CEANCI
CAREER EDUCATION ASSOCIATES OF NORTH CENTRAL ILLINOIS

# COMPREHENSIVE LOCAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

CEANCI REGION SUMMATIVE May 18, 2026

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Our CTE programs are producing real results where it matters most. Graduation rates have climbed from 93% to 95%, and the share of students successfully moving into jobs or continuing education after completing a program has jumped from 47% to 61%. Several districts are also earning postsecondary credit at nearly twice the state average – a sign that students are leaving high school with a real head start.

That said, academic proficiency scores in reading, math, and science have declined across the region, and math is a particular concern in several districts. This isn't unique to CTE, but it's a challenge we can't set aside. The region is actively working to address it by weaving math and literacy skills directly into CTE coursework rather than treating them as separate problems. Those efforts are underway, and we expect to see results over time.

Two other issues worth noting: access to work-based learning varies significantly across districts, and enrollment in programs that serve students in nontraditional fields hasn't grown the way we'd like. Both are areas of ongoing focus.

### ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY CTE

Students from special populations – including students with disabilities, English learners, students experiencing poverty, and foster youth – are graduating at strong rates and, in several districts, earning postsecondary credit at impressive levels. That reflects real, intentional work: early outreach starting in middle school, close collaboration between special education and career counseling staff, and individualized transition planning.

Where we still have gaps: students who most need hands-on, real-world experience – English learners, homeless students, military-connected students – are the least likely to participate in work-based learning. In some districts, their participation is effectively zero. That's the most concrete equity issue in this data, and it's one we're actively working to close.

Academic proficiency gaps for special population students are also more pronounced than for the general student population, and students with disabilities and English learners are transitioning to jobs or further education after graduation at lower rates than their peers.

Two structural changes can make a meaningful difference here: making sure the school day is structured so students can actually take CTE sequences alongside their required courses, and

making sure our data is accurate enough to show us where gaps exist. Both are solvable, and both are in progress.

## LABOR MARKET ALIGNMENT

CTE programs in this region are well-connected to local job markets in several key areas. Health/CNA programs, automotive, business/finance, and education pathways are all producing graduates for fields with high local demand and solid wages. The education pathway is a particular standout – students earning paraprofessional licenses are stepping directly into jobs in our own school buildings.

Two significant gaps exist that no district is currently filling. First, transportation and CDL: there are more than 300 annual job openings in this field regionally, experienced wages close to $34/hour, and not a single CTE program addressing it. A regional CDL pathway is being proposed and deserves serious attention. Second, while CNA programs are strong, they're functioning as final destinations rather than first steps. With only two nursing graduates for every ten registered nurse openings – and RN wages above $46/hour – there's a compelling case for building a clearer CNA-to-RN pipeline in partnership with Rock Valley College.

One consistent message from local employers across two years of advisory meetings: our students are technologically capable, but communication, accountability, and professional follow-through are areas that need development. That's showing up in every sector, and it's worth addressing directly in how we design CTE coursework.

## SIZE, SCOPE & QUALITY OF CTE PROGRAMS

Every district in the region meets the minimum requirements for CTE programming, and enrollment is growing. Over the past two years, the total number of CTE students has grown from roughly 15,800 to 17,600, and the share of students going deep enough into a program to be considered "concentrators" has climbed from 34% to nearly 40%. More students aren't just trying CTE – they're committing to it.

Middle school outreach is becoming a genuine regional strength. Nearly every district is reaching students before high school course selection through visits, orientation days, pathway fairs, and individual counseling conversations. That early exposure matters, both for enrollment and for equity.

Industry engagement and work-based learning are both growing, though unevenly. The districts making the most progress on work-based learning share a common factor: they hired someone whose job it is to coordinate those opportunities. That staffing investment – a Career Facilitator, a College and Career Coordinator – appears to be the single biggest differentiator in how well districts are connecting students to real workplace experiences.

Quality of instruction – specifically, how consistently academic standards and employability skills are woven into CTE courses – varies across the region and is an area of targeted improvement going forward.

### IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMS OF STUDY

Aiming for continuous improvement, nearly all districts participate in CEANCI's advisory committee structure and regular engagement with industry partners, though the frequency and formality of that engagement varies significantly from district to district. CEANCI conducts annual performance data reviews and collects quality program evidence from each program.

For career awareness, most districts engage students during the middle school to early high school transition as the primary window for career exploration, with CEANCI's Pathways Project and counselor workshops serving as a common support resource across several districts.

Rock Valley College serves as a key post-secondary partner for several districts in the region, making regional coordination around dual credit a natural opportunity.

There are no districts without approved CTE programs in this region. Many programs offer an orientation course, which is in a career exploration format. All programs offer the required orientation or introduction course and skills course at minimum. Many also offer advanced and workplace experience course as well. All programs either offer a full course or a unit on safety in the pathway, which vary greatly from safe food handline in culinary to copyright law in graphic design.

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### RECRUITING, RETAINING, AND TRAINING CTE TEACHERS

CTE teachers are a different kind of hire. Most come directly from industry, which means they bring deep content knowledge – and often need significant support on the education side: classroom management, lesson planning, working with students who have IEPs, and navigating school systems. The regional "Straight from Industry" cohort program through CEANCI provides that foundation, and it's working. But it's a starting point, not a substitute for ongoing support at the district level.

Districts that are keeping their CTE teachers share a few things in common: structured mentorship programs that pair new teachers with experienced colleagues, strong administrative communication, and access to the equipment and resources teachers actually need to do their jobs well. Districts that skip those investments tend to lose teachers – and when a CTE teacher leaves, the program they ran often disappears with them. That's a real risk, because there is no substitute pipeline for a welding or automotive instructor the way there might be for other positions.

The most universally cited professional development need across the region is training on how to support students with IEPs. That need shows up in virtually every district and connects directly to the equity gaps we see in student outcomes. It's a high-priority area for improvement.

One more practical issue: grant administration is consuming significant teacher time. Simplifying that process – so educators are spending time on students rather than paperwork – is a concrete, addressable problem that would benefit teachers across the region.

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## SECTION 1: STAKEHOLDERS IN PERSON

## SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS:

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BUSTER BARTON
CASSANDRA SCHUG
CHAD DOUGHERTY
EILEEN MCGINN
EMILY ROER
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KATY HAUN
MARC ECKMANN
MATT CASCIO
MATT FRY
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KRISTY CUMMERLANDER
LISA CLARK
MEGAN NILSON
MEGHAN DZIKI
NATALIA SALDENA
NATALIE SATI
PAYTON BUSHNELL
ROSE GOODLOVE
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THERESE SULLIVAN
TIFFANY RAUMAN
TONYA CLINE

## WORKFORCE BOARD REPRESENTATIVE

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KIM HALEY
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## INDUSTRY PARTNERS:

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CARI VANDERHEYDEN
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DAVID STACK
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ERIN PEDERSEN
GREG FIORUCCI
JASON ANDREWS
JASON GLODOWSKI
JASON HY
JEANIE SULLIVAN
JEFF BARABASZ
JILL JENNINGS
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KARISSA WRASSE
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KYLE WOLFE
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PAMELA RUENGER
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PAUL OLDROYD
PETER MEYER
RACHEL ERICKSON
REBECCA ROBINSON
RICK KRIEG
RYAN BURKE
SARAH BORGEN-HABBEN
SARAH WERCKLE
SHARMINE BERRY
VALERIE MALLON
WILL HAUN
WILL REIDNER

Online feedback: Students: 4,222
Parents: 370
Industry Partners: 14

# SECTION 2: STUDENT PERFORMANCE

CLNA QUESTION: Describe regional strengths, areas for improvement, and challenges for student performance.

