Maryland
GWDB CTE COMMITTEE

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future Career Counseling Implementation

Summary Analysis of MOUs

Governor's Workforce Development Board
Career and Technical Education Committee

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Executive Summary

Maryland's Career Counseling initiative is a cornerstone of the state's education reform agenda, established under the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*. Launched in July 2023, this initiative represents a unique statewide effort to ensure that every student is prepared for postsecondary education and career success. The program is built on a tri-agency partnership model that brings together Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs), and community colleges. This collaborative approach is designed to leverage the strengths of each partner, foster local innovation, and provide students with meaningful career exploration and planning experiences.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This report captures a snapshot of early-stage implementation of Maryland's career counseling initiative. The analysis examines Maryland's career counseling implementation across five core areas: governance, fiscal management, staffing, training, and delivery models. It also considers early indicators of impact, including student engagement, data systems, and industry partnerships. The analysis highlights effective local strategies while identifying areas where additional state guidance or standardization could strengthen equity, consistency, and overall system impact. The final section offers actionable recommendations for strengthening statewide alignment. The reader should note the report is not an assessment or evaluation of overall programmatic impact, which is targeted to be completed in early 2027.

GROUNDING IN EVIDENCE

This landscape analysis draws on direct evidence from the executed MOUs and addenda—representing all jurisdictions in Maryland—along with 2025 annual reports and 2025 spring check-ins conducted by the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB). Together, these sources provide a credible, representative snapshot of early-stage implementation, capturing current practices, promising innovations, and opportunities for improvement in career counseling across the state.

STATE OF IMPLEMENTATION

Maryland's career counseling system is grounded in a consistent tri-agency structure statewide, though the execution of this model varies across jurisdictions. Collaboration among LEAs, LWDBs, and community colleges is in place, reflecting cross-sector commitment to student success. At the same time, the review surfaced opportunities to clarify decision-making authority and operational standards. By building on existing collaboration and developing shared statewide standards, Maryland can further enhance equity, consistency, and impact of career counseling across regions.

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A key aspect of Maryland's model is its flexibility. The state provides direction and vision, while local partners have the latitude to adapt implementation to their communities' unique needs and resources. This flexibility has fostered a diverse landscape of governance, staffing, and delivery models that reflect local innovation. These differences offer valuable learning opportunities and highlight where greater alignment, and shared guidance can help ensure all students have equitable access to high-quality career counseling services.

KEY FINDINGS

- *Strong Foundations with Local Innovation:* Maryland's tri-agency model provides flexibility for jurisdictions to tailor services to local needs and resources.
- *Gaps in Consistency and Alignment:* High variation across governance, staffing, training, and delivery models can limit program reach and impact.
- *Opportunities to Strengthen Systems:* Standardizing quality expectations, building shared data systems, and professionalizing the career counseling role can help ensure long-term sustainability and equitable outcomes for all students, while preserving flexibility for local adaptation.

LOOKING AHEAD

As Maryland continues to build its career counseling infrastructure, ongoing evaluation and cross-agency collaboration will be essential to realizing the Blueprint's vision: connecting every student—regardless of background or geography—to meaningful career pathways and long-term economic opportunity.

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Methodology

This landscape analysis is based on desk research[1] conducted by Jobs for the Future (JFF) drawing on three sources provided by the State of Maryland: Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), 2025 Annual Reports, and Spring 2025 Check-In Notes from participating jurisdictions participating in meetings with the AIB. These documents were selected for their relevance in illustrating how Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs), and Community Colleges collaborate to deliver career counseling across the state. *It is important to note that this analysis reflects a desk-based review of these sources; it does not include direct feedback from local representatives involved in implementation.*

To identify emerging patterns, the JFF team applied AI-assisted analysis to surface common themes and variations in career counseling activities and impact across jurisdictions. Findings were then reviewed by the JFF team to ensure accurate interpretation and synthesized into actionable categories. The resulting analysis highlights key themes in implementation and impact and distills "criteria for success" based on identified practices and needs.

It is important to note that these criteria may reflect limitations in the data available from the three sources.

Throughout the report, the term "career counselor" is utilized to align with language in the *Blueprint* legislation. The JFF team acknowledges that variations of this term are used throughout the state including "career coach" "career advisor" and "navigator." For the purposes of the report, "career counselor" encompasses all variations.

