



# Georgia **Alignment** Toolkit

Resources for Connecting **Education** and **Business**



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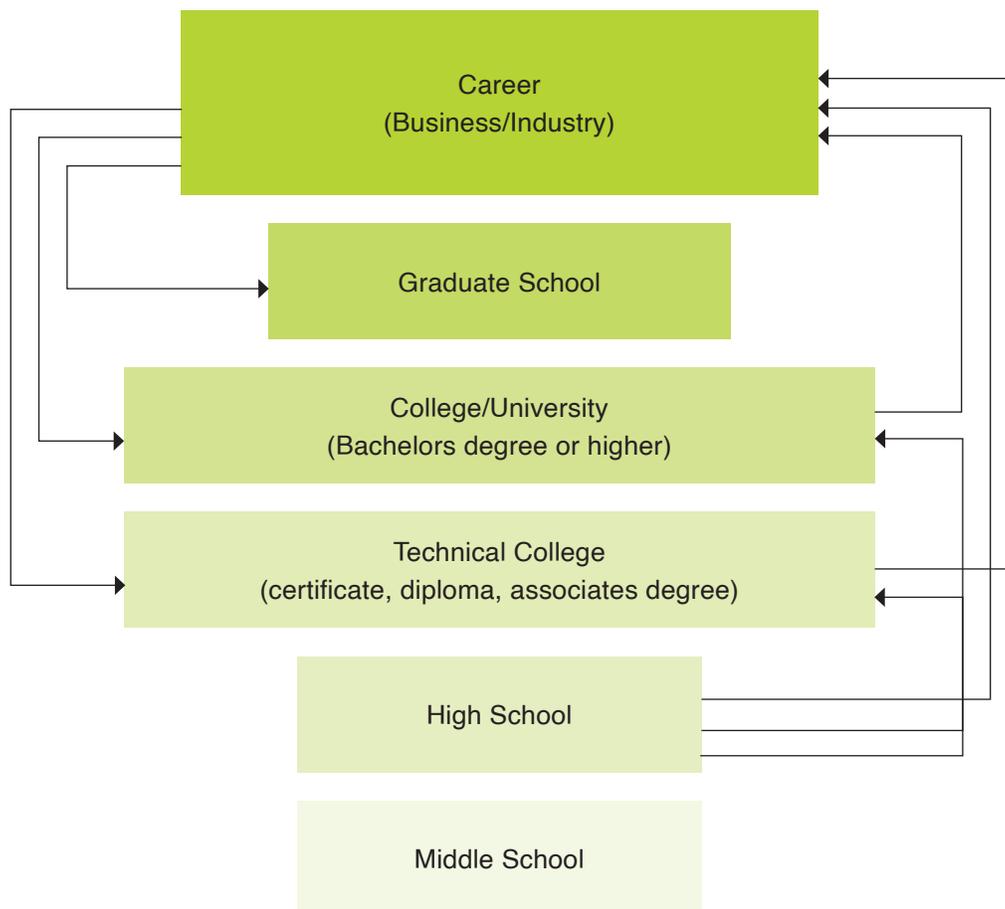
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## Section One

# What is Alignment?

Alignment is the process by which education and local employers match Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) pathways with workforce skills needs. Alignment means that CTAE pathways prepare students for jobs in their local economy. Proper alignment of community needs and CTAE pathways ensures that local workforce concerns are more likely to be addressed and can help schools, private employers, and students each maximize their returns from their investments in workforce education.

**Figure 1. Career Pathway Pipeline**



In secondary education in Georgia, a career pathway is a set of three related CTAE courses. Georgia currently has over 140 career pathways organized into 17 career clusters. You may already have multiple pathways in your high school(s) and programs in middle school(s) to prepare students to understand the pathways offered and what education and jobs can result from those pathways. But are students then furthering their studies in that subject? In postsecondary education—Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), University System of Georgia (USG), or private institutions—aligned courses follow on and add to the knowledge and skills gained during pathways in high school. Aligned pathways offer multiple exit points, seamless transitions from one level of education to the next, and industry-recognized credentials. Figure 1 on page 2 shows a career pathway pipeline, including those transitions and multiple exit points.

