



Midwinter Leadership Conference

February 4-6, 2026

Prescott Resort and Conference Center

Wednesday, February 4, 2026

8:00 AM – 3:00 PM	ACOVA Executive Committee Meeting Chino & Prescott <i>Eric Sorenson and ACOVA Executive Committee</i>
9:00 AM – 4:30 PM	ACTEAZ Fellows Issue Day #2 & Lunch Verde A (9:00 AM - 2:00 PM Issue Day) (12:00 Noon – 1:00 PM Lunch with ACOVA) Jerome (2:00 PM - 4:30 PM for auction setup) <i>ACTEAZ Fellows</i>
1:00 PM – 4:00 PM	ADE Quality and Compliance Training Granite Mountain <i>Michelle Martinez and the Program Services Team</i> Required training for Federal Perkins and CTED Monitoring. Districts being monitored in school year 2026-2027 are required to have at least one district level staff in attendance at this training. Sign-In begins at 12:30 PM.
1:00 PM – 5:00 PM	Advanced Methods of Teaching CTE Arizona <i>Amber Gloria</i>
1:30 PM – 5:30 PM	Midwinter Conference Registration/Check-In Bradshaw <i>Emeli Belloc and Courtney Cook</i>
2:30 PM – 5:30 PM 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM (Dinner Off-Site)	ACTEAZ Executive Committee Meeting & Dinner Verde A <i>Heather Webb and ACTEAZ Executive Committee</i>



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Thursday, February 5, 2026

7:00 AM – 8:30 AM	ADE CTE Administrator's Meeting Registration/Check-In Conference Lobby <i>ADE Staff</i>
8:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Advanced Methods of Teaching CTE Arizona <i>Amber Gloria</i>
8:30 AM – 11:30 AM	ADE CTE Administrator's Meeting Cottonwood, Clarkdale, & Sedona <i>Kevin Imes, Deputy Associate Superintendent for Career and Technical Education</i>
8:00 AM – 3:00 PM	Midwinter Conference Registration/Check-In Bradshaw <i>Emeli Belloc and Courtney Cook</i>
11:30 AM – 5:00 PM	Exhibit Hall Open (Exhibitors set up between 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM) Conference Hall Foyer
11:50 AM – 4:00 PM	Arizona CTED Consortium Meeting & Lunch Chino & Prescott <i>Joel Todd and CTED Superintendents</i>
11:45 AM – 1:30 PM	<div>  </div> Midwinter Conference Leadership Conference Luncheon & Welcome Cottonwood, Clarkdale, & Sedona <i>Heather Webb, ACTEAZ President, and Eric Sorenson, ACOVA President</i> <p>Keynote Panel: Workforce Readiness: How Arizona CTE Is Leading with Durable Skills Arizona's workforce future depends on more than technical skill—it depends on durable skills that show up on day one and last a lifetime. This opening keynote reframes workforce readiness through a hopeful, action-oriented lens. Grounded in current hiring data, the session challenges the narrative that young people are unprepared and instead calls our systems to lead with greater intention and alignment.</p> <p>Career and Technical Education is uniquely positioned for this moment. Across Arizona, thought leaders including AEF, AIEE, and SciTech are engaging statewide audiences around the State 48 Graduate Profile, creating a shared vision for the skills students need to thrive. In CTE classrooms and labs, these skills—communication, adaptability, professionalism, and work ethic—are already being taught through authentic, industry-aligned experiences.</p> <p>Featuring industry and education leaders, this keynote elevates Arizona's collective effort and invites us to make what works visible, shared, and scalable.</p>
1:30 PM – 2:00 PM	Exhibitor Break Conference Hall Foyer
1:30 PM – 4:00 PM	Post-Secondary AOAC Meeting Verde B <i>Jason Gee, Kevin Peck, Jennifer Kaufman Fourness, and AOAC</i>