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[1] Desk Research (also called secondary research): Process of collecting and analyzing information that already exists, such as reports, articles, statistics, and online data, to help build understanding or context without conducting new studies or surveys.

Analysis Overview

The Maryland Governor's Workforce Development Board CTE Committee identified three primary categories to assesses statewide implementation of the career counseling implementation during the January 30, 2025 meeting. These categories include *implementation, impact,* and *long-term student outcomes*. The summary analysis utilizes these categories to distinguish core components of local program delivery.

Implementation: Analysis will review how partners define their shared priorities, roles and responsibilities, and management of resources.

Impact: Analysis will review how partners are monitoring progress and creating a continuous cycle of improvement.

Long-term student outcomes: The sources analyzed do not include long-term student outcomes due to early stages of implementation.

Analysis of the MOUs and annual reports provides insight into how jurisdictions are approaching each of these components. The analysis below reflects the data shared from local partners as they reported on implementation and impact during the 2024-2025 school year.

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Implementation Analysis

As defined during the January 30, 2025 CTE Committee, effective implementation evaluates the scope of the career counseling programs (e.g. funding, hires, description of partners organizations engaged in activities). Based on this lens, the below analysis considers the structural design and governance of the career counseling program within the local jurisdiction. This section elevates commonalities, variations, and identified themes related to governance models, staffing, training, and career counseling delivery models.

GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIPS

All participating jurisdictions operate under a tri-agency governance structure involving LEAs, LWDBs, and community colleges. This foundational model establishes shared responsibility for delivering career counseling services and fosters collaboration among partners. Jurisdictions leverage the strengths of each agency to tailor services to local needs and resources, resulting in a variety of governance, staffing, and delivery models.

Governance models described in the annual reports and MOUs reflect three main variations, which differ primarily in how the career counselors are hired. While the categories below reflect these variations in how career counselors are hired, the reality of implementation is more nuanced. Jurisdictions have staff across the LEA, LWDB, and community college who support career counseling, with roles ranging from direct student-facing counseling to coordination and partnership management. There may be overlap in how functions are defined, reflecting a collaborative approach where multiple partners contribute staff to ensure comprehensive service delivery.

17 LEA-staffed *models have the career counselors hired by the LEA and fully embedded as school staff*:

- LEAs recruit, hire, train and supervise career counselors as employees of the LEA.
- LWDBs contribute their knowledge of career pathway planning, local and regional labor market data, and local business and industry trends. They also support the scaling of work-based learning efforts.
- Community colleges support dual enrollment and provide campus experiences.

5 LWDB-staffed *models have the career counselors hired by the workforce board and serving as contractors engaging with schools*:

- Workforce boards recruit, hire, train, and supervise career coaches. They are employees of the workforce board.
- LEAs provide support with integration of career counselors into the schools, access to student data and career advising platforms.

2 Hybrid staffing *models have career counselors that are hired by both the LEAs and LWDBs with some being hired by the LEA and others as LWDB employees or contractors assigned to the schools*:

- Both LEA and workforce boards hire career counselors with varying roles and responsibilities.
- Local preferences and operational capacity create multiple arrangements between schools and career counselors.

The MOU analysis shows that while collaboration is present, execution varies significantly across jurisdictions and would benefit from clearer decision-making structures. Many MOUs

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do not specify who holds final authority or how disagreements are resolved, leaving decision-making processes undefined. As a result, some jurisdictions experience slower implementation and role ambiguity, even as they celebrate the value of career counseling overall.

Anecdotes from the 2025 annual reports offer additional insight regarding the impact when partnerships are not grounded in clear roles and expectations. Below are observations shared by various jurisdictions:

- Differing work styles and organizational cultures, including individual leadership styles, slowed coordination and impacted scheduling group meetings. Establishing clear expectations and consistent metrics for evaluation of career counselors was central to ensuring consistency and effectiveness across their partnership. Relationships with staff and students were impacted occasionally when coaches did not perform duties as expected. Collaborative development of a job description was a solution implemented to address some of these challenges.
- Struggles with staff turnover and wide-ranging responsibilities for career counselors impact the overall working relationship between partners due to lack of role clarity and consistency.

The structure of governance directly shapes how staffing models are designed and implemented. Decisions about which agency hires, supervises, and trains career counselors flow from the governance agreements between LEAs, LWDBs, and community colleges. As a result, variations in authority and partnership dynamics influence career counselor roles, workloads, and professional supports. Understanding these governance relationships provides essential context for interpreting the staffing models that follow, which reflect how local jurisdictions operationalize shared responsibility on the ground.