The mission of CTAE is to provide Georgia students with high-quality educational programs, career pathways, and experiences that prepare them for workplace success. Through CTAE, students see the relevance of their high school efforts to their future career goals .... One of these accomplishments is the graduation rate of 96% for CTAE completers as compared to 80.6% for Georgia’s overall graduation rate.<sup>1</sup>

Aligning academic offerings with the needs of local employers involves creating clear course sequences to provide students with the most desired skills and knowledge as employees. Alignment ensures that students learn a specific skillset in a prescribed sequence, and it is critical to creating strategies to “generate and retain an educated population capable of driving economic growth.”<sup>ii</sup> If the student chooses to pursue postsecondary education prior to entering the workforce, alignment ensures that the student is prepared for that coursework and has taken the necessary prerequisites.

Using alignment to move students more efficiently from high school to a career, either directly from high school or after postsecondary education, is part of a larger comprehensive economic or community development plan for creating a competitive workforce now and in the future. Your local workforce must be able to meet current and future demand from existing and potential new employers. According to the magazine *Area Development*<sup>iii</sup>, the availability of skilled labor and a skilled labor force have consistently been top site selection factors.

Alignment does not necessarily mean starting a new pathway for a particular industry or employer, but it involves evaluating existing pathways to ensure that students and employers are seeing intended returns. Alignment is about using limited resources in your community to prepare students for success after graduation. The best place to start is to evaluate your current pathway offerings together with current and potential local employment opportunities. As you evaluate the current situation, you may consider some of the following questions:

- ⚙️ Are you preparing your students for current jobs and possible future jobs?
- ⚙️ Do the educational opportunities offered in your community allow for seamless transitions to each step of the educational ladder and eventually to jobs in your community?
- ⚙️ How many of your past students have gone on to employment locally after taking courses in a pathway meant to prepare them for that job?
- ⚙️ Are local companies hiring for positions that your pathway is meant to prepare them for?

## What is a Regional Economy?

While you may live or work in a specific city or county, your community is part of a regional economy. That region may incorporate other cities, towns, counties, or even parts of other states.

As you consider pathways and programs, you must look at the larger regional economy in which your school or district is situated. Where do the workers go every day to work? In some rural areas, they may travel further distances than in a more urban environment. Therefore, a rural region may be geographically large with a smaller population, while an urban area may be geographically smaller but with a large population. Your region may be defined by a governmental organization—say, the regional commission or a metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area. Your region may be defined more informally, such as several counties that share common interests.

Throughout this toolkit, we use the term “local” to refer to your region and the employers—both business and industry—that recruit and employ workers from your area. Local to you may be within your city/town, county, or a multicounty region, or all three. Develop an alignment strategy that fits the region in which your school district is located.

Alignment is not just a one-time event or process. Employers can come and go, and their needs change. Together with your alignment partners, you should examine the number and quality of the jobs that students are getting, how the skills required for those jobs change, the relevance of pathway and other academic offerings, and the skills needs of those employers. How have those changed recently? How are they likely to change? How do they need to change to keep up with the evolution of the local job market?

As Stephen Covey highlights in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, you should “begin with the end in mind”—employment—and work backwards to understand the academic path, competencies, experiences, and credentials that students need to achieve that goal<sup>iv</sup>. But that goal cannot be achieved without information being shared both ways: educational partners need to help businesses understand what they currently provide and what they can provide in the future, and businesses need to help educators understand what they need now and will need in the future. Engaging with your local chamber of commerce, development authority, and other economic development groups can help with this facilitation, and they should be part of the conversation. These groups may share information about future jobs that you did not already know.

Aligning pathways to the local economy requires a number of resources, tools, and actions. Alignment does not occur by chance but is an intentional effort by educators, district leadership, business partners, and others in the community or region. This toolkit is intended to provide you with the resources you need to begin your alignment efforts. It will help you bring together the appropriate partners to ensure students can gain employment and move on to postsecondary education, and that local employers are able to hire workers from the local area who are equipped with desired skills and knowledge.