Thursday Afternoon Sessions, February 5, 2026

2:00 PM – 2:50 PM				
Clarkdale & Cottonwood	Sedona	Granite Mountain	Arizona	Verde A
CTE Credentials in Action <i>Elena Gallego Rascon</i> <i>Robert Waller</i> <i>Michelle Martinez</i>	Igniting Futures: A Statewide Vision for Career-Connected Learning <i>Deb Raeder</i> <i>Rahsaan Bartet</i> <i>Christina Culbertson</i>	Analyzing CTE Data and Creating Visualizations to Produce CTE Program Data Sheets <i>Michelle Cray</i> <i>Marsha Becker</i>	Building Career Literacy and Postsecondary Readiness with Student-Centered Planning Tools <i>Erin Hawkins</i>	Revolutionizing CTE with Mock Interviews and Work-Based Learning Through AI <i>Dr. Scott Spurgeon</i>
3:00 PM – 3:50 PM				
Clarkdale & Cottonwood	Sedona	Granite Mountain	Arizona	Verde A
Educator Externships: Enriching Career Pathways Content Across CTE and Academic Programs <i>Gale Beauchamp</i> <i>Erin McGehean</i>	Tips for ADE Program Monitoring and WBL Documentation: Review and Update <i>Wesley Wood</i>	Achieve a Diploma Seal & Earn an Industry Certification <i>Dennis Bushong</i> <i>Maggie McGill</i>	Year 2 of the Academies of the Southwest Valley—How It's Going and What's Coming in Year 3 <i>Nate Showman</i>	Impressionable Minds: K-12, Social Media & Future Careers <i>Erik Gonzalez</i>
4:00 PM – 4:50 PM				
Sedona	Granite Mountain	Arizona	Verde A	
The Answer Is in the Room: An Unconference for Real CTE Challenges <i>Stephen Weltsch</i> <i>Heather Webb</i>	New Directors: Managing Your CTED Funding <i>Cathie Raymond</i>	Mining Engineering: The Need and the Opportunity <i>Dan Moreno</i>	Skills Every Employer Wants - National Work Readiness Credentials <i>Andy Ridley</i>	
5:00 PM – 6:15 PM	Networking Reception and ACOVA Student Scholarship Auction Eagle's Nest <i>All Conference Attendees and Exhibitors</i>			



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7:30 AM – 10:00 AM	Midwinter Conference Registration/Check-In Bradshaw Emeli Belloc and Courtney Cook
7:30 AM – 11:30 AM	Exhibit Hall Open Conference Hall Foyer
7:30 AM – 9:00 AM	Breakfast Buffet Cottonwood & Clarkdale
7:45 AM – 8:20 AM	ACTEAZ Board Meeting, Fellows Auction Report, & Advocacy Update Cottonwood & Clarkdale <i>Heather Webb, ACTEAZ President</i> ACTEAZ is a professional association whose purpose is to connect all CTE professionals with the network, resources, and abilities they need to make a meaningful difference. The business meeting will include strategic matters, including the secretaries' report, treasurer report, critical issues, and other business brought before its membership. All attendees are encouraged to attend.
8:20 AM – 8:30 AM	ACOVA Business Meeting Cottonwood & Clarkdale <i>Eric Sorenson, ACOVA President</i> ACOVA is a professional association whose mission is to build community, advocacy and leadership for Arizona Career and Technical Education (CTE) Administrators. The business meeting will include strategic matters, including the secretaries' report, treasurer report, critical issues, and other business brought before its membership. All attendees are encouraged to attend.
8:30 AM – 9:00 AM	Exhibitor and Coffee Break Conference Hall Foyer