STAFFING MODELS

Career counselors are responsible for providing individualized services to students in grades 6-12. Review of their job descriptions and annual reports shows standards for qualifications, professional development, and supervision vary widely across jurisdictions, driven largely by local hiring practices. Several factors influence staffing models, including:

- **Budget allocations**: Funding allocations in some jurisdictions only cover one career counselor. Other jurisdictions have a large team, including one with the budget for 52 coaches.
- **Existing resources at middle or high school**: Some jurisdictions can leverage existing community partners such as Peer Forward, AVID, Junior Achievement, and others to stretch their regional allocation further.
- **Career Counselor Salary Variation**: Jurisdictions vary as to whether the career counselors are LEA employees or LWDB employees. These agencies have vastly different salary schedules which can impact how far the allocations stretch.

Examples from jurisdictions:

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- Some assign counselors to specific grade levels, with counselors supporting middle or high school, but split across multiple schools. For example, middle school counselors are assigned to support up to 4 schools per counselor, while high school counselors have a ratio 1-2 schools. In general, these coaches spend 70-84% of their time providing services to middle and high school students and the remaining time spent collaborating with school colleagues, planning, collecting data, and participating in professional development.
- Integration of AVID-trained teachers and school-based advisory periods into its career readiness strategy, enabling counselors to focus more time on individualized student planning while teachers facilitate foundational career exploration.
- Some assign counselors to split their time across middle and high school. For example, each coach may serve one or two middle schools in addition to a high school assignment. In general, these career counselors spend 10-15% of their time providing services to their middle school students and 50-60% of their time serving their high school students, with the remaining time dedicated to collaborating, planning, collecting data, and professional development.

FISCAL MANAGEMENT

Jurisdictions have adopted a range of staffing and training models to implement career counseling, with noticeable variation in career counselor-to-school ratios, minimum qualifications and job requirements, career counselor salaries, and investment in professional development. These differences demonstrate both the flexibility and inconsistency across the state in operationalizing the model.

Before examining the different models, it's important to understand how career counseling is funded across the state. Local education agencies receive a per pupil allocation of $62+inflation for all enrolled prek-12th grade students each year. This funding is restricted to career counseling program administration and implementation, including the hiring of career counselors. Depending on the governance model, LEAs may retain funding to hire career counselors or distribute funding to the LWDBs to take the lead in hiring. LEAs may also distribute funds to community college partners.

Fiscal systems are a consistent element of Maryland's career counseling initiative. Most jurisdictions have established processes for receiving, allocating, and reporting Blueprint funds, often using a defined disbursement schedule and naming a fiscal agent to oversee financial operations. Consistency in financial management is a key lever to building trust and sustainability across local partnerships.

Despite this statewide investment, budget challenges and local variation remain significant. Differences in local resources, enrollment, and budget priorities mean that some jurisdictions can support large teams of career counselors, while others can fund only one or two positions. Variations in salary costs, local contributions, and reliance on short-term grants further contribute to uneven access and long-term sustainability. These patterns raise questions about funding adequacy and suggest value in a statewide review lens to surface practical approaches for reducing disparities, while preserving local flexibility.

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These funding dynamics shape the scale, consistency, and overall implementation of career counseling across Maryland. Jurisdictions with greater resources benefit from higher local revenues and larger state allocations and can support larger career counseling teams, provide robust professional development, and invest in technology platforms. In contrast, rural and lower-resourced jurisdictions may only be able to fund one or two career counselors, limiting student access, program reach, and the ability to sustain positions long-term or deliver equitable services across all schools.

TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

Qualifications for career counselors vary across jurisdictions, ranging from a minimum of an associate's degree to being a licensed teacher or school counselor. Some jurisdictions require credentials within the first year, while others do not. The variation is primarily driven by the agency hiring career counselors, with LEAs consistently having a higher minimum standard.

There is significant variation in ongoing professional learning and training requirements across the jurisdictions. Training ranges from ad hoc workshops, to requiring an industry-recognized credential in career development, to entering a full apprenticeship program. Training providers vary widely as well; some jurisdictions hire staff to support the planning and development of career counselors, others rely on the workforce board to facilitate training, and some utilize industry-recognized credentials to ensure quality training. Most jurisdictions mandate both initial and ongoing training for compliance and professional development. Given this variation, it may be useful to consider a shared process for developing and updating statewide training modules, drawing on local best practices while allowing for jurisdiction-level adaptation.

