



Middle School Career Exploration: **3-Year Partnership Plan**



Extending the Runway in Arizona

2025

November

“...I feel like we should get to explore the careers and find out what you would do in the careers and how you need to get there... I feel like we don't really do that a lot. And we need more of that.”

Lexi, 8th grade student



Arizona

About Our State



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

CENTER
FOR THE **FUTURE** OF
ARIZONA



Association for
Career Technical Education
of Arizona



ARIZONA
BUSINESS & EDUCATION
COALITION



Arizona
Educational
Foundation

Arizona is home to:

- **1,113,609** students, **260,725** of whom are in grades 6 through 8
- **2,429** schools across **200** districts

Approximately 40% of AZ middle school students received a career related course in school years 2023-24 and 2024-25, evidence that the importance of career exploration is recognized, even in the absence of state policy mandating participation.



Arizona Champions & Our Partnership

Creating a plan to improve middle school career exploration

Primary Owner	Primary focus in Leading Middle School Career Exploration improvement in the state
Arizona Department of Education	<p>Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Exceptional Student Services (ESS) will lead collaboration amongst state partners, support middle school career exploration efforts through professional development opportunities, and supporting a pilot program and statewide implementation of 8th grade ECAPs.</p> <p>CTE will support with K-8 Career Literacy standards and resources for implementation.</p> <p>CTE will develop a system and professional development for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to document and submit 8th grade ECAPs to the state for annual review.</p> <p>CTE will promote the expansion of Perkins funding to eligible (union and non union) districts to support career exploration for grades 5-9.</p> <p>CTE will assist with teacher certification to offer career exploration cou</p> <p>Title I and Title IV will support LEAs with funding opportunities to support middle school career exploration.</p>
Partners in this Plan	Description of Role in Supporting Middle School Career Exploration improvement in the state
Center for the Future of Arizona (CFA)	<p>CFA acts as the lead intermediary for the statewide Pathways to Prosperity initiative. CFA convenes key partners, connects opportunities with strategy, resources and tools, communicates data and progress, and catalyzes innovation and action for systems change. CFA serves as the lead intermediary responsible for this project.</p>
Association for Career and Technical Education of Arizona (ACTEAZ)	<p>The Association for Career and Technical Education of Arizona’s (ACTEAZ) purpose is to CONNECT all CTE professionals with the network, resources, and abilities they need to make a meaningful difference.</p>



Arizona Champions & Our Partnership

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Partners in this Plan	Description of Role in Supporting Middle School Career Exploration improvement in the state
Arizona Business and Education Coalition (ABEC)	Statewide nonprofit organization comprised of corporations both large and small, philanthropic and community organizations, state government agencies, individual community leaders, and K-12 and post-secondary institutions. The Coalition advocates to address the evolving needs of both the education and business sectors to grow Arizona's future.
Arizona Educational Foundation (AEF)	Arizona Educational Foundation champions excellence and opportunity in Arizona's public schools, rooted in a firm belief that education can break down barriers and strengthen lives and communities. We shine a bright light on the steadfast dedication of our state's educators and administrators, while fueling bold programs that spark growth and propel success.

Arizona State Superintendent of Public Education, Tom Horne, October 2025

“The Arizona Department of Education is honored to join the Middle School Career Exploration Impact Network, alongside career exploration leaders across the state and country. We strive for all Arizona students to have access to quality career exploration opportunities leading to individualized educational and career plans. Our mission is to raise academic outcomes and empower parents, and this partnership aligns with our objectives. We look forward to leveraging the support from ESG to achieve these goals.”



Start With Students

Centering the learner in our program design

Arizona students must be engaged in shaping middle school career exploration. They should provide feedback on resources and experiences, contribute to their development, and be included in a continuous improvement process.

Who did we engage and how?

- A team of 4 students, comprised of both middle grades and high school students, completed a 50 hour virtual internship with our team in October and November. Leveraging outreach to students within their network/schools, they conducted data analysis and research, and provided specific, actionable recommendations for supporting career exploration in middle grades. These students represent both rural and urban schools.
- See [Project Brief](#)

The Current Learner...

- Struggles to see the relevance of their education to real-world careers
- Seeks relevant, meaningful learning tied to future career and education goals
- Wants agency and needs tools and support to shape their own career path
- Wants hands-on experiences beyond traditional classroom curriculum

The main issue we found is that many students don't have equal access to career programs or guidance. Middle schools often don't focus on career exploration, and academic testing takes up most of the time.