## Perkins V

The federal Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (commonly called Perkins V) was signed into law in 2018. The law updates the policies and procedures for federal funding to support CTAE, including a change relevant to alignment. Perkins V requires each district to complete a comprehensive local needs assessment (CLNA) to support the local application for funds process. The CLNA process involves consulting with stakeholders (e.g., local industry, economic development organizations, workforce boards, student advocates) and reviewing performance data, labor market alignment, and program operations.

Visit the Association for Career and Technical Education Perkins V information page at [acteonline.org/perkins-implementation](https://acteonline.org/perkins-implementation) for additional resources.

For more information about the implementation of Perkins V in Georgia or for more resources to assist in the local needs assessment process please contact your GaDOE CTAE Region Coordinator.

## Section Two

# Alignment Partners

Ensuring appropriate alignment with postsecondary and business partner's needs requires collaboration and starts with gathering these stakeholders. Each partner has a vested interest in ensuring alignment between education and career: educational institutions want their students to succeed after graduation, and employers want to have access to the best talent. Once you have gathered your partners, you will need to conduct a needs assessment to determine what needs are being met and where you may be falling short. More information on the needs assessment can be found on page 8. You need partners at the table to help you conduct this assessment and establish strategies for aligning your curricula and programs to stakeholder needs. **You cannot and should not do this alone.** There are specific partners at each step along the career pathway pipeline (Figure 1 on page 2). Descriptions of each of these partners are provided.

### CTAERN Advisory Committee Training

CTAE Resource Network–Advisory Committee Training:

The CTAE Resource Network offers a one-day advisory committee training course to help school districts and programs build and strengthen their district and program advisory committees.

The course teaches CTAE professionals how to build, use, and sustain their advisory committees. Visit [ctaern.org](https://ctaern.org) for more information and to view available classes.

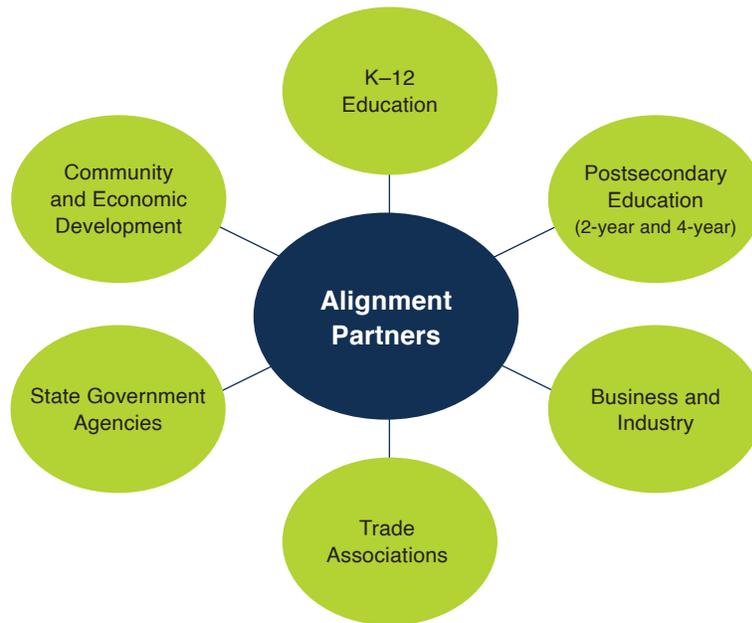
### Additional Economic Development Resources

Interested in learning more about economic development and/or earning economic credentials for your community?

Check out this video about economic development and education: <https://t.uga.edu/9ur>.

Visit [Georgia Certified Economic Developer Program \(uga.edu\)](https://uga.edu) for more information.



**Figure 2. Alignment Partners**

### **K-12 Education**

Include all K-12 stakeholders who may be impacted by the outcome of the needs assessment process, such as teachers, school counselors, CTAE directors, work-based learning coordinators, career coaches, and middle school educators and counselors. You may also consider taking a multidistrict/regional approach to your analysis and planning efforts.