Friday Morning Sessions, February 6, 2026

9:00 AM – 9:50 AM			
Sedona	Arizona	Verde A	Verde B
ACOVA Mini M&M: Essentials for New CTE Administrators <i>Eric Sorenson</i>	From Middle School to Meaningful Careers: Rural Strategies for Early CTE Engagement <i>Debra Raeder Michelle Perey</i>	Offering Industry- Recognized Credentials for the Skilled Trades and the Value to Industry Partners <i>Daniel Krauss Ashleigh Potuznik</i>	Troubleshooting Common TSA Issues <i>Hannah Higgs Judy Balogh Melissa Stinson-Borg Terri Ziegler</i>
10:00 AM – 10:50 AM			
Sedona	Arizona	Verde A	Verde B
ACOVA Critical Issues: Collaborating for Solutions <i>Rebecca Robinson</i>	From Potential to Pathways: Preparing Learners for Success in Registered Apprenticeship Programs <i>Joann Bueno</i>	Building Strategic Partnerships <i>Megan Mills</i>	Bolster Student Critical Thinking Skills with Program Specific Math <i>Susan Farretta Jeanette Scott</i>
11:00 AM – 11:50 AM			
Sedona	Arizona	Verde A	Granite Mountain
Shaping the Future of Arizona's CTE Summer Conference <i>Stephen Weltsch Shelly York</i>	Lead from Where You Are <i>Cathy Bailey-Bagby Tania Gray</i>	Create Impact, Teach STEM <i>Diane Sorden Lynette Clark Sylvia Garcia-Loehr Lisa Joe</i>	CTE Pathways Beyond High School: Connecting Education to Opportunity <i>Lori Luzier Heather Webb Marilynn Babyar</i>
12:00 PM – 1:00 PM	Midwinter Closing Lunch and Comments Cottonwood & Clarkdale <i>Heather Webb, ACTEAZ President, and Eric Sorenson, ACOVA President</i>		



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Thursday Afternoon Session Descriptions, February 5, 2026

2:00 PM – 2:50 PM

CTE Credentials in Action

Clarkdale & Cottonwood

Elena Gallego Rascon, Robert Waller, and Michelle Martinez

This workshop on Arizona CTE Credentials using the updated process will equip educators and session attendees with practical strategies for integrating high-quality, industry-recognized credentials into Career and Technical Education programs. The focus is on moving beyond conceptual understanding to tangible implementation that strengthens curriculum, increases student employability, and aligns with workforce demands. Bring your applications in progress, questions, and best practices to this hands-on session where we will guide you to a successful completion of your credential application. Bring your own device!

Igniting Futures: A Statewide Vision for Career-Connected Learning

Sedona

Deb Raeder, Rahsaan Bartel, and Christina Culbertson

What if every Arizona middle school student entered high school with clarity, confidence, and purpose? Arizona's Middle School Career Exploration 3-Year Partnership Plan aims to make that vision a reality. This session highlights a statewide collaboration among key partners and invites others to join in building a system where all students experience high-quality, developmentally appropriate career literacy and exploration.

Participants will explore recommended policy alignments, professional learning supports, and local implementation models that help students identify their strengths, connect learning to real-world opportunities, and design pathways to success. The session unpacks research-based components of quality career exploration, the development of early Education and Career Action Plans (ECAPs), and evidence of their impact on student engagement and learning. Attendees will leave inspired by how career-connected learning in middle school fuels motivation, strengthens durability skills, and expands opportunity, extending the runway to every learner's future.

Analyzing CTE Data and Creating Visualizations to Produce CTE Program Data Sheets

Granite Mountain

Michelle Crary and Marsha Becker

This session will present practical tools and strategies used by two districts to transform raw CTE data into compelling visualizations and insights. Learn how to share data effectively with teachers, administrators, and stakeholders to fuel data-driven decision-making. We will share common CTE data hurdles, successful analysis strategies, visualizations created (including a program data sheet). Walk away with immediately applicable ideas for harnessing your own CTE data. Examples from a suburban district and a rural district will be shared with tools any CTE Leader can use to replicate the process.

