

# Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development Collaborative

Event 2 – Pima / Santa Cruz



The **Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development Collaborative** is the Arizona Department of Education's opportunity to strengthen communication and collaboration among employers and community partners, and to gather their feedback with a concentrated focus on developing a strategic talent pipeline with regional Career Technical Education (CTE) and Adult Education programs. The work of the regional collaboratives is an effort to address the regional CTE Superintendent's and CTE directors' challenges and connect CTE programs, and the post-secondary and adult education programs to align more closely with the regional and statewide industry workforce needs.

To facilitate these workforce goals, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) will plan and deliver ten collaborative meetings throughout 2025 with every county in Arizona. These meetings will be held in partnership with District Superintendents, CTE Work-Based Learning Directors, CTE Directors, Arizona Adult Education Programs, Community Colleges, Workforce agencies, Economic Development Partners, and Industry Leaders. The meetings include presentations from the venue host, ADE leadership staff, and members from regional economic development organizations. The meetings include roundtable discussions with attendees focused on current partnerships and recommendations to strengthen or to develop talent pipelines and to create Work-Based Learning activities with regional employers with CTE and Adult Education Programs.

Information will be collected from each of the regional roundtable discussions and a follow-up survey will be sent to meeting attendees. This information will be compiled and is included in this report.

# The Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development Collaborative – Pima / Santa Cruz

On March 26, 2025, ADE held the second of 10 events in Pima / Santa Cruz Counties and sponsored by Pima Community College.

Location:  
 1255 N. Stone Ave.  
 Tucson, AZ 85709  
 Time: 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

91 people were invited to the meeting, 53 registered, and 42 people attended. The event was arranged to encourage cross-disciplinary dialogue and to create an environment for innovative ideas and partnerships. Attendees were from the following organizations:

Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity	Pima JTED	Sahuarita UHSD
Sun Corridor	Nogales Santa Cruz County Port Authority	Tucson Chamber of Commerce
Santa Cruz Workforce	Arizona Tech Council	Pima Community College
Santa Cruz County Provisional Community College	Tohono O’odham Community College	Education Forward
University of Arizona	Banner Health	Raytheon
South 32	UD Department of Homeland Security	El Rio Health
AAFES	Arizona@Work Pima County	Santa Cruz County
Arizona Department of Education	Amphitheater UHSD	Santa Cruz County GEAR UP Program

## **Feedback from the Meeting**

To encourage opportunities for improvement, ADE presented four questions. These questions will be the same at each of the 10 events to enable a comparison of responses received across the state. This will also be useful in providing information for other projects. The design of each question was predicated on inquiries ADE receives from community stakeholders, school leaders, and industries. The questions were:

1. What Work-based Learning (WBL)/Apprenticeship opportunities are currently taking place in your organization/community?
2. Based on economic development information, what gaps in your school/college need to be addressed to develop a talented pipeline to meet employment needs?
3. Who else from this community needs to be involved in this discussion?
4. What are the next steps?

### **Question Number One:**

What WBL/Apprenticeships opportunities are currently taking place in your

organization/community? The responses were diversified as the respondents covered the spectrum of WBL and Apprenticeship experiences. The most mentioned activity is apprenticeships. Examples of current programs from the participants include Community College apprentice programs, OneStop WIOA apprenticeship programs, trade apprenticeships with automotive companies, mining apprenticeships, and afterschool registered apprenticeships.

This indicates that experience working with apprenticeships programs is successful or at least regularly favored by businesses and schools. A deeper dive to understand how apprenticeship programs are organized and managed by the schools and companies will help with program creation and improvement. Not all apprenticeship programs mentioned were registered apprenticeships nor are they associated with CTE programs, in this case these programs are after school and managed by the employer.

Additional responses with other activities and work-based learning techniques were mentioned. Although a few of the activity or program definitions provided may not be specifically WBL or apprenticeship programs, they did show the willingness to create meaningful programs that connect students with career development. The takeaway is that there are many opportunities for work-based learning and career development aside from the recognized programs. The region is unique as to its location and often must be creative with the opportunities available that will provide the best outcomes for the students.

Below are the types of programs and mention count as provided by the participants.

