Understanding How Workforce Pathways Shape College Outcomes and Earnings Gains

Directors of career and technical education (CTE) programs play a critical role in determining how institutional priorities and policies are integrated with student-level interactions. Having access to complete data about student progress and outcomes can help CTE directors make important decisions about program development, budget requests, and institutional policy recommendations. More comprehensive data is now available on the CTE LaunchBoard, which can help support these activities. The LaunchBoard can also help make the link between specific program outcomes and institutional policy issues on topics such as measuring success, making scheduling decisions, and supporting educational planning.

This discussion guide is designed to be used with two short videos posted on the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Doing What Matters for Jobs and the Economy website that link new research on CTE outcomes with broader issues of educational policy. The first, “Building More Comprehensive Measures of Workforce Training Success” (four minutes), describes why success metrics for CTE programs need to be more comprehensive than completion of community college credentials or transfer to a four-year college. The second, an “How Workforce Pathways Shape College Outcomes and Earnings Gains” (eight minutes), examines the multiple types of workforce training offered by community colleges and their associated earnings gains, as a means of documenting the value of both short-term and long-term educational pathways.
Below are a number of possible discussions and action steps that CTE directors could undertake after viewing the videos.

Measuring Success
Both videos make a case that CTE programs should be assessed by looking at the following metrics:

- Completion of community college degrees and certificates
- Transfer to four-year universities
- Earnings gains
- Employment and employment retention
- Third-party certifications

By logging into the CTE LaunchBoard—a dashboard that can be accessed by anyone associated with a community college—you can find program-level results for your college on many of these metrics.

CTE LaunchBoard Uses

- **Program Review**: view rates and five-year trends on critical topics like milestones, completion, wage gain, and employment
- **Budget Requests**: make the case on programs that are likely to yield a strong return-on-investment based on enrollments, outcomes, and regional labor market information
- **Demonstrating Success**: showcase outcomes on both program completers and skills-builders—more experienced workers who are improving their employment status by filling skills gaps

There are a number of possible questions that you could discuss and actions you could take after reviewing LaunchBoard data.

**Discussion: Does the data on the LaunchBoard appear to be accurate?**

If not, the problem may lie in how your college codes and tracks program-level information. The LaunchBoard is largely populated from the annual uploads that colleges provide to the Chancellor’s Office for accountability reporting. If your information is being incorrectly tagged, it not only affects the LaunchBoard—it also affects how data appears in public reports like the Salary Surfer, the CTE Scorecard, and outcomes submitted to the federal government.

**Action**: Talk with your college’s institutional researcher to examine how course- and program-level information is coded and tracked.

**Discussion: In the “credentials” portion of the LaunchBoard Program Snapshot tab, is the “locally issued certificates” field filled in?**

Many colleges do not report the number of certificates given out for non-Chancellor’s Office-approved programs, because it is an optional part of accountability reporting. However, if colleges submit this information, it can be included on the LaunchBoard to provide a more complete picture of CTE outcomes.

**Action**: Talk with your chief instructional officer about the value of submitting this information and recommend that non-approved certificates be added to accountability reporting.

**Discussion: In the “credentials” portion of the LaunchBoard Program Snapshot tab, is the “external credentials” field filled in?**

The primary source of information for this field comes from the CTE Outcomes Survey, an optional survey that colleges pay to participate in (the survey is administered at cost by Santa Rosa Junior...

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Once your data is in place, you can determine if students are attaining outcomes that align with your program goals. For more information on how to leverage the completion and employment data in the LaunchBoard, as well as compare it to labor market information from your region (available in the “regional labor market information” portion of the LaunchBoard Program Snapshot tab), you can download a four-page guide that describes how one college used this type of information to drive program improvement. You can also view a PowerPoint presentation that details specific combinations of fields that can provide useful insights.

**Action: Use the LaunchBoard in program review and accreditation.** Talk with your institutional researcher and chief instructional officer about integrating the information available in the LaunchBoard into program review. You can also use the historical trend data displayed in the LaunchBoard to identify outcomes and set improvement goals, activities that are now required in accreditation reports.