### **Postsecondary Education**

Representatives from local institutions, including TCSG, USG, and private institutions, should be included in the process. The exact representative will vary depending on the school and program.

### **Employers**

Including local and regional employers is pivotal to making alignment work. If you need help identifying employers in your community, ask your community and economic development partners to help make those connections.

### **Trade Associations**

Depending on the particular pathway, it may be important to include local, state, or national trade associations. Trade associations can provide many resources that others may not be able to provide, including associations that have existing curricula or information that can be helpful during the needs assessment.

### **State Government Agencies**

Many agencies have resources that you can use in your needs assessment, or they can put you in touch with the right resources or partners to assist in your alignment efforts.

### **Community and Economic Development**

Each community has its own community and economic development organizations. Some of the common representatives in this category are members of the chamber of commerce, members of the economic development council or authority, utility representatives, members of workforce boards, and community development corporation members.

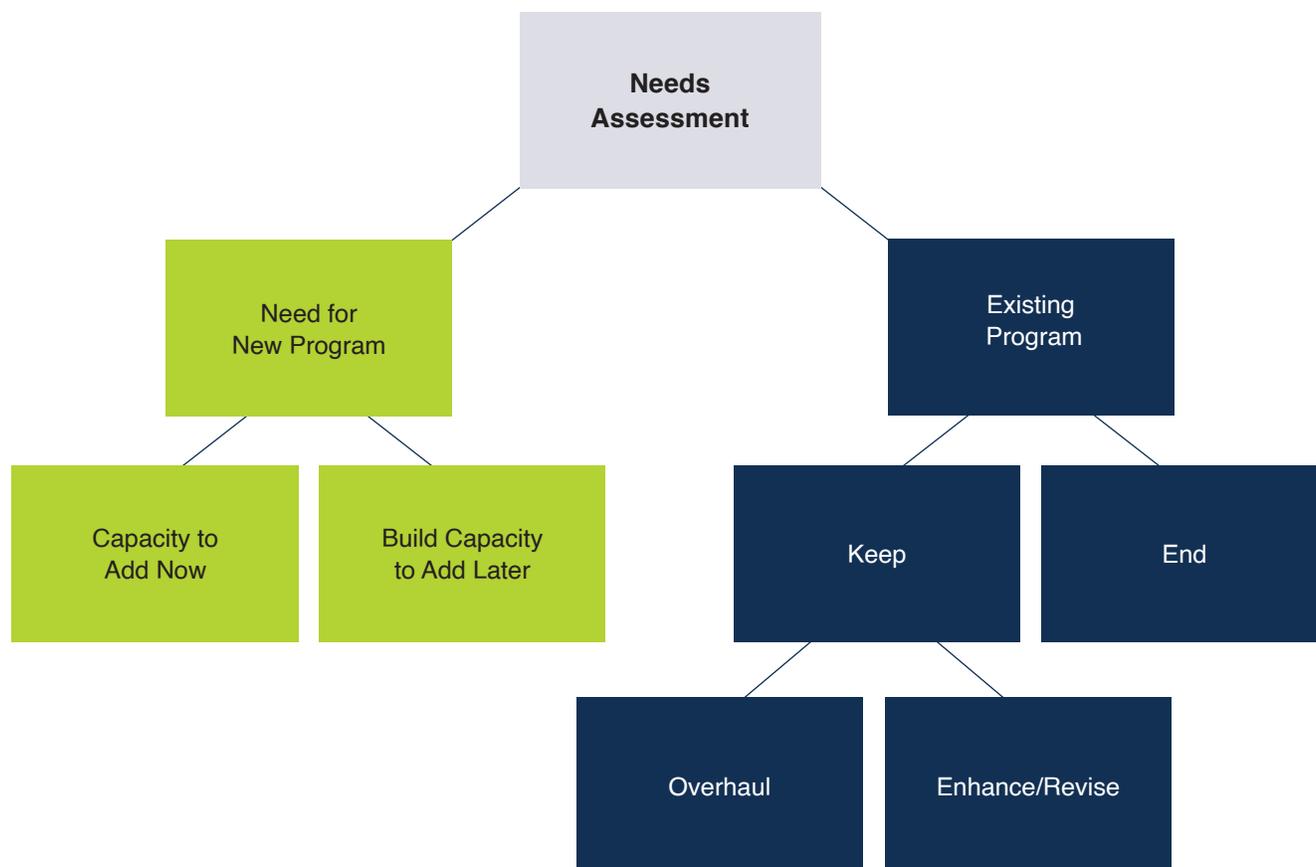
## Section Three

# Needs Assessment

Alignment starts with a needs assessment, which will drive your decision making. This assessment is the basis for understanding whether to keep or eliminate an existing program or if local needs require an entirely new program. At the most basic level, the needs assessment is about collecting information from and about employers and employment patterns in your region regarding hard-to-fill jobs and skills shortages. This process may involve interviews with businesses, conversations with local economic development professionals, surveys of business partners, and a review of relevant labor market information. It will help to identify key industries, high-demand jobs, and opportunities for the school system to plug into local workforce development needs.

Your needs assessment will lead down one of several paths, as highlighted in Figure 3 below. For example, imagine that your district launches a needs assessment process and focuses on reviewing its existing programs. You decide that your computer science pathway is largely meeting industry needs. However, based on feedback from employers, you decide to overhaul several parts of it, including the curriculum and the end-of-pathway assessment, and create opportunities for experiential learning.

**Figure 3. Needs Assessment Flow Chart**



## Needs Assessment Approaches

Three approaches can be used to conduct a needs assessment process. Some communities use more than one approach, such as combining a needs assessment meeting with targeted follow-up interviews to capture missing voices.

