

Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development
Collaborative

Event 11 – Maricopa



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 twelve 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 between regional employers and 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. The information received is compiled by ADE and included in this report.

The Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development Collaborative – Maricopa County

On April 3, 2026, ADE held the final of 11 scheduled statewide events in Maricopa County, sponsored by Maricopa County Community Colleges – Conference Center at Rio.

Location:

2323 W 14th St.

Tempe, AZ 85281

Time:

9 AM – 12 PM

394 people were invited to the meeting; 86 people registered and 69 people attended. The event was arranged to encourage cross-disciplinary dialogue and create an environment for innovative ideas and partnerships. The attendance make up was 28 individuals from business and industry, 12 from higher education or adult education, six from workforce development, four from economic development, 10 from CTE schools and nine from ADE.

Attendees were from the following organizations:

Molina Healthcare	SEMI Foundation	Arizona Center for Youth Resources (ACYR)
Neighborhood Ministries	Jobs for Arizona Graduates (JAG)	Phoenix Union High School District (PXU)
AZ Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)	WestMARC	Salt River Project (SRP)
Maricopa Corporate College	City of Chandler	Literacy Phoenix
Associated Minority Contractors of Arizona	The Laborers Training School	Glendale Union High School District (GUHSD)
AWP Safety	Grand Canyon University (GCU)	Arizona Science Center
Greater Phoenix Economic Council (GPEC)	Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD)	Canyon State Electric
Maricopa County	AZ Hispanic Chamber of Commerce	Western Maricopa Education Center (West-MEC)
Gilbert Public Schools	AZ Department of Economic Security (DES)	Tempe Union High School District
Mesa Community College	Tokyo Electric	Banner Health
Arizona Commerce Authority (ACA)	East Valley Institute of Technology (EVIT)	Advance CTE Arizona (ACTEAZ)
Agua Fria Union High School District	SciTech Institute	Phoenix Police Department
4 th Trimester Arizona	AZ Department of Education (ADE)	Center for the Future of Arizona

Feedback from the Meeting

To encourage opportunities for improvement, ADE presented four questions that were discussed among participants at their tables. These questions were the same at each of the 11 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 are:

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 talent 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. Forty-two unique opportunities are identified with some being identified multiple times. Some activities identified are tied to a single company, school, organization, or partnership, while others are a broad identification of an opportunity in the community. The most mentioned activities include the Rio Salado College and TSMC apprenticeship program, apprenticeship programs at large, and WBL opportunities through the Career and Technical Education Districts (CTED).

Additional responses to other activities and WBL techniques were mentioned. Although some 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 WBL and career development in addition to the recognized programs. Below are the types of programs and mention counts as provided by the participants.

Automated Industrial Technology program	2
Agua Fria Academy model	1
Labor Training School apprenticeships	2
Scan AZ	1
ElevatED/Chandler USD	1
AZ Science Center	1
Rio Salado/TSMC	4
Honeywell internships	3
SRP internships	3
Project SEARCH	1
Caterpillar internships	1

Skill Bridge	1
Phoenix PD internships	2
Molina Healthcare internships and observations	1
MCCCD	1
IET programs	2
Banner Health - Camp Scrubs, internships, externships, exploration simulations	2
Education apprenticeships and training	2
Automotive	1
Culinary	1
Apprenticeship programs	4
Clinicals	3
Internships (paid & unpaid)	3
Tech+ certification	1
K-12 dual enrollment	1
APS	1
Raytheon	1
School-Based Enterprises	2
Unions	1
CTEDs	4
Kudelski Security	1
CCAP	1
Dignity Health	1
Dream Builder entrepreneurship program	1
Phoenix RISE	1
Global Ties AZ	1