Building Career Literacy and Postsecondary Readiness with Student-Centered Planning Tools

Arizona

Erin Hawkins

This session explores how schools can strengthen career literacy and postsecondary readiness through a comprehensive, student-centered planning approach used across elementary, middle, and high school levels. As a former school counselor and current student success consultant, Amy will share practical strategies districts are using to help students discover strengths, connect interests to real career pathways, and build actionable postsecondary plans aligned to state expectations. The session will highlight effective practices for supporting counselor-led planning, improving student ownership, engaging families, and using data to guide meaningful conversations at scale. Participants will see examples of career exploration activities, course planning structures that promote academic alignment, and reporting methods that help teams identify early needs and close opportunity gaps. This session is designed to support counselors, administrators, and career readiness professionals seeking to deepen their students' readiness for life after graduation. No products or services will be promoted.

Revolutionizing CTE with Mock Interviews and Work-Based Learning Through AI

Verde A

Dr. Scott Spurgeon

Artificial Intelligence is transforming education, and at West-MEC, we're strategically integrating this technology to provide Mock Interviews and expand access to authentic work-based learning experiences. Through our implementation of Immersive Solutions MetaCoach AI technology in our Medical Assistant and Aesthetics programs, we're pioneering a scalable approach to hands-on career preparation.

Our initiative Demonstrates how AI can democratize access to immersive learning through interactive training sessions, virtual workplace scenarios, and advanced 3D modeling of professional environments. Show participants that by bringing traditionally external experiences inside our classroom walls, we're creating a blueprint for expanding equitable access to career preparation – particularly valuable for rural communities and programs facing clinical site shortages.

Join us for an interactive demonstration and explore how AI-enabled learning environments could help your program scale quality Mock Interviews and work-based learning opportunities. Experience the technology firsthand and discover how emerging tools can break down barriers while maintaining industry standards.

3:00 PM – 3:50 PM

Educator Externships: Enriching Career Pathways Content Across CTE and Academic Programs

Clarkdale & Cottonwood

Gale Beauchamp and Erin McGehean

Educator Externships provide teachers with real-world learning experiences that strengthen Career Pathways content across CTE and academic programs. A partnership with the Center for the Future of Arizona (CFA), the Maricopa County School Superintendent's Office with the Exploring Pathways to Bioscience & Healthcare Careers program offers a one-day Externship that connect directly with postsecondary programs, current students, and professionals. Participants gain understanding of skills, technologies, certifications, and expectations needed in high-demand sectors. Hearing from faculty, touring labs, simulations, and engaging with workforce, educators will enrich their knowledge to support career learning and advise students. Attendees will explore externship activities, classroom resources, and teacher feedback that illustrate how externships deepen classroom relevance and improve student career awareness. The session will conclude with a brainstorm to identify new areas of interest, industry sectors, and emerging skills to shape future educator externships planned for Summer 2026.



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Tips for ADE Program Monitoring and WBL Documentation: Review and Update

Sedona

Wesley Wood

This session is for CTE Directors and Teachers who would like to learn about ADE Program Monitoring requirements for WBL Documentation. The session will include a quick Program Monitoring review, location of WBL Resources, and documentation recommendations for specific monitoring indicators. We will discuss what this documentation can look like at our varying school settings across the state. This session will also review the information given at ACOVA but will have the most recent updates.

Achieve a Diploma Seal & Earn an Industry Certification

Granite Mountain

Dennis Bushong and Maggie McGill

The Center for Financial Responsibility Personal Financial Literacy Certification is an approved program for the Arizona Seal of Personal Finance. The Seal Program recognizes high school students who achieve a high level of proficiency in personal finance. The seal is placed on the student's diploma and noted on their transcript. Come and see how an industry certification can benefit both general education and CTE.

Year 2 of the Academies of the Southwest Valley—How It's Going and What's Coming in Year 3

Arizona

Nate Showman

This will be a recap of the work currently being done by the Academies of the Southwest Valley as we move into year 2 of implementation. This session will explore the work around our Guaranteed Experiences, Academy PLCs, Partner Engagement, and more!