## EFE150 REGION OVERVIEW OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Student data trending positively over time:

1S1 Graduation Rate: 93.18% in 2023; 95.44% in 2025
1S2 Extended Graduation Rate: 93.07 in 2023; 96.66% in 2025
3S1 Post Program Placement: 47.38% in 2023; 60.62% in 2025
4S1 Nontraditional Program: 29.94% in 2023; 31.47% in 2025
5S2 Program Quality Attained Postsecondary Credits: 48.31% in 2023; 61.91% in 2025
5S3 Program Quality Work Based Learning: 6.72% in 2023; 8.97% in 2025

Student data stagnating or trending negatively over time:

2S1 Academic Proficiency in Reading: 22.33% in 2023; 20.95% in 2025
2S2 Academic Proficiency in Mathematics: 19.51% in 2023; 16.49% in 2025
2S3 Academic Proficiency in Science: 51.42% in 2023; 48.84% in 2025

## CEANCI STRATEGIC FOCUS: PROGRAM QUALITY

The highest priority area of focus for programs in the EFE150 region is program quality adhering to the nine quality program criteria outlined in the Perkins grant. CEANCI strategically plans for and focuses on the four following areas:

- Development and Engagement & Employer-Informed Competencies and Skills: Providing opportunities to connect with industry partners through advisory work
- Work-Based Learning: Quality work-based learning and team-based challenges for students through career expos, site tours, and authentic skill-based competitions
- Quality Instructors: CTE teachers examine teaching practices through professional learning, industry partner input, market data, and career cluster resources
- Continuous improvement: CTE leaders and teachers examine programming through training and market data analysis

Other Goals and Strategies:
Academic Instruction & Supports: EFE 150 continues to offer opportunities for CTE teachers to learn and practice incorporation of core content into CTE courses. Stressing the use of common language from each of these content areas, the hope is that student test scores will show improvements.

Teacher Retention: Encourage schools to limit teacher turnover whenever possible. CEANCI has a cohort-style training, Straight from Industry, which assists school districts to retain quality CTE instructors. The training program is a full year and tackles 30+ essential teacher topics that CTE-ELS teachers need for success in a new profession.

Instructional Sequence: Consistent course code alignment to maximize credit for funding. Ensuring that course codes are caught in time for uploading is essential for accurate data collection, CEANCI conducts a course code audit twice per year for each school and each program.

Recruitment & Access: Inform teachers of nontraditional students identified when possible and compare school enrollments to local workforce demographics. Support recruiting and more nontraditional enrollments across all CTE options.

Postsecondary Placement: EFE 150 has started a graduate tracking program, but students have to opt-in for follow up. It is not a perfect system but has the intention of tracking more than students that enroll in post-secondary programs and are captured in the Clearinghouse data scoop.

## COMMON STRENGTHS IN STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Graduation Rates: Nearly every district highlights strong or improving graduation rates. CTE concentrators often outperform the broader student population – Belvidere's CTE concentrators graduate at 96.9% vs. an 88.8% district average, and Hononegah's CTE concentrators graduate 3 points higher than non-concentrators.

Postsecondary Credit Attainment: Multiple districts report impressive dual/early college credit numbers. Byron's CTE concentrators earn postsecondary credits at nearly double the state

average (85.3%), Meridian reports 58% of the Class of 2025 graduated with 15+ college credit hours, and South Beloit students earned 360 college credits in a single semester.

Work-Based Learning: Districts are expanding real-world experiences significantly. Belvidere reports hundreds of students in site visits, internships, and job shadows. Byron's WBL participation is 4x the state average. Rockford grew from 0% to 5.8% WBL participation, and Winnebago credits expanded career exploration (PreK–12) for improved post-program placement.

Academic Proficiency: Several districts show gains in reading, math, and science. Byron's science proficiency jumped from 62.4% to 78.1%, Rockford saw a 9.7% increase in science proficiency, and Meridian's science scores are more than 20% above the state average.

Nontraditional Program Participation: Rockford saw a 42.74% increase in nontraditional program participation, Meridian is more than 20% above the state average, and Winnebago credits teacher outreach for a 3.5% increase.

Post-Program Placement: Harlem and Winnebago both report stronger transitions to employment, education, or training. Rockford stands out with a 42.41% increase in post-program placement.

Overall, CTE programming is driving stronger graduation outcomes, broader access to college credit, and deeper connections to career pathways — with many districts outperforming state averages in key indicators.

## AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN STUDENT PERFORMANCE:

Academic Proficiency in Math and Reading: Nearly every district has declining or below-benchmark performance in math and/or reading. Belvidere's numbers are particularly stark — only 7.4% of CTE concentrators meet math benchmarks vs. 24.4% statewide, and 15% meet reading benchmarks vs. 28.6% statewide. Rockford saw a 31.58% decrease in math proficiency. Harlem, Meridian, and Winnebago all report multi-year downward trends in reading, and Harlem notes math has been declining for several years across all students. Byron raised questions about whether ACT-to-SAT score equivalencies are skewing comparisons.

Work-Based Learning Participation: Several districts fall short of state expectations for WBL. Belvidere reports that only 3.5% of graduating CTE concentrators completed a WBL experience compared to a 14.3% state average. North Boone specifically lists WBL as an area of need, and Winnebago acknowledges ongoing difficulty establishing WBL opportunities given their small community context.

Postsecondary Credit Attainment: North Boone identifies this as a gap area, and Winnebago notes it continues to be a challenge to build out these opportunities locally.

Nontraditional Student Recruitment: Hononegah highlights that nontraditional student enrollment in CTE programs is actually decreasing and is the one benchmark they have not met, despite active outreach through counselors and course guides.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention South Beloit raises a structural concern that cuts across all CTE programming – the loss of qualified CTE teachers frequently leads to programs being eliminated rather than paused, directly reducing student access to courses like woodworking.

Graduation Rate Stability: Meridian notes its 4-year graduation rate dipped below 98% for the first time in four years, and post-program placement remains about 4% below the state average.

Overall, academic proficiency – particularly in math – alongside access gaps in work-based learning continues to be a challenge. These challenges exist even in districts that are otherwise performing well, suggesting systemic pressures that CTE programming alone cannot fully address.

CLNA QUESTION: Identify your goals and strategies, including timelines, for addressing disparities or gaps in local levels of performance

PROPOSED STRATEGIES, INCLUDING STUDENT SUPPORTS AND INTERVENTIONS, WITH TIMELINE FOR ADDRESSING DISPARITIES OR GAPS IN LOCAL LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE:
Integrating Math and Literacy into CTE Classrooms: Belvidere is adding applied math courses like Amped on Algebra and Geometry in Construction. Rockford dedicates PLC time specifically to integrating literacy and numeracy into CTE instruction and partners with their local EFE for targeted professional development. Winnebago is sending teachers to workshops focused on incorporating English and math into CTE curriculum. Harlem is implementing targeted math supports and aligning professional development to the state Literacy Plan across all content areas including CTE.