**Needs Assessment Meeting.** This approach to gathering information focuses on getting various partners (e.g., business leaders, school leaders, community and economic development leaders) in the room for short presentations and discussion. Discussion topics include common needs and opportunities for partnerships.

**Needs Assessment Survey.** Another means of gathering information is through a short online survey. You could use an existing list of relevant contacts or work with your partners to develop a list. Several free or low-cost tools are available that can be used to develop and administer the survey, such as Survey Monkey, Qualtrics, or Google Forms.

**Needs Assessment Interviews.** The interviewer is typically a member of the school district's leadership team, sometimes accompanied by a partner. The interviews would preferably be conducted in person, but they can be completed virtually. The interviews are also a great way to garner input from partners who are not able or willing to participate in a needs assessment meeting or survey.

## Key Needs Assessment Questions

No matter the approach you use to conduct your needs assessment, you should focus on the following basic questions:

- ⚙️ What jobs are currently the most difficult to fill?
- ⚙️ What jobs do you anticipate struggling to fill in the next five to 10 years?
- ⚙️ What types of skills, knowledge, and attributes are entry-level workers missing when they interview for a position or start employment with your company?
- ⚙️ How can our school district help to meet your company or industry workforce development needs?

In addition to these key questions, the needs assessment process may need to address additional factors to best align programs, support students, and meet local workforce development needs.

As mentioned earlier, build multiple exit points into your career pathway pipeline. These exit points and their associated credentials, skills, and knowledge that a student can obtain should be evaluated.

Two other perspectives that a needs assessment must take into account are those of the students and parents/caregivers. Parents and students might have a bias toward certain industries and trades. Even a pathway aligned with industry cannot be successful if no students are interested in taking the classes or choosing a career in that industry, or if parents discourage enrollment. Some programs are naturally more popular than others in a high school and may not require heavy student recruitment. Other programs may not have a natural constituency, which can hinder enrollment. Overcome this bias by helping both parents and students understand the competencies required to succeed in these careers and their potential wage or salary.

## Labor Market Information

In addition to direct input from local partners, acquiring and relying upon strong data should be a core component of any community's needs assessment process. As mentioned previously, labor market information (LMI)—data about the quality of, supply of, and demand for a workforce—can be a powerful tool to help educational institutions align their offerings with employer needs. Continue to reference the data throughout the alignment process, and circle back to it if people forget why they are participating in the process or the importance of alignment for all stakeholders. Making decisions based on the data will help schools know what to offer, help students be prepared for jobs in the community, and help businesses

build their workforce pipeline. This section offers some pointers on using LMI data as well as some key questions to answer using data.