Examples of trainings offered:

- **Industry Credentials:** Career counselors may be required to earn credentials such as the Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF), Certified Career Services Provider (CCSP), or the Workforce Development Professional certification within the first year of employment.

- **School-Based Training**: All jurisdictions provide mandatory training on school-specific topics such as safety protocols, Title IX compliance, and special education.

- **Workforce Board Training**: Several jurisdictions identify their workforce board as the lead for providing ongoing training for the career counselors.

- **Professional Development Cadence:** Ongoing opportunities vary in frequency and structure, without consistent expectations across jurisdictions.
    - Examples of activities from unique jurisdictions:
        - Hosts a summer conference for career counselors
        - Career counselors participate in Career Coach professional development sessions, which are designed to align coaching practices

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across jurisdictions and reinforce shared standards for post-CCR pathway advising.

Several jurisdictions face critical retention challenges, often linked to compensation misalignment, lack of role clarity, and mismatches in organizational fit. Attrition in the role disrupted service delivery and underscored the need for more strategic alignment in staffing practices.

DELIVERY MODELS AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Maryland's career counseling initiative employs a range of delivery models to meet the diverse needs of students across the state. Career counselors provide direct services to students through two major structures. Career counselors "push in" to core academic classes to provide grade-appropriate career exploration lessons or universal assessments. Counselors also implement tiered supports to fulfill the individualized counseling requirement. Like other aspects of the model, implementation varies based on school scheduling, career counselor capacity, and local resources. Some schools are limited to classroom presentations, events, and field trips, while some schools layer in expectations for one-on-one advising, preparation for work-based learning, and family engagement. These variations can impact the career counselor's ability to tailor programming and advising in line with a student's individual strengths and interests. Given this variation, it may be useful to consider a statewide menu of delivery models with guidance on adapting them to local contexts, providing a common frame while preserving local choice.

Student engagement activities span a continuum from self-awareness in middle school to practical preparation for postsecondary pathways in high school. Across jurisdictions, the most consistently implemented activities center on career interest assessments and self-awareness tools that help students identify their strengths, preferences, and potential career paths early on. Common examples include the RAISAC Career Interest Inventory**,** YouScience**,** and Naviance assessments, which form the foundation for individualized advising and pathway planning. Other activities include:

- Job shadowing with local businesses and organizations
- Internship preparation, especially for upper-grade students
- Mock interviews and résumé workshops with community professionals
- Career fairs and industry tours

Local Practice Examples:

- Grade-level "Scope and Sequence" links classroom lessons, assessments, and career goals.
- Blending push-in classroom instruction with small-group and one-on-one sessions, allowing flexible depth of support. This three-tier system includes: Tier 1 as Xello software for all students, Tier 2 as small group meetings and field trips based on shared interests, and Tier 3 as one-on-one meetings with career counselors and school counselors.

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- Utilizing a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) model to structure advisement and target students with greater need for one-on-one support.

Maryland's flexible approach to career counseling has allowed local districts to design delivery models that reflect their unique student populations, partnerships, and community assets. However, implementation of "individualized" career counseling remains an area of ongoing clarification. While the tri-agency partners reached a shared working definition earlier in 2024, it is not yet clear whether the AIB will maintain this definition when finalizing statewide metrics guidance (anticipated in late 2025). Many LEAs do track student-level advising activity, but reporting categories in the AIB's annual template may not fully capture these data. In several jurisdictions, high counselor caseloads limit the feasibility of providing one-on-one sessions for every student, reinforcing the need for a balanced definition of "individualized" that reflects both quality and capacity. Additionally, AIB guidance has clarified that career coaches should not be responsible for placing students in work-based learning opportunities, underscoring the importance of distinct but coordinated roles across the tri-agency partnership.

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Impact Analysis

In the context of Maryland's career counseling initiative, impact refers to the effectiveness of a given career counseling program as seen through measurable changes in student engagement, career readiness, and postsecondary planning as a result of career counseling activities. Impact is assessed through both quantitative metrics (e.g., participation rates, pathway selection, credential attainment) and qualitative evidence (e.g., student feedback, case studies).

