

Frequently Asked Questions

Future Focused. Career Ready: Helping NC Students and Families with Post-Secondary Planning

Q. Why should students be focused on their career journey when high school graduation may be years away?

The reality is that every student is progressing towards a career throughout their time in school. Identifying aptitudes and interests, and engaging in work-based activities in middle and high school can help students and families feel more confident about their post-secondary plan.

Q. What is available in North Carolina that can help students explore career opportunities?

The current job market requires employees to hold new skills and varying levels of educational attainment. Students who are exposed to different careers that align with their interests will be exposed to classes, extracurricular activities and work-based learning experiences that will help them formulate a solid post-secondary plan.

There are many options that already exist to support a student's career journey:

- Earning dual high school and college credits
- Work-based learning like job shadow, internships, and apprenticeships
- Career and Technical Education classes in 16 career clusters and multiple pathways
To learn more, visit [NCCTE Courses, Credentials, and Pathways](#)
- Degree and/or non-degree credentials earned in high school classes
- Extracurricular activities that support a student's curiosity and interests

Q. What is dual enrollment and why could this help students with career exploration?

In North Carolina, eligible high school students can earn credentials and college credits tuition-free from North Carolina colleges and universities. This program is called Career and College Promise (CCP), and it is a statewide dual enrollment program. Three pathways are available through CCP.

College Transfer pathway	This pathway allows high school students to take classes at a local college and potentially earn college credit.
Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathway	This pathway allows students to take dual enrollment classes to earn college credits leading to technical credentials or workforce-based careers.
Cooperative Innovative High Schools (CIHS) pathway	This pathway allows students to earn an associate degree or two years of college credit at an approved high school partnered with a college or university (e.g., an early college).

Q. What is an industry-recognized credential and why does it matter?

Industry-recognized credentials are those that reflect the specific competencies needed for a given industry or occupational area. Students demonstrate mastery of knowledge and skills, increasing job prospects, marketability to employers, and options for post-secondary education. Learn more at [apprenticeship.gov](#).



Q. Where do students learn more about industry-recognized credentials?

The North Carolina Workforce Credentials Advisory Council has identified credentials targeted at high school students with professional and college aspirations. To learn more, visit [NCCTE Courses, Credentials, and Pathways](#).

Additionally, the Council identified priority non-degree credentials that are valued by employers and puts those who earn them on a path to a sustainable wage career. Visit [NCCareers.org](#) for a list of credentials which features over 10 career areas that may be of interest to students. This list is revised regularly, so be sure to check again soon!



Q. What is Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or Cambridge International Education (CIE) coursework?

The College Board defines **Advanced Placement (AP)** courses as “rigorous, college-level classes in a variety of subjects that give students the opportunity to earn college credit while in high school by scoring a 3 or higher (5-point scale) on the AP exam associated with that course.”

In North Carolina, 38 AP courses are offered in public high schools. 73 public high schools also offer the AP Capstone Diploma program. Courses range from AP Computer Science Principles to AP Human Geography to AP Biology.

International Baccalaureate (IB) courses follow a curriculum created by the International Baccalaureate Organization. Students can take individual IB classes and earn a certificate of completion for each class (with a score of 4 or higher on the corresponding IB exam) or can be IB diploma students, which is a 2-year program for juniors and seniors. In North Carolina, 29 public high schools offer the IB Diploma Programme and 4 public high schools offer the IB Career-related Programme.

Cambridge International Education (CIE) courses follow an international curriculum for a global community of learners and assessments with Cambridge International. Students can earn a Cambridge AICE Diploma. In North Carolina, 5 public high schools offer the Cambridge International program.

Exam fees for AP, IB and CIE exams are funded for all NC public high school students through the NC AP Partnership. To learn more, speak with your school counselor or visit [cambridgeinternational.org](#).