Expanding Work-Based Learning Opportunities: Multiple districts are prioritizing growth in WBL. South Beloit is growing business and postsecondary partnerships to increase job shadows, internships, and industry credentials. Harlem is focused on making WBL experiences more rigorous and better aligned to program goals. All districts work with CEANCI to ensure WBL courses are properly loaded in their student information systems, so participation is accurately tracked and credited.

ACT and College Readiness Supports: Belvidere has embedded ACT prep into the school day through WIN time and classroom instruction. Meridian has created a dedicated ACT prep

course for all juniors. Belvidere also offers Transitional Math and Transitional English courses to help students meet college readiness benchmarks.

Expanding CTE Program Offerings: North Boone is exploring new agriculture pathways including Ag Mechanics and Ag Welding and is conducting a facility study to create spaces for trades programs. Harlem is investing in renovated classrooms and a high school addition to support CTE growth. Hononegah has already added new PLTW computer science courses and a complete Education Career pathway.

Supporting Special Populations and Nontraditional Students: Byron highlights strong growth in enrollment among students with disabilities, low-income students, and female students. Hononegah is being intentional in recruiting nontraditional students through direct presentations to incoming ninth graders and events like Women in Manufacturing field trips. Meridian is focusing its school improvement plan on ELA growth specifically for LEP and IEP subgroups.

Teacher Development and Endorsements: Harlem is supporting current teachers in obtaining CTE endorsements to sustain and grow pathway offerings. Rockford provides building- and district-level professional learning for all teachers including CTE instructors.

Overall, the push to embed academic skill-building – especially math and reading – directly into CTE instruction, rather than treating it as separate from career programming is happening regionwide. Districts are also broadly recognizing that accurate data tracking, stronger WBL pipelines, and intentional support for underserved student groups are essential to closing performance gaps.

# SECTION 3: ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY CTE

CLNA QUESTION: Describe regional strengths, areas for improvement, and challenges

## EFE150 REGION OVERVIEW OF ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY CTE

Performance measures that are trending positively:

- English Learners are performing well in 1S1, 1S2, and 5S2
- Foster students are performing well in 1S2, 2S1, 3S1, 4S1, 5S2, 5S3
- Homeless students are performing well in 1S2, 5S2
- Low-income students are performing well in 1S1, 1S2, 4S1, 5S2
- Military students are performing well in 1S1, 1S2, 2S3, 4S1, 5S2, 5S3
- Non-traditional students are performing well in 1S1, 1S2, 2S3, 3S1, 4S1, 5S2, 5S3
- Special Ed students are performing well in 1S1, 1S2, 5S2

Performance measures that are stagnating or trending negatively:

- English Learners are struggling in 2S1, 2S2, 2S3, 3S1, 4S1, 5S3
- Foster students are struggling in 2S2, 2S3
- Homeless students are struggling in 1S1, 2S1, 2S2, 2S3, 3S1, 4S1, 5S3
- Low-income students are struggling in 2S1, 2S2, 2S3, 3S1, 5S3
- Military students are struggling in 2S1, 2S2, 3S1
- Non-traditional students are struggling in 2S1, 2S2
- Special Ed students are struggling in 2S1, 2S2, 2S3, 3S1, 4S1, 5S3

## STRENGTHS IN ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY CTE

Strong Graduation Rates for Special Populations: Several districts have special population students in CTE that are graduating at or above state averages. Belvidere reports graduation rates for English Learners (98.18%), non-traditional students (96.74%), and military-connected students (100%) that meet or exceed state benchmarks. Meridian reports a 98.1% extended graduation rate for CTE concentrators overall, with more than half of those concentrators being non-traditional students.

High Postsecondary Credit Attainment Across Special Populations: Belvidere has multiple special population groups exceeding state averages in postsecondary credit attainment, including students with disabilities (83.33%), English Learners (77.59%), and non-traditional students (85.71%). Meridian reports 90.8% of graduating CTE concentrators earned postsecondary credits, up from the 80s in prior years.

Growing Nontraditional Student Participation: Multiple districts are seeing increases in nontraditional enrollment. Winnebago grew nontraditional enrollment by nearly 3.5% and uses middle school outreach including 8th grade orientation to recruit students early. Belvidere reports high non-traditional participation across nearly all special population groups. Harlem reports that special population students are performing above the state average in non-traditional program participation.

Individualized Support Structures: Districts are building personalized support systems to ensure equitable access. South Beloit credits its small district size for enabling individualized guidance, with special education and ELL students receiving the same WBL and dual credit opportunities as their peers through close collaboration with their college and career director. Hononegah ensures every student with an IEP completes transition goals aligned to postsecondary planning, and counselors conduct annual four-year planning meetings with all students. Winnebago develops individualized plans for students with 504s and IEPs based on their specific needs.

Early and Broad Outreach: Several districts are intentional about reaching students before high school. Winnebago uses 8th grade orientation and requires a Career Education course for all 10th graders. South Beloit extends career exploration to grades 5-12. Hononegah uses

postcards, QR codes, pathway videos, and a CTE course handbook to reach incoming students and families.

Work-Based Learning Access for All Students: South Beloit explicitly emphasizes that special populations – including special education and ELL students – receive equal access to WBL, career exploration, and dual credit opportunities. Harlem reports special population students are performing above the state average in work-based learning engagement.

Overall, districts are moving beyond simply enrolling special population students in CTE and are actively building support systems – individualized planning, early outreach, targeted interventions, and equitable access to dual credit and WBL – to ensure these students can succeed once they're in programs.

## AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY CTE

Work-Based Learning Access Gaps: Belvidere reports 0% WBL participation for English Learners, military-connected, and homeless students, with very low rates for low-income (1.73%), nontraditional (3.85%), and students with disabilities (4.76%). Hononegah reports that special education concentrators and non-traditional students are falling short in WBL participation. These numbers suggest WBL opportunities are not yet reaching the students who may need them most.

Math and Reading Proficiency for Special Populations: Multiple districts report persistent academic proficiency gaps among special population subgroups. Harlem identifies mathematics proficiency as its biggest equity gap, with special populations performing below the state average. Belvidere reports minimal or zero reading and math attainment for English Learners, homeless, military-connected, and students with disabilities. Hononegah notes special education CTE concentrators are behind in both reading and math. Meridian flags a decline in reading scores among male CTE students dropping below the state average.

Post-Program Placement Disparities: Several districts note that special populations are not transitioning successfully after graduation at equitable rates. Belvidere reports particularly low placement rates for military-connected students (16.67%), students with disabilities (35.09%), and English Learners and homeless students near or below 40%. Rockford lists post-program placement as a key area for improvement among special populations. Hononegah specifically calls out low-income CTE concentrators as falling short in post-program placement.

Postsecondary Credit Attainment Gaps: Hononegah notes that non-traditional students and special education concentrators are not meeting benchmarks for postsecondary credit attainment. Rockford identifies attained post-secondary credits as an improvement area for special populations. North Boone's 12-month post-secondary enrollment sits at only 52.3%, though it rises significantly at 16 months.

Scheduling and Structural Barriers: Hononegah claims a structural access problem – with only 6 periods in the school day and a limit of two electives per semester, students simply don't have enough room in their schedules for robust CTE participation. There are also no CTE options at their middle school feeder programs, limiting early exposure. High student demand for health science exists but no pathway has been developed yet.