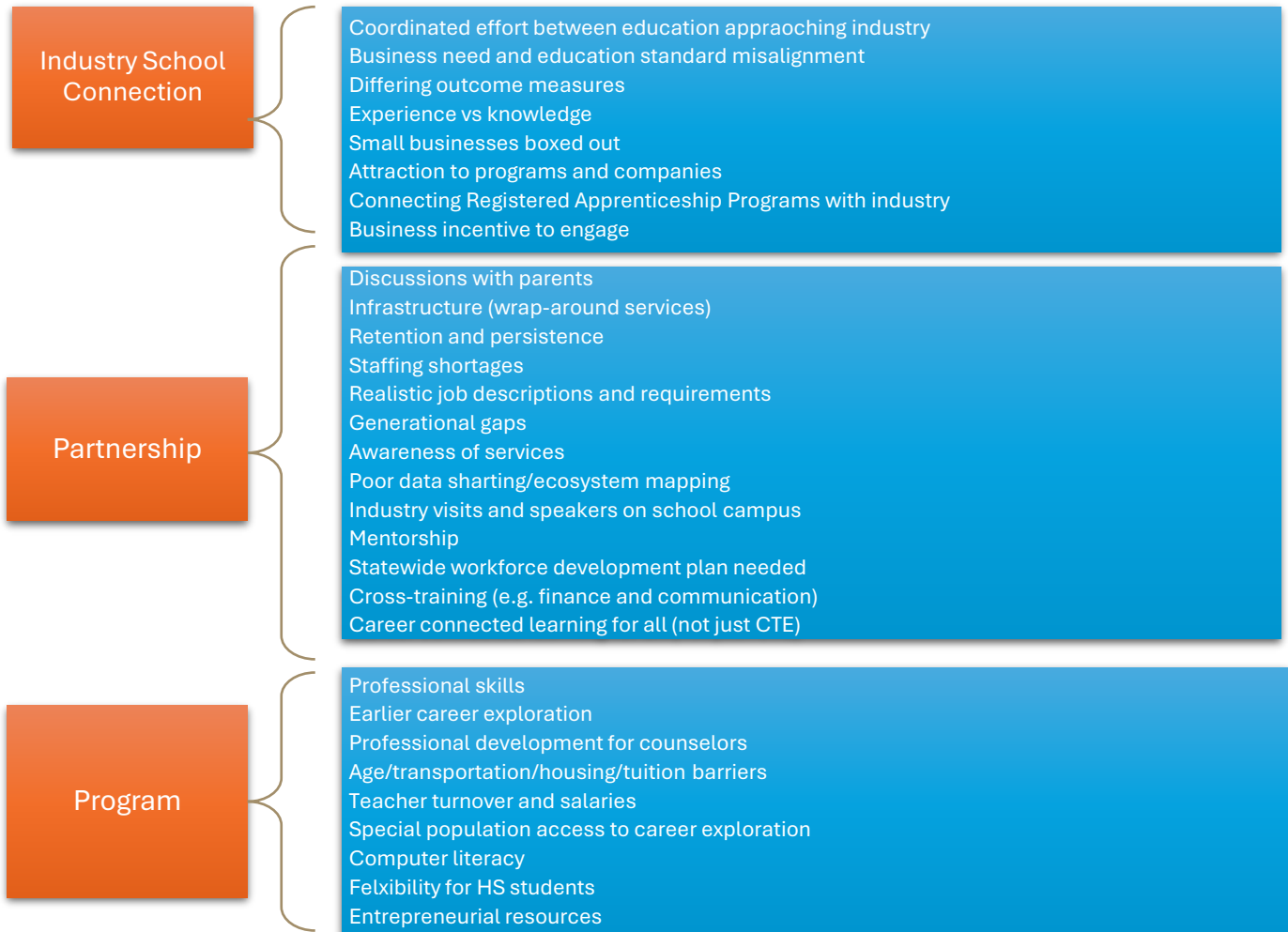
Question Number Two:

Based on economic development information, what are the gaps in your school / college that need to be addressed 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 adult education programs, community college, 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. Participants expressed a lack of collaboration between education and industry and that there is room for improvement in the education system and its workforce development efforts. See the comments below.



Question Number Three:

Who else from this community needs to be involved in this discussion? This question asks the attendees from their perspective, who, not in attendance, would benefit from attending the event. Although there were representatives present from many of these organizations and every organization mentioned was invited, the desire to have more representation was apparent. The populations most identified as critical to include in these discussions are employers and parents. Government was highly identified as needing to be included in these conversations with comments regarding a need for policy and funding influence. Others frequently identified as needing to be

included in the conversation were students and schools (K-12, adult, and higher ed). Non-profits, workforce boards, social media, K-12 educators, and chambers of commerce were also identified at more than one table. These responses are consistent with responses collected in other regions. The table below displays all responses.

