



Learning & Leading with CTE

September 2026 Newsletter

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Seeing a Future. Building a Path.

When Acting U.S. Secretary of Labor Keith Sonderling visited West-MEC Southeast Campus in Phoenix this past month, he saw something Arizona CTE professionals experience every day: students preparing for the world of work while they are still in high school.

Sonderling toured programs in artificial intelligence and advanced manufacturing before meeting with local business leaders about the skills Arizona employers need. He emphasized the importance of connecting education to the skills students will need in their careers, ensuring they leave school prepared for the jobs they pursue.

What Secretary Sonderling observed is only part of the journey. Career preparation begins long before a student walks into a CTE classroom.



It may start when a student discovers an interest they never knew they had, when a counselor introduces new career possibilities, when a teacher connects classroom learning to the real world, or when an industry professional provides a glimpse of what the future could hold. These early experiences are powerful because they help students explore potential career paths and envision possibilities they may not have previously considered. High school CTE builds on that foundation by giving students opportunities to develop technical and durable skills, earn industry credentials, work alongside professionals, and discover that their learning has purpose.

A special thank you goes to West-MEC Superintendent Dr. Scott Spurgeon, for bringing together a coalition of industry experts, the Maricopa County Community College District, and ACTEAZ to lift the collective voice of CTE in

this critical work. When we bring our expertise and resources together, we strengthen our ability to ensure that every Arizona student has meaningful opportunities to explore careers, develop skills, and connect education to a future that can lead to economic independence.

The discussion surrounding Sonderling's visit highlights an important point: preparing students for their futures is not a single event at the end of high school. It is a journey that starts early and grows through meaningful experiences. And Arizona CTE is helping lead that journey.

Training Future Medical Professionals



ACTEAZ was recently invited to participate in the annual Liberty High School Medical Assisting Vitals Simulation Lab. Hosted by health program CTE teachers Diana Burdzy (ACTEAZ Fellow) and Mrs. Pasmore, with support from Carol Bush, RN, this marked the fifth consecutive year the lab has trained students for careers in the medical field. Students practiced checking vital signs—such as temperature, pulse, blood pressure, weight, and height—along with conducting patient interactions.

"Our students are trained on vital signs the first 3-4 weeks of school, that way they can go out after this program and perform clinicals," Mrs. Burdzy explained. "This simulation lab is getting them ready for their career by practicing on "real-world" patients. It's much easier to perform these interactions with classmates, especially if you know them. This is why I invite participants such as our community and staff since that is more of an authentic experience."



More than 80 volunteers from Liberty High School and the surrounding community came to participate, providing a diverse audience for students to interact and train with. "This gives them hands-on experience with real patient scenarios," said Mrs. Pasmore. "They can work through any questions or hiccups that they might have and get comfortable working with the public in general since it's a big jump."

“

I like the way we get a hands-on experience and practice for the field.”

Students utilized professional-grade equipment, including clinical thermometers, pulse monitors, and scales. "I like the way we get a hands-on experience and practice for the field," one student noted.

Hosting a simulation on this scale requires robust support from the nursing community. Carol Bush, RN, affiliated with GCU, brought her extensive nursing expertise to help train the students. "The medical field is a wonderful industry. This program wants students to understand how to learn the soft skills and hard skills to become a professional medical assistant."

Carol also demonstrated the program's most advanced technology, the Nursing Anne Simulator. This high-tech simulator provides scenario-based training and is connected to a SimPAD tablet. The user can tailor training modules, and have Nursing Anne replicate human-like symptoms in real time. "This equipment provides students with technical skills and capabilities a future medical assistant is going to be expected to do in their employment," Carol shared.

Diana Burdzy and Mrs. Pasmore's recent recognition with a Peoria Leading with Excellence Pin reflects the dedication and commitment they bring to their students each day. ACTEAZ is proud to see the incredible work our educators and Fellows exemplify. A special thank you to Diana, Mrs. Pasmore, Carol, and Liberty High School for helping students envision their career paths and shaping a brighter future for Arizona.