Keep the following in mind as you research LMI:

- ⚙️ Do not limit your data collection to a snapshot in time. Make sure you look at trends over time.
- ⚙️ Benchmark your community against similar or surrounding areas, or use a state average.
- ⚙️ Look at existing employers as well as at sectors that have the promise of growth. As an educator, you may not know this information, so rely on your partners.
- ⚙️ Each data source has limitations, so it is important to pull from multiple sources. These sources should ideally include quantitative (statistical) data backed by qualitative (interviews) information from partners.

### How to Use the Data

When it comes to alignment, it is helpful to define a region and pick three to five key indicators that you think best make the case to get everyone on board with your plans. Defining your region can be difficult. For many districts, it is easier to stick to a single county. However, if surrounding counties heavily influence your local economy, including them may be helpful. Additionally, if your county has very few employers, then a larger regional approach may be beneficial. In alignment, the rule of thumb is that your region should include places where your students can reasonably travel for experiential learning opportunities since this is a large part of quality alignment.

It is important to look at historical data, current data, and projections. The balance among these three data sources, as well as talking to partners, will help you see the big picture. Below are six key labor market data questions that may be helpful to think about as you pull together data to share in your alignment process. This list is not comprehensive, and you may want to consider additional data points.



## Key Labor Market Questions

- ⚙️ What are the largest industries in my region?
- ⚙️ What are the fastest-growing jobs in my region?
- ⚙️ What are the highest-paying jobs in my region?
- ⚙️ Where are people in my region commuting to and from for work?
- ⚙️ What are the current training and education levels of my community's workforce?
- ⚙️ Where do the students from our high school(s) go after graduation?

Again, this list is not exhaustive, and other indicators may be relevant and useful for your district. Once you pick which indicators you want to use, it is important to present the data in a way that everyone can understand. Educators may understand the education data easily but not the economic data, while community and business partners may understand economic and labor data but be confused about the educational data. Providing a combination of several types of indicators can make the conversation about creating new programs or aligning current ones easier.

Data sources to help answer the key questions above include:

- ⚙️ GeorgiaData was developed by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government and contains state- and county-level data on a wide variety of topics, including economics, education, labor, and population.
- ⚙️ Georgia Labor Market Explorer is compiled by the Georgia Department of Labor and contains occupational outlooks, wage and employment data and other relevant information.
- ⚙️ OnTheMap is a tool that allows users to understand where workers live and where they work.
- ⚙️ Census provides the most comprehensive community data available through the American Community Survey (ACS). This resource includes information on jobs, demographic variables, educational attainment, housing, migration, poverty, income, etc.
- ⚙️ GOSA High School Graduate Outcomes dashboard shows you how many students from a high school or district go on to pursue a career, additional education, etc. These data are presented by graduation cohort, so you can see how students' post graduation decisions change over time.

Additional information on each question and the relevant source can be found online.

### Georgia Workforce Planning Guide

If you need more help analyzing data and understanding how workforce development can work in your community, consult the [Georgia Workforce Planning Guide](#), developed by Georgia Power and the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, for additional information and resources.

### CTAERN LMI Course

If you're interested in becoming more proficient at using labor market information, the CTAE Resource Network partners with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia to offer a one-day course focused on helping CTAE educators and administrators use these data for workforce development planning and decision-making. For more information, please visit [ctaern.org](http://ctaern.org).

### CTAE LMI Reports

Did you know that there are regional labor market analysis reports as well as cluster reports at [CTAEDelivers.org](http://CTAEDelivers.org)? These PDFs provide more tailored labor market data in an easy-to-read format.

## Section Four

# Alignment in Practice

As you evaluate alignment between educational programs and your regional economy, you will need to look at several key factors that are a part of alignment:

**Number of jobs in your region.** How many jobs in the industry or industries does the pathway prepare students for? For a pathway to be viable, your region must have a sufficient number of jobs in the relevant industry for students to compete for upon graduation. A limited number of jobs in a particular industry may indicate limited opportunities for employment after graduation.