The statewide initiative is in its early years of implementation; therefore, available data on student outcomes is limited but growing. Jurisdictions were asked to report available data this year. Below is a snapshot of the metrics and the number of jurisdictions currently able to report on these metrics.

Has career counseling adequately prepared students for post-CCR pathways?

% of students who completed career readiness assessment	17 jurisdictions reported for both MS and HS
Student self-reported confidence levels in career readiness	18 jurisdictions reported for MS
# of students participating in individualized counseling sessions	11 jurisdictions reported for MS and HS
# of students completing a 6-year plan	8 jurisdictions reported for MS and HS
# of students who participated in career exploration activities	16 jurisdictions reported for MS and HS
# of students who identify post-CCR pathway preferences	12 jurisdictions reported for HS
% of students applying to postsecondary education, career training, or RA	12 jurisdictions reported for HS

DATA SYSTEMS AND ACCOUNTABILITY FISCAL MANAGEMENT

Maryland's data collection systems for career counseling are still evolving, with jurisdictions using different platforms and definitions that complicate statewide aggregation. Measuring the impact of career counseling programs on long-term outcomes—such as graduation, postsecondary enrollment, and employment—will require additional years of consistent tracking. As the initiative matures, continued investment in unified data systems and longitudinal evaluation will be critical to fully demonstrate its value.

Maryland's career counseling initiative relies on data collection and reporting to monitor program implementation and impact. Jurisdictions use a variety of technology platforms—such as Naviance, Xello, Pathful, and SchooLinks—to track student participation, career assessments, and pathway selection. These systems help coaches tailor programming to individual student interests. One jurisdiction has identified a way to track students' evolving career interests over time through their Google AppSheet system. This is a potential

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method to show student impact as they engage more deeply in career exploration activities.

Privacy compliance is front and center, with jurisdictions uniformly referencing FERPA and HIPAA requirements. However, MOUs show that data collection is still in its early phases. Jurisdictions are still identifying ways to capture the metrics included in the April legislative update and they express concerns about data sharing rules and best practices, data management protocols, and how to monitor program implementation. As a result, there is limited statewide alignment on data sharing and feedback loops, and data-driven decision-making varies across jurisdictions.

The state has an opportunity to explore ways to strengthen data collection through use of data sharing agreements, data dictionaries, and clear guidance on data privacy. Given this landscape, it may be useful to consider a phased approach to building unified data systems—starting with common definitions and governance, then piloting light-touch exchanges, and integrating platforms where feasible.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACT

As jurisdictions implement career counseling models under the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, the depth and quality of student participation provide early signals of program effectiveness. While this section is not focused on data systems or accountability structures, it is closely tied to important career counseling metrics—such as career readiness assessments, pathway selection, and work-based learning participation. Understanding how students engage with career counseling services provides valuable insight into equitable access, delivery, and the potential for long-term impact.

Jurisdictions report that delivering career counseling in high schools presents unique challenges, including scheduling constraints, larger student populations, and limited precedents for integrating career programming. Transportation barriers—particularly in rural areas—can also restrict access to experiential learning opportunities.

Analysis of MOUs and annual reports reveals several key insights:

- **Participation is high, but data depth varies**: Most jurisdictions report strong engagement in foundational career exploration activities such as career assessments and classroom presentations. However, data on deeper engagement experiences—such as internships, apprenticeships, or credential attainment—remain limited. This is partly due to the AIB's annual reporting template, which did not require jurisdictions to report disaggregated work-based learning (WBL) outcomes. Instead, the template focused on broader indicators, such as the percentage of 12th graders with identified post-graduation plans (e.g., apprenticeship, college, employment, military, or service year). Several reports did not include these data, reflecting both reporting inconsistencies and gaps in local data systems. The robustness of career coaching data collection is variable across jurisdictions, underscoring the need for more consistent metrics and integrated systems for tracking student participation and outcomes.

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- **Pathway selection is a key milestone**: The percentage of students who select and persist in a post-CCR pathway is emerging as a central indicator of impact. This milestone reflects both student agency and the importance of career counseling in guiding informed decision-making.
- **Equity remains a priority**: Jurisdictions are increasingly disaggregating engagement data by student subgroup (e.g., race, income, geography, language, disability). While comprehensive equity metrics are still in development, this trend reflects a growing commitment to ensuring all students benefit from career counseling services.
- **Qualitative impact is emerging**: Student and family feedback indicate increased awareness of career options and improved confidence in postsecondary planning. However, these outcomes are not yet measured systematically across the state.

