

Auditing a State Career and Technical Education Program for Quality

A PLAYBOOK FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS

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About *Excelin*Ed

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From policy development to implementation, *Excelin*Ed brings deep expertise and experience to customize education solutions for each state's unique needs. Focused on educational opportunity, innovation and quality, *Excelin*Ed's agenda is increasing student learning, advancing equity and readying graduates for college and career in states across the nation.



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CONTENTS

- 2** Introduction
- 4** Three Phases of a State CTE Program Audit
- 6** PHASE 1 | PLANNING AND PREP
Establishing the Audit Rationale, Priorities and Program Quality Indicators
- 10** PHASE 2 | IMPLEMENTATION
Identifying and Collecting Data for Program Quality Indicators
- 16** PHASE 3 | ANALYSIS AND NEXT STEPS
Translating Results into Action
- 20** What's Next



INTRODUCTION

In its first and second Career and Technical Education (CTE) playbooks, ExcelinEd explored the importance of strengthening state CTE programs, provided a high-level view of how states can undertake this critical work, and illustrated the vital role that cross-sector partnerships play in developing robust CTE pathways. With a firm grasp on the process and a robust set of stakeholders engaged, policymakers can now turn to the deeper work of addressing needed changes to existing programs to ensure they are meeting the “non-negotiables” for long-term student success.

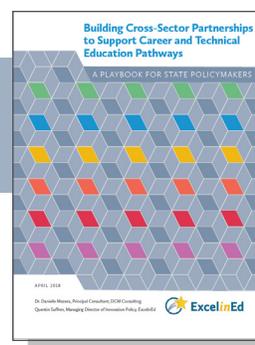
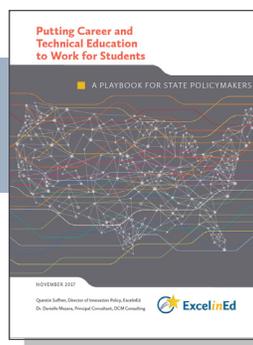
Yet before such changes can be undertaken, states must first understand what their programs currently provide for and deliver to students. Is their program aligned to the state’s workforce needs and higher-skill, higher-wage career opportunities? Does it provide a solid foundation for the long-term advancement and economic mobility of its citizenry? Do its pathways incorporate the most critical and up-to-date skills and experiences learners will need to adapt and thrive in jobs not yet even identified or in existence?

In many states, the answers to these questions can be elusive. Consider that most state CTE programs have been in existence for decades, with many being quite generous in their expansion of new pathways and programs of study. As a result, the sheer quantity of available options across multiple career clusters can obscure the effectiveness—or ineffectiveness—of certain programs of study. Though states do report on broader program performance as part of their federal Perkins grant requirements, these indicators provide only a limited view of quality, long-term outcomes and alignment with business and industry needs. States can—and should—go beyond federal reporting requirements to ensure their CTE programs are designed to meet the needs of their students and the future economies of their state.

To truly assess program quality, alignment and overall effectiveness, states should conduct a CTE program audit. Such an audit can set the stage for a rich and robust examination of why and how a current state CTE program is being offered, what it is actually achieving and whether or not those achievements are fully aligned with the state’s education, economic and workforce priorities.

This third playbook outlines key design components of a purposeful state CTE program audit, a three-phase process for establishing and conducting such an audit, a customizable framework for CTE program quality indicators and a rubric for evaluating overall CTE program quality.

Click on the cover image to view other playbooks in ExcelinEd’s Career and Technical Education playbook series.



HIGH-QUALITY CTE PROGRAMS:

Non-Negotiables for State Policymakers

- 1** All promoted programs of study align with state and/or regional industry and labor market data.
- 2** Programs of study incorporate experiential learning and capstone experiences valued by industry.
- 3** Secondary programs of study vertically align with postsecondary programs.
- 4** Courses are sequential and progressive in a given program of study.
- 5** Secondary programs of study incorporate courses and exams eligible for postsecondary credit or hours where appropriate.
- 6** Course standards are robust and accurately represent the academic, technical and employability skills learners must master.
- 7** Educators receive ongoing, progressive training and professional development to ensure their instruction is reflective of course standards and current industry work environments.
- 8** Federal, state and local funding are utilized to leverage and drive programmatic changes leading to the implementation of vertically aligned education-to-career learning pathways.



