

This response was prepared for Pad McCracken, Montana Legislative Services Division

Your Question:

You asked about middle school and early high school career exploration. Specifically, you asked about ways states are offering career exploration and advising in grades 7-10.

Our Response:

[Research](#) has found that adolescence is a time when students begin to think more abstractly, learn through teamwork, and have a desire to explore topics they find interesting. Additional [research](#) suggests that middle school is a time when students can benefit the most from career exploration. Given where adolescent children are developmentally, there is an opportunity for students to [develop employability skills and gain a sense of their interests](#) through career exploration in middle school and early high school.

There are a series of ways that states have developed and supported career exploration and CTE opportunities for middle school students. High school career exploration is often conducted through career and technical education courses and programs. Under [Perkins V](#), states can use federal funds to support CTE and [career exploration](#) in grades five through 12. Generally, states have considered policy and state action in the following areas to foster and support early CTE and career exploration:

- Offer and create introductory CTE courses or career exploration opportunities in middle schools.
- Require the completion of a CTE or career-oriented course in middle school.
- Requiring personalized education and career plans beginning in middle school.

While research demonstrates a benefit of early career exploration and states have developed policy that supports the creation and offering of career exploration, there are some notable barriers associated with providing access to career exploration across a state. Notable [barriers](#) include funding, school and guidance counselor capacity, teacher licensure requirements for CTE teachers and a focus on core academic subjects at the school level.

Offer and Create CTE and Career Exploration Opportunities in Middle School

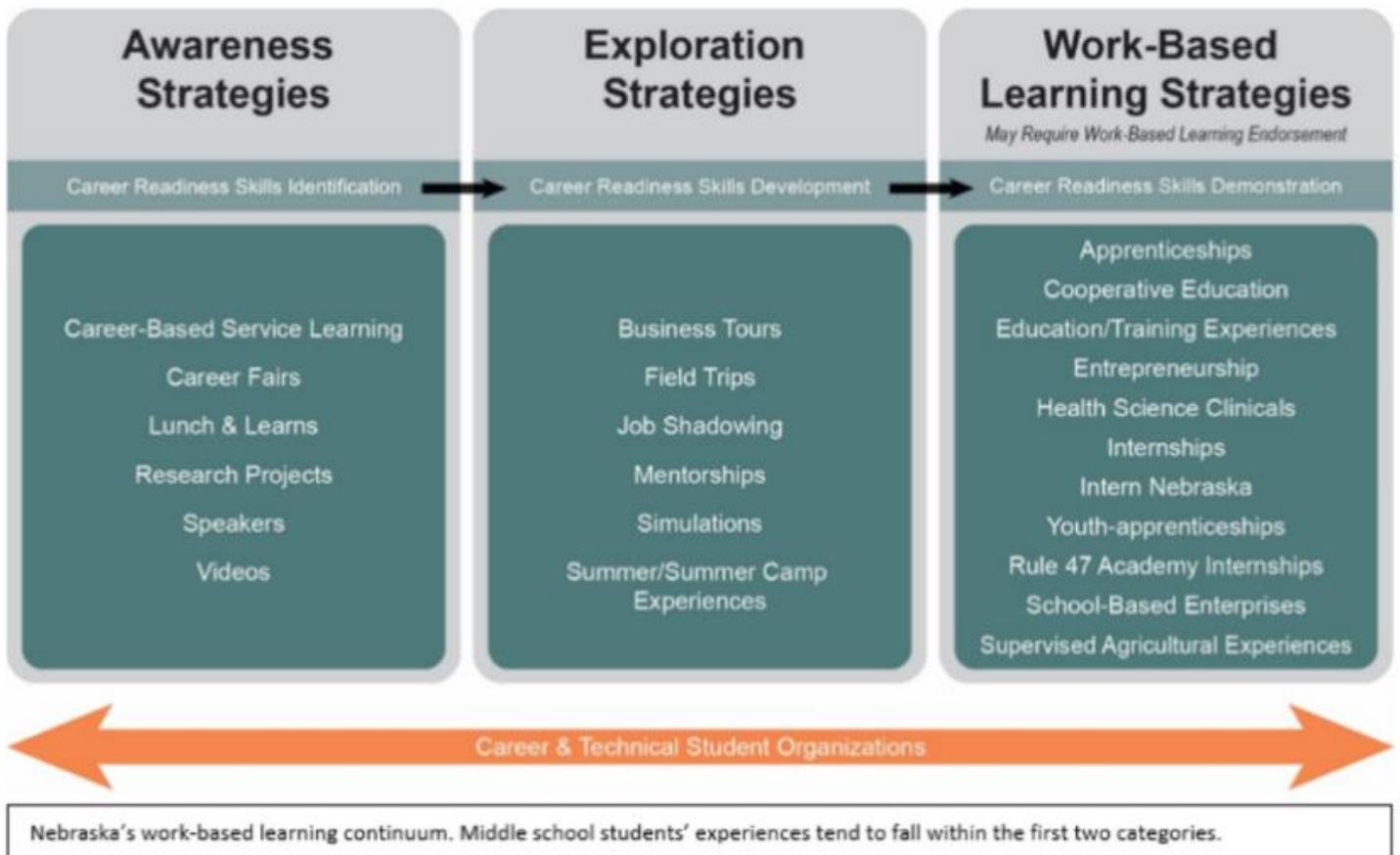
Some states have [adopted policy](#) that expands and supports offering CTE courses and career exploration in middle school. Depending on the structure of the program or course offerings, students can learn about employability skills, connect academic interests and classroom learning with potential careers, and begin the process of identifying and planning for learning opportunities in high school. States that have adopted expansion of CTE and career exploration to middle schools have worked to align standards and systems across middle school and high school programming to allow students to build on their early exploration and coursework.