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Question Number Four:

From the information collected, what should your next steps be? This question explores from the perspective of the attendees what they have learned and what they are experiencing, what the next steps can be or what they are interested in exploring. Many responses share a theme of increasing collaborative efforts between industry and education stakeholders. Below are the comments provided:

- Connect with regional hubs (e.g., WestMARC, East Valley Collaborative)
- Benchmark national examples.
- Increase awareness and communication.
- Engage industry in more workforce and education collaboratives.
- Continued and earlier career exploration.
- Embed WBL opportunities into CTE programs.
- Educating about direct industry entry points.
- Break silos.
- Make systems nimble to withstand changes.
- Strengthen advisory boards.
- Ensure program standard alignment.
- Create a worker to teacher pipeline.
- Collect more information on resources and programs.
- Develop sustainable grant/funding options.
- Create statewide career days for each age group.
- Collaborative database.
- Develop new partnerships.
- Collaborate with perceived competitors.
- Create visual aids to communicate manageable steps to engage.

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 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 of 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 69 people who attended the event, 22 (32%) responded to the survey. It is common that survey participation ranges from 25-40% - 32% is an expected response rate to the survey.

Question Number One:

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

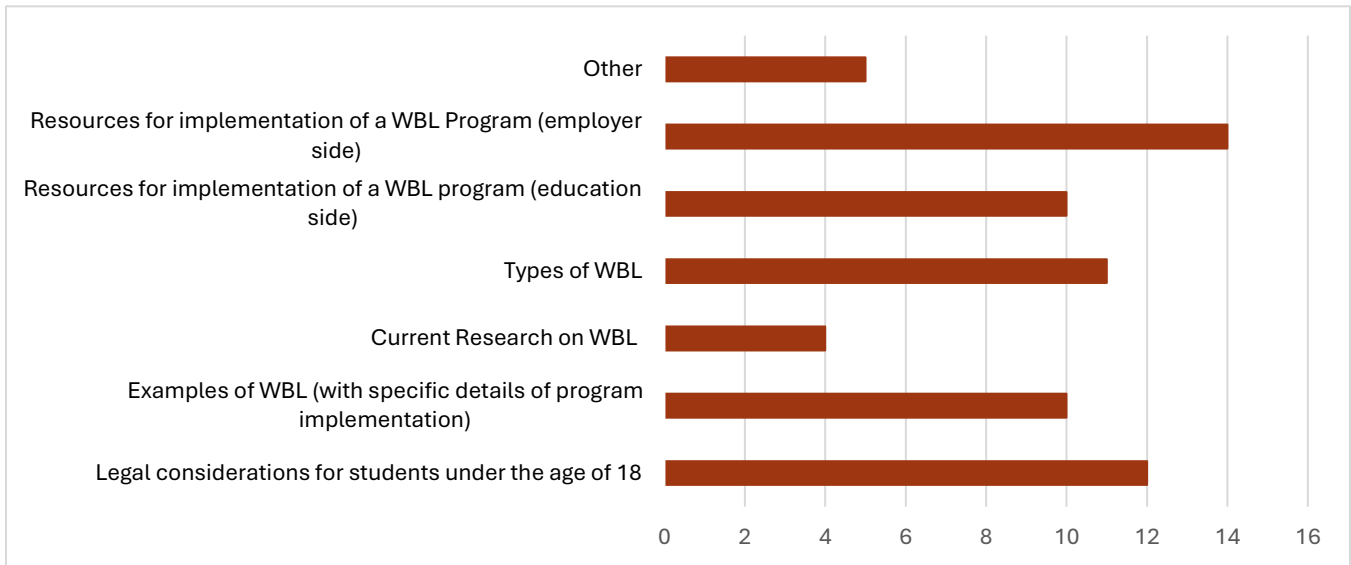
The results were based on a 1-to-5 criteria, with one representing least likely and five representing most likely. The average rating of 4.14 (83%) indicates that most participants either plan to begin or continue engaging in work-based learning (WBL) programs or opportunities. Forty-five percent of respondents selected “5” indicating that there is a high interest and motivation to begin or adapt WBL opportunities in Maricopa County. Fifty-five percent of respondents selected either “4” or “3,” with no respondents selecting “2” or “1.” This is compelling evidence that participants of the ecosystem are intent on improving WBL opportunities in their area.

