



The Future Moves With *Us*

Creating a launchpad for *discovery, skill-building,*
and *innovation* for all students in Washtenaw
County through Career Technical Education

thank you.

We want to acknowledge the following vision partners who participated in our Think Tank sessions in April 2024, including:

ALAN BURG, Member, Kiwanis Club of Ann Arbor

STEPHANIE CASEY, Assistant Professor of Mathematics Education and Director of the STEM Institute, Eastern Michigan University

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CHAD WIEBESICK, CTA, Director of Media Relations and Special Projects, Destination Ann Arbor

We'd similarly like to thank the following individuals who have committed to serve on the Washtenaw County CTE Advisory Committee:

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DR. DEREK CAENEY, Senior Executive Engineer, Toyota North America Research and Development

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DR. ALENA ZACHERY-ROSS, Superintendent, Ypsilanti Community Schools

A LETTER FROM OUR **SUPERINTENDENT**

Dear families, parents, and all members of our Washtenaw County community,

Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD) is committed to providing a world-class education for all students—an education that equips students with the tools, opportunities, and agency to explore and create their own path for success.

One core way we do this is by offering applied and experiential learning opportunities that give students the chance to *learn by doing*. Through this approach, we unlock a world of discovery for students. They gain real-world skills connected to in-demand careers and industries like technology, healthcare, engineering, and business. They also learn about what brings them joy and inspiration through exciting hands-on, applied and experiential learning activities.



Career Technical Education (CTE) programs are a powerful example of these types of enriching learning opportunities. **For students, CTE is where learning comes alive through hands-on projects, work-based learning, and industry-connected experiences. For Washtenaw County, CTE shapes and strengthens the workforce and economy as students graduate with confidence and an informed postsecondary plan on their way to becoming the next generation of skilled workers, creators, and leaders.**

When we think about the future of education and what that should look like, that's applied and experiential learning. CTE is a key pillar of applied and experiential learning that keeps skills, engagement, and student interest at the forefront of its focus and design. But this can only become reality if our community works together to support these essential programs.

In this report, we explore what CTE means for our students in Washtenaw County, the current challenges students face in accessing programs, and how we are coming together so every student can benefit from these life-changing learning experiences.

We have an opportunity to re-envision learning in a way that focuses on exploration, problem-solving, and skills that are truly relevant to our students' future education and careers. We can break down barriers and inspire young people, helping them thrive and find their purpose in life. And, we can make this happen by working with local businesses, higher education institutions, policymakers, and funders to give young people the skills they need to be productive and successful after they graduate, regardless of their pathway.

The time is now to expand access to CTE across WISD so every student in Washtenaw County can experience hands-on, purposeful learning that prepares them for the future.

From our higher education institutions to local businesses, schools, educators, and families, we all have a role to play when it comes to building a world-class education system right here in Washtenaw County.

Let's come together *today* to set our students up for success *tomorrow* through CTE.

Moving forward together,


Naomi Norman



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"Washtenaw scholars deserve exceptional and world-class opportunities because they are exceptional and world-class scholars. CTE is not a program, it's a promise. It's a promise to empower our scholars, to strengthen our community, and to build a brighter future for all."

Dr. Alena Zachery-Ross

Superintendent, Ypsilanti Community Schools

What is CTE and *why* does it matter to Washtenaw County?

In Washtenaw County, we believe in the power of education to transform students' lives and their communities. We are committed to providing every student the resources and support to discover and design their path to success.

That's why, starting in preschool and continuing through high school, we offer cutting-edge learning experiences that spark a lifelong love of learning *and* build the skills needed to succeed in college and career. Career Technical Education (CTE) is at the heart of this mission.

Our CTE programs are a launchpad for discovery, where learning is active, industry-connected, and designed to inspire the next generation of professionals. We believe that **no matter where they are, students should be able to explore their purpose, passions, and potential through hands-on experiences, real-world opportunities, and pathways that lead to college and career success.**

Essential, holistic student development is at the core of applied and experiential learning, and CTE embraces this. These programs give students a sense of fulfillment and purpose, and cultivate a lifelong love of learning. They put students at the forefront of innovation. Through Washtenaw County's CTE programs, we have a chance to prepare students for college and careers, while also helping them connect to their communities, solve problems, and become engaged citizens.

But this vision for CTE can only be achieved if WISD can provide fair, universal access to CTE programs for all students in its districts.



"[My CTE program] provided a path for me going forward that I would not have otherwise had. It equipped me to serve in clinical positions right out of high school, allowing me to work in health care day one and help pay for my college nursing program. I am a firm believer that making an investment in a student today will pay dividends for many years to come, and I am proof of that."