Data Accuracy and Reporting Challenges: South Beloit and Byron both raise concerns about the reliability of the data itself. South Beloit points to inconsistencies in course coding and tracking, particularly for courses offered through Wisconsin institutions, making it difficult to accurately demonstrate equitable participation. Byron notes that racial and ethnic subgroup data is largely redacted, meaning the true picture of how those students are performing is unknown. This is a significant equity concern in itself – you can't address gaps you can't measure.

The most consistent equity gaps center on work-based learning access, math proficiency, and post-program placement for students with disabilities, English Learners, and low-income students. Compounding these challenges are structural barriers like scheduling constraints and data reporting inconsistencies that make it harder to both serve and accurately account for special population students in CTE programs.

CLNA QUESTION: Based upon student data at the regional level and responses (Goals/Strategies) from the LNAs:
Identify goals and strategies, including timelines, for addressing equal access to high-quality CTE courses and programs of study for all students. Include descriptions of how you will:

- Prepare special populations for self-sufficiency
- Prepare special populations for non-traditional fields
- Provide equal access for special populations
- Ensure non-discrimination for special populations

## GOALS AND STRATEGIES, INCLUDING TIMELINES, FOR ADDRESSING EQUAL ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY CTE COURSES AND PROGRAMS OF STUDY FOR ALL STUDENTS

### EFE 150/CEANCI GOALS AND STRATEGIES

EFE 150/CEANCI Community Outreach Coordinator sits on a TPC (Transition Planning Committee) specifically for students with disabilities who are transitioning from school to the workforce. This committee provides these students with an annual resource fair with over 45 vendors to learn about resources, and in many cases jobs, such as working for the following companies below.

- Barbara Olson Center of Hope
- Bridgeway Inc.
- Caravel Autism Health

- Clearbrook
- FurstStaffing
- Goodwill Northern Illinois
- IL Dept. of Rehabilitation Services - VR/HSP
- RAMP Disability Resources and Services
- Service Inc. of Illinois
- The Workforce Connection

EFE 150/CEANCI supports Project Search students each year at the PATHWAYS PROJECT middle school career fair that provides them with an opportunity to meet various pathways, and business partners with the hope of helping secure them with potential jobs. CEANCI has also participated in assisting with mock interviews for these students.

EFE 150/CEANCI, in collaboration with Goodwill, created a LEARN TO EARN program in two pilot high school buildings. The curriculum is work-focused and designed especially for students who are learning the English language AND trying to find first jobs. The first run of the program began and ended in the spring semester, 2026. EFE 150 plans to continue working with business partners through the summer to help these students find jobs in the community.

EFE 150/CEANCI Community Outreach Coordinator currently holds the President Board position at Women in Today's Manufacturing organization after being on committees and the board for nine total years. The WOTM puts on an annual fundraiser dinner, and for the 2026 event, female welding students from Harlem High School made 30 WOTM centerpieces and had an opportunity to present this project-based learning opportunity to eventgoers. EFE150's annual skills-based competition for Technical & Engineering Education pathways encourages female participation, which is growing every year.

## SCHOOL DISTRICT GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Expanding Work-Based Learning Access: Belvidere matched over 80 students with WBL opportunities in 2025-26 and is explicitly extending access to special education students through collaboration with their Special Ed department. South Beloit is expanding job shadows, internships, and credential programs like CNA with individualized transition planning. North Boone plans to increase job shadowing and work experience for all students including special populations. Winnebago is continuing career expos, company tours, and field trips into FY26.

Intentional Scheduling and Program Access: Several districts recognize that structural barriers limit access and are taking steps to address them. Meridian is redesigning its schedule for 2026-27 to eliminate study halls and give all students – including special populations – more room for CTE electives. Byron is working to increase CTE's influence in the master scheduling

process to ensure special population students get priority consideration for their preferred courses.

Targeted Professional Development for Teachers: Multiple districts are investing in teacher training to better serve diverse learners. Rockford is partnering with its Bilingual Department to train all teachers, including CTE instructors, on strategies for supporting ELL students – with the expectation that these strategies will also benefit students with disabilities and IEPs. Harlem is providing professional development on inclusive instructional practices. Winnebago is sending teachers to workshops specifically focused on recruiting, supporting, and retaining special populations in CTE.

Academic Support Integration: Districts are embedding academic support directly into CTE instruction rather than treating them separately. Belvidere is using SIOP strategies and push-in services for English Learners within CTE courses, alongside CTE-integrated math courses like Amped on Algebra and Geometry in Construction. Hononegah is using Newsela across CTE classrooms to differentiate reading instruction and build literacy skills within non-reading-based courses. Rockford expects its ELL-focused professional learning to improve academic proficiency, dual credit success rates, and post-program placement.

Counselor-Led Pathway Planning and Monitoring: Several districts are using structured counseling and data monitoring to ensure equitable placement and participation. Belvidere uses SchooLinks and counselor-led planning to help students map career pathways, with ongoing monitoring to identify gaps by subgroup. South Beloit emphasizes collaboration between special education staff and the college and career counselor for individualized transition planning. Harlem is establishing routines to ensure CTE enrollment reflects the overall student population.

Leveraging CEANCI Regional Support: Multiple districts use CEANCI as a resource for supporting special populations. Harlem, Hononegah, and South Beloit all note that CEANCI events – including career expos, pathway-specific events, transitional planning committees, and employment-focused ESL programs – are being used to ensure special population students have equitable exposure to career exploration opportunities.

Data Monitoring and Non-Discrimination Policies: Several districts are committing to more rigorous data tracking to identify and address disparities. Belvidere and South Beloit both emphasize ongoing monitoring of enrollment and performance data by subgroup. South Beloit also highlights the need to ensure accurate course coding so participation is properly captured in reporting systems.

There seems to be a shift toward intentionality – districts are moving from general access policies to targeted strategies that actively remove barriers for specific student groups through scheduling changes, individualized planning, teacher training, and expanded WBL

pipelines. CEANCI's regional support infrastructure appears to be a meaningful shared resource across nearly all districts in this effort.

# SECTION 4: LABOR MARKET ALIGNMENT

CLNA QUESTION: Based upon the new program summaries, local need requests, and discussion points, describe new programs of study that will be developed and submitted for State approval for FY25-FY28, including year of implementation.

## ESSENTIAL SKILL BUILDING IN EFE 150 REGION CTE PROGRAMMING

Between 2024-2026, EFE 150/CEANCI conducted 11 Advisory Committee meetings with teachers and industry partners that covered over 30 pathways. The passion and patterns regarding weak essential skills are striking – job applicants without communication and accountability skills came up in nearly every single meeting regardless of industry. Worth noting what's absent: there are no unprompted positive comments from employers about communication, accountability, or work ethic in any of the meetings. Those gaps appear to be real and consistent across the board.

Essential Skill Weaknesses: Communication was flagged not just as a soft skill gap but as a structural problem in some districts – Manufacturing partners specifically called on business leaders to advocate for bringing speech and communication courses back to the curriculum. Accountability was the one skill where employer surveys and educator surveys consistently agreed, showing up as the top-ranked skill in both the Education and Health Science meetings' survey results.
The "immediate gratification" problem threads through several pathways too – Arts & Comm, Financial Services, and Culinary all noted that younger workers struggle with the idea of starting at the bottom and working up, which connects to work ethic and realistic expectations.