These insights suggest that student engagement is both a reflection of implementation quality and a lever for continuous improvement. As Maryland continues to refine its career counseling model, elevating student voice and tracking engagement across a continuum of experiences will be essential to realizing the Blueprint's vision of equitable, high-impact career readiness for all.

INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

Industry engagement is a vital component of Maryland's career counseling initiative, offering students a spectrum of experiences that range from introductory, exploratory activities to deeper, sustained engagements with employers. Both "light touch" opportunities—such as career fairs, guest speakers, and short-term job shadowing—and more intensive, ongoing relationships—like internships, apprenticeships, and multi-year collaborations—play important roles in helping students explore career options, build professional networks, and develop real-world skills.

Across the state, the depth, consistency, and coordination of industry partnerships vary significantly. Some jurisdictions have established robust, ongoing relationships with local employers and industry groups, providing students with regular access to work-based learning and career development opportunities. Others rely more heavily on episodic or exploratory experiences, which still offer valuable exposure and can spark student interest in new fields. Given this variability, it may be useful to consider a statewide convening of employer partners and education/workforce stakeholders to share best practices and co-develop common engagement protocols, while preserving local relationships and flexibility.

Several factors influence the nature and strength of these partnerships, including:

- *Existing relationships* between employers, LEAs, and LWDBs.
- *Geography*, with urban and suburban jurisdictions often having greater access to a diverse employer base, while rural jurisdictions often face challenges due to limited local industries.
- *Communication and coordination*, as some jurisdictions report difficulties in aligning outreach efforts among LEAs, LWDBs, and community colleges.

Examples of partnership models include:

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- **Healthcare Partnerships:** One jurisdiction runs a "Camp Scrubs" summer program, developed with a local hospital and college, provides hands-on healthcare career exploration for students in grades 6–12.
- **Business Specialist Roles:** Another jurisdiction created a dedicated position to strengthen employer engagement and expand opportunities for students.
- **Nonprofit Collaborations:** Partnerships with organizations like Junior Achievement bring structured career programming to middle and high school students across several jurisdictions.
- **Supporting Diverse Learners:** One jurisdiction's "Pathway and Possibilities Night" and Talbot County's collaboration between Family Navigators and career counselors ensure multilingual learners and newcomers have equitable access to industry experiences.
- **Employer Engagement Approach:** Another jurisdiction designates its workforce board partner to maintain a shared employer list and manage outreach efforts to ensure employers are not approached by multiple agencies simultaneously.

By supporting both exploratory and sustained engagement, Maryland's career counseling initiative seeks to ensure that all students have meaningful connections to the world of work. Expanding these opportunities statewide will require continued investment in effective partnership models and strategies to address geographic and resource disparities. Strengthening employer engagement—from light-touch interactions to deeper, sustained partnerships—will further enhance career counseling efforts across the state.

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Recommendations for State Consideration

The following recommendations are offered by Jobs for the Future (JFF) based on the findings and themes outlined in this analysis. While these recommendations are not formal positions of the Governor's Workforce Development Board (GWDB), they reflect JFF's synthesis of evidence and promising practices identified across Maryland jurisdictions. Importantly, we recognize that the state has already begun to consider and act on several of these recommendations. These suggestions are intended to support ongoing efforts to strengthen Maryland's career counseling system and are closely aligned with the key findings:

- *Strong Foundations with Local Innovation:* Maryland's tri-agency model provides flexibility for jurisdictions to tailor services to local needs and resources.
- *Gaps in Consistency and Alignment:* High variation across governance, staffing, training, and delivery models can limit program reach and impact.
- *Opportunities to Strengthen Systems:* Standardizing quality expectations, building shared data systems, and professionalizing the career counseling role can help ensure long-term sustainability and equitable outcomes for all students, while preserving flexibility for local adaptation.

TRI-AGENCY GOVERNANCE

1. **Clarify roles and responsibilities:** Analysis of MOUs and county practices suggests that success is less dependent on which governance model is used (LEA-led, LWDB-led, or hybrid) and more dependent on whether each agency's role is clearly defined and consistently understood. To support statewide consistency while preserving local flexibility, the state can support this by developing minimum standards or templates for MOUs that clarify decision-making authority, role contributions, and conflict resolution protocols. One jurisdiction's tri-agency governance model offers a promising example of shared accountability and operational clarity, with each partner contributing distinct strengths and engaging in regular coordination.