Carmen, 8th Grade, Yuma

Teachers and counselors also lack the resources needed to help students learn about different careers. Because of this, students don't always understand how school connects to real jobs, which lowers their interest. Without early exposure, many students enter high school unsure of their career goals

Sean, Senior, Peoria



Start With Students

Centering the learner in our program design

During October and November, a group of Arizona students participated in a six-week project focused on strengthening middle school career exploration. They researched best practices, surveyed their peers about their experiences and needs, analyzed 174 survey responses, and drew on their own experiences to shape their findings. Together, they developed a set of recommendations for what meaningful career exploration should look like in Arizona. Listen to their recommendations here:

[AZ Student Career Exploration Showcase](#)



Incorporating Student Voice, Student Choice

The Arizona team is committed to listening to students and taking their recommendations seriously. As we move forward, we will incorporate their insights directly into our implementation plan. In addition, we will continue to elevate student voice through an ongoing Student Advisory, described later in this plan.



Self-Assessment Summary

Identifying Arizona's strengths and opportunities

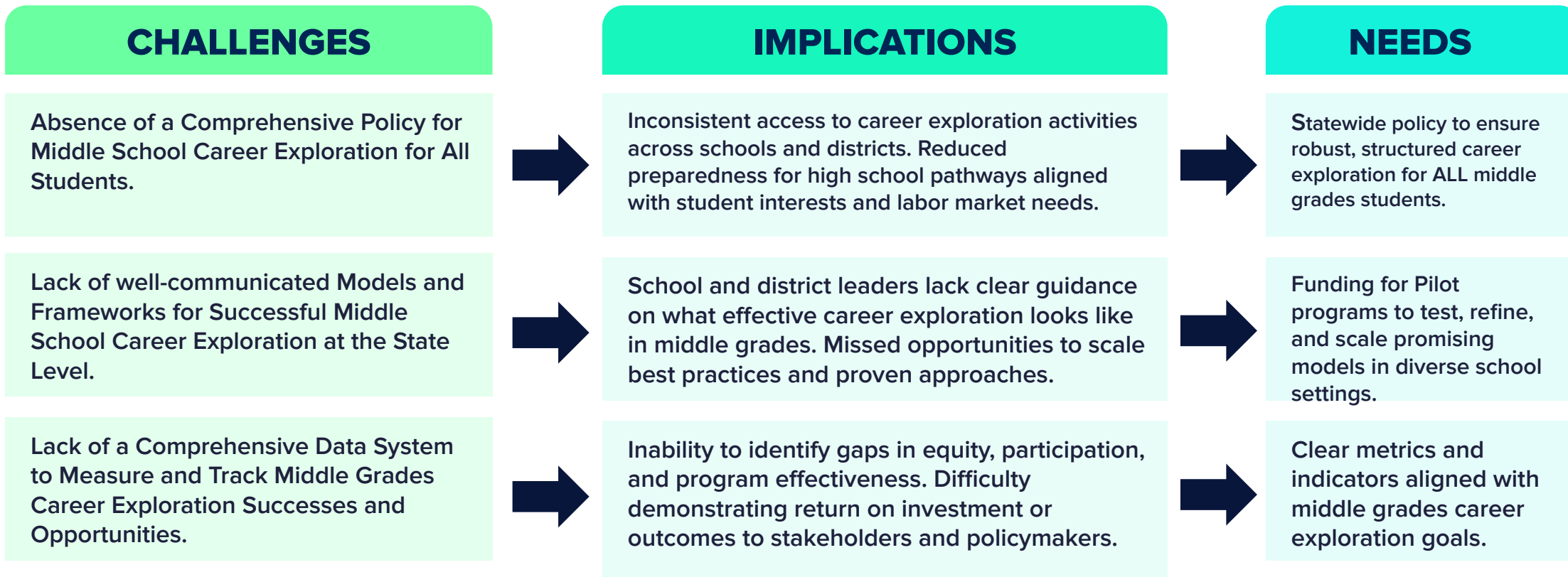
Asset Map Category	 Enabling Conditions	 Limiting Conditions
VISION <i>State champions, coordination efforts, logic model, public commitments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong intermediaries providing technical assistance and resources to schools. (e.g., CFA, ABEC, AEF, Junior Achievement (JA), Jobs for Arizona Graduates (JAG), AZ GEAR Up) Arizona Coalition for Career Readiness - stakeholder collective commitment to career exploration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many stakeholders with strong commitment, but no clear leader to guide and influence policy. School partners don't always see the connection between stakeholders.
POLICY <i>Statewide frameworks, accountability systems, clear district and student expectations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K-8 Career Literacy Standards ADE supported counselor training, offered across the state several times a year as well as online, with focus areas on career exploration. An established CTE process supports school-level data collection on student participation in middle grades career exploration and subsequent placements in CTE courses. Data is collected and analyzed annually. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absence of a state-level framework to support consistent, meaningful career exploration in middle school. Lack of shared criteria for high-quality career exploration activities and student artifacts. School accountability systems do not currently measure or incentivize career exploration at the middle school level.
INFRASTRUCTURE <i>Funding sources, professional development, data strategy, partnerships, material supports</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a strong foundation to build on—robust curricula, training resources, and proven implementation models already exist. Free state platform for career exploration - MyFuture AZ, JA Inspire Perkins funding allowable for middle grades career exploration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools struggle to implement robust career exploration without clear models, funding, and technical assistance. Lack of trained educator and funding models for directing Perkins funds to middle grades, including mechanisms for 9–12 districts to transfer funds to K–8 systems.