Apprenticeship – 10

In person internships (Paid / Unpaid) – 9

Clinicals – 3

Work-Based Learning – 3

Summer Youth Program – 3

Upskilling Activities – 3

Senior Exit Projects – 3

Pre-Apprenticeship – 2

Externships – 2

Virtual Internships (Paid / Unpaid) – 1

Job Shadowing – 1

Certification Training – 1

Youth Industry Programs – 1

Simulated Work Experiences – 1

**Question Number Two:**

Based on economic development info, what are the gaps in your school/college that need to be addressed in order to develop a talent pipeline to meet employment needs? Responses from this question are annotated in three categories:

- Industry / School Connection
- Program Gaps
- Partnerships

Industry / School Connection refers to program alignment between the CTE and/or community college, adult education programs, and industry/employers. The comments reflect the attendee's perceptions and experiences with CTE programs or CTE students or community colleges. Program gaps are perceived or experienced deficiencies, challenges, or feedback on the performance of CTE or community college programs or the makeup of the students in these programs. Partnerships are proposed or perceived gaps in collaboration, communication, or awareness of CTE programs or post-secondary opportunities.

The purpose of incorporating the whole workforce development ecosystem in these round table conversations is to discover room for improvement or challenges experienced by these partners. The information provided was expressed by the participants. (See comments below)

Industry / School Connection

- Directly connect education sector to workforce in order to make jobs easier to attain for participants
- Enhance workforce education with CTE schools
- Connections with jobs, internships, apprenticeships of job opportunities
- Inform schools on types of work or locations available for students
- Business should be at the table to meet - K-12 districts, One Stops, Adult Ed., Arizona@Work
- Develop better workforce ready students (professional skills)
- More connection w/ employers

Program Gaps

- Enhance durable skills ie. AI Analytics
- Energy industry: address industry growth
- Day care/s for student parents
- Transportation for students
- Get students to follow up after high school on their status. Gaps in info gathering
- Not enough CTE opportunities
- Include students in decision-making on program development
- Program red tape, doesn't set students up for success
- Develop space programs
- Lack of qualified teachers
- Concerns with citizenship and cultural barriers
- lack of funding for programs and industry awareness to fill long term industry needs
- Expand ECAP and Career exploration into every district
- Available district CTE programs should include electricity, logistics, and energy
- More discussions on age restrictions
- Align CTE programs with in demand sector
- No readiness skills, parents need to be informed