THREE PHASES OF A STATE CTE PROGRAM AUDIT

A purposeful state Career and Technical Education program audit process should identify on the front end the complexities of program execution and the robust returns on investment the program should provide if aligned with state education, economic, and workforce priorities.

At a high level, an effective state CTE program audit encompasses three main phases:

PHASE 1 PLANNING AND PREP

Establishing the Audit Rationale, Priorities and Program Quality Indicators

Before any data collection begins, policymakers must articulate the rationale for launching a state CTE program audit, the state's priorities for its program audit and which indicators of program quality matter most.

PHASE 2 IMPLEMENTATION

Identifying and Collecting Data for Program Quality Indicators

In this phase, policymakers identify and benchmark the specific data (quantitative and qualitative) that will be used to measure and evaluate program quality.

PHASE 3 ANALYSIS AND NEXT STEPS

Translating Audit Results into Action

This phase includes analysis of audit data and results, development of a comprehensive audit report with recommendations and creation of a strategic plan articulating the necessary steps for aligning the state's CTE program with its established education, economic and workforce priorities.



Auditing for Compliance vs. Auditing for Quality

When most people think of an audit, they likely think of compliance—whether a program is adequately adhering to certain requirements, such as federal or state grant guidelines. A robust CTE state program audit looks beyond the binary notion of compliance and more at the state's opportunity to exceed requirements and truly meet the needs of their students and their state. It sets the stage for rigorous examination of which aspects, including discrete programs of study, are providing the returns on investment for program completers in the form of economic mobility and career success. Given the constant change within states' economies, policymakers should consider an audit as a recurring activity every few years to review and reaffirm CTE programs.

State CTE Program Audit Process

PHASE 1 PLANNING AND PREP

Establishing the Audit Rationale, Priorities and Program Quality Indicators

1

Establish purpose and priorities.

Identify program quality indicators.

Determine the process and timeline.

2

PHASE 2 IMPLEMENTATION

Identifying and Collecting Data for Program Quality Indicators

Develop audit questions.

Establish thresholds for program quality indicators.

Collect quantitative and qualitative data.

Identify and resolve process challenges.

3

PHASE 3 ANALYSIS AND NEXT STEPS

Translating Results into Action

Analyze audit results, including strengths, weaknesses and gaps.

Document findings and recommendations.

Develop a strategic plan for program improvement.

AUDIT
PROCESS
RESULT

High-Quality
State CTE
Program



1

PHASE 1 PLANNING AND PREP

Establishing the Audit Rationale, Priorities and Program Quality Indicators

- Establish purpose and priorities.
- Identify program quality indicators.
- Determine the process and timeline.

The first phase of a purposeful CTE audit process—establishing the rationale—allows policymakers to firmly set the reasoning, expectations and desired outcomes for a state CTE program audit before launching it. If appropriate time and counsel are taken during this phase, then the resulting CTE program data collection and analyses will be well-aligned with the policymakers' deeper intentions for the overall audit. It's also important to note that collaboration with state-level and local stakeholders during this phase can go a long way toward supporting a smooth implementation of any identified recommendations following the conclusion of the audit.

Policymakers need to firmly set the reasoning, expectations and desired outcomes for a state CTE program audit *before* launching it.

Determining the “Why” and “How”

Though it seems straightforward, the first step in framing a state Career and Technical Education program audit is articulating why the audit is being considered in the first place. Presumably, it is to assess the health and effectiveness of the state program and the policies that support it. Yet this is also an ideal moment to connect the purpose of the program audit with broader economic and education goals of the state or region. For clarity and communication with stakeholders, this “why” should be articulated in the form of a purpose statement. A purpose statement is not intended to exhaust the process; however, it should be crafted such that it answers two basic policy-leading questions:

- **Why is an audit of the state’s CTE program needed?**
- **What questions is the audit intended to answer, and what will this lead to?**

