with the first question. Since there are a lot of questions to get through, ask for a few people, not everyone, to answer each of the following questions, asking for different perspectives as needed. Be sure to save at least ten minutes to ask “Important Questions”.

Priority Questions:

1. What program do you teach in and how long have you been in your role? What is your background in this area?
2. For newer teachers, what was your recruitment like? What were important factors for your decision to work here?
3. For senior teachers, what factors influence your decision to stay here?
4. Do you have contact with employers in your industry? If so, what partnerships have been most beneficial for students?
5. Where do students from your program go after graduating (i.e., further training, work, college, etc.)?
6. What support do you and/or the school provide to help CTE students develop post-graduation plans? Are your students getting time with a Career Coach as part of that support?
7. How do you measure the effectiveness of your CTE program, and what data or feedback informs changes or improvements?
8. If you could redesign your subject's program of study, what would you change?
9. What professional learning opportunities are available for you?

Important Questions to Ask with At Least 5 Minutes Left:

1. From your perspective, what are the strengths of your school's CTE programs?

2. What do you need as a CTE teacher that you feel you may not be getting?
3. What do you see as the key CTE challenges facing your school now?

Additional Questions:

1. How do you collaborate with your colleagues (CTE and academic teachers)? How do you collaborate with other colleagues within this LEA?
2. Do any of your programs have school-based businesses that serve the school community and/or local clients?
3. Do you think the certification requirements for CTE teachers are well-aligned to what is needed to teach in the area you teach in?
4. What CTSOs (Career and Technical Student Organizations) do you all participate in? What clubs/programs/sports do you all participate in? Can you speak to those and how they help students?
5. What do you see as the biggest hurdles in expanding CTE at your school?

Questions for CTE Students

Instructions for focus group lead: Please start by asking everyone to introduce themselves with the first question. Since there are a lot of questions to get through, ask for a few people, not everyone, to answer each of the following questions, asking for different perspectives as needed. Be sure to save at least ten minutes to ask “Important Questions”.

Priority Questions:

1. What year are you, what program are you enrolled in, and why did you choose the program you’re in?
2. How did you learn about the program you are enrolled in now? What was the process of getting enrolled into the program?
3. How has your experience in the classroom been for your CTE classes? How is it different from your other classes?
4. Have you had any work experience as part of your program?
5. If you have a different home school, how do you get to your CTE program and / or to your job (if applicable)?
6. Will you graduate with any certifications/credentials or college credits?
7. What is your plan post-graduation, and how did you develop it? Did you work with a career coach or career counselor to help with this plan?
8. How much do you know about careers in your industry (salary, training paths)? How did you get this information?

Important Questions to Ask with At Least 5 Minutes Left:

1. What would you say is the best thing about your program? What are some of your CTE program’s strengths?
2. If you could change anything in your program, what would it be? What challenges have you faced in your CTE program?
3. Looking back on when you first enrolled in your CTE program, what advice would you give to students who are currently considering CTE as an option?

Additional Questions:

1. Are there any CTE programs you think the school/LEA should offer that it does not now?
2. Have you participated in any competitions or extracurricular activities related to your CTE program? If so, what was your experience like?
3. How well do you feel your CTE program is preparing you for the workforce or further education in your chosen field?
4. How do your family and friends perceive your enrollment in a CTE program, and has their perception changed since you started?
5. How does your school promote CTE programs to students, and what improvements would you suggest to increase awareness and interest?

Questions for Career Counselors/Coaches

Instructions for focus group lead: Please start by asking everyone to introduce themselves with the first question. Since there are a lot of questions to get through, ask for a few people, not everyone, to answer each of the following questions, asking for different perspectives as needed. Be sure to save at least ten minutes to ask "Important Questions."