Q. What resources are available for students and families to learn more about career pathways?

- **NC Careers.org** — take a deeper dive into the 16 career clusters, course requirements, and resources, and learn more about how CTE can prepare every student for a career and post-secondary success.
- **NC Careers.org/CTE and NC CTE Course Management System** — find the 16 career clusters and learn more about how CTE can prepare every student for career and post-secondary success.
- **Career and College Promise | NC DPI (Department of Public Instruction)** — find detailed information about North Carolina’s innovative program to help students and families earn college credit in high school and reduce post-secondary college expenses.
- **CIHS Resources | NC DPI** — find the small, rigorous early colleges and industry aligned high schools that allow students to earn an associate degree in five years of high school/ community college.
- **Career and Technical Education | NC DPI** — find detailed information about career pathways, course requirements for industry aligned, rigorous, hands-on classroom experiences.



Q. What are the roles in a district or at a school that help facilitate career conversations with students?

- A **School Counselor** is a great place to start as they will guide students in choosing classes that align with career goals and can help formulate career plans.
- A school district or school may also have a specialist called a **Career Development Coordinator** who works collaboratively with administrators, student services personnel, and teachers to ensure the delivery of career development services for students.
- North Carolina high schools also employ **CTE directors and staff** to coordinate career development opportunities for students participating in CTE classes.
- **Classroom teachers** are an excellent resource as they help students identify their talents and hone their interests.



Q. How do students learn about what employers need and expect?

Based on community conversations facilitated in every region of the State, the **North Carolina Portrait of a Graduate** identified the most important competencies, durable skills and mindsets needed to be successful in the workforce.

The **America Succeeds North Carolina report** scanned millions of job listings to identify what employers value most and what skills students should cultivate during their K-12 educational journey.

Work-based learning and internship experiences are a tremendous way to put their durable skills to work on the job.

Q. What is work-based learning and how do students get involved?

Work-based learning opportunities include internships, job shadowing, or apprenticeships. This is an educational approach that allows students to put theory into practice through real-life work experiences. The goal is to help students explore what they learned in a classroom through hands-on opportunities, which allows them to discover what they love to do while developing skills needed post-graduation.

Work-based learning allows students to explore career pathways through exposure, engagement, and experience. Students may be able to earn class credit or a stipend for these opportunities!

Students can also simulate work-based learning with project-based learning and demonstrated mastery. This is especially important if the student cannot participate in an internship or apprenticeship, which is the case in some states as laws may require employees to be at least 18 years of age to work on certain job sites.

Q. What are the alternative academic options to a 4-year degree?



Community College — students can earn a 2-year degree with flexibility and technical training, and can transfer to earn a bachelor's degree from a state university.



Vocational or Technical School — students can walk away with a diploma or postsecondary certificate (rather than a college degree) and enter the workforce immediately.



Online Credential Attainment — students can earn these distinctions allowing them to demonstrate skills developed in an online setting.



Youth Apprenticeships — students can gain hands-on experiences that are linked to community college courses, on the job training and lead directly to employment.

Q. What classes are offered in North Carolina to support careers after high school?

Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes are offered at every North Carolina public high school. These rigorous, yet engaging and hands-on classes prepare students for community college, university, military, or the workforce upon high school graduation. Many of these courses align to career pathways at our 58 Community Colleges across North Carolina.

CTE classes are open to every student, and it is recommended that every student include CTE electives in their high school portfolio, as these courses align to real-world expectations and successful career and civic engagement.

Q. How do I get financial aid to support my post-secondary plans?

College Foundation of North Carolina (cfnc.org) - Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a form each student must fill out in order to receive federal financial aid for college. This is the first step in the financial aid process. If completing this as a high school senior, a student must renew the FAFSA form each year you remain in school to stay eligible for federal student aid.

FAFSA completion is not required in North Carolina, but it is strongly encouraged. Students leave more than \$100M annually in Pell Grants behind by not completing their FAFSA. School counselors, career development coordinators, and administrators can help students and families complete this federal form.

Q. Is there a statewide resource for career planning?

NCCareers.org allows students and parents to explore occupations based on zip code, plan a career based on lifestyle, and discover the education and training needed to equip them for the path of their choice.

There are many other career planning tools available to students, and some local school districts offer their own! These tools may include Major Clarity, Naviance, Kuder, and ScholarPath (beginning Fall 2022). Students should check with their school counselor or CTE administrator to learn more.