Question Number Two:

What do you need to know more about to participate in a successful WBL program (select up to three)?

Respondents were given the option to select up to three responses for this question. “Resources for implementation of a WBL Program (employer side)” was selected by the highest number of survey participants with 14 selections. Legal considerations, types of WBL, examples of WBL and resources on the education side also received a high rate of response. This indicates that there is a need for more information about what WBL is and legal considerations for participants under the age of 18. ADE Workforce Development and Work-Based Learning Staff is working to synthesize information regarding under 18 legal considerations for WBL participants/workers to distribute to the CTE community, through the WBL Guidebook, for reference when developing industry

opportunities partnerships for high school students. Resources to develop WBL programs. Like other regions in Arizona, the need for resources for implementation is high demand in Maricopa County.



Question Number Three:

What are the main benefits of 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 (32%) said to “enhance student understanding of your industry.” Responses to this question demonstrate that there is industry interest in providing exposure to CTE students. “Filling staffing needs” received 27% of responses. These responses demonstrate and align with the makeup of attendees at the Regional Ecosystem event being majority business and industry.

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Question Number Four:

Which partnerships would you like to expand or learn more about? This question had four response options: Economic Development, CTE programs, Community College, and Workforce, and respondents were prompted to select all that apply. Eighteen of the 22 respondents would like to expand partnerships and learn more about the Workforce. Thirteen respondents selected Economic Development and CTE Programs as an area they would like to expand partnerships and learn more. With twelve selecting Community College as their highest area of interest here. This is consistent with other regions in Arizona, with Maricopa County having a more evenly spread in interest across all areas.

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Question Number Five:

Who should lead this conversation going forward? This question aimed to gather participants' insights on who should lead the ongoing ecosystem collaboration discussions, manage the detailed efforts to enhance student employment opportunities, and support workforce talent pipeline development. Respondents were asked to select two options. Respondents favored local Workforce Development Board to lead these conversations moving forward. Economic Development organizations, local CTEDs, and Chambers of Commerce were also selected as highly favorable. School districts and elected officials were seen as the least favorable to continue leading the conversation (see the graph below). Topics presented and discussed at this event relate to workforce development, talent training, and employability opportunities. Workforce Development Boards work directly in this area and were identified and selected as the most well positioned to lead these discussions.

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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. Comments and current partnership methods are listed below.

ASU and U of A internships	ElevatED and Greater Phoenix Chamber partnerships	Manufacturing Specialist program with TSMC and Rio Salado College	EVIT programs	Chandler USD Semiconductor Pathway steering committee
Camp Scrubs for middle schoolers	JAG partnerships with various schools	EV/Chamber expanding access to HS opportunities	BuilditAZ	AZAMI, MITI

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 criteria, with one representing the least valuable and five representing most valuable.

The average rating was 4.23, indicating that the meeting was valuable for participants. Ten participants (45%) selected “5”; seven participants (32%) selected “4”, and five participants (23%) selected “3”, with no selections of

“2” or “1”. Participants do view the event as a valuable expenditure of their time, with reservations that are explored in question number eight.

Question Number Eight:

Please explain your answer to number 7. To better understand the ratings given in question 7, respondents were given an opportunity to explain their rating. Seventeen of the 22 survey participants offered feedback for this prompt. Two common themes can be identified through the responses. First, this was a terrific opportunity for networking and new connections and initiatives are being explored between participants. Second, there is a need for actionable items to come out of discussions like this. There were also three call outs for more industry involvement in these conversations. The meeting served the intended purpose of building connections and opening conversations between education and industry. One attendee stated, “it was a good conversation between partners that will only enhance our connections.”

Conclusion

Local schools and businesses have a shared interest and a shared responsibility to the community they serve. Both entities are affected by the outcomes of schooling, which provide students with learning experiences that support their ability to make a measurable contribution to, and receive meaningful benefits from, the society they will lead in the future. There are WBL and job training opportunities available throughout Maricopa County, and this meeting created an opportunity for all parties to brainstorm best ways to expand and better align industry needs and education efforts. The good news is that business, economic development, and local workforce leaders show eagerness to work together to support the career development of students via CTE education.