Priority Questions:

1. How long have you been in your role? What is your background in this role? What is your title? Career Coach? Career Counselor? Something else?
2. How is career counseling organized at your school, and in this district? How do professional school counselors and career coaches work together in your district?
3. Is there a work-based learning coordinator and if so what is their scope of work and how do they interact with career counselors/coaches?
4. How does the career counseling staff stay up-to-date with CTE programming and workforce trends in the LEA and the state?
5. How are students introduced to and informed of CTE programs? Who leads this introduction? How are parents informed about CTE offerings?
6. How are students who change their minds about a program/career path supported?
7. What opportunities are there for career exploration/education in middle school? In high school?
8. How are CTE students supported in planning for post-CCR pathways?
9. How are CTE students supported in making post-graduation plans?

Important Questions to Ask with At Least 5 Minutes Left:

1. What do you see as the strengths of career coaching/career counseling in this school/district? What is going well? What are you celebrating?
2. What do you see as the challenges of career coaching/career counseling in this school/district? What has been a challenge?

Additional Questions:

1. Do you track post-graduation outcomes, such as enrolling in further education /training or entering the workforce?

2. In what ways does the school involve parents and the community in the CTE program?
3. How do you think the CTE guidance could be improved? Is feedback on guidance and support collected from students?
4. Are there issues with students being able to access CTE programs? If so, what are the reasons and what are current strategies to address access issues from your perspective?
5. What do you see as the biggest hurdles in expanding CTE at this LEA?

Questions for School/LEA Leadership

Instructions for focus group lead: Focus groups with School/LEA Leadership are rare since we receive most of this information through the Brief and Orientation. Please start by asking everyone to introduce themselves with the first question. Since there are a lot of questions to get through, ask for a few people, not everyone, to answer each of the following questions, asking for different perspectives as needed. Be sure to save at least ten minutes to ask “Important Questions”.

Priority Questions:

1. How long have you been in your role? What is your background in CTE?
2. From your perspective, what are the strengths of your LEA/school's CTE program, and what have you made the most progress on recently?
3. Can you give us an overview of the structure of CTE programs in your school / LEA? If not addressed, ask about: Dual enrollment, WBL, Range of programs, Application process, Transportation
4. Is there capacity for all interested students to participate in CTE programs? Are there any barriers to enrollment?
5. For those students who are not able to enroll and stay on a waitlist, what's the process for those students? What happens if they don't get off the waitlist?
6. How does the LEA/district update CTE programs? What are some current plans you have for adding new programs, expanding existing programs or eliminating current programs?
7. What are your district's strategies for increasing CTE enrollment and WBL opportunities, particularly apprenticeships?

Important Questions to Ask with At Least 5 Minutes Left:

1. From your perspective, what are the strengths of your LEA/school's CTE program, and what have you made the most progress on recently?
2. What do you see as the key challenges facing your LEA/school now in CTE?
3. Where would you like the LEA to be in five years in regards to CTE?

Additional Questions:

1. Are any CTE teachers earning National Board Certification? If so, have they been able to move into differentiated roles?
2. How do you collaborate with local business and industry and community colleges?

3. Do you have sufficient teachers for current programs? If not, what are the issues in recruiting them?
4. What measures are in place to assess the long-term impact of CTE programs on students' career trajectories and contributions to the local economy?
5. Do certain programs have higher completion rates than others?
6. Are there clear pathways from current CTE programs to community college certificate and degree programs?
7. What strategies are employed to raise awareness and improve perceptions of CTE programs among students, parents, and the broader community?
8. In your opinion, how well does the programming at your school align with key (high-growth, high-wage) industries in your community and statewide?