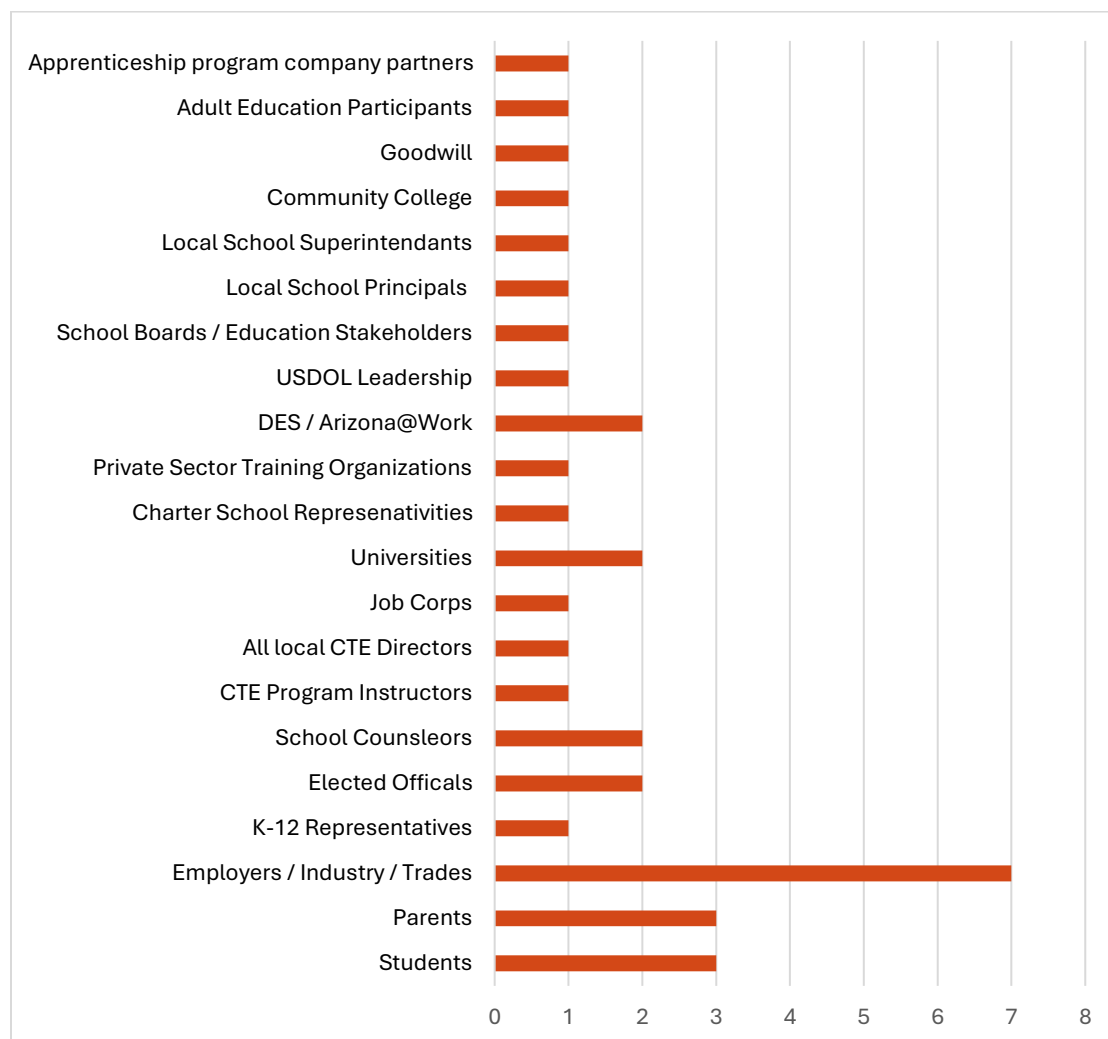
Partnerships

- Break down silos, work together
- Champion change cross border AZ/ Sonoran human relations
- Employers - be involved give input
- Need to work w/ industry in smaller communities to know which programs are needed to attract enough students
- Expand Elevated Ed AZ throughout Tucson to offer more internships, job shadows, etc.
- Funding. private/public partnerships, mentoring programs
- Grow similar pathways for Adult Ed, CTE Students and job corps.

**Question Number Three: Who else from this community needs to be involved in this discussion?**

This question asks the attendees about their perspective on who additionally would benefit from attending the event. The responses from the participants expressed their idea of who in the community should attend discussions like this and who was not at the meeting that could have added valuable information of additional content. Each table was considered one mention, there were seven tables.

Although the participants were from different areas of the Workforce ecosystem, a few of the comments were common among the tables. A common theme expressed by all participants was that they would like to see more employers, industry, and trade companies attend these meetings. Additionally, a few of the tables expressed that they would like to see elected officials, parents, students, school counselors, charter schools and employment agencies present. The results are below.



**Question Number Four: What are the next steps?"** From the information collected, what should these next steps be? This question explores from the perspective of the attendees, from what they have learned and what they are experiencing, what can the next steps be or what are they interested in exploring? Below are the responses.

- Keep on keeping on! We do pretty well collaborate for South AZ. We can be the spark, but we need the fuel!
- Have additional discussions on; How are you going to use this info? What are ADE's next steps? How can ADE support us?
- Create more opportunities for dual enrollment
- Find more opportunities to expose participants to workforce areas (CTE)
- Get more parent/student involvement
- Make participants aware of all the options they can pursue
- Focus on soft-skills training for participants to be prepared for work experience (job interviews/resumes/references)
- Find alternatives, traditional schools are not the way for every student
- Conduct a GAP analysis - Industry vs Education not moving at same pace
- Provide more info to students about all the options (some just follow their friend's path)
- Provide additional training, students need life skills classes for HS Students to start in middle schools
- Consider more junior ROTC: teaches discipline and life skills
- Review other states programs
- Have students to attend these meetings
- Create a point of contact for data sharing and local companies
- Grow our own talent locally for local companies
- Network with others here to make a bigger impact
- Enhance Relationships: know who to talk to at various organizations, share info
- Develop a resource fair with CTSO`s and Businesses
- Create a community leadership (education<->industry) mentorship