In addition to articulating the audit’s purpose, state policymakers should also establish specific priorities that will guide the process. These priorities might reflect statewide goals for high-demand career pathways, postsecondary credential attainment, work-based learning opportunities or a focus on identified industry-valued certificates. Regardless of the focus, these priorities should:

- **Establish the direction(s) that the overall audit will take.**
- **Act as the guardrails needed to ensure that the audit exposes and measures the state CTE program—without veering off track.**
- **Guide the identification of program quality indicators—as well as the data needed to help address key questions about program health and effectiveness.**

Though this work should be customized to match a state’s interests and stakeholder networks, the following template can serve as a guide.

Template: State CTE Program Audit Purpose and Priorities

[DOWNLOAD FULL TEMPLATE](#)

Audit Purpose Statement	Why is an audit needed? What is it intended to answer? State your purpose for the audit.
Audit Priorities	To achieve a successful audit, the following priorities will be pursued:
Priority 1	
Priority 2	
Priority 3	



Forming an Audit Team

Given the complexities of a state CTE program audit, it's essential that a policymaker tap a small cadre of internal and external stakeholders to serve on the "audit team." Members might include representatives from executive branch agencies or key legislative staff, depending on the state. Unlike broader stakeholders, audit team members are day-to-day thought partners and data gatherers who can help ensure continued progress and remove potential road blocks and obstacles to completion.

Gaining Stakeholder Buy-In

Stakeholder engagement is essential when it comes to successfully setting robust state CTE policy and enacting programmatic reviews and changes. The design and execution of a state CTE program audit is no exception. Before soliciting stakeholder participation, however, the audit team must be clear on what, why and when stakeholders are needed in the audit process. Generally, stakeholders should be engaged to provide (a) critical feedback on the audit's purpose and priorities, (b) qualitative and quantitative program data and (c) critical feedback on key recommended changes. By being strategic on the front-end, a policymaker will ensure greater likelihood of stakeholder support and advocacy on the backend when it comes time to initiate policy and programmatic changes to the state's CTE program.

Developing State CTE Program Quality Indicators

Program quality indicators (PQIs) reflect what constitutes a high-quality state CTE program. These PQIs will also serve as quality thresholds or benchmarks once state CTE program data are collected and measured against the audit's established priorities. Evaluating program outcomes against these PQIs will help states better understand (a) whether their CTE program meets a high bar for quality (and where it does or does not) and (b) whether it does so for all students, not just certain populations.

Based on the "non-negotiables" for high-quality CTE programs included on page three, ExcelinEd has distilled the following six state CTE program quality indicators. Policymakers should consider them as a starting point as they determine their own PQIs and definitions.

State CTE Program Quality Indicators (PQI)

- **“College and Career Ready” Programs of Study:** CTE programs of study should incorporate a series of progressive industry-relevant and industry-valued courses that are sequential and that purposely braid core academic and technical skills learning. Course standards should reflect an elevated level of instructional rigor that matches the desired level of learning. Where appropriate, completed coursework in a program of study should lead to awarded postsecondary credit and industry certifications.
- **Education and Industry/Labor Alignment:** CTE programs of study should fully align with statewide and regional (and where appropriate and local) economic and labor priorities and projected growth areas. Economic, labor and wage data should call attention to **high-growth, high-demand and high-wage** opportunities, and the role secondary education must play in meeting those opportunities.
- **Postsecondary and Secondary Program Systems Alignment:** CTE programs of study at the secondary level should be vertically aligned with credentialed (certificate or degree) programs offered at the postsecondary level. These alignments in turn should be fully aligned with the state’s economic and labor priorities. This vertical sequencing ensures that there are “no dead end” programs being promoted to students.
- **Career Transition Experiences and Skills Development:** The state CTE program promotes and provides multiple access points for students to obtain employability- and career-related experiences. These should be visibly progressive over the course of a student’s K-12 learning continuum, culminating with one or more capstone experiences in high school that allow a student to exhibit her/his academic and technical skills development. These capstone experiences include, but are not limited to, work-based internships and industry-valued certification exams.
- **Educator “Lifecycle” Professional Development:** The state CTE educator professional development and training program should be complementary to the rigor and relevance of CTE programs of study and courses. It should reflect and reinforce the necessary classroom conditions and instructional capacities needed to achieve student academic and technical learning success. Utilizing the “lifecycle” approach, educators are provided multiple, ongoing touch points over the course of a given year and over the course of their profession to sharpen their instruction and retain relevant industry know-how and skills reflective of their content expertise.
- **Leveraged Funding to Drive Policy and Program:** Targeted federal, state and local funding are identified and leveraged through state policies to drive attainment of state CTE program priorities. Funding includes traditionally allocated CTE sources, such as the federal Perkins grant, as well as other funding sources that reflect shared priorities across state agencies and stakeholder groups and which can be reallocated appropriately, providing greater programmatic returns on investment.