Appendix D | Glossary and Acronym Guide

Term	Acronym	Definition
Accountability and Implementation Board	AIB	An independent unit of Maryland State government created by the <i>Blueprint for Maryland's Future</i> law to ensure successful implementation of the <i>Blueprint</i> over the multi-year implementation period and achievement of the <i>Blueprint's</i> intended outcomes.
American Job Center	AJC	One-stop centers where job seekers and employers access coordinated workforce services (also sometimes called One-Stops). Every local workforce area has at least one.
Bachelor of Arts	BA	University degree that focuses on liberal arts, humanities, social sciences, languages and culture, and fine arts.
<i>Blueprint for Maryland's Future</i>	<i>Blueprint</i>	A set of policies and dedicated funding that is intended to transform Maryland's early childhood, elementary, and secondary education system to the levels of high-performing systems around the world. The <i>Blueprint</i> became law in 2021 with a 10-year plan to create a world-class public school system by transforming early childhood, K-12, and career readiness, focusing on five key pillars: expanding universal Pre-K; developing high-quality teachers; creating career pathways, including CTE; increasing resources for struggling schools/students; and strong governance/accountability for equity and excellence. The <i>Blueprint</i> aims to ensure every student, regardless of background, achieves college and career readiness through increased funding and systemic changes.
<i>Blueprint's</i> 45% Goal	45% Goal	The <i>Blueprint for Maryland's Future</i> set a goal that by the 2030-2031 School Year, 45% of high school graduates will have completed the high school level of a Registered Apprenticeship or another industry-recognized credential (Md. Ed. Code §21-204). The joint CTE Vision, approved in 2025, updated this goal to specify that the goal would be out of CCR graduating students. This metric is calculated by adding together the high school level of a Registered Apprenticeship completion and the

Term	Acronym	Definition
		IRC attainment rate, divided by the total number of graduating students who are CCR. The CTE Committee is charged with defining the terms that meet the <i>Blueprint's</i> 45% goal. For more information on these policies, visit the GWDB website .
Career and Technical Education	CTE	Courses and learning opportunities in a range of vocations that provide students with the skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary to thrive in their careers.
Career and Technical Student Organization	CTSO	National organizations for middle and high school students in CTE programs that develop real-world activities, competitions, and service projects to prepare students for future careers and higher education.
Career Connected Learning	CCL	A continuum of learning experiences that includes career awareness, career exploration, career preparation, and/or career training through learning. These experiences are connected to learner interests and abilities and industry- or occupation-based needs and expectations.
Career Counseling/Coaching	-	A new initiative within the <i>Blueprint</i> wherein LWDBs, LEAs, and their local community college partner together to provide individualized career counseling to all middle and high school students. Many of the areas have distinguished their career counselors from school counselors by referring to them as career coaches, hence the terminology counseling/coaching is used interchangeably.
Career Ladder	-	A compensation structure enacted by the <i>Blueprint</i> that is developed by an LEA with the input of local school leaders, educators, and union representatives that provides teachers with opportunities to advance in their careers while remaining in the classroom and recognizes high quality school leaders. As teachers advance to higher tiers of the career ladder, educators will take on additional leadership responsibilities.
Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Act	Perkins V	Federal legislation providing funding for CTE in the U.S., aiming to prepare students for high-skill, high-wage jobs by linking academics with technical skills through hands-on training and support for

Term	Acronym	Definition
		special populations, with the latest version being Perkins V (2018) that reauthorized funding and emphasized strong business-industry connections and equity.
Code of Federal Regulations	CFR	The official compilation of federal rules and regulations, including those governing WIOA programs.
Code of Maryland Regulations	COMAR	Official compilation of all administrative regulations issued by agencies of the state of Maryland.
College and Career Readiness	CCR	A student's readiness to succeed in entry-level courses at a postsecondary institution or a professional pathway upon graduation from high school. The State Board of Education defines the College and Career Readiness (CCR) standard, as required by the <i>Blueprint</i> . To view this policy, visit the Maryland Public Schools website .
Comprehensive High Schools	-	Comprehensive high schools are traditional high schools with available CTE programs for students to enroll in.
Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment	CLNA	Local applicants of Perkins V must conduct a comprehensive local needs assessment at least every two years and include it in their local application to be eligible to receive financial assistance. The law requires eligible applicants to describe how their CTE programs are sufficient in size, scope, and quality to meet the needs of all students served by the eligible recipient; and aligned to State, regional, Tribal, or local in-demand industry sectors or occupations identified by the State workforce development board or local workforce development board, including career pathways, where appropriate; or are designed to meet local education or economic needs not identified by State boards or local workforce development boards.
CTE Completers	-	Students who meet all requirements in a state-approved CTE program of study.
CTE Concentrators	-	An individual who has earned at least two credits in a single state-approved CTE program of study.