### **The Survey**

As stated, the purpose of the meeting was to gather information from the region regarding CTE and Adult Education Programs. In addition to the roundtable discussion and presentations, ADE distributed a survey to all attendees. The survey was designed to capture more feedback on the programs and ideas and use the comments to develop an actionable plan. Another objective was to discover who the participants would prefer to continue the conversation to address barriers or enhancements to CTE, Adult Education programs. We sent the survey to every participant after the Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development Collaborative meeting. The survey asked the following seven questions.

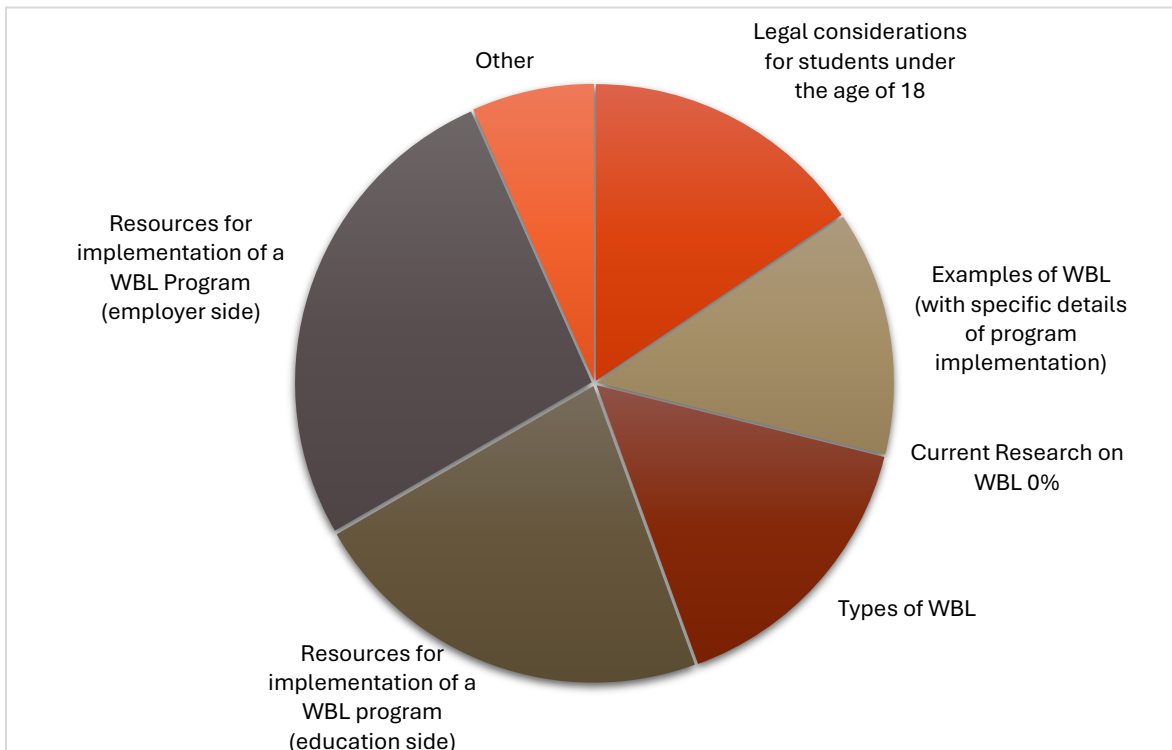
1. Based on what you have learned how likely are you going to start (or change) a work-based learning opportunity?

2. What do you need to know more about to participate in a successful WBL program (select up to three)?
3. What are the main benefits for partnering with CTE programs?
4. Which partnerships would you like to expand or learn more about (select all that apply)?
5. Who should lead this conversation going forward? (Select Two).
6. What industry-education partnerships or initiatives are currently operating in your area?
7. How valuable was the event to you or your organization?

Of the 42 people who attended the event, 15 (36%) responded to the survey.