Cindy Elliott, RN, FACHE

President of Trinity Health Michigan Medical Groups



CTE sparks students' *curiosity, discovery, and connection* to the real world

Across Washtenaw County, **CTE gets our students excited about learning** – this is every educator's goal and every student's hope. With CTE, our students understand *why* they're learning what they're learning. By offering students innovative, hands-on learning experiences early, students can discover new, practical interests and explore what energizes and motivates them. When students are passionate about what they are learning and can connect it to the world around them, they are more engaged in school.



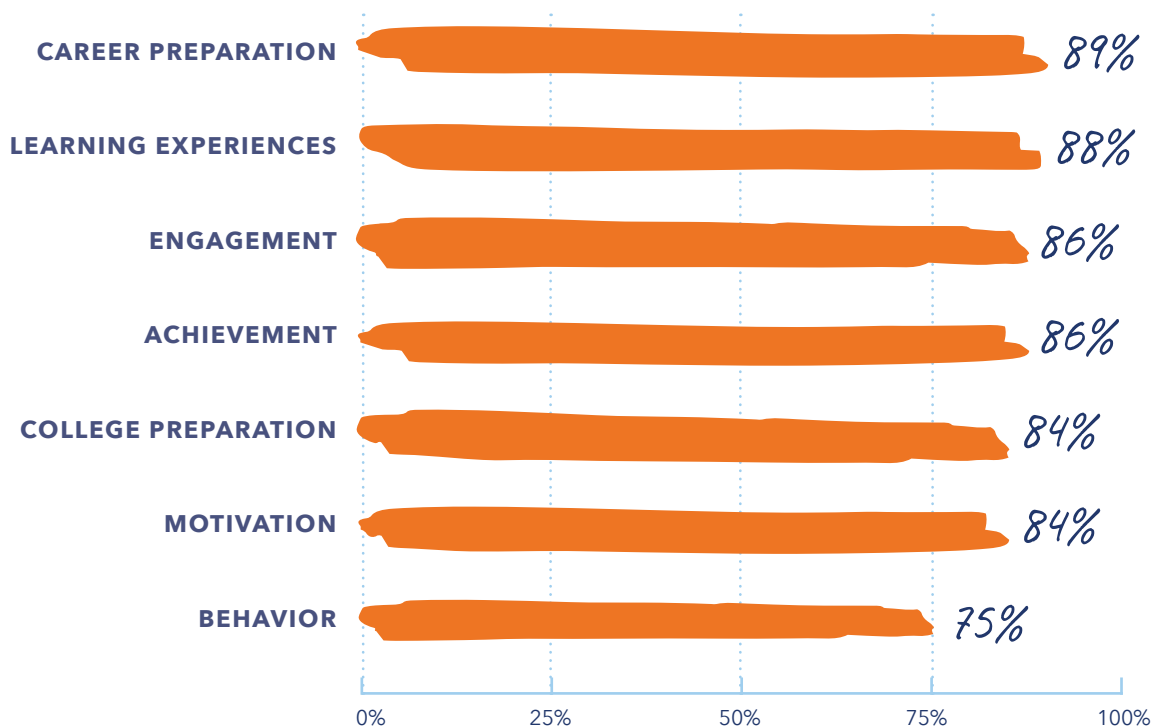
"You will spend a lifetime establishing and growing your careers, and pursuing something that you're passionate about goes a long way. Passion is nurtured through early education, and CTE might just be the secret sauce in the recipe for education."

Jochen Faber

Managing Director, Liebherr-Aerospace Saline, Inc.

How CTE Nurtures Student Success

A recent survey and focus groups show that WISD parents, caregivers, students, and community members **all agree** that applied and experiential learning opportunities like CTE have **wide-ranging, positive impacts on students'**:



(Source: Hanover Research, 2024)

CTE integrates and **enhances traditional academic concepts**. For example, students learn math and physics in the classroom that they can apply as they design, build, and fly drones in their engineering CTE program. Other students enrolled in the health sciences CTE program have opportunities to directly connect their biology courses to patient care. All levels of rigor – standard, honors, dual enrollment, and Advanced Placement (AP) – are seamlessly blended and represented in Washtenaw’s CTE programs. This **gives all students a competitive advantage** as they consider their college and career paths.

CTE gives students a competitive advantage. Students learn so much more than just concepts – they learn how to apply their skills in real-world settings.



“The CTE classroom allows me to learn business concepts, apply what I am learning and solve problems in real time, and progress through concepts much more quickly than in a traditional setting. CTE has also allowed me to learn about myself and skills I never knew I possessed, preparing me for the world beyond high school.”

Jayden Canter
CTE Student, Whitmore Lake High School

CTE also helps students refine the intangible, human skills necessary to be **productive, valued, and engaged**, not only in the workforce, but also in their community. Real-world projects, internships, work-based learning, and CTE student organization competitions support development of leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and teamwork skills.

To put it simply, this leads to meaningful, lasting impacts for our students:

- CTE builds **curious, lifelong learners who think critically**, embrace innovation, and solve problems creatively.
- CTE reinforces the **interpersonal skills students need to communicate and collaborate** effectively at work, at home, and in their community.