Naming What We Need to Solve

Identifying challenges to address to achieve success

Arizona faces challenges in middle school career exploration due to the absence of a comprehensive policy, lack of well-communicated models and frameworks at the state level, and the absence of a unified data system to track and measure progress.





Assets to Prioritize

Arizona assets to improve and create

Arizona will prioritize maximizing existing resources, identifying gaps, developing new supports for implementation, and establishing policy to ensure all students receive high-quality career education.

Asset Category (i.e., Vision, Policy, Infrastructure)	Assets to Improve
Policy	Build on grades 6-8 career literacy standards to include quality framework and successful and sustainable models.
Infrastructure	Robust set of resources, curriculum, tools, training and technical assistance available at no cost to schools.
Infrastructure	Leverage the CFA-developed <u>High School Co-Advising Framework</u> , which emphasizes career-focused advising conversations between students, families, and counselors - adaptable for 6th-8th grades, and can be used to inform and build out middle grades career exploration experiences.

Asset Category (i.e., Vision, Policy, Infrastructure)	Assets to Create
Policy	Statewide middle school Education and Career Action Plan (early ECAP) Policy, aligned with high school ECAP requirement.
Infrastructure	Clear and practical funding models, including use of Perkins, Title funds, and other available funding streams. Consider and outline opportunities for braided funding.
Infrastructure	Refine feasible, best practice implementation models, to include examples for multiple school contexts. Develop specific track at CTE summer conference for principals on career exploration. Maintain the ADE CTE repository of resources.



Our Vision Statement

Beginning with the end in mind

All Arizona middle school students will have access to high-quality, developmentally appropriate career exploration that sparks curiosity, broadens possibilities, and empowers students to discover unique future pathways to success. Through engaging, consistent experiences, family involvement, and a shared statewide language, students will be prepared to enter high school with clarity, confidence, and purpose.



Student Impact

Detailing the possibilities of quality middle school exploration

To reach our vision, Arizona’s plan will work backward from the following long-term outcomes. In order to set students on a path to successful family-sustaining careers, we need to ensure they have the information they need to select, enroll in, persist through, and be successful in high quality high school and postsecondary pathways. In order to do so, we need to create a system where every middle school student has the information they need to make decisions about their pathway.

Career Awareness and Exploration

Through multiple, meaningful, robust career exploration experiences, every middle school student understands the purpose of career exploration, learns about various career clusters, identifies their interests, and explores how those interests align with potential careers.

Career, Secondary, and Post-secondary Education Planning

Supported through state policy and school practice, every middle school student sets career and education goals and creates a plan that connects their interests to high school courses and work-based learning opportunities. Students have the knowledge and skills to confidently navigate their educational and career paths, even as their interests grow and change.

Career Preparation and Postsecondary Education

Supported by their school and community, every student graduates on time and, following their education plan, either earns college credit or CTE industry certifications, enrolls in a postsecondary program, or pursues a career aligned with their interests. Supports state to meet AZ Achieve 60 goal.

Career Attainment

Supported through regional partnerships, industry, education and community, student secures and maintains employment within their career pathway of interest. Student expands career knowledge, skills and experiences to advance along career pathway.

Vibrant workforce, Quality Job Attainment

A vibrant workforce and quality job attainment fuel the state’s economic growth, strengthen communities, and enhance the overall wellbeing of Arizona’s people—driven by a clear, accessible pathway from career exploration to meaningful employment.