2. **Encourage regular, structured communication across sectors:** Jurisdictions that hold recurring meetings among agency leads report stronger alignment and more agile responses to implementation challenges. The state could consider recommending structured communication protocols or regular convenings to support ongoing coordination and peer learning across agencies.

3. **Strengthen state guidance and support:** Many jurisdictions expressed a desire for clearer direction from the state on minimum standards for roles, staffing, metrics, and accountability. The state can play a stronger role in defining and sharing best practices—from hiring to implementation to progress monitoring—by providing

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additional guidance, exemplars, and technical assistance. Regularly elevating and disseminating promising practices could further promote consistency, clarity, and continuous improvement across local models.

STAFFING AND TRAINING FOR CAREER COACHES

1. **Strengthen alignment of skills and qualifications:** In partnership with Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and workforce partners, develop state-supported guidance that articulates the core competencies, skills, and professional learning expectations for career coaches. Establishing shared expectations—not prescriptive hiring mandates—would promote consistency in quality and readiness across jurisdictions while respecting local hiring authority. Such guidance can help reduce variation in staffing practices, support professional growth for current coaches, and advance greater equity in service delivery statewide.

2. **Ensure consistent professional learning and training:** The current variation in learning and training practices highlights the need for consistent, high-quality standards that prepare career counselors to work effectively with students. The state may consider developing or endorsing core training modules aligned with the Maryland Career Development Framework[2] and CCR standards, while allowing for local adaptation.

3. **Strengthen equity and transparency in resource allocation:** Jurisdictions that strategically align available resources—considering existing school supports, counselor roles, and time distribution—tend to demonstrate more consistent service delivery. The state can play a supportive role by developing benchmarking tools and guidance that help local partners analyze and compare resource-to-need ratios, rather than prescribing uniform standards. Sharing these insights across jurisdictions can promote more equitable, data-informed decisions that improve access and consistency while respecting local funding realities.

4. **Continue to evaluate budget needs:** Ongoing assessment of funding adequacy and equity can help ensure all students have access to high-quality career counseling. Jurisdictions would benefit from state-provided technical assistance to maximize resources, and targeted investments could support equitable access regardless of geography or local resources.

CAREER COUNSELING DELIVERY MODELS

1. **Align resource allocations with middle and high school needs:** Effective local models differentiate delivery based on student population and school structure. High schools often require additional coordination, flexible scheduling, and transportation

[2] Maryland State Department of Education. (Revised August 2022). *Maryland Career Development Framework for College and Career Readiness: Grades Pre-K – Postsecondary/Adult*. Retrieved from https://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Documents/CTE/CDFrameworkAugustRevised2022.pdf

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solutions and would benefit from targeted supports and guidance to address these challenges.

2. **Clarify definitions of individualization requirements:** Clear definitions of individualization—whether through universal lessons, small group work, or intensive counseling—would help inform appropriate career counselor-to-school ratios and ensure sustainable service delivery. In addition to guidance, the state can create a clear framework to support consistent implementation and allocation of resources.

3. **Strengthen equity goals:** While equity is a stated value across local MOUs, the state should assess funding mechanisms and resource allocations to operationalize equity across the state. One example would be the difference in funding available for data collection tools in less populated jurisdictions. In addition, the state may encourage tri-agency partners to include measurable engagement benchmarks or required student touchpoints in their MOUs, enabling the tracking and analysis of equitable access and impact.

DATA SYSTEMS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1. **Establish data governance standards:** In 2025, the state provided guidance on metrics and began to capture student outcome data in annual reports submitted to the AIB. Review of those outcomes shows that most districts are still identifying data sources and aligning our tracking methods to the newly defined metrics. Additionally, MOUs and 2025 spring check in notes show that most jurisdictions seek guidance in developing data systems and agreements to manage and share data effectively. Clearer governance structures – covering data ownership, access, and use – would strengthen coordination across agencies and ensure consistency in reporting. The state could support this by creating a shared data policy with standards, expectations around roles of tri-agency partners when it comes to data tracking and sharing, and by providing templates and guidance for FERPA and HIPAA compliance to streamline data-sharing and improve data quality across partners.