What are High-Growth, High-Demand and High-Wage Opportunities?

High-Wage Occupations:

Occupations paying at or above the median hourly wage or the mean annual wage for statewide or a particular region.

High-Demand Occupations:

Occupations having more than the median number of total (growth plus replacement) openings for statewide or a particular region.

High-Skill Occupations:

Occupations with a typical educational level needed for entry of postsecondary training (non-degree) or higher; or occupations with an apprenticeship as the “typical on-the-job training” level; or occupations typically needing related work experience or long-term on-the-job-training for entry and postsecondary training (non-degree) or above as competitive.



2

PHASE 2 IMPLEMENTATION

Identifying and Collecting Data for Program Quality Indicators

- **Develop audit questions.**
- **Establish thresholds for program quality indicators.**
- **Collect quantitative and qualitative data.**
- **Identify and resolve process challenges.**

With the first phase of the state Career and Technical Education program audit completed, the audit team can begin framing audit questions and the collection of data in response to those questions. This work should fully reflect and follow lock-step with the already-determined broad audit priorities and specific state CTE program quality indicators (PQI).

A strong set of questions is one that fully exposes the program's current level of quality for that specific program quality indicator.

Developing CTE Program Audit Questions

For each established state Career and Technical Education program quality indicator, the audit team will need to develop a set of audit questions that will guide the subsequent data collection and analyses. A strong set of questions is one that fully exposes the program’s current level of quality for that specific program quality indicator.

There is no predetermined number of audit questions necessary for each PQI. Based on each indicator’s definition, the audit team should identify what is most important based on the audit’s established purpose and priorities. The audit team should prioritize the quality of questioning and whether each question will help ascertain the overall quality of the state’s CTE program as defined by its PQIs. If a drafted question does not add value, it should be removed. In the end, there should exist a manageable set of probing questions for each program quality indicator.

The customizable sample template of audit questions and data sources below can be used to guide the compilation of data and subsequent PQI rubric scoring. The questions directly reflect the state CTE program quality indicators and definitions listed in the previous section and are transferable or customizable, as needed.

Template Sample: Program Quality Indicator Audit Questions & Data Sources			DOWNLOAD FULL TEMPLATE 
Program Quality Indicator (PQI)	Audit Questions	Validating Data	Data Source
“College and Career Ready” Programs of Study	1. Are the courses in each state-promoted CTE program of study sequenced correctly to progress student learning accordingly?	1. Student course enrollment and course pass rates	1. State K-12 student information system
	2. Are the course standards in the state-promoted CTE courses content- and skills-appropriate for their program of study’s field of occupation?	1. Participating employer 2. National industry standards	1. Administered survey 2. National associations 3. State industry councils
	3. How do state-promoted CTE programs of study provide student access to early postsecondary courses or exams? Is access to these opportunities equitable? How is this reflected in student credit attainment for those students concentrating in a program of study?	1. Student course enrollment and course pass rates	1. State K-12 student information system 2. State longitudinal data system
	4. How do state-promoted CTE programs of study provide student access to industry-valued certifications? How is this reflected in student certification attainment for those students concentrating in a program of study? Are these opportunities available to all students?	1. Number of exam-qualified students 2. Student exam participation rate 3. Student exam pass rate	1. State K-12 student information system 2. State longitudinal data system 3. Vendor data
	5. Are the courses in each state-promoted CTE program of study being offered/taught to students sequentially by local school districts? Are some schools and districts more or less likely to offer these courses?	1. Student course enrollment	1. State K-12 student information system

