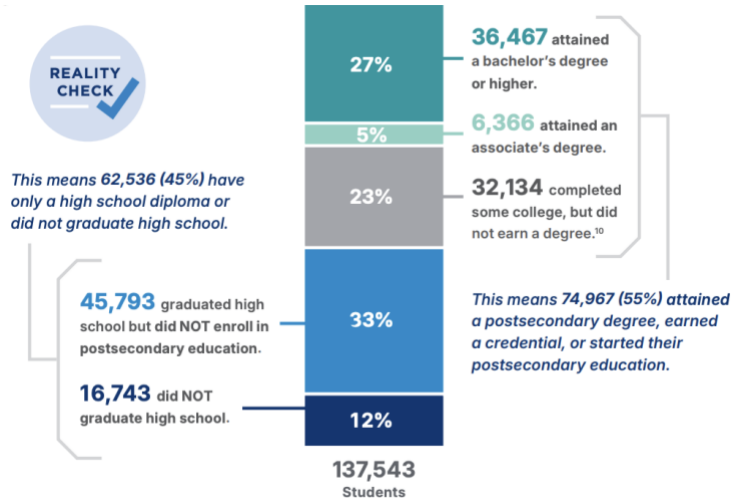


Expanding Career-Connected Learning and Career Pathways in Ohio: A Vision for 2025 and Beyond

As Ohio looks toward a more competitive and innovative future, it is clear that we must rethink the middle and high school experience. Not enough schools and districts are providing career connected learning opportunities for their students, causing students to miss essential opportunities to connect their educational experiences to viable career paths in Ohio. Our proposed 2025 Career-Connected Learning Recommendations aim to provide steps toward transforming the education system in Ohio, putting students at the center of their learning, to better equip them with the knowledge and skills, connections, experiences, and direction that will prepare them for success in Ohio's workforce and in life.

Reality Check: The High School Experience as a Last Formal Education Stop for Many

The [Reality Check report](#) from Ohio Excels reveals a concerning trend. Of the 137,543 students in Ohio's graduating Class of 2017, 45% (62,536) exited Ohio's education system prior to high school graduation or education beyond high school. This statistic underscores a crucial reality: **for nearly half of Ohio's students, high school was their last formal education stop before entering the workforce.** For these students, expanding career-connected learning is essential to their future success, economic self-sustainability, and to Ohio's competitiveness.



The Imperative for Transformation in Education



As Ohio's economy grows and diversifies, fueled by investments from companies like Intel, Google, and Honda-LG, and factors like declining population - demand for skilled workers continues to rise. Ohio currently has over 100,000 job openings that pay \$50,000¹ or more, with projections indicating that 66% of jobs by 2031² will require postsecondary education or credentials. Despite this demand, many high school graduates are not prepared for these opportunities. To bridge this gap, **Ohio's**

education system must adapt by emphasizing career-connected learning and high-quality career pathways.

Career-Connected Learning

Career-connected learning refers to educational experiences that help students understand their interests and aptitudes, link their studies with real-world careers, and help them see their future job opportunities. This approach includes activities like career exploration, career coaching, and career pathway options. The goal is to give students more insight into their career options and give them a head start in preparing for them. ³

High-Quality Career Pathways

High-quality career pathways are educational programs offering a sequence of academic and technical courses, work-based learning, early college options, and industry-recognized credentials aligned with industry needs. These pathways prepare students with the skills, certifications, and experiences required by employers,

¹ Jobs paying over \$50,000 are specifically highlighted by OhioMeansJobs.com: <https://ohiomeansjobs.ohio.gov/>

² https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Projections_2031-State-Report.pdf

³ [Ohio Department of Education and Workforce's Career Connections Framework](#)

supported by partnerships between schools, postsecondary institutions, and employers to facilitate smooth transitions into the workforce or further education. Designed to support entry and advancement within specific fields, these pathways equip students for both initial employment and long-term career growth, providing employers with a skilled talent pipeline and the state with the human capital needed for a thriving economy.

2025 Career-Connected Learning Recommendations

Led by Ohio Excels, a diverse group of career education stakeholders formed a coalition to identify key policy pillars to guide Ohio’s transformation efforts.

Pillar	Goal	Key Policies
Middle School Career Exploration	All students receive high-quality career exposure, coaching, and planning before high school that helps guide them to and through high school graduation.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Require explicit career exploration and coaching in middle school, through a new course or course equivalent. 2. Develop a state Framework for Quality Career Coaching. 3. Evaluate the effectiveness of existing Career Awareness and Exploration funds.
Work-Based Learning	Expand equitable access to high-quality Work-Based Learning opportunities to enhance career awareness and readiness.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand incentive funding for employers participating in high-quality work-based learning to encourage them to work with more Ohio students.
In-Demand Credentials	Ensure that state incentives are promoting the earning of industry credentials that are valued by employers to ensure future student success and alignment to workforce needs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Replace the current credential point system with a three-tiered system based on value to industry & employers, and employment outcomes for students. 2. Expand the Innovative Workforce Incentive Program funding to ensure schools are receiving full incentive payments.
Workforce Outcomes	Ensure transparency and continuous improvement in Ohio's education system by tracking and reporting outcomes for graduates, using data to inform policies and practices, and providing accessible insights to the public.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create user-friendly data tools, like dashboards and reports, for stakeholders to access pathway ROI and outcomes, supporting data-driven decisions and public transparency. 2. Create a cross-agency governing board to oversee a data system connecting education and workforce data. 3. Ensure the College, Career, Military, and Workforce Readiness measure on the state report card is rated so that schools and districts prioritize these experiences.
Expanding Career-Technical Education	Expand opportunities for more students to be exposed to and enroll in high-quality Career-Technical Education programs aligned with industry needs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Phase out the 7th & 8th Grade Waiver that allows schools to opt-out of CTE, ensuring courses are available to all middle school students. 2. Define the role of Career-Tech Planning Districts (CTPDs) across Ohio to ensure equitable access to high-quality career-technical education (CTE) for all students.

Coalition Endorsements:

Alliance for High Quality Education, ExcelsinEd, Greater Cleveland Career Consortium, Learn to Earn Dayton, Ohio Association of Career-Technical Educators, Ohio Farm Bureau, Ohio Federation of Teachers, Sean P. Dunn & Associates, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, and Ohio Excels. The Ohio Departments of Education & Workforce and Higher Education are active coalition members.

Looking Ahead

To fully realize Ohio’s vision for career-connected learning for all students, we must provide the necessary resources and support structures to students, families, educators, and employers alike. These recommendations aim to lay the foundation for this transformation of our K-12 education system over the next two biennial budgets.