Which of the following skills and characteristics are **MOST IMPORTANT** for students to be successful in college or in a career?

(Source: Hanover Research, 2024)

Surveyed parents, school staff, and community members

1. CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING	79%
2. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION	69%
3. WORK ETHIC	55%
4. EFFECTIVE TIME MANAGEMENT	54%
5. INITIATIVE AND SELF-DIRECTION	54%



CTE helps students *confidently* plan for college, careers, and *lifelong success*

CTE has drastically evolved as the world has changed over the past decade. When Washtenaw students can access CTE programs, they have opportunities to earn certifications, college credits, and hands-on experiences – the first step to lucrative, fulfilling, and future-focused careers in engineering, business, healthcare, technology, and more. CTE students thrive because **CTE launches them toward high-wage, high-skill, in-demand careers.**

*Michigan CTE students achieved
a higher median
annual income*

across all levels of education attainment when compared to non-CTE students.

(Source: Median Annual Wages by Educational Attainment and High School CTE Status, 2024)



Of Washtenaw CTE students,

*86%
enroll in college*

after high school graduation.

(Source: Washtenaw County CTEIS Report, 2025)



"CTE has transformed my life in many ways. We learn technical skills like how to build a house from the ground up and x comm on problems in our own houses. But we also learn leadership, communication, and teamwork skills that are valuable in any career and any endeavor that students might take on aer high school. I'll be attending college in the fall, and I'm grateful to be taking my CTE experiences with me."

Grace Colone

CTE Student, Ann Arbor Community High School

Through CTE, students gain a competitive advantage by more effectively:

- building **technical and soft skills** through hands-on learning and industry and postsecondary partnerships.
- earning **industry-recognized credentials, certificates, and/or dual enrollment or articulated college credits** connected to in-demand fields. This saves them time and money after graduation.
- graduating with confidence and more **clarity about where they want to go** and how they'll get there.

We can't afford to have a student approach the stage at high school graduation and say, "I'm great at math, but I don't know what I'm going to do with it." We can't afford to have a student graduate saying, "I don't know what I want to be." We want all of our graduates to have an informed postsecondary plan, and CTE and applied learning experiences are how we do that.



77.5%
of students

who complete at least one state-approved CTE program reported that they were **using the skills learned in their CTE programs for postsecondary education or in their current job** following high school.

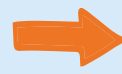
(Source: Michigan CTE Fact Sheet.)

The 1-2-7 rule clearly supports the need for CTE programs.

For every **one** job requiring an advanced degree,



there are roughly **two** jobs requiring a bachelor's degree



and **seven** jobs requiring a credential, but not a bachelor's degree.



(Source: Defining the Goal: The Truth Path to Career Readiness in the 21st Century, 2016)



CTE strengthens our businesses and communities

Today, careers and industries are constantly changing and require a rapidly evolving set of skills. With access to CTE programs, students are given **hands-on experiences in industry-based settings that build their skills so they can meet and exceed those industry demands** and contribute to our economy.

Our deep partnerships with local industries offer students **mentorships, internships, and real-world learning opportunities that prepare them for the future**. These partnerships shape our local industries and strengthen the future workforce by creating a strong talent pipeline for local industries.



"Like so many employers in Washtenaw County and across the nation, we are seeing a growing need for skilled professionals. Healthcare is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the United States. It is expected to generate one-third of new future jobs over the next decade. That kind of growth presents a tremendous opportunity, but only if we are preparing people to step into those roles. CTE can help ll that gap."

Jasmine Criswell, MBA, PMP

Anchor Strategies Project Manager, University of Michigan Health

For every \$1 invested in secondary and postsecondary CTE, the state economy gains approximately \$5.



More than 90% of employers nationwide believe that increased investments in CTE would have a *positive* or *very positive* impact on their businesses. ★★★★★

(Source: Advance CTE Fact Sheet, 2021)

THE DATA ARE CLEAR:

Everyone in our community has a stake in expanding access to CTE for all students from PreK through graduation in Washtenaw County. When we empower every student to discover and design their path to success, we support our students and our futures. The future moves with us.



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Andrew Milkey
Project Manager, Ideal Contracting, LLC

2019

2020

2021

2022

Research



APRIL 2019 - JULY 2024: The University of Michigan Youth Policy Lab released a series of five CTE reports focused on various CTE focus areas, including: Washtenaw County residents' familiarity with CTE and their interest in expanding it; statewide CTE access and participation; local workforce CTE demand; and identifying opportunities to improve access in Washtenaw County. Each report outlined a clear message: Increased access to CTE programs benefits all students.