Impressionable Minds: K-12, Social Media & Future Careers

Verde A

Erik Gonzalez

This presentation explores how social media shapes adolescents' impressionability, identity, and career choices, which are ultimately influencing our future workforce. Constant exposure to rapid online feedback conditions teens to seek instant validation, making them more susceptible to external influence and less patient with long-term goals. As a result, career decisions may be based on popularity or perceived status rather than genuine interest or skill. To counter this, educators and employers can help youth develop resilience and self-efficacy by setting smaller, bite-sized goals that provide consistent positive reinforcement, which are mirroring social media's instant feedback loops, but in a productive, skill-building way. By aligning digital feedback patterns with real-world growth, we can better prepare the next generation for meaningful, sustainable careers and ensure their digital habits become a strength, not a setback.



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The Answer Is in the Room: An Unconference for Real CTE Challenges

Sedona

Stephen Weltsch

Step into a highly interactive unconference where Arizona's CTE professionals bring the real challenges sitting on their desks today—and solve them together. No long lectures. No preset agenda. Participants surface their most pressing issues, self-select into solution groups, and tap the collective expertise of peers who face the same realities. Whether it's enrollment, industry partnerships, program quality, staffing, data, or daily operational hurdles, this is collaborative problem-solving at its best. You'll leave with practical strategies, new connections, and the reminder that in Arizona CTE, the answer is in the room.

New Directors: Managing Your CTED Funding

Granite Mountain

Cathie Raymond

This session will help new CTEA understand and manage their funding sources and learn how to proactively plan for future funding.

Mining Engineering: The Need and the Opportunity

Arizona

Dan Moreno

Mining industry leaders predict over half of all currently employed mining engineers in the United States are going to retire by 2030, creating a need for over 3,500 new engineers in this vitally important field. At the same time, there are only a little more than 400 students enrolled in the country's 14 mining engineering undergraduate programs. This program serves as an introduction to the little known discipline of mining engineering and presents possible routes to explore careers in the mining industry through AZ CTE's engineering advocacy. Participants will not only learn about the different roles possible with a mining engineering degree, they will also engage in simulations of activities similar to some of those performed by engineers working the mining industry using both digital and physical models.

Skills Every Employer Wants - National Work Readiness Credentials

Verde A

Andy Ridley

Vast numbers of studies show that employers seek foundational workplace skills over job-specific skills. This presentation explores the National Work Readiness Credentials, focusing on validating Academic Skills (work ready reading, math, and data analysis), Soft Skills (communication, teamwork, adaptability), and Digital Skills (digital literacy, technology proficiency). These components form a vital framework equipping students with the skills essential for navigating complex work environments, enhancing productivity, and meeting the demands of modern workplaces. Implementation discussion will provide insight into how these skills can be effectively integrated into career technical education programs, workforce alignment, workplace skill development initiatives and general career literacy.

Friday Morning Session Descriptions, February 6, 2026

9:00 AM – 9:50 AM

ACOVA Mini M&M: Essentials for New CTE Administrators

Sedona

Eric Sorenson

ACOVA's Mini M&M is designed exclusively for new Career & Technical Education administrators seeking the knowledge, tools, and confidence needed to thrive in their roles. This interactive session provides an invaluable opportunity to learn foundational and timely information essential for success in CTE leadership. Participants will engage in a dynamic mix of round-table conversations and panel discussions led by experienced, highly respected CTE administrators from across the state. These seasoned experts will share practical strategies, real-world insights, and lessons learned—offering support that is both relevant and immediately applicable. Whether you are navigating compliance, strengthening programs, supporting instructors, or building industry partnerships, Mini M&M offers a welcoming space to ask questions, gain clarity, and build connections within the Arizona CTE community. Join us to accelerate your learning, expand your network, and start your leadership journey with confidence.