Our Core Beliefs

Values that drive us to our goal

For every middle school student to make informed decisions, Arizona believes:

1

Core Belief 1: Increased awareness of and active engagement with multiple career pathways will enable students to connect their education to careers and make informed decisions about secondary and postsecondary education plans.

2

Core Belief 2: Enabling policies, widely communicated best practices, and accessible high-quality resources ensure all schools can implement career exploration programs for all students.

3

Core Belief 3: Key stakeholders are aligned around shared goals and are working together to support all schools, students, and families through coordinated communication, collaboration, and accountability.



Defining High-Quality Career Exploration

Arizona defines high-quality middle school career exploration as intentional, developmentally appropriate activities and experiences that help students in grades 6–8:

- Understand their interests, strengths, and values
- Explore a wide range of career paths and secondary/postsecondary options
- Connect classroom learning to real-world applications
- Develop early planning and decision-making skills
- Gain exposure to the world of work through direct and indirect experiences
- Develop an Early Education Career Action Plan that is informed by their interests, strengths and values



Defining High-Quality Career Exploration




Key Components of High-Quality Middle School Career Exploration:

- 1. Student-Centered & Inclusive**
 - Tailored to all student
 - Promotes access for all learners
- 2. Developmentally Appropriate**
 - Focuses on exploration, not decision-making
 - Builds foundational self-awareness, confidence and curiosity
- 3. Integrated into the Curriculum**
 - Connects careers to academic subjects and real-world problems
 - Uses project-based or experiential learning methods
- 4. Exposure to a Range of Careers**
 - Includes activities like career days, guest speakers, job shadowing, or virtual tours
 - Highlights both traditional, emerging and crosscutting career paths
- 5. Informed by Data and Reflection**
 - Uses interest inventories, career assessments, and student reflections and goals
 - Helps students build early academic and career plans (e.g., individual learning plans)
- 6. Involves Families and Communities**
 - Engages parents/guardians in the exploration process
 - Leverages local industry and community partnerships
- 7. Supported by Trained Educators and Counselors**
 - Staff have access to training, tools, and resources to guide exploration effectively
 - Encourage K-12 CTE certification by career exploration educators
 - Promote K-12 school counselor certification and training



Accountability Framework

Measuring the quality of our career exploration delivery expectations

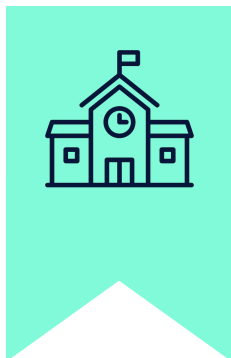
 Defining Quality	 Accountability Mechanism	 Implementation Support
<p><i>We will meaningfully differentiate between schools and districts in the following areas:</i></p>	<p><i>We will use the following federal and state laws to do so:</i></p>	<p><i>We will support schools and districts to improve by:</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent delivery of quality career exploration experiences for all students in grades 6-8. • Regions and schools adopt the “Definition of High Quality Career Exploration” put forth in this plan. • Provide training, resources and support to educators facilitating career exploration education. • Students leave 8th grade with evidence of an education and career action plan that informs their high school pathways planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades 6-8 Career Literacy Standards • Leverage high school Education Career Action Plan (ECAP) requirement - middle school <i>early</i> ECAP will support improvement of high school ECAP. • Early ECAP policy must include clear, manageable accountability measures. ADE must ensure capacity and a process to measure ECAP fidelity and provide support when not met. • Leverage CTE Perkins grant monitoring for middle schools receiving Perkins funds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide schools with curated, grade-level appropriate career exploration education aligned to student development and readiness. • Provide districts and schools with training to support career exploration strategy, implementation and continuous improvement. (Leverage existing ADE training). • Provide a framework that aligns middle school career exploration with the high school Education and Career Action Plan (ECAP), including recommended activities, timelines, student artifacts, and reflection tools.



Career Exploration Expectations

Outlining expectations in policy to align with our vision

Although there is currently no policy requiring evidence of middle grades career exploration for all students, Arizona has robust K-8 career literacy standards and a policy mandating that all high school students graduate with an Education Career Action Plan. The high school policy can serve as a model to guide the development of middle school policy.