Essential Skill Strengths: Technology fluency is the clearest and most consistent positive – employers across multiple pathways acknowledged that younger workers genuinely outpace older staff when it comes to speed and comfort with digital tools. That's a real asset.
Passion and engagement came up strongly, but with an important caveat: it tends to appear when students are in hands-on or applied settings, not traditional classroom ones. The Health Science and Education internship testimonials are glowing, but that enthusiasm isn't described as showing up universally.
The hands-on learning theme is probably the most actionable takeaway here – multiple pathways independently noted that when students are placed in real or simulated work environments, they perform noticeably better. That aligns with the concern about soft skills too, since several instructors suggested labs and applied projects as the best vehicle for teaching things like teamwork and problem solving.

## GRADUATES OF EFE150 REGION PROGRAMS THRIVING IN THE LABOR MARKET AND WHY

Health/CNA pipeline is the region's clearest win. Nursing Assistants (329 openings) and Teaching Assistants (213 openings) are the two highest-volume certificate-level occupations, and both have solid, multi-district CTE coverage.

Automotive is well-developed and credentialed. ASE certification, Ford ACE partnership, dual credit, and widespread program availability make this one of the region's strongest CTE-to-career pipelines – and experienced wages ($31.06) clear the living wage bar.

Education pathways are exemplary. Multiple districts have Education CIPs with real WBL placements in local schools. The RPS 205 paraprofessional license pathway is a standout model connecting directly to a living-wage occupation.

Business/finance foundation is broad. With DECA, dual credit finance courses, and student business enterprises present across multiple districts, business-pathway students have meaningful access to the region's high-volume bachelor's-level openings.

## IMPLEMENTING NEW PROGRAMS IN THE EFE 150/CEANCI REGION

*Any new programs of study will take years to plan for and implement. According to analysis of the labor market projections and the supply gaps, there is one noticeable need and another noticeable structure change that should happen:*

### CDL / Transportation Pathway

Certificate
Annual openings: 311
Exp. Wage: $33.89
Supply gap ratio: 0.4 (only 4 completers per 10 openings)
Current CTE coverage: None

Transportation pathway leading to CDL training is the most urgent unaddressed gap in the region. With 311 annual openings is the second-highest certificate-level demand, the experienced wage clears the single-adult living wage by $10/hr, and the supply gap ratio of 0.4 means the region produces fewer than half the workers needed. No district LNA mentions this field at all. A transportation/logistics pathway – beginning with a pre-CDL awareness and career exploration course, culminating in partnership with a carrier or community college for CDL licensure – could be developed regionally through CEANCI. Students must be 18 for a CDL, making a senior-year WBL or articulated program the right model.

Suggested HS pathway model: *Foundations of Technology (Gr. 10)* → *Diesel Mechanics (Gr. 11)* → *Truck and Bus Driving (Gr. 12)* → Articulated TDT program with RVC.

### Pre-Nursing / Allied Health Sequence (RN Pipeline)

Associate's Degree
Annual openings: 283
Exp. Wage: $46.33
Supply gap ratio: 0.2 (only 2 completers per 10 openings)
Current CTE coverage: CNA only

Registered Nursing has the worst supply gap ratio (0.2) among associate's-level occupations with high volume, and the highest experienced wage in that tier. CNA programs exist across the region but function as endpoints rather than on-ramps to RN. The fix is structural: deliberately articulating the CNA → Medical Assistant → RN sequence with Rock Valley College's nursing program, so students leave high school with credits and a clear pathway rather than a standalone certification. Many districts are already building Health Science CIPs – this framing should guide their design.

Suggested HS pathway model: Health Occupations & Introductory Concepts and Skill Dev't *and* Dual credit Medical Terminology *(Gr. 10)* → CNA (Gr. 11) → Nursing Assistant Workplace Experience (Gr. 12) → Articulated to RVC Associates Degree in Nursing. Groundwork already laid at: Belvidere, Harlem, Winnebago, Hononegah, RPS 205.

It is hard to determine a year of implementation due to a teacher shortage and the difficulty to find specialized CTE teachers on top of that. Ideally, it would happen before this current grant period (by FY28) but there are no guarantees that schools have the capacity for such changes (especially the truck driver training).

Otherwise, programs specifically mentioned in district LNA reports mention the following: Healthcare & Health Sciences: Several districts are growing in this area. Rockford is developing a Dental Assisting Pathway (launching SY28) and expanding general healthcare offerings. South Beloit is exploring allied health certifications and ambulatory/social services coursework, building on their existing CNA pathway. Winnebago is doubling its Health Science (Athletic Training) program by moving the teacher to full-time. Hononegah is working toward a Health Sciences CIP (Allied Health or CNA) through internal course approval.

Hospitality & Leisure: Rockford is significantly expanding its Hospitality Pathway, and Meridian and Harlem are both looking at hospitality as an emerging area aligned with regional growth projections.

Business, Finance & Technology: Both Belvidere and Hononegah are eyeing AP Business with Personal Finance. Belvidere is also exploring AP Cybersecurity and is looking at broadcast media and aviation as new pathway areas.

Trades & Technical Programs: North Boone plans to bring Welding in-house for 2027–28 (currently offered off-campus) and is also considering Mechanics. South Beloit students are

already accessing Welding, HVAC, Industrial Maintenance, and IT through Blackhawk Technical College.

Mental Health & Education Pathways: Rockford is developing a Mental Health & Wellness Pathway in partnership with the University of Illinois College of Medicine and Rockford University, and has also strengthened its Education Pathway, including a route to a Paraprofessional Educator License.

Work-Based Learning Expansion: Belvidere is broadly working to increase internships, job shadows, site visits, and guest speakers across all pathways, including internal internships within district departments. South Beloit is building a fire department cadet program partnership.

Textile Manufacturing: Harlem specifically called out textile product manufacturing as an emerging area worth investigating, based on local industry growth data.

Overall, healthcare, hospitality, and trades are the most commonly recurring themes, with several districts leaning on advisory board labor market data – particularly through CEANCI – to guide their decisions.

CLNA QUESTION: After reviewing your labor market data, LNA results, and discussion points, indicate any potential CTE programs that you plan to discontinue in your region.
Pathways such as Administrative Assistant, Industrial Electronics, Computer Programming, Machine Tool Technology, and Photography have a decline in the job market outlook by 2032, varying from -2% to -14% expected over the next 8 years. These programs may see reasons to be discontinued in the near future if the trend holds.

The HS CTE-related supply gap for this region shows that certain programs are overdeveloping workers in certain pathways such as Certified Nursing Assistants, for which we are producing 1.2 CNAs for every position. Another is Computer Network Support Specialists, for which we are producing 1.5 specialists per job opening.

Considering all of this, currently, there are no programs that are planned to close in any district according to district LNA reports. EFE 150/CEANCI will continue to encourage districts to analyze labor market information to determine pathway restructuring if possible.

## SECTION 5: SIZE, SCOPE, QUALITY

CLNA QUESTION: Referring to the definition of size, does the region meet the recommended minimum number of CTE programs of study? If no, what are the goals and strategies, including timelines, to address this area?