From Middle School to Meaningful Careers: Rural Strategies for Early CTE Engagement

Arizona

Debra Raeder and Michelle Perey

How do we spark early interest in CTE pathways before students reach high school, especially in rural communities where access can be limited?

The Arizona Business & Education Coalition (ABEC) and Mountain Institute CTED, together with countywide partners, are working to answer that question through the Yavapai County Future Ready Council. This collaborative effort is creating a unified model that connects middle-school career exploration with high-school CTE programs and the county's key economic drivers, in an effort to ensure that ALL students have clear, relevant, and attainable pathways to pursue.

In this session, we'll share practical strategies, lessons learned, and actionable approaches for strengthening the bridge between middle and high school and beyond. Participants will explore how aligned efforts can ignite student interest, build academic and career readiness, and help students confidently navigate their next steps toward postsecondary education, training, and meaningful careers.

Offering Industry-Recognized Credentials for the Skilled Trades and the Value to Industry Partners

Verde A

Daniel Krauss and Ashleigh Potuznik

NCCER (National Center for Construction Education and Research), in partnership with Pearson, offers Industry Recognized Credentials to CTE students through accreditation, instructor certification, standardized curricula, and career resources. NCCER Industry-Recognized Credentials equip students with the credentials they need to succeed. This session dives into the NCCER curriculum available for CTE programs while also hearing directly from industries partners on why they look to hire students with NCCER credentials. High schools, vocational schools, and technical community colleges all play a crucial role in building successful career pathways and creating talent pipelines for the industry. NCCER has been providing quality education programs and credentials to high schools for over 25 years. Our print and digital solutions, developed with subject matter experts, include pre-built turnkey courses with automatically graded assignments, videos, online activities, and testing that connects with our credential engine to provide students with transcripts and digital credentials.



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Troubleshooting Common TSA Issues

Verde B

Hannah Higgs, Judy Balogh, Melissa Stinson-Borg, and Terri Ziegler

This session is designed for directors and teachers new to the Technical Skills Assessment. With every problem there is a systematic approach to determine why something doesn't work as expected and how to resolve the problem. The TSA Troubleshooting Guide offers a jumpstart to help you with common TSA issues. This guide addresses how teachers acquire access to the TSA dashboard and utilize its features to register students for the TSA, access the test roster to monitor student progress during testing, request that students retake the test using the new updated Change Request feature, and access, interpret, and use the data from the TSA reports. We have a guide with your name on it, we will review the contents with you, and we will answer all your questions. Join the TSA Technical Standards and Assessment team: Judy Balogh, Team Lead; Hannah Higgs, Program Specialist; Melissa Stinson-Borg, Program Specialist; and Terri Ziegler, Program Specialist.

10:00 AM – 10:50 AM

ACOVA Critical Issues: Collaborating for Solutions

Sedona

Rebecca Robinson

The ACOVA Critical Issues session at the ACTEAM Midwinter Conference provides CTE leaders with a dedicated space to collaborate, reflect, and identify the most pressing challenges and opportunities facing Career & Technical Education today. Designed for local directors and administrators across Arizona, this interactive working session invites participants to share their top priorities, emerging concerns, and real-world insights related to both local and statewide CTE issues. Through facilitated discussion and collaborative analysis, attendees will collectively determine and prioritize the current critical issues impacting CTE programs. The outcomes of this session directly inform and shape the ACOVA Board's annual program of work—ensuring that statewide efforts, advocacy, and professional development initiatives remain aligned with the needs of those leading programs at the local level. Join us to lend your voice, contribute your expertise, and help set the direction for Arizona's CTE leadership community in the year ahead.

From Potential to Pathways: Preparing Learners for Success in Registered Apprenticeship Programs

Arizona

Joann Bueno

Registered Apprenticeship is a proven earn-and-learn model that combines paid, on-the-job training with related technical instruction, leading to a nationally recognized credential and a pathway to sustainable careers. CTE plays a vital role in preparing learners to succeed in these programs.