**Action: Make the case for more resources.** You may be able to use these expanded outcomes to make the case for why a program deserves more resources, new equipment, an additional faculty member, or a greater number of sections.

**Action: Identify program components that need attention.** If the numbers aren’t strong, you can begin investigating how to help more students reach their goals. Bring LaunchBoard results to your employer advisory committees to see if they can shed insight into hiring and wage factors, as well as skills that may need more emphasis. Talk to your faculty about whether students are hitting key benchmarks, as documented in the “milestones” and “credentials” portions of the LaunchBoard Program Snapshot tab. Determine whether your program might benefit from a stackable credentials structure.
because students are able to improve wages without completing the program. Convene a focus group with students to gather their perspectives on how to improve outcomes.

**Action:** Get a handle on the bigger picture. Connect with your regional consortia chair to identify ways to share data on your student outcomes with other similar programs in your region, so you can see how your program fits into the larger training and labor markets.

**Discussion: For short-term programs, does the LaunchBoard enable you to make a case for policy and advising changes?**

Being able to demonstrate positive employment and wage outcomes can help to advance policy changes, such as exempting courses from repeatability limits, creating a local certificate that can be easily integrated into educational plans, or securing Chancellor’s Office approval for an existing local credential.

For example, a multi-media program might have historically low completion rates, paired with high employment and wage outcomes as demonstrated in the LaunchBoard. If the program is facing declining enrollments that are being driven by repeatability rules, the college could map this high-value pathway, ensure it is documented in a local certificate or Chancellor’s Office-approved certificate, and adjust policies at the institutional level that are inadvertently preventing students from reaching their goals.

**Action:** Identify systemic problems. Talk to your faculty and document specific problems with existing policies, particularly those that are being treated on a case-by-case basis because the context for CTE program design and delivery is not sufficiently understood. Bring these larger issues to college leadership with proposals for how to adjust relevant policies so that better addresses the needs of workforce students and programs.

**Action:** Share your outcomes data with counselors and your chief student services officer. Ensure they have the information they need so they can help skills-builder students prepare appropriate educational plans. Make sure they understand the full range of your program pathways, which may include both short- and long-term options within the same subject area, and the type of student each pathway is designed to support.

**Action:** Demonstrate the value of your program. Walk through the LaunchBoard outcomes with your dean and chief instructional officer, so they have a better understanding why your program is meeting the needs of both students and employers, and the specific pathways that have been designed to meet these goals.

**Find Out More**

- **Chancellor’ Office resource website** on Doing What Matters for Jobs and the Economy, which describes how workforce training is being strengthened among California Community Colleges: [http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/Home.aspx](http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/Home.aspx)

- **Four-minute video** on why success metrics for career and technical education (CTE) programs need to be more comprehensive: [http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/CollegeLeadershipResources/InformingPolicy.aspx#video1](http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/CollegeLeadershipResources/InformingPolicy.aspx#video1)

- **Eight-minute video** on the multiple types of workforce training offered by community colleges and their associated earnings gains: [http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/CollegeLeadershipResources/InformingPolicy.aspx#video2](http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/CollegeLeadershipResources/InformingPolicy.aspx#video2)

- **CTE LaunchBoard**, a dashboard of workforce training outcomes available to faculty and staff of California community colleges: [https://www.calpassplus.org/launchboard/Home.aspx](https://www.calpassplus.org/launchboard/Home.aspx)

- **Resource guides** on understanding the LaunchBoard and how to use specific features: [http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/LaunchBoard/Resources.aspx](http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/LaunchBoard/Resources.aspx)

- **Case studies** on using labor market data to inform program-level planning: [http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/LaunchBoard/Resources.aspx](http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/LaunchBoard/Resources.aspx)

- **Contact information for regional consortia chairs** and other technical assistance providers who can help broker conversations among community colleges with similar programs: [http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/Contact.aspx](http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/Contact.aspx)

- **Information on the CTE Outcomes Survey**, a voluntary survey that capture employment outcomes of former students, conducted at cost by Santa Rosa Junior College: [http://www.santarosa.edu/cteos](http://www.santarosa.edu/cteos)