2. **Align data elements with desired student outcomes:** Standardizing data elements and definitions across jurisdictions —and aligning them to the Maryland Career Development Framework—would enable consistent evaluation of program effectiveness and support evidence-based decision-making.

3. **Develop statewide dashboards to promote transparency and improvement:** Creating shared dashboards with standardized data inputs would allow the state and local partners to monitor student engagement, outcomes, and work-based learning participation in real time. This visibility would make continuous improvement more organic and data-driven across all levels of implementation.

4. **Link fiscal incentives to student engagement and outcomes:** The state could strengthen accountability by integrating performance measures into fiscal reporting. Linking student engagement and outcomes to financial incentives will

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push for greater accountability and foster innovative solutions to strengthen program delivery and partnership. This would also help ensure funding decisions are directly tied to impact and equity goals.

5. **Provide guidance on dual-purpose career advising platforms:** Platforms such as Naviance, Xello, Schoolinks, and Pathful serve dual purposes—as tools for student engagement and data collection. Strategic guidance on platform selection, implementation, and integration will increase data consistency while preserving local flexibility.

INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

1. **Strengthen supports and resources for employer engagement:** The state could offer guidance and models for identifying an employer or industry engagement lead within each tri-agency partnership and standardizing outreach roles in local MOUs. Establishing clear points of contact and consistent engagement protocols would create a more streamlined experience for employers and help jurisdictions build sustained partnerships that provide meaningful students experiences aligned with regional workforce needs.

2. **Target resource allocation to address geographic challenges:** Geography can impact access to quantity and diversity of employers and industry-types. It can also impact transportation access and increase coordination challenges. These issues look different across rural, suburban and urban areas, but consideration of resource allocations and guidance regarding use of allocations can support jurisdictions addressing these barriers. Guidance examples might include virtual engagement platforms, regional partnership models or increased school-based experiences.

3. **Leverage and scale local success and innovation:** Jurisdictions that demonstrate success through strong employer partnerships and creative solutions provide valuable models for others. The state may consider developing mechanisms to identify, document, and scale these effective practices across similar regions.

Conclusion

Maryland's tri-agency career counseling initiative has fostered a dynamic and evolving landscape of local practices, with jurisdictions demonstrating innovation in governance, staffing, delivery models, and industry partnerships. The 2025 MOUs show clear progress toward greater transparency and shared accountability—introducing more detailed structures for staffing, delivery, data sharing, and fiscal management that strengthen partnerships and clarify implementation. Together, these local advancements have established a strong foundation and surfaced promising strategies for engaging students and building career readiness.

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Looking ahead, Maryland can build on this momentum by scaling effective local practices, connecting implementation details more directly to impact, and continuing to strengthen MOUs to reinforce clarity around roles, responsibilities, and shared goals. With targeted state guidance on quality standards, data systems, and professional development—and a continued balance between local flexibility and coordinated state support—Maryland is well positioned to advance a cohesive, equitable, and high-performing career counseling system that connects every student to meaningful pathways and lifelong opportunity.

Coming Soon

Two companion reports will be released in 2026, developed by JFF in partnership with the Governor's Workforce Development Board and CTE Committee, Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Workforce Association and the Accountability Implementation Board to guide Maryland's continued progress toward a coordinated and equitable career counseling system.

Best Practices Report

This report builds on the current analysis to highlight effective practices and replicable models emerging statewide. Drawing on insights from focus groups with more than 69 stakeholders representing nearly every jurisdiction, it will identify actionable strategies to strengthen tri-agency collaboration, enhance service quality, and advance equitable outcomes. The report is designed for state and local leaders across LEAs, LWDBs, and community colleges implementing *Maryland's Blueprint for the Future* vision for high-quality career coaching.

Maryland Career Counseling Framework

The framework will provide a structured guide for state and local action, outlining three developmental stages—Coordination, Collaboration, and Integration—that describe both a path for system growth and the qualities of an equitable, high-performing statewide network. Grounded in strong governance, the framework will clarify roles and expectations among state partners while supporting local flexibility to design models that meet community needs. It serves as both a roadmap for continuous improvement and a common language for building a connected, high-performing statewide network.

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References

- 2025 Implementation Reports
- 2024 and 2025 MOUs
- 2025 Check-In Notes

Maryland

GWDB CTE COMMITTEE

Governor's Workforce Development Board
Career and Technical Education Committee

www.gwdb.maryland.gov