This session will explore how CTE educators, counselors, and program directors can help students move from potential to accessible career pathways by embracing potential-based hiring, which values aptitude, motivation, transferable skills, and relevant real-world experience. We will discuss how to build pre-apprenticeship and readiness pathways that develop both technical and employability skills, and how employer engagement is key to ensuring programs align with real industry needs.



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Building Strategic Partnerships

Verde A

Megan Mills

Learn how to build a strategic partnership framework that boosts industry involvement in the classroom, strengthens ROI for partners, and elevates your overall engagement process. Perfect for anyone new to partnerships or ready to level up their existing strategy.

Bolster Student Critical Thinking Skills with Program Specific Math

Verde B

Susan Farretta and Jeanette Scott

CTE instruction improves standardized math and ACT scores by making math relevant through problem-based learning, teaching students to think critically, and using tools like estimation, modeling, and fostering collaboration. Math concepts are embedded within real-world CTE scenarios, making them more relevant and easier for students to understand and retain. Applying the AZ CTE Professional Skills framework to integrate these strategies by designing relevant thinking activities, assessing understanding through diverse methods, and developing individualized student goals to enhance performance.

11:00 AM – 11:50 AM

Shaping the Future of Arizona's CTE Summer Conference

Sedona

Stephen Weltsch

Join an energized working session where participants come together to form a special committee that will help design the future of the annual CTE Summer Conference. Through collaborative discussion and quick-fire analysis, attendees will examine critical elements of the event—ideal dates, number of days, key experiences, and what today's educators most need from a statewide conference. This is your chance to influence the direction, structure, and impact of one of Arizona's flagship CTE gatherings. Your insight matters, and your voice will help shape what comes next.

Lead from Where You Are

Arizona

Cathy Bailey-Bagby and Tania Gray

Join *Lead From Where You Are*, a focused session for teachers, directors, and counselors who want to reflect and enhance their leadership skills. Through collaborative activities—sticky-note affinity grouping, Leadership Web mapping, and the Leadership Compass self-assessment—participants will identify strengths, uncover growth opportunities, and develop actionable strategies to empower colleagues and students. Ideal for classroom teachers and school leaders committed to fostering distributed leadership.



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Create Impact, Teach STEM

Verde A

Diane Sorden, Lynette Clark, Sylvia Garcia-Loehr, and Lisa Joe

Our session will showcase a practical, scalable approach to preparing and energizing students for future careers. This fun and hands-on learning includes peer mentorship and community engagement. The program started by the Arizona Educational Foundation allows us to immerse our teens in dynamic science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) labs that encourage curiosity, deeper thinking and greater understanding of scientific principles.

Once high school students build foundational skills, they transition into mentor and leadership roles- teaching and aiding younger learners through school and community outreach. This mentorship deepens the understanding for all ages, and it fosters confidence. Through participation, students have connected to local business and industry, and they have applied their problem-solving and innovation skills to authentic challenges. These experiences have exposed students to real-world career pathways, promoted workforce readiness and strengthened career preparation.

Attendees will gain practical tools to implement this model in their own rural schools through CTE programs, including examples of engaging STEM labs, mentorship structures and strategies for building meaningful experiences for all learners. The presentation will highlight success stories and student outcomes that demonstrate the transformative power of student-led STEM teaching and learning.

CTE Pathways Beyond High School: Connecting Education to Opportunity

Granite Mountain

Lori Luzier, Heather Webb, and Marilyn Babyar

Discover how high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs open doors to a wide range of postsecondary opportunities. This session explores the seamless transitions from high school CTE pathways to career training and certificate programs, local community college degrees, university bachelor's (and even post-baccalaureate options), and the College Board's AP Kickstart program. Learn how these aligned pathways prepare students for high-demand careers while earning valuable credentials and college credit—empowering every learner to build a clear, achievable plan for success beyond graduation.