Current State	
Expectations for Districts & Schools	<p>AZ does not have a policy requiring middle grades career exploration.</p> <p>ADE has released and broadly disseminated updated K-8 Career Literacy Standards and is actively supporting their statewide implementation through providing training to counselors and teachers and through sharing resources via the ADE CTE website.</p>
Expectations for Middle School Students	<p>As outlined in the career literacy standards, students will investigate careers and career pathways, demonstrate financial literacy, practice employability skills and build technology skills as related to careers.</p>

Opportunities for Alignment & Clarification
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Align middle school <i>early</i> Education and Career Action (ECAP) with high school ECAP requirement.• Support schools to identify various funding sources and provide support and models for high school union districts to fund feeder K-8 districts through Perkins.• Provide clear and easy to implement roadmap and resources for schools to be able to implement robust career exploration programs that include students documenting progress through an early ECAP.



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Proposed Guidelines for Early ECAP

Expectations for Middle School Students



- By end of 6th grade: Complete aptitude/interest inventory; document at least 3 career exploration activities
- By end of 7th grade: Complete aptitude/interest inventory; document at least 5 additional activities including at least one hands-on experience
- By end of 8th grade: Complete aptitude/interest inventory; document at least 5 additional activities, including at least one work-based learning experience
- By the end of 8th grade: Finalize early ECAP artifact to include evidence of self-reflection, identification of individual skills, interests and values; career goals aligned with skills, interests, and lifestyle preferences and related education and training; exploration of high school CTE/dual enrollment/career connected courses and postsecondary options; Career Pathway Plan for high school and beyond. Middle school ECAP will transition to high school ECAP seamlessly.
- Recommendation: Districts should ensure all students have access to digital platform for documentation



Policy Levers

Codifying our state's expectations for middle school career exploration

While Arizona lacks a clear policy on middle school career exploration, existing guidelines and organizational practices can be leveraged to inform policy and support scalable implementation.

Priority Asset	Federal Lever to Pull	Strategy	Owner(s)	Impact
Allowable Funding Title I – Grade-to-Grade Transition Title IV-A – Well-Rounded Education Perkins V – Career exploration funding allowable in grades 5–9	Title I- Supporting Transitions Title IV A- Well-Rounded Education	Provide guidance to LEAs on using Title I funds for 6-8 career exploration activities that support successful transition to high school pathways Issue guidance clarifying that career exploration activities qualify as “well rounded educational opportunities” under Title IV-A Emphasize in state guidance and LEA training that Perkins funds are explicitly allowable for career exploration in grades 5-9 (not limited to HS)	ADE	Districts have clear authority to use existing Title I allocations Districts call allocate Title IV-A towards career exploration learning opportunities, platforms and professional development for educators Remove barriers to using Perkins funds in middle grades; increase funding available for pilot expansion



Policy Levers

Codifying our state's expectations for middle school career exploration

While Arizona lacks a clear policy on middle school career exploration, existing guidelines and organizational practices can be leveraged to inform policy and support scalable implementation.

Priority Asset	State Lever to Pull	Strategy	Owner(s)	Impact
Build on 6-8 career literacy standards to include quality framework and successful and sustainable models.	Middle school early ECAP requirement	Leverage relationships and influence with AZ State Board of Education to recommend they establish policy requiring 8th grade students to complete an ECAP that documents career exploration activities and informs HS pathways selections	CFA, ABEC, AEF, ACTEAZ, ADE	Students will be given opportunities to participate in and document their career exploration education. By the end of 8th grade, all students will have a version of an early Education and Career Action Plan.
Robust middle grades career exploration resources, training and supports exist statewide.	Middle school ECAP requirement	Require all middle school counselors and career exploration instructors to complete an ADE-approved training on career exploration by June 30, 2028.	CFA, ABEC, AEF, ACTEAZ, ADE, Schools, Other Local Stakeholders	In the next 3-5 years, educators across the state will be given access to trainings to support with the implementation of robust career exploration activities at the middle school level. All Arizona Educators will have easy access to statewide career exploration resources and technical assistance; this will be broadly communicated on a continual basis.



Funding Mechanisms

Arizona's current funding supporting middle school career exploration

Although Arizona receives millions annually from Perkins and Title funds, there is currently no system to track how schools use these funds for Middle School Career Exploration. ECAP listening sessions offer an opportunity to informally gather this information. Establishing a tracking mechanism that includes funding information will be a priority during implementation planning.