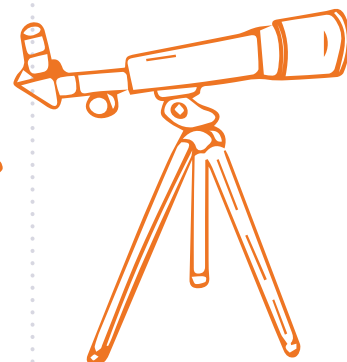
Progress in Motion

Highlighting the strategic milestones that have shaped this path forward.

Research

Visioning

Funding



JANUARY 2022 - APRIL 2023: WISD coordinated a superintendent work group to explore the possibility of a regional CTE system.



Funding

A school year is from August until June the following year.

2021-22 SCHOOL YEAR: WISD received \$535,000 in grant funds from the Michigan Department of Education to update equipment for existing CTE programs and purchase new equipment to help launch new programs.

2023

2024

2025

2026

DECEMBER 2024: Hanover Research conducted focus groups with local middle and high school students, parents, and business leaders to learn more about their experiences with applied and experiential learning opportunities and how they can be improved for future students.

JANUARY 2025: Hanover Research conducted a countywide survey of more than 4,000 middle and high school students, parents, educators, and business leaders to understand their experiences with CTE opportunities.

APRIL 2025: Epic-MRA conducted a survey on behalf of WISD to understand community perceptions of CTE programs.

Visioning

APRIL 2024: WISD hosted CTE-focused think tank sessions with industry, government, education, and philanthropy partners.

AUGUST 2024: The Washtenaw Superintendents' Association and think tank participants developed a PreK-12 CTE framework.

AUGUST 2023: Washtenaw County districts and the WISD jointly invested in a countywide CTE director position to lead CTE collaboration efforts.

WINTER/SPRING 2025: WISD updated all nine local school district Boards of Education on CTE growth and opportunities.

JANUARY 2025: The Michigan Department of Education Board of Education passed a resolution calling for increased expansion and investment in CTE programs, particularly where CTE opportunity gaps exist.

MARCH 2025: WISD hosted a PreK-12 CTE Education Summit, bringing together 200+ community stakeholders to co-create the next chapter of countywide CTE.

APRIL 2025: WISD formed an advisory committee of school and business leaders to guide, sustain, and grow CTE efforts long-term in Washtenaw County.

2022-23 SCHOOL YEAR: The Michigan Department of Education facilitated a state-awarded grant of \$576,000 for CTE equipment.

MARCH 2024 - SEPTEMBER 2024: WISD received a \$250,000 state grant to study the consolidation of CTE services and support to expand student access.

2023-24 SCHOOL YEAR: WISD received a final state CTE equipment grant of \$1,153,000.

AUGUST 2024 - SEPTEMBER 2025: WISD was approved for a \$5,000,000 state consolidation grant to implement the findings and recommendations of the July 2024 U-M YPL report.

Understanding the challenge:

An opportunity to improve access



Barrier to Access:

Supply doesn't meet the *growing* demand

Across Washtenaw County's public schools, we are proud to offer more than 70 state-approved CTE programs, which are housed in our local high schools across four districts/consortia:

1. Ann Arbor
2. Whitmore Lake
3. Ypsilanti
4. South and West Washtenaw Consortium (SWWC), representing Chelsea, Dexter, Lincoln, Manchester, Milan, and Saline

These local districts/consortia run their CTE programs independently from one another, both from a funding and operations perspective. **Even with more than 70 programs available, not all schools or districts have the resources to meet the growing demand for CTE.** While some districts struggle with sustaining their CTE programs and meeting the current student demand, others don't have the capacity to improve or expand programs to ensure they are up-to-date and align to industry needs. That means some **students miss out on cutting-edge learning opportunities that set them up for success after graduation.**



"The world around us, and more importantly around our students, is quickly evolving, and so too must our approach to education and the opportunities we provide for all students. Given this, CTE is no longer an elective option. It's a critical pathway that leads our students to their next steps in life."