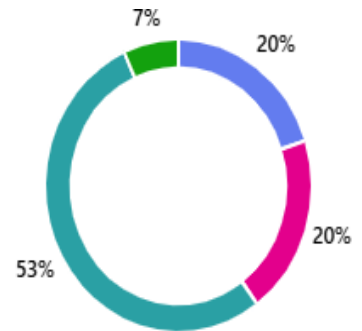
**Question Number One:** Based on what you have learned how likely you are going to start (or change) a work-based learning opportunity? The results were based on a 1-to-5 criteria, with one representing least likely and five representing most likely. The rating of 4.0 shows that most of the participants agree that they are going to start or continue with work-based learning programs or opportunities.

**Question Number Two:** What do you need to know more about to participate in a successful WBL program (select up to three)? The results show that there is a need for information regarding resources for implementation of work-based learning opportunities from an employer perspective. The second most important question selected was about the resources for implementation of work-based learning opportunities from the educator perspective. This indicates the need for additional information to the public and training on work-based learning resources for both the educator and the industry partner. Additional comments expressed that there is a concern that we should consider a student’s perspective on the efficiency of a WBL program or opportunity. Another comment was that there needs to be more about what is a good WBL partnership, what does a successful program look like. More exploration is needed on this subject. (See chart below)



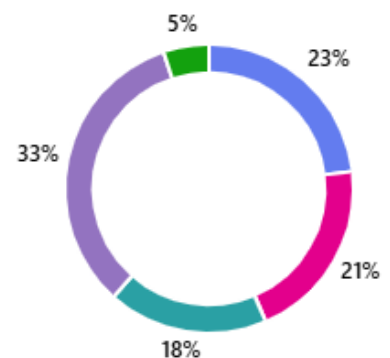
**Question Number Three:** What are the main benefits for partnering with CTE programs? The purpose of this question is to discover from the participant's perspective the benefit of working with a CTE program. The majority responses (53%) said “to grow your business”. This indicates the local investment perspective on how the participants value CTE programs. (See the graph below.)

● Fill staffing needs	3
● Enhance student understanding of your industry	3
● Provide an economic opportunity for your community	8
● To grow your organization	0
● Other	1

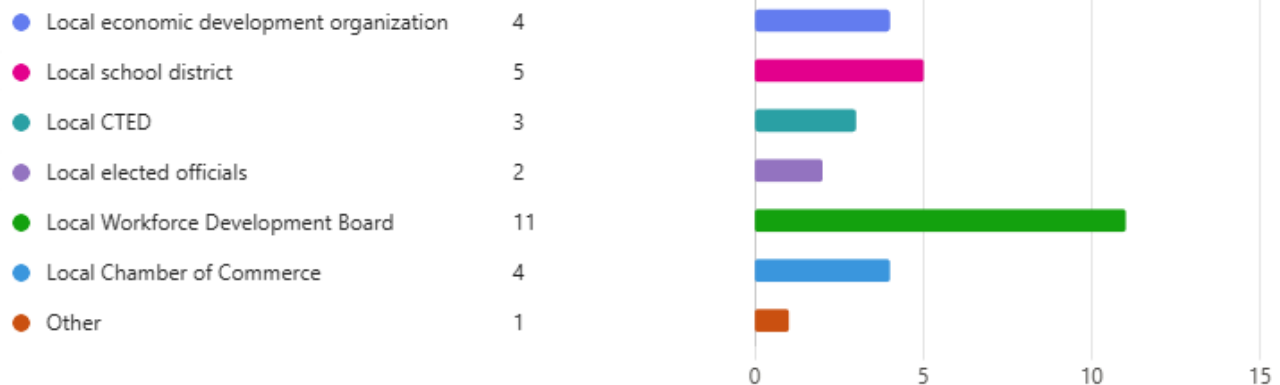


**Question Number Four:** Which partnerships would you like to expand or learn more about? This question had four options: economic development, CTE programs, Community College, and workforce. Attendees were asked to select one answer only. Most of the participants selected Workforce (33%), second was economic development (23%), then CTE programs (21%), and finally community College (18%). There were two that selected “Other” one of the others indicated that they want to learn more about WIOA and the other stated that they want to learn more about the “A Thriving Arizona” organization. (See the graph below.)