All schools in the EFE150/CEANCI region meet the recommended minimum number of CTE programs.
As a matter of fact, according to data collected from Illinois School Report Cards, CTE enrollment is trending up over the course of the past few years in all districts. In SY 22-23, the sum of participants in CTE for the CEANCI region totaled 15,834 with 5,430 concentrators (34.29%). In SY 24-25, the sum of participants in CTE for the CEANCI region totaled 17,618 with 7,012 concentrators (39.8%).
Only Belvidere mentioned having to turn students away from the Automotive and Culinary programs because the interest is so high yet the spaces limit the number of students it can accommodate.

CLNA QUESTION: Describe the region level student recruitment and retention plan that extends into middle school to address equity gaps.
Early Awareness & Course Introduction: Most districts are reaching students before high school course selection. Hononegah sends mailers to all middle school families and has CTE teachers visit sender schools in person. Winnebago introduces programs at 8th grade orientation. Byron holds a dedicated 8th grade pathway day that includes a trip to the ROE and conversations with current high school CTE students. North Boone hosts an elective fair alongside 1:1 counselor meetings with every student.

Career Exploration Events: Several districts use structured events to broaden exposure. Rockford's Academy Expo connects every 9th grader with more than 120 career options supported by regional employers. South Beloit runs a robust monthly career exploration cycle – career awareness, a career panel, and then an actual business visit – for grades 5–12, plus virtual job shadows using VR headsets. Meridian sends 8th graders to the CEANCI Pathways Project and offers an Agriculture Club at the middle school level.

Middle School Coursework & Pathway Connections: Harlem created a middle school "wheel" of introductory courses for grades 6–8, employs CTE-licensed teachers, and aligns course sequences to the high school CTE pathway options. Belvidere offers Project Lead the Way at the middle school to build early hands-on experience that connects directly to high school manufacturing pathways. Meridian is also exploring spreading elective offerings down to the middle school level.

Equity & Access Efforts: Belvidere focuses on equity, making all recruitment materials available in multiple languages and using platforms like SchooLinks to ensure consistent access for all families. Rockford emphasizes that every student – regardless of background – participates in high school visits and the Academy Expo. South Beloit's monthly career exploration model spans grades 5–12, building sustained exposure over time rather than a single touchpoint.

Ongoing Advising & Retention: Winnebago has academic advisors meeting individually with every student in grades 8–12 to discuss CTE options both locally and regionally. North Boone

similarly holds 1:1 counselor meetings for course selection. Byron uses PaCE activities consistently across grades 6–12, regularly evaluating and revising them.

Districts are getting students into career exploration experiences *before* they make high school course selections, with individual advising and hands-on exposure being the primary tools. Equity-focused efforts around language access and universal participation are present but vary significantly by district.

CLNA QUESTION: Based upon PDR data, Enrollment Trend data, LNA summative statements, and discussion regarding Size, Scope, and Quality, what are our goals and strategies, including timelines, to address those CTE programs that ARE NOT meeting the following requirements? Additionally, include goals and strategies for continuous improvement in CTE programs that ARE meeting the following requirements.

There are no programs not meeting the requirements in terms of Size and Scope. There are issues with Quality which CEANCI plans to address through Professional Learning opportunities with CTE teachers.

CLNA Question: Enrollment size

All EFE150/CEANCI districts have programs that meet the minimum enrollment size for CTE programming. Districts monitor and analyze their own enrollment trends and consider safety when enrolling students in all CTE pathways, as some would require a lower maximum student occupancy for safety reasons.

CLNA QUESTION: Incorporating challenging State academic standards

Curriculum Mapping & Formal Review Processes: Byron requires all teachers to develop and publicly post curriculum maps aligned to state standards. Belvidere takes a structured PLC (Professional Learning Community) approach, where CTE teachers collaboratively identify priority Illinois academic standards each spring, using them as the foundation for instruction, assessment, and grading across both high schools. Meridian uses a Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle to regularly identify gaps and create improvement plans.

Integrating Literacy & Math into CTE Instruction: Several districts are making a deliberate effort to weave core academic skills into CTE coursework. Hononegah has adopted a writing standard with a rubric aligned to ACT and college-and-career readiness benchmarks, implemented across all CTE courses, along with weekly reading integration. Winnebago sends teachers to CEANCI-led workshops specifically to help CTE teachers incorporate English and math into everyday instruction.

Post-secondary Readiness Supports: Belvidere offers Transitional English and Transitional Math courses for seniors to strengthen academic skills and reduce the need for remedial coursework after graduation – a direct bridge between CTE and postsecondary expectations.

Industry & Postsecondary Partnerships: Rockford uses its Academy Advisory Board to bring industry partners directly into curriculum conversations, ensuring standards alignment also connects to real workforce expectations. Harlem similarly works with Rock Valley College and community partners to discuss program needs alongside standards.

CEANCI is a shared infrastructure for programs alignment but has no state CTE curriculum or standards to enforce. Individual districts must create their own internal processes – whether through PLCs, curriculum mapping, or targeted literacy and math integration – to prioritize academic standards into CTE curriculum.

CLNA QUESTION: Addressing technical knowledge and skills

Industry Advisory Meetings: Many districts lean heavily on CEANCI's monthly advisory meetings as the primary venue for discussing and updating technical skills. Harlem and Hononegah also participate in pathway-specific advisories. These meetings give teachers direct access to what employers are currently expecting from workers entering their industries.

Direct Industry Partner Engagement: Several districts go beyond advisory meetings to embed industry input more deeply into curriculum. Rockford has industry partners directly informing technical competency identification, equipment purchasing, and course design. Belvidere works with Growth Dimensions to connect with local industry and uses guest speakers, site visits, and events like the D100 Health Fair to keep teachers current. Byron has instructors attend annual industry conferences and professional development to stay on top of current practices.

Employer-Informed Occupational Frameworks: Hononegah and Winnebago both reference a notable resource – a set of work tasks compiled for 30 occupational areas across specific pathways, developed through the EFE system and available to all CTE teachers. This gives instructors a concrete, employer-informed foundation for what technical skills to teach. Hononegah looks forward to the CTE technical standards that ISBE is currently developing, which could further support this work going forward.

Postsecondary & External Program Partnerships: South Beloit takes a distinctive approach by sending students directly to Blackhawk Technical College for half the school day in programs like Welding, IT, HVAC, Industrial Maintenance, and CNA – all aligned to workforce technical skill demands. They're also part of the Stateline Manufacturing Alliance, collaborating with local manufacturers on how to implement technical knowledge in classrooms. South Beloit additionally attends monthly Business Education meetings through the Greater Beloit Economic Development Committee specifically to discuss the technical skills local employers are seeking.

Internal Review & Standards Alignment: Meridian continues to use its Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle to identify gaps in technical skill coverage and create improvement plans. Belvidere aligns

technical knowledge development through its CCPE framework, which intentionally embeds industry-relevant competencies into each pathway.

Districts are relying on sustained, structured relationships with industry — through advisory boards, employer partnerships, and postsecondary connections — rather than treating technical skill alignment as a one-time curriculum decision. CEANCI serves as a critical regional hub making that industry access consistently available to teachers across all districts.