Term	Acronym	Definition
CTE Framework	-	Under the <i>Blueprint</i> , the CTE Committee is charged with developing a statewide Framework for CTE that prepares students for employment in a diverse, modern economy. Maryland's CTE Framework lays out the State's vision and priorities for CTE and supports the goals of the <i>Blueprint</i> . To view the CTE Framework, visit the CTE website .
CTE Participants	-	An individual who earns not less than one credit in a state-approved CTE program of study.
CTE Program of Study	CTE POS	A structured, multi-year educational pathway connecting high school academics with real-world career skills, allowing students to explore various fields, earn industry certifications and college credits, and gain work-based experience (internships, apprenticeships etc.) for smoother transitions to careers or further education. These programs align academic and technical standards, preparing students for today's dynamic workforce through hands-on career connected learning and partnerships with businesses.
Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services	DPSCS	Maryland state agency that is responsible for overseeing correctional institutions, community supervision, and related public safety programs to protect the public and support rehabilitation.
Division of Rehabilitation Services	DORS	DORS is an agency of MSDE. DORS is composed of the public vocational rehabilitation (VR) employment services program and the Disability Determination Services.
Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning	DWDAL	A division within the Maryland Department of Labor, overseeing Maryland's apprenticeship programs, Maryland Workforce Exchange, correctional education, and other workforce development initiatives.
Dual Enrollment	DE	An opportunity where high school students take college courses for both high school and college credit, often with low or no tuition, though requirements and credit transfer vary by state and institution. Programs can be on-campus, online, or at high schools, sometimes leading to an associate degree alongside a diploma. For the <i>Blueprint</i> -specific policy on dual enrollment, visit the Maryland Public Schools website .

Term	Acronym	Definition
Eligible Training Provider List	ETPL	WIOA mandates that each state have an eligible training provider list (or system, as it is called in Maryland) so the consumer can research career and training options suitable to their interests. ETPL is continuously updated to provide accurate information on currently approved eligible programs of postsecondary providers.
Employment Advancement Right Now	EARN	A Maryland state-funded, competitive workforce development grant program that is industry-led, regional in focus, and a proven strategy for helping businesses cultivate the skilled workforce they need to compete. It is flexible and innovative, designed to ensure that Maryland employers have the talent they need to compete and grow in an ever-changing 21st century economy.
Expert Review Teams	ERT	Created under the <i>Blueprint</i> , these are teams of expert educators and industry leaders who visit schools on scheduled visits to observe, interview, and engage with school faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders. ERTs will review data, conduct a comprehensive school visit, and then identify opportunities for improvement, particularly for implementation related to the <i>Blueprint</i> .
Fiscal Year	FY	Covers a funding period that starts on July 1 and ends on June 30, i.e., fiscal year 2023 (FY23) begins July 1, 2022, and ends June 30, 2023.
Governor's Workforce Development Board	GWDB	The GWDB is Maryland's state workforce development board. State workforce development boards vary in name and structures across the U.S., but they all share statutory responsibilities under the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including serving as the Governor's policy-making body for workforce development, oversight of the state's public workforce development system, and development of the state's workforce development plan. State workforce boards are appointed by the governor and led by private sector business representatives, who make up a majority of the board's membership. Boards also include organized labor; leaders from state agencies responsible for post-secondary education, career and technical education, workforce development and economic

Term	Acronym	Definition
		development; and community organizations. Boards often represent the embodiment of public-private partnerships. Maryland's GWDB serves as the Governor's chief strategy and policy-making body for workforce development by engaging key business, labor, education, community, and State and local government leaders to collaborate and advise the Governor on business-led workforce approaches that advance Maryland's economic competitiveness and build pathways to work, wages and wealth for all Marylanders. Governor Wes Moore's 2023 executive order concerning the GWDB solidifies its leadership role in setting the statewide vision and strategy for workforce development, building partnerships to accelerate implementation of that strategy, and holding Maryland's workforce development system accountable to delivering results.
Graduation Rate	-	The four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate is the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. For any given cohort, students who are entering grade 9 for the first time form a cohort that is subsequently "adjusted" by adding any students who transfer into the cohort later during the next three years and subtracting any students who transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die during that same period. This definition is defined in federal regulation 34 C.F.R. §200.19(b) (1) (a)-(iv).
High School Level of a Registered Apprenticeship	HSLRA	A Registered Apprenticeship (RA) program, approved by the Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Council (MATC), that begins while an apprentice is in high school, and requires that students complete 144 hours of related instruction (RI) and at least 250 hours of paid on-the-job training (OJT) before their high school graduation. Further RA requirements continue post-graduation, in accordance with total program standards approved by MATC. For more information on this policy, please visit the CTE Committee website .