Current Funding Sources to Support Middle School Career Exploration




Percentage of Total Funding	Federal Funding	State Funding	Local Funding	Philanthropic Funding
	14%	49%	26%	11%
Funds currently support...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General Middle School Career Exploration activities and classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Middle School Career Exploration programs and events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Middle School Professional Development and programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Middle School Advocacy Resources and tools for Middle School Career Exploration
Funding opportunities include...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perkins Title Funds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perkins State Priority Grants Jobs for Arizona Graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County Superintendents Career and Technical Education Districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Forward AZ Arizona Educational Foundation Arizona Business and Education Coalition Center for the Future of Arizona Arizona Board of Regents Association of CTE for AZ Junior Achievement Pipeline Connects ASU Career Services



Data Strategy Framework

Data-driven decision making to improve student experiences

Arizona’s data strategy will include ADE developing a tracking system, equipping schools with data tools, and supporting continuous improvement through data analysis.




 Core Beliefs	 Outputs to Measure	 Data Strategy
<p>Core belief 1: Increased awareness of and active engagement with multiple career pathways will enable students to connect their education to careers and make informed decisions about secondary and postsecondary education plans.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every student is enrolled in or experiences a set of defined career exploration education • Career exploration education will be impactful for all students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADE will collect early ECAP data annually from all schools to identify the career exploration activities being offered. • ADE will track student enrollment in middle school career exploration and exploratory CTE (eCTE) courses, building on current data collection efforts to determine student experience in career exploration. • ADE will gather data on student participation in middle school CTSOs and JAG programs to determine participation levels and increases over time.
<p>Core belief 2: Enabling policies, widely communicated best practices, and accessible resources ensure all schools can implement high-quality career exploration programs for all students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools provide adequate staffing to provide career exploration education including but not limited to: school counselors, classroom teachers for both general and special education students, and instructional aides to support students on IEPs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADE will collect data on staff roles and responsibilities related to early ECAP activities through the ECAP reporting process. • Information on classroom teachers delivering early CTE content will be gathered through ADE’s CTE data collection. • ECAP participation and quality data will be analyzed quarterly, with findings shared publicly and used to identify districts in need of support. • Annual student surveys on ECAP effectiveness will inform timely adjustments and improvements to the program.



Data Strategy Framework (Continued)

Data-driven decision making to improve student experiences

Arizona's data strategy will include ADE developing a tracking system, equipping schools with data tools, and supporting continuous improvement through data analysis.

 Core Beliefs	 Outputs to Measure	 Data Strategy
<p>Core belief 3: Key stakeholders are aligned around shared goals and are working together to support all schools, students, and families through coordinated communication, collaboration, and accountability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools train or support their staff in attending training necessary to implement career exploration education.• Schools provide parents with opportunities to become involved in their child's career exploration journey.• Intermediaries providing technical assistance and resources to schools demonstrate alignment with shared goals and support schools in making connections across organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ADE will track the number of participants in trainings it provides and will conduct surveys to assess effectiveness. ADE will encourage participation from all schools.• Schools submit ECAP plan and student samples to ADE annually.• Schools will report training sessions and participant numbers in their annual ECAP plans.• Schools will include examples of parent engagement activities in their annual ECAP plans.



Student Engagement Strategy

Leveraging student voice as data to inform your policies & programs

A statewide student advisory group will be established to actively contribute insights, ideas, and feedback, playing a key role in the continuous improvement of middle school career exploration.

STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

The student advisory council will include 10 students statewide, with balanced representation from urban and rural schools. It will feature at least one tribal student and include both middle and high school participants.

KEY ACTIONS

- Identify an organization to lead a student advisory council.
- Develop and formalize the student advisory council roles, responsibilities, and operational procedures.
- Recruit students, ensuring intended representation.

STUDENT VOICE AS DATA STRATEGY

Students Engaged

Advisory council members will rotate annually to ensure diverse perspectives from students across various schools and regions of the state.

Frequency of Engagement

Twice a year, Student Advisory Council meetings will be held to review and provide improvement feedback on the implementation of career exploration initiatives in middle schools throughout the state.

Integrating Analysis with Data Strategy




Qualitative feedback from students will be incorporated into continuous improvement processes. Student voice data will be shared with school leaders and educators across the state to inform local implementation.



State Supports

Providing the tools to build local capacity





One of Arizona’s key strengths in middle school career exploration is its diverse, free educational resources, supported by dedicated intermediaries who provide these resources along with technical assistance and training to schools. However, there is a need to systematically collect and curate these resources and establish a consistent process for schools to easily discover and access them.