● Economic Development	9
● CTE Programs	8
● Community College	7
● Workforce	13
● Other	2



**Question Number Five:** Who should lead this conversation going forward? This question was designed to acquire the participants’ perspective on who should continue the ecosystem collaboration conversation, oversee the in-depth work to improve student employment opportunities, and aid with the workforce talent pipeline. The respondents identified the Local Workforce Development Board as the best choice, the local school district came in second, and the local elected officials came in as the least unlikely choice. (See the graph below.)



**Question Number Six:** What industry-education partnerships or initiatives are currently operating in your area? This question asks the attendees to name the current partnerships in their local region. The importance of this information is to identify existing local partnerships that are already working well. There were a few comments that indicated challenges in establishing partnerships, however, there were also examples of successful programs due to their strong partnerships. Other comments and current partnership initiatives are below.

Higher Education Career Pathway Program	NUSD#1 and SCVUSD #35 are beginning a partnership with local workforce to give opportunities to seniors in internship opportunities	Industry partnering with JTED on hosting CTE student internships	Partnerships with South32, Santa Cruz County Provisional College, local school districts, and County School Superintendent	Arizona Registered Apprenticeships
Southern AZ Manufacturing Partnership	Pima JTED; Prosperity Initiative through Pima County	Developing new partnerships	We have 17 unique programs in Amphi, so there are several industry specific options for pathways to college or straight to industry in engineering and bioscience	SAMP (Southern AZ Manufacturing Partners), Jim Click Automotive/SER, Apprenticeships - South 32, KE&G,
JTED, Arizona Registered Apprenticeships, Tucson Electric JATC	The Southern Arizona Workforce Leadership Academy and these sessions	Manufacturing in Mexico partnerships		

Under the Santa Cruz County School Superintendent's Office and the GEAR UP Program, we have developed a project-based GEAR UP 2 Work Internship program for 16 - 18-year-old high school students. The program develops soft skills, networking opportunities, project-building activities, and mentoring by industry partners. We also have developed the Leaders in Training (LIT) Summer Internship program at the Santa Cruz County complex. Students participated in a 5-week working program that entails 2 hours a week in workforce skills workshops plus 20 hours a week in the departments. Most recently, led by the South32 Hermosa project, elected officials, school districts, and industry partners were to come together to form an executive committee to begin discussion on a community training center for students and adults. No meeting scheduled as of yet. We also have a post-secondary attainment group that is in the preliminary stages. Workforce development group started by Greg Lucero and the Nogales Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce. The school districts each have their CTE programs and JTED.

There is a strong relationship with the Chamber of Commerce and Educational organizations. Workforce development coalition is getting started in our area that includes elected officials, chamber members, industry partners, community college district, and school districts. The SCC School Superintendent was awarded a GEAR UP Grant in 2018 which continues to prepare students for their postsecondary journey. As a component of the grant, the College and Career Access Center in the Santa Cruz Center Provisional College District facility, C-CREO Hub, was established. The HUB provides financial aid planning, workforce soft skills workshops, college-level tutoring, family resources, and many other student services. We also have sponsored several sessions of GEAR UP 2 Work project-based internship program at each high school. Students work with industry partners to create and present a project for the company. GEAR UP also facilitates the LIT "Leaders in Training" Summer Internship Program at the Santa Cruz County Complex. The Santa Cruz County School Superintendent has applied for a new grant award that will run from 2026 - 2031.

**Question Number Seven:** How valuable was the event to you or your organization? This question sought to determine the value of the meeting. Was the meeting meaningful to the attendees or did they feel it was an effective use of their time? Respondents were to answer the question using 1-to-5 scale, with one being not valuable and 5 being most valuable.

46% of the respondents selected 5, indicating the meeting was most valuable. The lowest response was from one attendee who rated the event as 1. The total rating for the event was 4.20 out of 5.

## **Conclusions**

Local schools and businesses have shared interest and shared responsibility to the community they serve. Both entities are affected by the outcomes of schooling which provide students with a learning experience that supports their ability to make a measurable contribution to and receive meaningful benefits from the society they will join and lead in the future. The good news is that business, economic development and local workforce leaders perceive a shared responsibility for and show eagerness to support the work of educating workforce ready students.