Term	Acronym	Definition
Industry-Recognized Credential	IRC	A formal validation of an individual's skills and/or competencies that align with state or regional in-demand occupations and are recognized by industry and employers. It may be a certification, license, or credential obtained through an assessment process, and is portable and may be stackable. The IRC leads to documented positive employment outcomes, ensures relevance in the labor market, and supports career advancement and economic development for credential holders. An IRC must be approved by the CTE Committee's criteria to meet the definition of counting in the <i>Blueprint's</i> 45% goal. For more information on this policy and which IRCs are currently approved, visit the Maryland Public Schools website .
Labor Market Information	LMI	Data about jobs, wages, hiring trends, and economic conditions used to guide workforce planning and career decisions.
Local Education Agency	LEA	A local school system or school district. Maryland has 24 local education agencies, one for each of the counties and Baltimore City.
Local Workforce Development Board	LWDB	There are 13 local workforce areas in Maryland, each supported by a Local Workforce Development Board. The areas are guided and led by the private industry in the area to meet the current and future hiring needs of their employer community. The local workforce areas build connections between workforce development and economic development by serving as a vehicle for identifying needs and developing and ensuring implementation of an effective workforce strategy. Local workforce areas develop and oversee locally delivered workforce services as well as leverage community resources through their American Job Centers.
Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Council	MATC	An appointed Council that reviews all Registered Apprenticeship sponsor applications and decides if the program meets all the apprenticeship requirements.
Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Program	MATP	A unit within MD Labor's DWDAL that oversees apprenticeship.

Term	Acronym	Definition
Maryland Department of Labor	MD Labor	Maryland state agency that provides job development and employment training to help citizens get the skills and expertise they need to move with the economy into Maryland's future.
Maryland Department of Legislative Services	DLS	Maryland state agency that operates under the policies and directives of the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Delegates, the Legislative Policy Committee, and the Joint Audit Committee. DLS conducts research and drafts legislation for members of the Maryland General Assembly.
Maryland General Assembly	MGA	The legislative body of the state of Maryland, including the House of Delegates and State Senate.
Maryland Higher Education Commission	MHEC	State of Maryland's higher education coordinating board responsible for establishing statewide policies for Maryland public and private colleges and universities and for-profit career schools. MHEC also administers state financial aid programs that affect students on a statewide basis.
Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center	MLDSC	State agency created for the purpose of generating timely and accurate information about student performance that can be used to improve the State's education system and guide decision makers at all levels. To accomplish this task, the MLDS collects and organizes individual-level student and workforce data from all levels of education and the State's workforce.
Maryland State Department of Education	MSDE	State agency overseeing education throughout Maryland.
Maryland Workforce Association	MWA	Association of the 13 Local Workforce Development Board directors that collaborates with the Maryland Department of Labor, GWDB, and other state workforce partners to foster regional and statewide collaboration and sharing of best practices.
Maryland Workforce Exchange	MWE	Online job seeker/workforce services system. It was specifically designed for job seekers, students, case managers, employers, training providers, workforce professionals, and others seeking benefits and services.