	 Digital Platforms & Templates	 Guidance Documents	 Training & Professional Development
Current Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College Ready AZ, Education Forward Arizona Guide to My Future, JA Inspire, Major Clarity, Edge Factor, SchoolLinks, My Future AZ, Xello 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K-8 Career Literacy Standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECAP training and guidance resources available to high schools can be leveraged for middle school educators. Intermediary support providing technical assistance, resources and training for middle school educators.
Assets to Create & Grow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue supporting schools with the implementation of existing platforms, resources and training to incorporate ECAP activities into existing models. Funding tracking/reporting system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on 6-8 career literacy standards to include quality framework and a robust set of implementation resources with curriculum, tools, training and technical assistance - contingent on funding. Housed at ADE. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create ECAP training for middle schools and offer this statewide, building upon existing ADE CTE career exploration training.



Arizona's Logic Model

Connecting beliefs to impact

Beliefs 	Activities 	Outputs 	Outcomes 	Impact
<i>To reach our goal, we will address our root problems with these core beliefs:</i>	<i>In order to address our problem, we will accomplish the following activities:</i>	<i>We expect that once accomplished, these activities will produce:</i>	<i>We expect these outputs will lead to the following changes:</i>	<i>We expect that if accomplished, these outcomes will lead to the following long-term shifts:</i>
Increased awareness of and active engagement with multiple career pathways will enable students to connect their education to careers and make informed decisions about secondary and postsecondary education plans.	Implement career exploration resources, including frameworks, curriculum, and tools vetted and supported by external partners.	Statewide usage of career exploration resources by staff and students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every student is enrolled in or experiences a set of high-quality defined career exploration education/programming. • Schools provide adequate staffing to provide career exploration activities including but not limited to: school counselors, classroom teachers for both general and special education students, and instructional aides to support students on IEPs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All middle school students gain meaningful opportunities to explore careers and engage in real-world experiences, enabling them to connect their education to future goals, develop self-awareness, and begin building a strong career identity. As a result, they make informed high school course-taking decisions and document their learning, experiences, and goals in a personalized Education and Career Action Plan (ECAP)
Enabling policies, best practices, and resources are in place, widely communicated, and supported to ensure that all schools are able to implement high quality, robust career exploration programs for all students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early ECAP requirement for middle grades students is approved policy. • Refine and “package” comprehensive set of quality models and resources and share broadly with schools. • Provide technical assistance to schools to implement robust career exploration program. • Provide teacher/counselor training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will have artifacts documenting their participation in career exploration activities tied to the usage of statewide career exploration resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools will train or CTE certify their staff in attending training necessary to implement career exploration activities. 	
Key stakeholders are aligned around shared goals and are working together to support all schools, students, and families through coordinated communication, collaboration, and accountability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a place to store all materials and provide access to educators and partners statewide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AZ State Board of Education will approve a ruling on Early Education and Career Action Plans for middle school. Schools will be required to submit evidence of early ECAP plan and student completion to ADE. 		



Key Milestones & Responsible Parties

Creating a 3-year action plan for success

AREAS OF FOCUS	KEY MILESTONES			RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
	2026	2027	2028	
Creating buy-in and commitment to act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create State research brief, slide deck to be used by all stakeholders <input type="checkbox"/> Present at various forums (e.g., ACTEAZ, Counselor/Supe Association, ACCR) <input type="checkbox"/> Identify early-adopters/pilot schools and share best practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing presentations, transitioning to dissemination of best practices, various implementation models <input type="checkbox"/> Provide technical assistance to pilot schools. Identify and track success metric. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing presentations, transitioning to dissemination of best practices, various implementation models 	CFA, ABEC, ADE - full team support
Set policy for early ECAP requirement. Include accountability framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Gather feedback from Superintendents/School Leaders <input type="checkbox"/> Present to AZ State Board of Education - include suggested policy language and rollout plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Support schools to prepare for policy implementation <input type="checkbox"/> Begin data collection <input type="checkbox"/> Employ Plan/Do/Study/Act (PDSA) continuous improvement model to assess effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Implement policy <input type="checkbox"/> Employ Plan/Do/Study/Act (PDSA) continuous improvement model to assess effectiveness 	CFA, AEF, ABEC, ACTEAZ, ACCR, schools, other stakeholders
Curate and disseminate models, resources, training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Identify organization to collect and curate data/resources <input type="checkbox"/> Identify funding source(s) to support data curation over time <input type="checkbox"/> Begin resource collection <input type="checkbox"/> Broadly disseminate resources <input type="checkbox"/> Outline a middle school CTSO program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Assess resource effectiveness - PDSA cycle <input type="checkbox"/> Adapt or retire resources according to PDSA outcome <input type="checkbox"/> Create new resources, particularly as LMI changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Assess resource effectiveness - PDSA cycle <input type="checkbox"/> Adapt or retire resources according to PDSA outcome <input type="checkbox"/> Create new resources, particularly as LMI changes 	Lead organization identified to curate resources, broad dissemination through all stakeholders.
Student and family voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create state student advisory - need to establish owner for advisory. <input type="checkbox"/> Develop student feedback loop resources for schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Maintain state student advisory <input type="checkbox"/> Include students in PDSA cycle <input type="checkbox"/> Solicit student-developed resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Maintain state student advisory <input type="checkbox"/> Include students in PDSA cycle <input type="checkbox"/> Solicit student-developed resources 	Lead org identified to support state advisory (ACTEAZ?), Schools