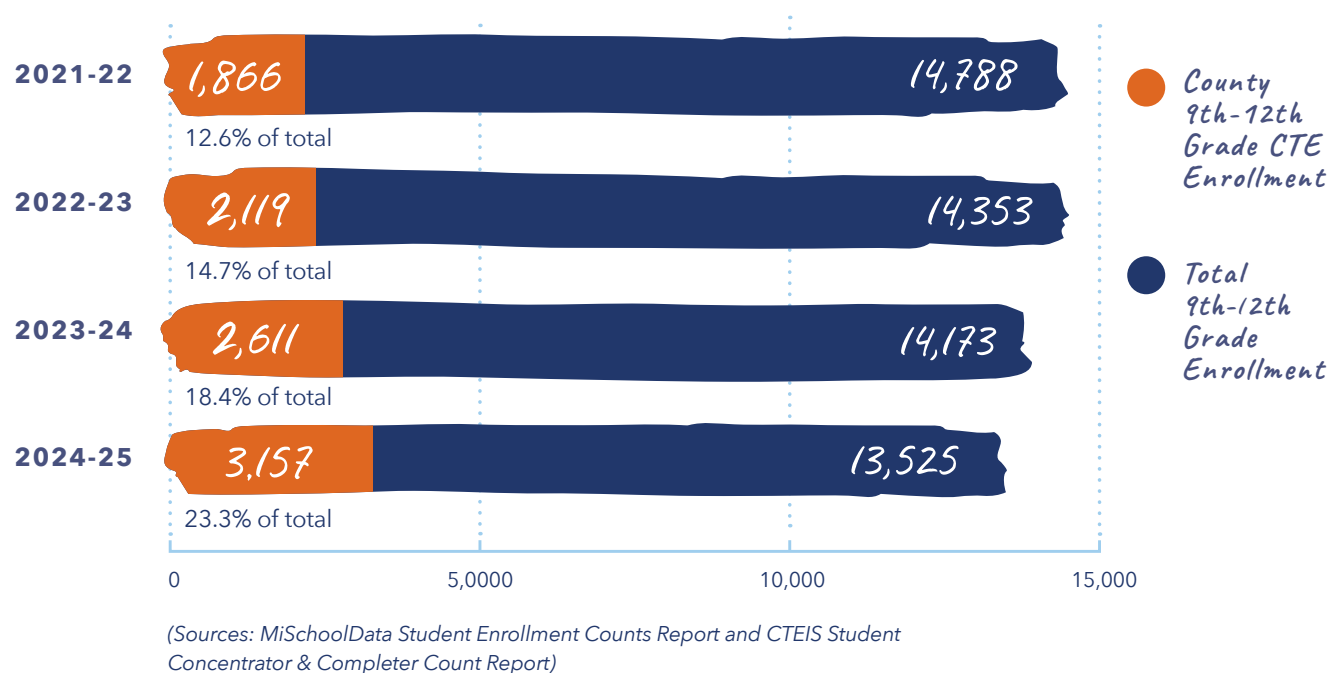
Jazz Parks

Superintendent, Ann Arbor Public Schools

Today in Washtenaw County, more students want to enroll in CTE programs than we have available spots for. With demand at an all time high, we have an opportunity to respond and meet that demand.

In the 2024-25 school year, **more than 325 Washtenaw students were on waitlists**, even after adding 25 new state-approved CTE programs in the last few years.

At a time when 9th-12th grade enrollment is decreasing across the county, our CTE enrollment has doubled. In other words: the demand for CTE is strong across Washtenaw County, but the number and type of CTE programs available haven't kept pace. This means **not all students in our county can explore their interests through impactful CTE programs.**



Barrier to Access: *Inequities* in the current model

When we dig even deeper into the data, we see that:

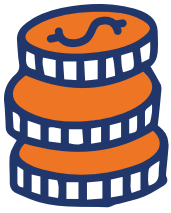
- Students in low-income communities, as well as Black students and Hispanic students have less overall access to CTE. These students are less likely to attend schools with at least one CTE program.
(Source: University of Michigan Youth Policy Lab "Inequities in CTE Access in Washtenaw County" Report, 2024)
- Students in smaller districts have less access, too.
(Source: University of Michigan Youth Policy Lab "Inequities in CTE Access in Washtenaw County" Report, 2024)
- These demographic variations coupled with additional funding, transportation, and logistic barriers collectively contribute to the fact that Washtenaw students have access to fewer CTE programs compared to their peers across the state.



"Seventy-eight students in the SWWC were waitlisted this year for CTE programs. We talk about agency and student voice all the time. Students are telling us a story; they want these experiences. They want to graduate not only with a diploma, but with a clear path that aligns with their career goals."

Mike Kapolka

Superintendent, Chelsea School District



Barrier to Access: *Funding*

Local school districts' general funds support the majority of CTE programs in Washtenaw County. Today, districts are pulling more than \$10 million from their general funds to bring learning to life through CTE. Districts are being asked to **cover the immense costs of adding new programs, hiring qualified CTE instructors, repairing necessary equipment, and budgeting for certification exam costs**, which can range from \$150 to \$750. These costs are in addition to their day-to-day costs to operate their districts and run their schools, and it is not sustainable. **Our current funding model limits our ability to inspire the next generation of professionals.**

Today:

- **Funding levels vary across districts**, meaning not all students have the same reliable access to enriching CTE opportunities.
- Whereas most other Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) in Michigan use their millages (i.e., property taxes) to fund countywide CTE centers that *all* students can access, **Washtenaw County's current funding model results in local districts/consortia independently operating** their own CTE program.
- Without a sustainable approach to funding at the county level – one that is supported by multiple funding streams – districts have to rely on limited resources to support CTE.
- All of this leads to **real differences in access and opportunity, depending on where a student lives.**

Barrier to Access: *Transportation and logistics*

While there are more than 70 CTE programs available across Washtenaw County, there are stark boundaries that determine which students can enroll in which programs. In other words, the **community in which a student lives determines the set of CTE programs available to them.** Traveling within a district/consortium to access an available program that is only available on a campus far from their home campus can present a major challenge for many students.