Term	Acronym	Definition
Memorandum of Understanding	MOU	A legal document describing the broad outlines of an agreement that two or more parties have reached.
National Board Certification	NBC	Professional certification available in pre-K–12 education that certifies a teacher’s demonstrated ability to positively impact student learning. NBC is administered by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS).
On-the-Job Training	OJT	Hands-on training from an experienced mentor at the job site, focusing on skill and knowledge necessary for occupational proficiency. OJT is a requirement of the Registered Apprenticeship system.
Personally Identifiable Information	PII	
Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment	RESEA	Federally funded program that helps unemployed individuals return to work more quickly by combining eligibility reviews for unemployment insurance with personalized career guidance, job search assistance, and referrals to training and support services.
Registered Apprenticeship	RA	An industry-driven, high-quality career pathway where employers can develop and prepare their future workforce, and individuals can obtain paid work experience, receive progressive wage increases, classroom instruction, and a portable, nationally-recognized credential. Registered Apprenticeships are industry-vetted and approved and validated by the U.S. Department of Labor or a State Apprenticeship Agency. In Maryland, Registered Apprenticeships are approved by the Maryland Department of Labor’s DWDAL in consultation with MATC.
Registered Apprenticeship Programs	RAP	Training programs that combine paid on-the-job training with related classroom instruction. RAPs provide workers with skills and industry-recognized credentials, ensuring quality through registration with USDOL or State Apprenticeship Agencies.
Related Instruction	RI	A systematic form of instruction that teaches technical and academic competencies that apply to the occupation, often in a classroom setting or

Term	Acronym	Definition
		online, for Registered Apprenticeships.
Request for Proposal	RFP	A document issued by an organization to solicit bids from vendors for a project or service. It outlines the project's requirements and evaluation criteria. Vendors submit proposals detailing how they will meet the requirements, including costs and timelines. The RFP process ensures competitive and transparent vendor selection.
School Year	SY	The months of the year during which school is open and attendance at school is required.
Social Security Number	SSN	
Special Populations	-	In Perkins V, special populations demographic groups include the following: (A) individuals with disabilities; (B) individuals from economically disadvantaged families, including low-income youth and adults; (C) individuals preparing for non-traditional fields; (D) single parents, including single pregnant women; (E) out-of-workforce individuals; (F) English learners; (G) homeless individuals described in section 725 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a); (H) youth who are in, or have aged out of, the foster care system; (I) youth with a parent who - (i) is a member of the armed forces (as such term is defined in section 101 (a)(4) of title 10, United States Code); and (ii) is on active duty (as such term is defined in section 101(d)(1) of such title; and (J) migrant students (secondary only).
State Apprenticeship Agency	SAA	State-level entities that oversee and manage apprenticeship programs. They ensure programs meet federal and state standards, provide technical assistance, and promote apprenticeship opportunities to employers and job seekers.
State Determined Performance Level	SDPL	Targets set by states under Perkins V to measure the effectiveness of CTE programs. These performance levels assess how well CTE programs prepare students for postsecondary education and the workforce.
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment	SNAP E&T	Federal program run by states that helps people receiving food assistance (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP]) get job skills, training,

Term	Acronym	Definition
& Training		and work experience to find employment.
Technical Assistance	TA	The process of providing targeted support, such as training or resource sharing, to a specified body.
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	TANF	Federally funded, state-administered program providing temporary cash assistance, job training, and support services (like childcare) to low-income families with children to promote self-sufficiency and economic stability, operating through block grants with flexible state-run programs.
United States Department of Education	USDOE	Federal agency that sets education policy and administers federal funding, working to serve America's students and support state/local systems.
United States Department of Labor	USDOL	Federal agency overseeing labor in the U.S.
Work-Based Learning	WBL	A continuum of activities that occur in part or in whole in the workplace, providing the learner with hands-on, real-world experience. It combines skill development with training opportunities and is a key strategy for developing talent and preparing students for the workforce and evolving labor market.
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act	WIOA	A federal law that aims to strengthen and improve the U.S. workforce system. WIOA provides funding for job training and education programs, promotes workforce development, and ensures that job seekers acquire skills necessary for employment. WIOA also supports employers in finding skilled workers and aligns workforce programs with economic development.
Youth Apprenticeship	YA	An apprentice with a valid Apprenticeship Maryland Program (AMP) agreement submitted by an LEA and their approved employer. AMP Youth Apprentices are not formally Registered Apprenticeships in Maryland. Participants are required to complete at least 450 hours of OJT and 1 credit of approved RI.



Maryland

GWDB CTE COMMITTEE

Governor's Workforce Development Board
Career and Technical Education Committee

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