Learning & Leading with CTE

November 2026 Newsletter

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Happy November ACTEAZ!



As we wrap up our first semester of the 2026-2027 school year and the last newsletter of 2026, I would like to reflect on all of the work we have already accomplished so far as an association.

The ACTEAZ Board of Directors has been working on our program of work, including continued efforts to strengthen our state conferences. We listened to your feedback and have shortened the schedule for the Connection Conference, Arizona's largest CTE gathering. Our goal is simple: to make the conference experience more valuable and accessible, so educators can get the most out of their time with us while better serving Arizona CTE.

The next opportunity to connect with your CTE family will be at the 2027 Midwinter Leadership Conference. If you haven't already, make sure to register at acteaz.org to reserve your spot. Be part of the movement and shape what's next in CTE.

This year, ACTEAZ has also had the pleasure of visiting schools across multiple districts and seeing CTE in action. Those visits are powerful reminders of why we do this work. You–our CTE champions–are showing students what is possible with career exploration and real-world opportunities. Arizona was also well represented at state and national conferences, where our Board Members joined panel discussions and helped strengthen our connections across the CTE community.

It's these stories, shared experiences, and connections that make our community stronger. I look forward to all we'll accomplish together in the new year.

- Jennifer Kaufman Fourness, ACTEAZ President

We are Arizona CTE:
Stronger Together

There is something special about gathering with people who share a purpose. At the November ACOVA Fall Conference, ACTEAZ was proud to spend time with Arizona's CTE family—educators, administrators, counselors, and industry partners who show every day what is possible when we learn from one another and work toward something bigger than ourselves.

Cochise County Superintendent Dr. Jacqui Clay delivered an inspiring keynote with a message that resonated: This is CTE's time. She challenged us to sing CTE from a common hymnal—to find our shared voice, tell our story consistently, and make certain the impact of our work is heard across Arizona.

That spirit carried throughout the conference. Practitioners shared ideas, tackled challenges, mentored colleagues, and offered practical strategies to strengthen programs and expand student opportunities. ACTEAZ was especially proud to join ACOVA and ASA in presenting CTE 101: From Foundations to Futures, a statewide effort to equip our CTE family with a common message and resources to champion CTE in every community. Find these advocacy resources through ACTEAZ.

These gatherings remind us that none of us does this work alone. We are part of a statewide family, connected by the students we serve and the futures we help create.

Come be part of the conversation. Join us February 3–5 at the ACTEAZ Midwinter Conference in Prescott. Bring your experiences, questions, and ideas. You belong in this room, and Arizona CTE is stronger when you are part of it.









The Importance of Middle School Career Exploration

The earlier students begin exploring careers, the better prepared they can be to make informed choices about their futures. That belief drives the AzAMLE (Arizona Association for Middle Level Education) Middle Matters Leadership Collective, a professional learning series focused on strengthening leadership and commitment to Arizona's middle grades. The series offers four free sessions each school year.

The first session, "Designing the Pipeline: CTE for the Middle Grades," took place in October at the Laveen Education Center. Led by Susan Faretta, Career Development Specialist at the Arizona Department of Education, and Rahsaan Bartet, Career Literacy Specialist at West-MEC, the session explored research on the value of career and technical education (CTE) and ways to build a pathway from middle school into high school programs. Participants also received practical tools they could put to use in their schools.

ACTEAZ spoke with Rahsaan about the session and why these conversations are necessary. "This is super important for the middle school level because it helps students get self understanding and self awareness early. They can start making better informed decisions around CTE programs". It can also introduce students to a range of options before they choose a pathway, helping them connect their interests and strengths with future possibilities.

Rahsaan also spoke about the annual Connection Conference, which offers opportunities to learn about middle school career exploration and resources for supporting students. "There are lots of great things happening at the Connection Conference. It had the most career exploration courses offered to attendees," he explained.

> **"Students get self understanding and self awareness early."**

Arizona is expanding middle grades career exploration through five pilot districts representing both rural and urban communities. Each district is developing and testing best practices to learn what works best for their students. Putting these plans into action will not only create better outcomes for our state, but also lead to solutions nationwide. Through these leadership sessions, participants are helping students see the possibilities ahead and strengthening the movement to make career exploration more accessible. "I'm super excited for the work AzAMLE will be doing at the state level and nationally".

Student Ambassadors shaping their futures

Dr. Kathryn Strevell,
Director of CTE
Nadaburg USD

On November 3, 2026, Mountainside High School Career and Technical Education (CTE) Ambassadors, a student leadership group made up of students from different CTE programs, designed and facilitated Nadaburg Unified School District's Future Workforce Forum. The ambassadors put their leadership and professional communication skills into practice as they guided small-group discussions, moderated a panel, and led a Q&A where students exchanged questions directly with local employers and education leaders. NUSD student Ambassadors led conversations centered on three questions:

- What tells an employer that a student is ready for an entry-level job?
- What experiences should students have before graduation?
- What skills will local employers need in the next three to five years?