Increased travel leads to decreased participation. **Students are twice as likely to attend a CTE program if it is offered in their home high school** compared to having to travel to a different school.

- An additional 10 minutes of travel time to a neighboring school that might offer a particular CTE program reduces the likelihood that a student will participate in that program. Almost no students travel more than 30 minutes to a CTE program.
- At the same time, **many Washtenaw County schools can't offer reliable transportation for students, due to funding limitations.** This means accessing CTE programs is neither simple nor convenient for many students.



*Students are
twice as likely
to attend a
CTE program*

**if it is offered in their home
high school compared to
having to travel to a
different school.**

Let's meet this *challenge together*

The time is now to come together and invest in a **strong, lasting funding model that expands equal CTE access and opportunities for all WISD students.**

We can lay the foundation for our students' future success by **coming together as a community to build a collaborative, long-term funding strategy.** This means blending together funding and support from everyone invested in Washtenaw County, including:

- philanthropy,
- state and federal sources,
- local taxes,
- colleges and universities, and
- business and industry partners.

Our *collective vision* for Washtenaw County students

Over the last several years, local education leaders have worked with business and industry partners to identify a path forward together. In Washtenaw County, we're working toward our vision where all students can explore their passion, purpose, and potential. That means we will:



1. eliminate gaps in CTE access and provide every student with the opportunity to immerse themselves in innovative learning opportunities.
2. increase student engagement at an early age, using CTE as a launchpad for early discovery.
3. increase the number of students who are curious, skilled, and confident about their next steps after graduation.
4. increase the number of students earning college credits and industry-recognized certifications on their way to college or career.
5. shape the future workforce in our community.



"Before joining the manufacturing program, I wasn't sure what path I wanted to take. But, this program provided structure, opened multiple doors and gave me opportunities in robotics, engineering, and aerospace. I chose manufacturing because it allows me to work across multiple industries and makes me a valuable asset to any employer – or even to myself as a future consultant."

Dylan Presley

CTE Student, Ypsilanti Community High School

We're *considering every option* to expand access to CTE in Washtenaw County

CTE has **reached a tipping point in Washtenaw County**. State and federal funding can shift with new and changing policy priorities and leadership. Philanthropic dollars can end with new leadership or grant timelines. Businesses, colleges, and universities alone cannot support CTE across Washtenaw County. And general school funds are already stretched thin as we work to provide students with the best resources, tools, and staff possible.

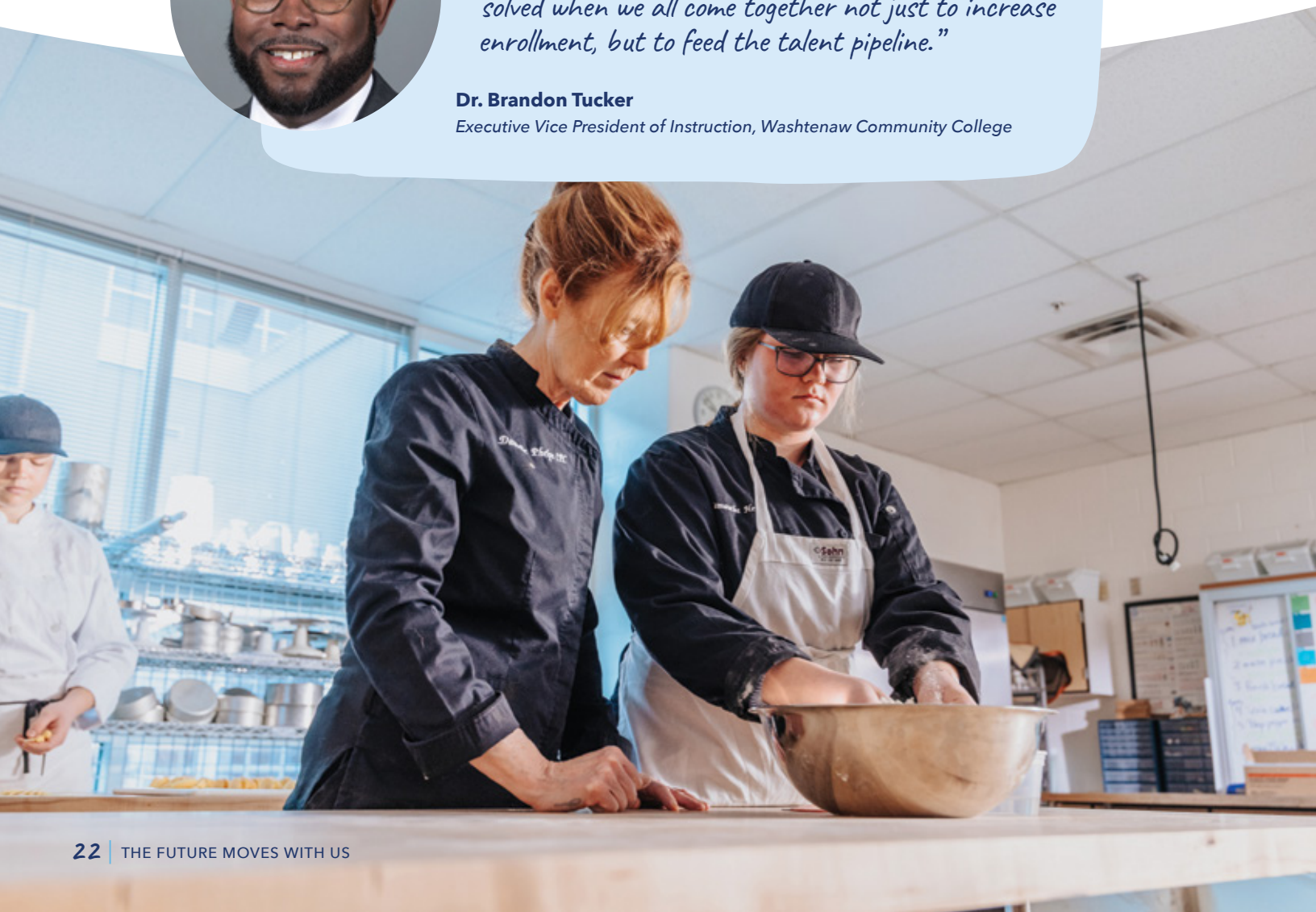
Yet, each of these funding sources plays a critical role, not only in sustaining current CTE programming, but also increasing access to additional programs throughout Washtenaw County. By braiding these various funding streams together, we can successfully provide every PreK-12 Washtenaw student with high-quality, experiential learning opportunities that lead to a bright future.