Establishing CTE Program Quality Thresholds

Following development of the program quality indicator questions, the audit team will need to establish the thresholds—ideally, ranges—for evaluating the quality of the program. This can be a simple rubric with quantitative or qualitative measures for each indicator designating high-quality, moderate-quality or low-quality. These thresholds should be descriptive, making clear what range of achievement/attainment equates to each quality level. The following page offers a snapshot of such a rubric developed as a resource for this playbook.

Identifying Valued Data and Sources

As noted above, a robust state Career and Technical Education program audit should utilize both quantitative data and qualitative data to clarify what the current state CTE program values and whether or not those values align with the set priorities, program quality indicators and quality thresholds.

Quantitative data should derive from verified state agency data systems (individual, cross-agency and state longitudinal data systems). Where applicable, data that are self-reported by school districts or other sources but are accepted by a state agency should be noted accordingly. This playbook's template of audit questions on page 11 includes a column to cite data sources. Cataloguing the data and data sources in the completed template will improve efficiency for future data requests.

Given that some program quality indicators and audit questions will need to be addressed with qualitative data, the audit team should identify these needs early on and, in many cases, develop a process for collecting the information. For example, the Career Transition PQI may have an audit question and an identified quality measure that requires the surveying of employers who served as host sites for student interns as part of the state's promoted K-12 work-based learning program. By collecting this qualitative data, it will improve the understanding of the overall program quality and lead to more accurate scoring on the state CTE program rubric.

For both quantitative and qualitative data measures, policymakers should ensure they have the right data—and right amount of data—to provide meaningful analyses and policy recommendations. When there is an over-collecting or an under-sampling of data, the results can be just as detrimental to the overall intentions of a well-designed audit as an audit that is poorly defined.

For both quantitative and qualitative data measures, policymakers should ensure they have the right data—and right amount of data—to provide meaningful analyses and policy recommendations.

Template Sample: CTE State Program Audit Rubric

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Program Quality Indicator: “College and Career Ready” Programs of Study

Definition: Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs of study should incorporate a series of progressive industry-relevant and industry-valued courses. These courses should be sequential and braid core academic and technical skills learning. Course standards should reflect a high level of instructional rigor that matches the desired high level of learning. Where appropriate, completed coursework in a program of study should lead to awarded postsecondary credit and industry certifications.

Program Quality Threshold	High-Quality (HQ)	Moderate-Quality (MQ)	Low-Quality (LQ)
Quality Threshold Descriptor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 100% of state-promoted CTE programs of study (POS) offer courses reflecting the academic, technical and employability skills necessary for that occupation. ■ 100% of POS courses are appropriately sequenced to ensure student skills mastery. ■ >85% of students who start a state-promoted POS earn CTE concentrator status. ■ 100% of students have access to early postsecondary course/exam credit while progressing through their chosen POS; >90% earn 1 (or more) postsecondary credit. ■ Where industry appropriate, 100% of students have access to industry-valued certifications (IVC) while progressing through their chosen POS; >90% earn IVCs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ >85% of state-promoted CTE programs of study (POS) offer courses reflecting the academic, technical and employability skills necessary for that occupation. ■ >90% of POS courses are appropriately sequenced to ensure student skills mastery. ■ >65% of students who start a state-promoted POS earn CTE concentrator status. ■ 100% of students have access to early postsecondary course/exam credit while progressing through their chosen POS; >70% earn 1 (or more) postsecondary credit. ■ Where industry appropriate, 100% of students have access to industry-valued certifications(IVC) while progressing through their chosen POS; >70% earn IVCs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <85% of state-promoted CTE programs of study (POS) offer courses reflecting the academic, technical and employability skills necessary for that occupation.<90% of POS courses are appropriately sequenced to ensure student skills mastery. ■ <65% of students who start a state-promoted POS earn CTE concentrator status. ■ Where industry appropriate, 100% of students have access to industry-valued certifications (IVC) while progressing through their chosen POS; <70% earn IVCs. ■ <65% of CTE concentrators matriculate to postsecondary; <65% earn postsecondary credential.
Validating Data Sources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ State K-12 student information system ■ State longitudinal data system ■ State postsecondary information system ■ Administered survey ■ Vendor data 			
Special Data Considerations			