CLNA QUESTION: Addressing employability skills

Structured Frameworks & Standards: Several districts are grounding their approach in formal frameworks. Rockford designs its seminar courses around the Workforce Readiness Standards and the Postsecondary Workforce Readiness Act, ensuring direct instruction in communication, collaboration, professionalism, and problem-solving. Hononegah references the ISBE's Illinois Employability Framework, and both Hononegah and Winnebago draw on the same employer-informed resource covering employability skills across 30 occupational areas — available to all CTE teachers regionally. Harlem similarly references state-identified essential employability skills and technical competencies as a foundation for student development.

Work-Based Learning & Real-World Application: Belvidere has a structured Work-Based Learning course, which places students in internships and employment experiences ranging from 20 to 60 hours, with a dedicated Career Readiness Facilitator helping students access opportunities. Reflection and employer feedback are built into the process. Rockford reinforces employability skills through mock interviews, workplace-style evaluations, and project-based learning with regional workforce partners.

Business Partner Engagement: South Beloit brings business partners directly into classrooms to work with students on the specific employability skills those employers are seeking, with their College and Career Director attending monthly meetings with the Greater Beloit Economic Development Committee to keep that feedback loop current. Belvidere uses a similar model through job shadows and site visits.

Curriculum-Wide Integration: Winnebago takes a whole-program approach, embedding employability skills across all CTE courses and using the "Be Here Now" attendance and readiness initiative as an additional reinforcement tool. Byron has built a four-year, grades 9–12 curriculum entirely focused on college and career readiness, including financial literacy and soft skills, and gives CTE teachers summer access to industry professionals through the ROE's Workplace Wednesdays program.

Advisory Meetings & Coordination: As with technical skills, CEANCI advisory meetings serve as a consistent regional touchpoint for discussing employability skill expectations, with North Boone and others relying on them as a primary mechanism for keeping instruction aligned to what employers actually need.

Dedicated Staffing: A few districts focus on investment in dedicated personnel. Belvidere has a Career Readiness Facilitator, Meridian employs a College and Career Coordinator, and South Beloit has a College and Career Director — all roles specifically designed to bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world career preparation.

Districts are moving away from treating employability skills as incidental and toward embedding them deliberately — whether through formal frameworks, structured work-based experiences, direct employer involvement, or dedicated staff — across all four years of high school CTE programming.

CLNA QUESTION: Meeting with an established advisory committee

For many districts, CEANCI serves as the primary infrastructure for advisory committee participation. Many districts rely on CEANCI-hosted meetings as their main or supplemental avenue for connecting teachers with industry partners across multiple CTE pathways. CEANCI explicitly communicates attendance expectations to schools, helping ensure consistent teacher participation across the region. Meridian acknowledges that while local advisory development is still maturing, regional boards like CEANCI allow them to maintain compliance in the meantime.

District-Hosted Advisory Structures: Hononegah has built a system of broad and in-depth locally-run advisory work. It hosts quarterly regional advisory meetings through its Engineering and Manufacturing Connections (EMC) group, with 30-plus companies represented, plus an annual fall evening event spotlighting those pathways. A separate quarterly construction advisory group brings in 20-plus companies, and its INCubator.edu entrepreneurship course uses local business partners as active mentors and curriculum contributors — not just advisors. This represents one of the more fully-developed local advisory models described across all the reports.

Rockford takes a similarly structured approach through its Academy Advisory Board, which combines large-group sessions focused on district-wide priorities like work-based learning with industry-specific subcommittees that do deeper work on technical knowledge and curriculum alignment. This tiered structure allows for both broad engagement and targeted, pathway-specific input.

Multi-Partner Meeting Networks: Belvidere has built a network of recurring meetings with multiple distinct partners — Growth Dimensions, Rock Valley College, the WorkForce Connection, a neighboring district (North Boone), and EdSystems — each serving a somewhat different purpose, from local workforce alignment to state-level trend monitoring. Teachers are also encouraged to attend CEANCI advisories on top of these local touchpoints.

Program-Specific Local Committees: Byron has Automotive and Agriculture teachers running their own advisory committees with local businesses and community colleges, while other programs default to CEANCI regional advisories. This hybrid approach – strong local committees where capacity exists, regional support where it doesn't – reflects a practical middle ground several districts seem to be working toward.

Showcasing Student Work as an Engagement Tool: Winnebago takes a slightly different angle, using invited sessions where CTE students present their projects to local business partners and school board members – turning advisory engagement into a two-way exchange where industry sees student work firsthand rather than simply advising from a distance.

CEANCI provides a reliable shared foundation, but districts vary considerably in how much local advisory infrastructure they've built on top of it. Hononegah and Rockford have the most developed independent structures, while others are still working toward more consistent local engagement to complement what CEANCI provides regionally.

CLNA QUESTION: Including team-based challenges or CTSO

Career and Technical Student Organizations are the most consistently cited mechanism across districts. FFA is particularly prominent – Belvidere, Byron, Meridian, and North Boone all highlight FFA events and activities as a major source of team-based challenge experiences. North Boone specifically notes a significant number of students earning state FFA degrees and completing SAE projects each year. DECA appears at both Belvidere and Rockford, HOSA at Rockford, and Educators Rising and Science Olympiad at Harlem. These organizations provide built-in, structured competitive and collaborative experiences that naturally satisfy the team-based challenge requirement.

CEANCI Regional Competitions: For districts with less internally developed capacity, CEANCI's regionally hosted team-based challenges serve as an important resource alongside local efforts.

Embedded Curriculum Design: Some districts are integrating team-based challenges directly into course structure rather than treating them as add-on events. Hononegah embeds problem-based learning activities into its Engineering curriculum as a standard part of instruction, and also uses capstone regional competitions in Auto, Cabinet, Engineering, Culinary, and Graphic Communications. Byron uses the INCubator EDU model as a year-long team-based challenge in its Business program, and its Medical Science teacher collaborates with a local nursing home to implement industry-connected challenges. Rockford embeds team-based challenges across all CTE courses as a systemic expectation rather than a pathway-by-pathway decision.

Locally Created Competitions & Events: Several districts have developed their own distinctive challenge events like egg drops, bake-offs, and designer challenges. North Boone's FCS teacher creates two semester-based challenges – an International Food Competition and a

Cupcake Wars – judged by community members and industry leaders. These locally designed events allow districts to tailor challenges to their specific programs and community context.
CCPE Alignment: Belvidere has formalized its approach most explicitly through the CCPE endorsement process, with each of its six approved endorsements requiring two ISBE-approved team-based challenges aligned to the program of study. This gives their challenges both structure and state-level validation. Meridian similarly ties team-based challenges to its Healthcare and Education pathway endorsements.

Professional Development & Ongoing Growth: Belvidere brought in targeted professional development for CTE teachers in February 2026 to learn how to design and implement team-based challenges effectively. Harlem is actively working with pathway teachers to ensure at least two team-based challenges are embedded in every program – suggesting this is an area of active development rather than a fully realized practice for some districts.

The range of team-based challenges across districts is fairly wide – from Rockford and Hononegah, where team-based challenges are systematically embedded across programming, to districts that are leaning heavily on CEANCI to fill this requirement. FFA and CTSOs serve as the most reliable common thread, while locally created competitions and CCPE-aligned challenges represent more intentional, district-driven approaches to meeting this component.