"We have space, we have talent and faculty, and we have passionate people who want to be at the table. But we still have a gap – a gap that can only be solved when we all come together not just to increase enrollment, but to feed the talent pipeline."

Dr. Brandon Tucker

Executive Vice President of Instruction, Washtenaw Community College



How we make it happen



Businesses, Colleges, and Universities Are Powerful Partners

Hands-on learning experiences are the cornerstone for CTE, and business and postsecondary partnerships make those experiences **possible**. They offer CTE students real-world experiences, mentorships, and training opportunities that build students' skill sets and allow them

to explore key industries while earning college credits and industry-recognized certifications.

For example, Toyota North America partners with WISD, Ypsilanti Community Schools, Lincoln Consolidated Schools, and Eastern Michigan University through their Driving Possibilities program. In response to an expected 2 million STEM jobs going unfilled in the next decade, Toyota focuses on supporting PreK-12 STEM and career-readiness.

Through partnerships like these, our schools are better able to ensure our CTE offerings are regularly updated and industry-aligned, our local industries have direct access to student graduates who are prepared to enter the workforce and our community's economy grows.

Business leaders and postsecondary leaders must continue to deepen and maintain critical WISD partnerships that empower students and provide a launchpad for a bright future.



Visit WashtenawCTE.org to learn more about setting up a new *PARTNERSHIP* or expanding your current program.



"We in higher education need to partner with CTE and with industry in order to transform into institutions of opportunity for all students; into institutions that can't into students' lives, rather than systemically disenfranchising those lives that cannot readily t into college."

Dr. Ryan Gildersleeve

Dean, College of Education, Eastern Michigan University



A CTE Millage in Washtenaw County

Unlike the 41 Intermediate School Districts across the state of Michigan that currently have a vocational millage (property tax), WISD does not have a millage to fund our CTE programs. **Through a voter-approved millage, all Washtenaw County students could learn vital career and college skills through CTE.**

This fall, Washtenaw County will be voting on a millage campaign that will provide at least \$20 million to Washtenaw County's CTE programs, which would cover districts' existing CTE expenses paid from their general funds, as well as the opportunity to expand universal access to CTE.



For students, approving a millage means creating more opportunities for discovery, practical skills, and future-forward careers.



For schools, a millage might mean more industry-connected instructors, professional development, and programs.