**Preparation for entry-level roles.** Does the pathway provide the knowledge, skills, and experience to help students secure entry-level jobs? Program–industry alignment should allow for students to graduate from high school and start work the following week.

**Relationships with employers.** Does the program have relationships with employers who can hire its graduates, help guide the curriculum, and enhance the educational experience? A program cannot be fully aligned if it does not have relationships with pathway-relevant employers.

**End-of-pathway assessment (EOPA)/industry-recognized credential.** Does the EOPA offer the student a credential that can help them be more competitive in the job-search process and enhance their value to potential employers? Aligned programs must work with their business partners and regional employers to ensure the credential helps prepare students for the workforce and adequately reflects the learning attained during the pathway.

**Work-based learning opportunities.** Work-based or experiential learning opportunities are critical for developing student interest in a pathway and providing hands-on learning. Does your work-based learning program include relationships and placements that can help your pathway completers apply their classroom learning? Advisory committee members may be a good place to start as you look to increase these kinds of opportunities for your students.

Once you have a better understanding of what local employers need, what postsecondary education requirements your pathways meet, and what you offer, you can begin aligning your curricula with those requirements and needs.

### Creating and Replicating High-quality Experiential Learning for High School Students

The Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia, with the support of Georgia Power, has released a guide and related resources to help school systems and business partners create and replicate high-quality experiential learning programs in their communities. Visit [gaworkforce.org/explearning](http://gaworkforce.org/explearning) to access the guide, case studies, and other related resources.

## Aligning to Postsecondary Education: Articulation and Dual Enrollment

As mentioned previously, successful alignment includes both aligning skills and knowledge to industry, but also to postsecondary education. While students may acquire the necessary skills to go directly into the workforce upon high school graduation, many careers require a postsecondary credential.

By aligning pathways to postsecondary education, schools ensure that students have a clear path to their chosen career. Alignment makes that explicit connection between students' high school studies and their postsecondary education. The ability to earn multiple certificates or degrees during their education and career progression also provides students multiple exit points as well as entry points.

Both dual enrollment and articulation agreements align high school pathways to postsecondary education. These opportunities may save students time and money in earning their degree or credential and enable them to join the local workforce faster. It is important to note that high school courses do not have to provide actual postsecondary credit to be aligned. Whether you are negotiating articulation agreements or accessing dual enrollment coursework, you are discussing alignment.

**Articulation Agreements.** The statewide articulation agreements between the Georgia Department of Education and the Technical College System of Georgia and the University System of Georgia are designed to provide Georgia high school students with the opportunity to receive college credit as the result of successful completion of specific CTAE high school courses taken in a pathway and successful completion of an external assessment or credential. These agreements recognize the efforts and skills acquisition of high school students giving them the opportunity to earn advanced standing in a Program of Study at a technical college or university without having to participate in dual enrollment or duplicate coursework.

As of Fall 2023, the Georgia Department of Education and the Technical College System of Georgia have 18 of these agreements in place with more to come. There are also two existing agreements with the University System of Georgia. School systems and individual colleges also have the option to create articulation agreements to meet specific local workforce needs. This initiative is a priority for both the GaDOE and the TCSG to accelerate Georgia high school students' ability to earn valuable credentials more quickly.

**Dual Enrollment.** Dual enrollment occurs when a student accesses college course work while still enrolled in their high school. The completed course work is posted to both the high school transcript and the college transcript simultaneously, allowing the student to advance their postsecondary education and potentially earn certificates, licenses, diplomas, or degrees before high school graduation. Dual enrollment can also benefit the school and school system through expanded access to programs that may not be available locally due to budget constraints, limited space, or other reasons. There are a variety of models for dual enrollment, so it is critical for schools to choose the model that best meets student needs and works best in the system's specific environment. Dual enrollment may be a critical component in creating more opportunities for students in CTAE, especially in rural Georgia.

