Understanding How Workforce Pathways Shape College Outcomes and Earnings Gains

College leaders—including chancellors, chief instructional officers, chief student services officers, and boards—play a critical role in determining institutional priorities and policies. Having access to complete data about programs and students can help college leaders make important decisions about resource allocation, scheduling, and advising. More comprehensive data is now available on the CTE LaunchBoard, which can help to inform institutional planning as well as key activities like accreditation and program review.

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 career and technical education (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 college leadership 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

» **Accreditation**: view rates and five-year trends on critical topics like completion, wage gain, and employment

» **Resource Allocation**: examine which programs are likely to yield a strong return-on-investment by comparing enrollments with regional labor market demand

» **Success Score Cards**: capture 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**: Have program directors review LaunchBoard data. If there appear to be problems, 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**: Begin submitting non-Chancellor’s Office approved certificates as part of 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 College—detailed information on pricing, timelines, and survey questions are available on their website). However, colleges can also upload data from other sources, provided that the information is linked to individual student records and the
The collection methodology is certified by Cal-PASS Plus and the RP Group. Understanding whether college programs are well-aligned with industry-recognized credentials can help inform curriculum and program development.

**Action:** Determine the best way to gather information on third-party credentials for your college. Have your institutional researcher or a CTE program director learn more about the CTE Outcomes Survey or contact launchboard@cccco.edu to learn how to certify data collected by your institution through other means.

**Understanding Outcomes**
The longer video points out that colleges may be addressing diverse goals through their workforce training programs. For example, some programs require a long sequence of courses to ensure that students master complex skill-sets, while others—like those targeting skills-builders—only need to offer a class or two to fill discrete skill gaps. Short-term programs may be just as effective as longer programs at helping students reach sizable wage gains, depending on the industry and the experience level of the student. Examining the data in the LaunchBoard can help you determine whether your program is helping student attain the appropriate outcomes.

Possible questions that you could discuss and actions you could take are outlined below.

**Discussion: Looking at factors such as completion, employment, earnings gains, and third-party certifications, and given the goals of your program, how successful do students appear to be?**

Once your data is in place, you can determine if students are attaining outcomes that align with CTE 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 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:** Reassess resource allocation. With more comprehensive data on outcomes and labor market demand, determine whether your college is allocating the appropriate budget, staffing, and course sections for specific CTE programs.

**Action:** Demonstrate the value of CTE programs. Include a broader range of metrics in conversations and reports about student success, so you can explain how workforce programs are meeting the needs of both students and employers, and the specific pathways that have been designed to meet these goals.

**Discussion: Does the LaunchBoard indicate the need for policy and advising changes for CTE?**

Workforce programs may be disadvantaged by some college policies, such as repeatability limits and priority enrollment that is predicated on
completing matriculation—particularly for workers who are seeking to fill a few discrete skills gaps. For example, a multi-media program might have historically low completion rates, but high employment and wage outcomes as demonstrated in the LaunchBoard. If the program is facing declining enrollments because students are being kept out by repeatability rules and courses are not being scheduled given the college’s focus on degree-related pathways, the college may elect to re-examine these policies.

**Action: Identify systemic problems.** Talk to CTE directors to determine if there are 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. Determine where it is appropriate to adjust relevant policies to better address the needs of workforce students and programs.

**Action: Ensure counselors and chief student services officers have access to the LaunchBoard and discuss workforce training pathways with CTE leadership.** Student services can work with CTE programs to ensure they have the information they need to help students prepare appropriate educational plans, including understanding the full range of CTE 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.

**Find Out More**

Below are links to resources listed in this document. You can also get your questions answered by emailing launchboard@cccco.edu.

- **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.asp#video1](http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/CollegeLeadershipResources/InformingPolicy.asp#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.asp#video2](http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/CollegeLeadershipResources/InformingPolicy.asp#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 planning: [http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/LaunchBoard/Resources.aspx](http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/LaunchBoard/Resources.aspx)
- **Information on the CTE Outcomes Survey**, a voluntary survey that captures employment outcomes of former students, conducted at cost by Santa Rosa Junior College: [http://www.santarosa.edu/cteos/](http://www.santarosa.edu/cteos/)