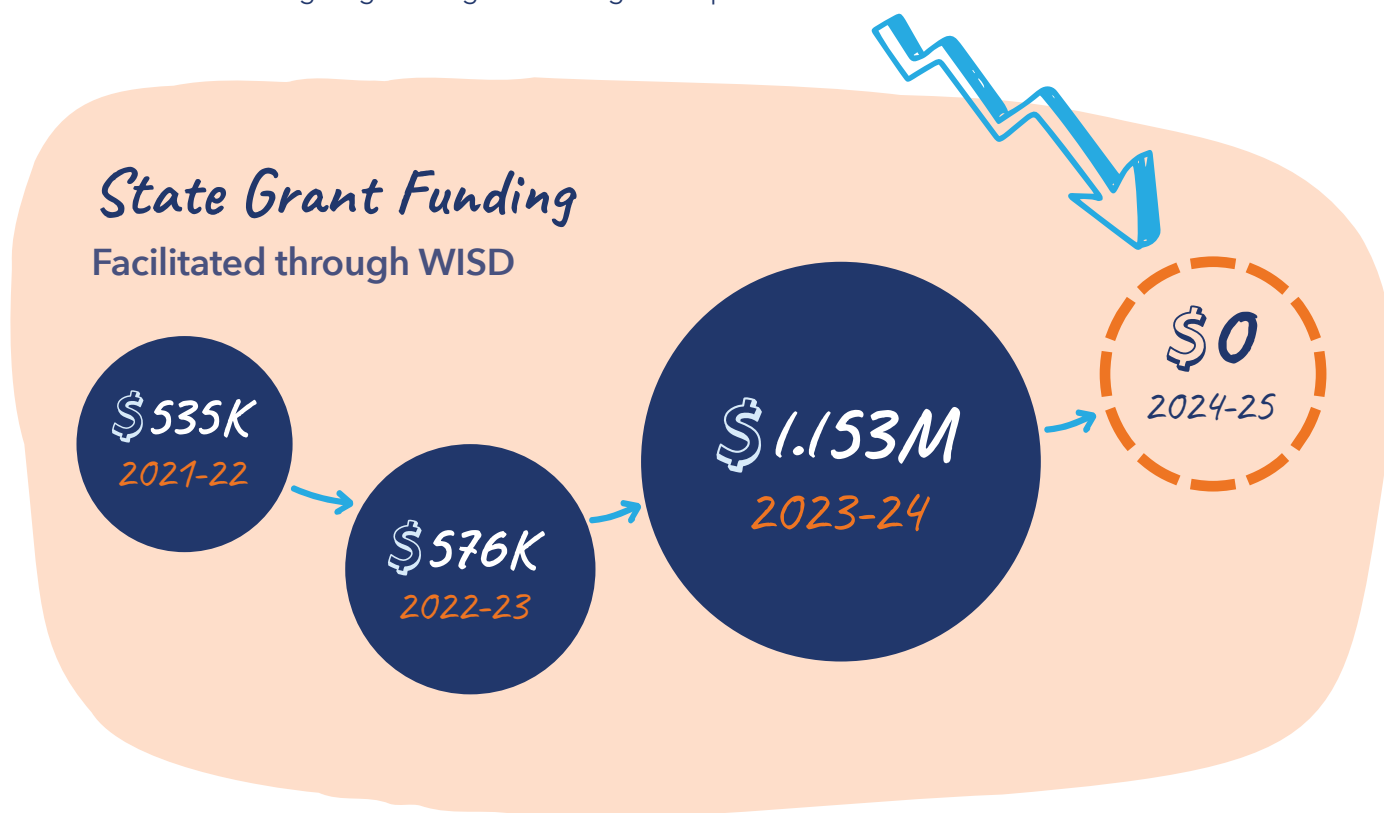
And for the county, approving a millage means better workforce development that supports a strong community and local businesses.



Washtenaw County community members can learn more about the **UPCOMING VOTE** and the impact on students' CTE opportunities at: WashtenawCTE.org

Policymakers Can Prioritize CTE Programs and Policies

Over the last few years, WISD has been able to support our districts and expand and improve CTE programs. We've done that through legislative grant funding that expired in 2024.



Federal policies, such as the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins V), the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), along with our state's CTE Early Middle College and CTE Dual Enrollment Programs, all provide substantial, needed support for CTE programs.

Policymakers must continue to support these essential policies so that students across Michigan can access CTE programs. **National, state, and local policymakers must fund education and workplace policies and programs that support CTE programs and our students' futures.**



LEARN MORE about how Washtenaw County is building a CTE system that fosters curiosity, innovation, and college and career readiness among all students: WashtenawCTE.org

Let's reimagine a Washtenaw student's education journey: What it looks like when we expand access



All students deserve an experience like this.

The time is now to expand access to engaging, hands-on CTE experiences that foster curiosity, build skills, and set students up to thrive in college and career.

Together, the future moves with us.



"Students who complete CTE programs gain valuable, practical skills and the opportunity to start exciting careers after high school and to build a strong foundation for success in postsecondary education. All Michigan students deserve access to these opportunities, regardless of their race, socioeconomic status, or where they live."

Dr. Pamela Pugh

President, Michigan State Board of Education



Visit *WashtenawCTE.org*
to learn more about how WISD
is empowering every student to
discover and design their
path to success through CTE.