Here are some questions you should think about when considering new dual enrollment partnerships or reviewing existing programs:

- ⚙️ What will the logistics for the dual enrollment program be (e.g., instructor, schedule, location, transportation, lab requirements)?
- ⚙️ What credential, certificate, diploma, degree, or skills will the student graduate with?
- ⚙️ What is the local industry demand for graduates of the program? What kind of feedback have we received from our business partners on the program?
- ⚙️ Do we have enough program-ready students to launch this dual enrollment program, or is there an opportunity to tap into existing classes?

## Did You Know?

Researchers examining dual enrollment programs have found the following:

- ⚙️ Over half of Georgia’s high school dual enrollment students took their courses through a Technical College System of Georgia institution.
- ⚙️ 90% of high schools in the United States offer dual enrollment classes.<sup>vi</sup>
- ⚙️ Georgia has offered a dual enrollment program since 1992.<sup>vii</sup>
- ⚙️ Dual enrollment students are more likely to graduate from high school, enroll in college, and remain in college than students who do not participate in dual enrollment.<sup>viii</sup>

### Accelerated Career Diploma

For students who have already chosen a career path in which they plan to work after high school, the Accelerated Career Diploma provides an alternative route to graduation.

The Accelerated Career Diploma is a path in Georgia’s dual enrollment program that offers Georgia’s high school students an opportunity to attain two technical certificates, a technical diploma, or an associate degree while simultaneously completing the nine courses required to obtain a high school diploma.

For more information about the Accelerated Career Diploma and required certifications/courses, please contact your local high school counselor.





### Creating a Local Pathway

Georgia currently offers hundreds of CTAE courses. If you have begun to go through the alignment process and have realized that the courses in one of the 140 pathways do not align to your local needs, you can create a unique local pathway through the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). The process for creating new pathways is straightforward but, to be successful, you must involve local partners. A good place to start is with the school's established advisory committee, which is made up of representatives from regional business partners, postsecondary institutions, and other stakeholders. Advisory committees can help to ensure alignment by reviewing the curriculum, facilitating work-based learning placements, advising on end-of-pathway assessments, and ensuring that the program helps meet workforce development needs. This committee also enhances the classroom experience by contributing resources, speaking to classes, and providing job shadow opportunities, as well as in many other ways.

The first step in creating a local pathway is to conduct a needs assessment using the advisory committee and as many other stakeholders as possible. During this needs assessment process, if the district sees the need for and chooses to move forward with creating a local pathway, the next step is to convene a team that will work with GaDOE staff to design the course of study, write the three proposed courses, and select the appropriate industry credential as the end-of-pathway assessment. This team should consist of 50% + 1 from related businesses and industries. The team should also include teachers from the program area as well as partners from postsecondary institutions. All partners must stay involved at all times throughout this process.

Once a team designs curriculum, district leadership must submit a pathway rationale, program of study, course standards, teacher qualifications, and a list of necessary equipment with lab design to GaDOE for approval. The final step for local pathway creation is State Board of Education approval. While GaDOE assists in the design process and submits the request to the State Board on behalf of the local district, representatives from the school, as well as industry partners, may be asked to present their case. This approval process can take up to 60 days.

## Section Five

# Conclusion

CTAE pathways play an important part in their community's workforce development ecosystem by helping young adults acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in their regional economy. By aligning pathways with high-demand careers, you are preparing your students for success and building local sources of talent for key industries.

Gathering your partners—K-12 and postsecondary education, business and industry, community and economic development, trade associations, and relevant governmental agencies—to conduct a needs assessment is key to understanding if your pathways are aligned with the requirements of current job openings and of future hiring. LMI data from a variety of sources will help supplement the information you gather from your partners.

Alignment is an inherently local and intentional process that involves a large amount of work by the district and local partners. Creating stronger alignment between education and industry improves the “overall effectiveness and performance of education, workforce, and human service systems.”<sup>iv</sup> Ultimately, alignment is about setting shared goals and making decisions about how to best utilize resources to serve students and local employers.



# Endnotes

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