A State's CTE Program Includes a Variety of Programs of Study

Auditing a state's Career and Technical Education program means taking a critical look at the program's existing "programs of study." These are the formal sequences of academic and technical coursework, experiences and associated postsecondary or industry-recognized credentials that students can pursue and complete within one of the 16 defined career clusters. For instance, nursing is a program of study that falls under the health science career cluster. Where possible, all the data compiled and analyzed against the program quality indicators should also connect to a specific program of study. This will allow the programs of study to serve as an organizing principle for both the analysis of data and outcomes as well as key changes or improvements needed down the road.

Other state policies should also be used, including labor and workforce, postsecondary and economic development, where appropriate. For example, one measure associated with the College and Career Ready Programs of Study PQI is the number of secondary students who earn state identified industry-valued certifications at time of graduation or during the immediate seven months following graduation. Using this measure, a policymaker then sets the threshold ranges for each of the three quality levels, allowing each PQI to be scored once data are collected.

Factors Affecting Data Collection for Program Quality Indicators

Collecting audit data to address key questions related to program quality is likely to be one of the more time-consuming and challenging tasks in the process. Before embarking on it, the audit team should consider the following factors that may affect the data gathering activities:

- The number of program quality indicators and associated questions that need to be addressed.
- The number of existing Career and Technical Education programs of study (and component parts, such as courses) within the broader state CTE program (some states have well over 100 while others have significantly fewer)—and by extension, the amount of relevant data associated with them.
- The availability of and ease of access to identified quantitative data.
- The amount of qualitative data that must be pursued and collected.
- The level of stakeholder engagement and support, particularly across state agencies and with workforce boards, employers and industry organizations.

Some data collection challenges may be known, and others may be discovered during the audit process. As a result, audit team members will need to consider how certain measures of program quality may need to be adjusted or augmented—while still reflecting the established rationale and priorities of the audit itself.

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3

PHASE 3 ANALYSIS AND NEXT STEPS

Translating Results into Action

- Analyze audit results, including strengths, weaknesses and gaps.
- Document findings and recommendations.
- Develop a strategic plan for program improvement.

Once the state Career and Technical Education program data analyses are complete, the next step is to begin evaluating the results with an eye toward how this information should impact the state's CTE program. If well-designed and executed, a state CTE program audit process should result in a set of data-validated policy and program recommendations. These recommendations should reflect the state's priorities and identify what is needed to implement a high-quality state CTE program that will support those priorities.

If well-designed and executed, a state CTE program audit process should result in a set of data-validated policy and program recommendations.

Analyzing Audit Results

Once data are collected based on the program quality indicators audit questions, the audit team should begin analyzing the findings. This action step will vary in both complexity and process from state to state. For this playbook’s purposes, it involves the review of all collected data outcomes against the CTE program rubric’s established measures for each PQI threshold. Based on the threshold descriptors and accompanying measures and available data, policymakers should score each PQI (including the relevant data justifying the score). Where there are threshold measures that do not have verified data or there are no data, a policymaker should fully acknowledge these data gaps, and utilize these gaps accordingly during the PQI analyses and any subsequent policy recommendations.

The unpacking of the program quality indicators rubric should be methodical. The audit team should refrain from rushing to judgment or drawing policy or programmatic conclusions until every data measure tied to each chosen PQI threshold is assessed. Given the complexities of a state CTE program, all the program’s influencing factors (positive and negative) need to be identified before any revised or new policy is drafted. Using a set of critical questions that provide varying levels of examination can help in the analysis process. For instance:

- Looking at the data measures used to score each PQI, what factors influenced those measures—positively and negatively? Specifically, from a (a) policy standpoint, (b) programmatic standpoint, (c) participant standpoint or a (d) data quality and collection standpoint?
- For those PQIs that were scored low in the rubric, what contributed to that decision? Were there misalignments in the policy or in the program execution?
- For those PQIs that were scored high in the rubric, what contributed to that decision? And what takeaways can influence other work from a policy or a programmatic standpoint?
- Looking across all PQIs, what is the broader diagnosis of the current state CTE program when considered against the established audit rationale, priorities and the PQI definitions?