[Ohio](#): In 2014, the legislature enacted [legislation](#), which requires schools to provide CTE courses in seventh and eighth grade. The courses offered are primarily introductory or exploratory courses aligned with high school CTE courses through state-level standards. The state has allowed teachers with a teacher license to teach most middle school CTE courses. The state department provides a range of [resources](#) for schools including outlines for each

middle school course. Participation in the courses is not required; however, in 2017, 73,728 students participated in middle school CTE courses. Advance CTE provided a [summary](#) of the policy and program.

Nebraska: In 2015, the governor created the [Developing Youth Talent Initiative](#). The program connects seventh and eighth-grade students to learning opportunities in manufacturing and information technology. Of their annual appropriations, the Nebraska Department of Economic Development administers up to \$250,000 to a minimum of two projects. One of the two projects must be in a community with a population of 100,000 or less. Businesses are the lead applicant and must partner with a local public school to develop a program. The state has provided a [description](#) of all funded projects dating back to 2015.

The state has a workforce development continuum, as outlined below. The initiative programs tend to fall into career awareness.



Requiring CTE or Career-oriented Course Competition in Middle School

In addition to offering CTE courses and exploration experiences, states have adopted policy that requires students to take CTE courses or engage in career exposure experiences that are offered in middle school. In some instances, the requirement connects broader CTE or career standards and academic and career plans for the students.

Virginia: State statute requires that each school board require each middle school student to take at least one career investigation course or engage in an alternative activity that allows for career exploration. The course or alternative experience must provide the foundation for the student to develop their academic and career plan. The state board of education is required to develop content standards for the career investigation course and experiences.

Requiring Personalized Education and Career Plans Beginning in Middle School

Some states have implemented requirements for career and academic planning. Generally, the plans provide an opportunity for students to identify their interests and possible opportunities they can pursue to reach academic and career goals. While plans do not necessarily lead to career exploration for all students, the planning process can allow students opportunities to identify and pursue experiences based on their interests.

The requirements and resources to support the programs vary across the states. As noted earlier, a potential barrier to implementing and carrying out planning requirements is the [capacity of school or guidance counselors](#). In some instances, states provide funding to develop infrastructure that supports both the student and counselors in facilitating the planning process.

[Wisconsin](#): In 2013, the state passed legislation to provide continual funding to implement and support academic and career advising statewide. State [statute](#) requires that all students in grades six through 12 receive academic and career planning services beginning in the 2017-18 school year. To meet the requirement, the department of public instruction created and implemented the Academic and Career Planning program. The department provides and maintains technology and computer programs to support districts in providing academic and career planning to students. Also, the department provides guidance and technical assistance to school districts, teachers and counselors on how to provide academic and career plans for students.