Students are built to lead. At the Future Workforce Forum, the ambassadors showed what that looks like in practice. They shaped a conversation that gave employers and educators a firsthand look at how students think about entering the workforce and gave students a clearer picture of what local employers value.









CTE in Action: Preparing Students for What Comes Next

ACTEAZ had the opportunity to visit Career and Technical Education programs across Scottsdale Unified School District, and what we experienced was a powerful reminder of why this work matters.

At Chaparral and Saguaro high schools, we met students putting learning into action. Engineering and robotics students walked us through their robot designs, explaining how they were building on last year's competition experience to create an even more advanced robot for this spring. Beyond competition, these students were applying their expertise to engineer real projects for outside customers. Culinary students were learning alongside regional industry legends like Mark Tarbell, while construction students were gaining valuable experience from the Chasse Building Team. Across programs, work-based learning, industry mentors, and authentic applications connected classroom learning to careers.

But what resonated most was the students themselves. They could confidently articulate the skills they had acquired, the industry credentials they were earning, and their plans for life after high school. They understood not just what they were learning, but where it could take them.

We know the research: CTE contributes to stronger graduation rates and student achievement. But seeing it firsthand makes the impact tangible.

A tremendous thank-you to Jayme Fitzpatrick, Director of College and Career Readiness, and the dedicated CTE teachers across Scottsdale Unified. They are modeling high-quality CTE and ensuring students leave high school with skills, confidence, credentials, and a clear path forward.

This is CTE at its best: learning with purpose, connecting education to opportunity, and preparing students for lives of choice.



Arizona CTE Affiliate Updates

azffa.org/AATA

The AATA Fall Conference was held in Flagstaff, AZ on September 3rd & 4th with over 50 members in attendance. The conference was a successful gathering to strengthen agriculture in the state. Longtime Ag teacher Mr. Walt Wesch (Baboquivari) gave an inspiring speech, AATA Committee work was completed by a wide variety of members, and ten National Forest Service workers were on-site in local forests to explain industry trends and the FFA Forester CDE. Professional development opportunities continued at Pine Canyon Resort where attendees got to learn about the sports turf industry from professionals and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA).

azabea.org

The AZME and ABEA Winter Conference will be held in Flagstaff, Arizona on January 21-26, 2027. Information can be found on azme.org and azabea.org

ateia.org

ATIEA is excited to announce the First Annual ATIEA Trap Shoot Fundraiser, taking place December 12, 2026, at the Ben Avery Shooting Range.

We are inviting CTE educators, instructors, administrators, and CTE supporters from across Arizona to join us for a day of friendly competition, fellowship, and support for CTE.

If you are interested in forming a team or participating in the ATIEA Trap Shoot Fundraiser, please contact: atieaorg@gmail.com

azsa.org

Get involved in ASA! The Arizona School Administrators (ASA) is a statewide association that supports school and district administrators across Arizona. Serving over 1,500 administrators statewide, ASA is a collective voice committed to strengthening schools and students.

The Career and Technical Education Division is a great resource for leadership development in the admin level. Members will get a variety of opportunities to be involved in collaboration and connections among K–12, CTEDs, postsecondary education, and industry.

If you're interested in getting involved, contact President-Elect Dr. Kathryn Strevell at kstrevell@nadaburgsd.org.

azsca.org

Our annual conference is February 1-2, 2027 at the We-Ko-Pa Resort. Make sure to reserve your room by 1/21/27, early bird registration ends November 29th. The deadline to register for the conference is 1/22/27.

If you have questions, reach out to Kristina Guy at kristina.guy@west-mec.org

ACTEAZ Save the Dates

2027 midwinter leadership conference



February 3-5, 2027
Prescott Resort & Conference Center

I AM CTE

2027 CONNECTION CONFERENCE

JULY 9-13, 2027
TUCSON, AZ

acteaz

CTE STATE AWARDS

SUBMIT YOUR NOMINATION TODAY

Learn More

ACTE Save the Dates



Sound The Bell: Time To Lead
Region V
ACTE
Colorado Springs

Save the Date:

ACTE Region V 2027
Leadership Conference
Colorado Springs, CO



Partner Organization Updates

Proud to partner with AZCTECC

Used It? Rate It! is a new opportunity for CTE teachers to share brief feedback on units, lessons, and projects published on the CTE Curriculum Connection. Educators can share what worked, what could be better, and what would make the resources more useful in their classroom and lab.

Their feedback matters and guides future development of resources.
Link: bit.ly/useitrateit

ctecaz.org

Proud to partner with ACOVA

Visit ACOVA at acova.org for information on the following upcoming events and highlights:

You can make a difference in the future of Arizona students!
Click the link below to donate and help support students in reaching their post-secondary education goals through scholarships!
ACOVA Student Scholarship

acova.org

STAY IN THE LOOP



Become an ACTEAZ Member — it's free!

Make sure you're subscribed to ACTEAZ Email Blasts to receive updates about the release of future newsletters. ACTEAZ members strengthen their network in Arizona CTE.

Join ACTEAZ

acteaz.org/about-us/membership/

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.

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