**IMPACT
TOMORROW**



Arizona CTE Builds Stronger Postsecondary Partnerships

Arizona continues to demonstrate what is possible when CTE professionals, community colleges, industry and workforce partners come together around a shared commitment to learners.

At the ACTE Postsecondary CTE Summit, Arizona attendees connected with CTE leaders and colleagues from across the country to exchange ideas, explore emerging practices, and strengthen relationships that can help expand opportunities for Arizona learners.

Community colleges are a particularly important part of this work. They serve as strong partners in Arizona's workforce and CTE ecosystem, helping learners move from high school CTE experiences into postsecondary education, industry credentials and careers. These partnerships can create clearer pathways while giving learners opportunities to build both technical and durable skills aligned to the needs of employers.

The Summit provided an opportunity for Arizona to both learn from national conversations and share the work happening across our state. As the expectations of learners, employers and communities continue to evolve, maintaining strong connections across education and workforce systems is essential.



Danny Fisher and Jennifer Curtis (MCCD), ACTE Next Level Postsecondary CTE Fellows.

For ACTEAZ, this work reflects a fundamental belief: we are stronger when we work together. No single organization can create the seamless education-to-career pathways Arizona learners need. It takes relationships, shared purpose and a willingness to learn from one another.



From left to right: Jimmy Koch (ACTE National), Dr. Alisha Hyslop (ACTE National), Jennifer Kaufman-Fourness (MCCD and ACTEAZ President), Kevin Fleming (Catapult), and Danny Fisher (MCCD).

The Arizona delegation returned with new ideas, new connections and renewed energy to continue building an ecosystem where every learner can see a pathway from learning to opportunity.

We are grateful for the Arizona CTE professionals and postsecondary partners who continue to show up, share their expertise and invest in the future of our learners and our state.

Lead • Inspire • Unite. That is the strength of the Arizona CTE community.



Counselors: The Career Connectors Our Students Need



ACTEAZ recently had the privilege of connecting with 165 school counselors from across the West Valley for a conversation about one of the most important roles in a student's journey: being a career connector.

We are grateful for the counselors who show up every day to help students see possibilities beyond the paths they may already know. A conversation, a question, an introduction to a career, or encouragement to try a class can become a connection that changes what a student believes is possible. Stephen Weltsch led a "Red Thread" activity with participants to identify what makes you love what you do. Career development is not a straight line or a single decision, it is a network of connections. Counselors hold an important piece of that thread.

Students cannot pursue possibilities they cannot see, and counselors cannot effectively connect students to pathways they do not know well. That creates an important opportunity for CTE teachers.

Invite counselors into your world. Don't rely solely on an email or course catalog description. Visit counselors in person and provide them with helpful resources—a program overview, student success story, industry credential information, college-credit opportunities, or examples of where graduates go next. Invite counselors to visit your classroom, see student demonstrations,

participate in CTSO activities, meet industry partners, or take a "walk and talk" through your entire program.

Tell the CTE story in terms that help counselors connect it to student futures: hands-on learning, technical and employability skills, industry certifications, postsecondary opportunities, and pathways to meaningful careers.



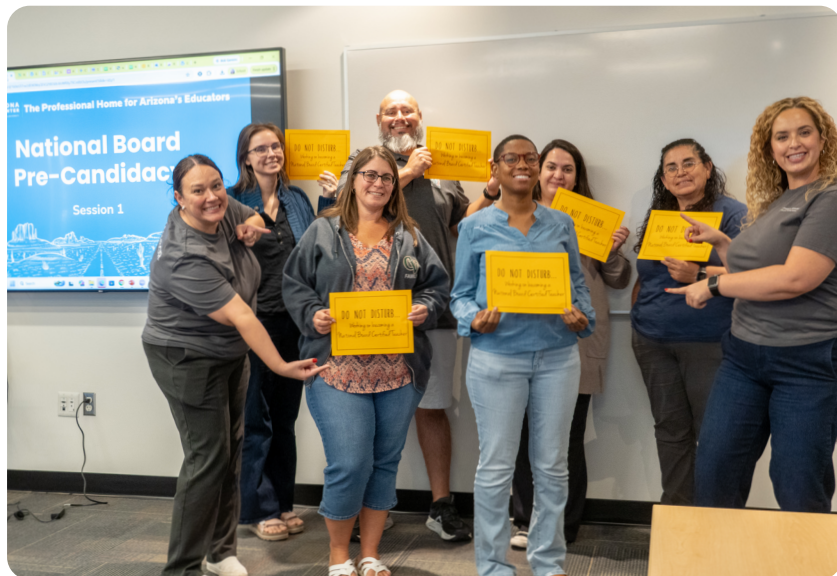
Our counselors are critical allies. Thank you to the 165 counselors who gave us their time—and to every counselor across Arizona who helps students discover what could become possible.