During the analysis process, policymakers can start tying results to recommendations by pairing side-by-side the concluding analyses with potential policy and programmatic changes. These should inform the creation of the audit report and subsequent strategic plan, which will drive all policy and programmatic recommendations.

Crafting of the State CTE Program Audit Report and Strategic Plan

Once the audit's program analyses are completed, the audit team should (a) report findings and (b) recommend a path forward to strengthen the state's Career and Technical Education program. For this playbook's purposes, these two deliverables are an audit report and strategic plan.

Audit Report

The state CTE program audit report should include both a narrative retelling of the various phases and actions undertaken as well as a set of recommended policy and program changes. When the report reveals the audit recommendations, it should state how each recommendation will resolve any identified policy and program issues and how each will lead to the strengthening the state's CTE program if implemented. This should include the identification of appropriate data indicators, which will serve as accountability measures for ongoing state CTE program analyses going forward. If there are potential costs tied to a recommendation, or if a recommendation may require legislative changes, those should also be called out.

Strategic Plan

A high-level strategic plan demonstrates the key actions and timelines proposed for each recommendation. This document should identify responsible parties and anticipated deliverables as the plan is being executed. Once the audit report and its recommendations are approved, the initial high-level strategic plan will need to be expanded, providing greater detail to the identified work that needs to be accomplished. The more detailed strategic plan should also incorporate a robust communications and marketing approach to assist with messaging to various stakeholders, whose buy-in will be essential for the immediate- and long-term success of the recommendations.

Education is an essential component to any
state's economic and workforce plans.



Preparing for Unwelcome or Unpleasant Findings

Every state's audit will produce its own set of findings grounded in the rationale, priorities and program quality indicators that policymakers establish. However, policymakers and stakeholders should be prepared to consider some potentially unwelcome findings and recommendations. For instance, the audit may result in recommendations that certain programs of study be overhauled or eliminated because they are not aligned to labor market demand, are “dead end” pathways with no postsecondary transition, or both. It might also reveal gaps in equity and access for higher-skill and higher-wage programs of study. In short, the audit recommendations will likely provoke some hard conversations about courses and pathways that are popular with local schools and districts. That is why it is critical that the audit process is transparent, methodical and inclusive of stakeholder views from the get-go—so that the resulting conversations and proposed changes are grounded in shared priorities for program quality and student success.

Resetting State CTE Program Expectations and Outcomes

A well-designed and executed state Career and Technical Education program audit should lead to a resetting of stakeholders' expectations for program quality and alignment. It should also inform broader conversations about K-16 education and statewide goals for economic mobility. As a state acts upon its CTE program audit report recommendations, its leaders and policymakers have an opportunity to reframe public conversation about what is valued by the state.

Education is an essential component to any state's economic and workforce plans. It can, through a strong state CTE program, provide a lasting mark on how well current and future workforces are prepared to meet the diverse needs of industries and employers. Those states that do pursue this will have an edge over those that do not in the high-stakes pursuit of employer recruitment and long-term statewide economic stability.

WHAT'S NEXT



This playbook marks the third in a five-part series exploring strategies and a set of processes that states can engage in to improve their Career and Technical Education programs. Looking ahead, *ExcelinEd* will consider how states currently fund their CTE programs, along with strategies states could adopt to support aligned, robust pathways. Finally, we will look at some of the ways that policymakers can ensure CTE programs are vertically aligned to postsecondary credential and advanced training opportunities.

ExcelinEd looks forward to working with states as they navigate this vital process to improve their CTE programs and provide students opportunities for lifelong advancement and success.

Visit [ExcelinEd.org/Innovation/College-Career-Pathways](https://www.ExcelinEd.org/Innovation/College-Career-Pathways) for more information and resources.