Collaboration Strategies for Year 1

Working together to enhance middle school career exploration

2026 Key Milestones

RESPONSIBLE

ACCOUNTABLE

CONSULTED

INFORMED

Q1

Q2

Q3

Q4

		RESPONSIBLE	ACCOUNTABLE	CONSULTED	INFORMED
Q1	Establish monthly expanded AZ team meeting. Team will guide plan implementation, Create Research Brief, Pitch Slide deck	CFA, ABEC	CFA, ABEC	ESG, ABEC, Partners	Stakeholders
	Codify plan for ADE to collect and curate resources, process for resource inclusion. Begin resource collection/expansion to build on current resource library	ADE, with support from ABEC, CFA, ACCR and others	ADE	AZMLE, ABEC, ACCR, ACTEAZ, EFA, CFA	Stakeholders
Q2	Present to various organizations/meetings to build buy-in and commitment to act. (Seven opportunities identified in Q 1&2)	ADE, CFA, ABEC, AEF, ACCR members	ADE, CFA, ABEC, AEF, ACCR members	School Leaders/Educators	Stakeholders
	Gather feedback from Superintendents/School Leaders. Team to analyze feedback, reflect and refine plan.	ADE, CFA, ABEC, AEF, ACCR members	ADE, CFA, ABEC, AEF, ACCR members	School Leaders/Educators	Stakeholders
Q3	Broadly disseminate resources to schools	ADE, CFA, ABEC, AEF, ACCR members	ADE, CFA, ABEC, AEF, ACCR members	School Leaders/Educators	School Leaders/Educators
	Present to AZ State Board of Education and seek ruling on middle school ECAP requirement	TBD (Team Member Leadership)	TBD	TBD	School Leaders
	Outline a middle level CTSO program	ADE	ADE	ACTEAZ, School Leaders/Educators	School Leaders/Educators
Q4	Create a state student advisory and establish an owner for the student advisory	TBD	TBD	School Leaders	Stakeholders
	Develop student feedback loop resources for schools to ensure student voice is part of PDCA cycle	TBD	TBD	TBD	School Leaders



Communication Plan

Getting all stakeholders on board



School Leaders



This audience needs to understand the evidence-based outcomes of middle grades career exploration, its return on investment and see implementation models covering necessary personnel, capacity, and funding.

We can reach this audience through association meetings, personal connections, one-on-one meetings, county superintendent leadership.

Some of the teams and organizations best positioned to communicate with this audience include ADE, ACTEAZ, AEF, EFA, Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR), non-profit advocates.



State Board of Education



This audience needs to understand the evidence-based outcomes of middle grades career exploration, its return on investment, stakeholder support, and see examples of model policy language and accountability frameworks.

We can reach this audience through advocacy and presenting at the meetings.

Some of the teams and organizations best positioned to communicate with this audience include ADE, Superintendent's Association, ABOR.




Counselors/Teachers



This audience needs to understand key student outcomes of middle grades career exploration (the why), what implementation involves including training and resources (the what and how), the benefits for their students, connections to their current work, and practical guidance to integrate career exploration without adding unmanageable burden.

We can reach this audience through ADE communications, training, district/school leaders.

Some of the teams and organizations best positioned to communicate with this audience include ADE, ACTEAZ, AEF, AZ School Counselors Association, non-profit partners



Together we can ensure that all Arizona middle school students have access to high-quality, developmentally appropriate career exploration that sparks curiosity, broadens possibilities, and empowers students to discover unique future pathways to success.

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