Educators Taking Their Next Steps

This past month, ACTEAZ hosted a National Board Pre-Candidacy Workshop, marking the important first step for Career and Technical Education (CTE) educators pursuing National Board Certification to elevate their professional practice.

The in-person workshop was led by National Board Certified Educators Kimberly McCroy and Lauren Moraga from PimaJTED. Educators traveled from all across Arizona—including the metro Phoenix area, Tucson, Lake Havasu, and Chinle—to attend. Attendees engaged in collaborative group activities and received comprehensive resources outlining the certification journey. This highly-motivated cohort came ready to dive into this process.

National Board Certification offers high-impact professional development tailored to real-world classroom and counseling practices. By going through important standards and evaluations, educators receive actionable feedback that directly advances CTE programs. The best practices developed through certification better prepares an educator for program monitoring, which strengthens schools and districts as a whole. In addition to district-offered financial incentives, Arizona stands out by providing streamlined recertification pathways for qualifying National Board Certified educators.



ACTEAZ is thrilled to support these dedicated educators as they take this exciting next step in their professional journeys. Their commitment to National Board Certification is vital for advancing the future of CTE across Arizona!

National Board Certification

National Board Certification is the most respected professional certification available in education and provides numerous benefits to teachers, students and schools. It was designed to develop, retain and recognize accomplished teachers and to generate ongoing improvement in schools nationwide.

(Source: NBPTS.org)

[Learn More](#)

ACTEAZ Save the Dates



2027
midwinter
leadership conference



February 3-5, 2027

**Prescott Resort
& Conference Center**



2027
CONNECTION
CONFERENCE



**JULY 9-13, 2027
TUCSON, AZ**



ACTE Save the Dates

Best Practices
for
CTE Administrators
CONFERENCE
2026

**100
ACTE**

Oct. 6-8

Denver, Colorado

Grand Hyatt Denver

**100
ACTE**
Centennial Celebration

ACTE's CareerTech

**VISION
2026**

Ernest N. Morial Convention Center

New Orleans

DEC. 2-5



Save the Date:

**ACTE Region V 2027
Leadership Conference
Colorado Springs, CO**

Partner Organization Updates



Proud to partner with AZCTECC

Looking for engaging resources that work across any CTE program? Explore the CTE Curriculum Connection's Universal Units, featuring 75+ ready-to-use Professional Skills and Standards lessons designed to help students build the skills employers value across every industry.

Grab the [one-pager](#) now to discover resources you can use in your classroom today!

ctecaz.org



Proud to partner with ACOVA

SAVE THE DATE FOR THE ACOVA FALL CONFERENCE!
November 5-6, 2026
Prescott Resort and Conference Center-Prescott, AZ
Registration: \$325

Call for Presentations Now Open: [Submit Here](#)

Each session will last 55 minutes and will take place on Thursday, Nov. 5th. Proposals are being accepted until full. Please refrain from announcing your session until it has been approved and you have received confirmation by October 17, 2026.

acova.org



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Check out our previous newsletters

If you missed a previous issue, you can find past newsletters on our website here:

ACTEAZ Newsletters

acteaz.org/acteaz-newsletters/

Have a story idea?

Send your full story or story idea to Stephen Weltsch (stephenweltsch@acteaz.org) and Courtney Cook (brandtechnology@acteaz.org).

We're happy to help craft your idea into a finished piece for our future newsletters available to the CTE community.