CLNA QUESTION: Offering work-based learning opportunities

Comprehensive WBL Continuums: The most developed approaches treat work-based learning as a structured progression rather than isolated events. Rockford describes a full continuum including a College & Career Expo, industry site visits, job shadows, internships, externships, and project-based learning – all guided by local workforce partners. Hononegah similarly offers WBL opportunities embedded across all 17 of its approved CTE pathways, with varying levels of rigor and intensity depending on the course level, spanning career speakers, field trips, competitions, job shadows, mock interviews, and internships. These two districts represent the most systematically built-out approaches in the group.
Dedicated Staffing to Drive WBL Growth: More proactive districts invest in dedicated personnel. Belvidere added a Career Facilitator role this past year specifically to identify and expand WBL placements, with a stated goal of growing student placements and strengthening community partnerships by SY27. Meridian created a College and Career Coordinator position for the same purpose. This staffing investment appears to be a meaningful differentiator in districts that are actively expanding WBL access.

Internal Resources as WBL Placements: Belvidere takes a creative approach by leveraging internal district resources – IT, buildings and grounds, maintenance, and student services – as job shadowing and internship sites. This is a practical way to expand placements without relying entirely on external business partnerships and could be a useful model for districts with limited community partner capacity.

Program-Specific WBL Integration: Byron has WBL embedded in Medical Science, Education, Agriculture, and Automotive, with Engineering beginning implementation in 2025. All students in the Work Education and Exploration course participate in WBL as a core requirement. Meridian has students in internships across five areas of study, hosts an Explore Day each April where juniors and seniors participate in job shadows – with 123 students participating in April 2026 – and connects students to Manufacturing Day site visits.

CEANCI & Regional Support: Harlem coordinates WBL experiences in partnership with CEANCI, including job shadows, company tours, internships, classroom visits, and mock interviews through regional career expos and pathway-specific events. This regional infrastructure again serves as practical support for districts that may not have the local capacity to build and manage these relationships independently.

Emerging & Pilot Programs: Winnebago is in an earlier stage, currently focused on career exploration and actively building toward more internship opportunities. Notable efforts include a pilot educational WBL experience with a local elementary school, facility tours with local businesses aimed at potential employment outcomes, and a partnership with another high school to expand CNA classes and nursing home WBL placements. South Beloit has active business partnerships for WBL opportunities, with students already attending Blackhawk Technical College for hands-on technical programs.

There is a significant variation in WBL development across the region. Rockford and Hononegah have the most comprehensive and systematically embedded approaches, while several other districts are in active growth or early development phases. Dedicated staffing, internal placement creativity, and regional CEANCI support appear to be the key enablers for districts making the most progress in this area.

CLNA QUESTION: Offering programs with appropriate and accessible facilities using industry standard technology and equipment

Funding Mechanisms: Grants – particularly Perkins funding – are the most commonly cited tool for keeping facilities and equipment current. Hononegah explicitly uses grant funds as the primary basis for equipment updates, maintaining what it describes as state-of-the-art facilities across its CTE programs. Winnebago similarly directs grant money toward keeping technology and equipment at industry standard. Meridian credits CEANCI support and previous Perkins funding for enabling students to work with professional-grade equipment, including significant technology investments in its Cardinal Ink student-run business. This reliance on grant funding is a consistent thread across smaller districts that may not have large capital budgets to draw from independently.

Industry-Aligned Facility Design: Several districts are actively redesigning spaces to mirror real workplace environments rather than traditional classroom settings. Belvidere's redesign of its

Foods classroom into a commercial kitchen environment for 2025-26 is a strong example of this approach, with the district committing to ongoing evaluation and updating of CTE spaces to reflect industry expectations. Byron is implementing a state-of-the-art engineering lab with updated equipment. Rockford's current Academies model, supported by local industry partners, ensures all students have access to classrooms equipped with industry-standard technology – with continuous monitoring and updating built into the process.

Regional & Postsecondary Facility Access: Several districts address facility gaps by sending students to external sites rather than building all capacity internally. Belvidere students access welding instruction at the Advanced Technology Center and EMT and CNA coursework at Rock Valley College, giving them immersive experiences with industry-rated equipment they might not otherwise have locally. South Beloit relies on Blackhawk Technical College, where industry partners ensure all technology and equipment meet industry standards. North Boone similarly leverages CEANCI regional programs and Rock Valley College to supplement what it can offer on-site.

Advisory Committees Informing Equipment Decisions: Harlem and Winnebago both point to CEANCI advisory meetings as the mechanism through which industry-standard facilities, technology, and equipment expectations are reviewed and discussed – helping teachers and administrators stay informed about what current industry settings actually look like. Rockford's industry partners play a similar role through the Academies Advisory Board, directly informing equipment purchasing decisions alongside curriculum development.

Long-Term Facilities Planning: Following the footsteps of both Harlem and Rockford, North Boone is looking in terms of infrastructure, noting that its district facilities master plan specifically includes the addition of dedicated CTE spaces – suggesting a recognition that current facilities may not fully meet program needs and a commitment to addressing that over time.

Honest Gaps & Ongoing Demand: Belvidere's Introduction to Welding classes are consistently full and heavily requested – pointing to a situation where student demand may be outpacing current facility capacity. This tension between demand and access is likely present in other districts as well, even where it isn't explicitly stated.

Districts use a combination of grant funding, postsecondary partnerships, regional program access, and industry advisory input to maintain facility and equipment quality – with the most developed districts actively designing spaces to simulate real workplace environments rather than simply updating what already exists.

## SECTION 6: IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMS OF STUDY

## EFE150 REGION CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

*CLNA QUESTION: Describe your CTE Continuous Improvement Process that continuously evaluates and improves your Programs of Study in collaboration with stakeholders and advisory committee, including meeting frequency*

CEANCI closely evaluates individual programs annually in terms of teacher licensure, instructional sequence, and enrollment. CEANCI also keeps a running Program Quality Review, in which teachers can add evidence for each of the nine quality program criteria set in the Perkins grant. This allows CEANCI to see gaps easily to make plans for PD or other opportunities to fill the gap. CEANCI hosts a variety of advisory committee meetings during each year in collaboration with instructors, industry partners, and sometimes students. Annually, performance measures are reviewed, analyzed, and presented to all district superintendents (Board of Governors) and district representatives serving as CTE directors. Some of those stakeholders are also building principals. These reviews also give CEANCI an opportunity to develop engagement activities to address deficiencies.

## DISTRICT-LEVEL CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Belvidere takes a structured administrative approach, with the Director of Student Services & Career Readiness conducting annual program reviews for state alignment and bi-weekly meetings with CTE Content Leaders. They also pursue new course proposals through a formal district process.

Byron relies on stakeholder engagement through business roundtables annually, with some instructors (automotive and agriculture) meeting biannually. Their Medical Science instructor connects with healthcare professionals at a local nursing home quarterly.

Harlem leverages CEANCI's monthly advisory committee meetings across multiple CTE pathways, bringing together instructors, industry partners, students, and postsecondary representatives to assess program alignment with industry needs.
Hononegah uses the most layered approach – bi-annual meetings with auto industry experts for ASE certification, bi-monthly meetings with a 30-organization manufacturing group, quarterly construction advisory meetings, and monthly entrepreneurship partner classroom visits.

Meridian meets with advisers and area professionals no fewer than three times per year and requires all CTE teachers to submit annual growth data and assessment criteria to administration for review.

North Boone also uses CEANCI's monthly advisory meetings, involving instructors, industry partners, students, and post-secondary representatives to evaluate program alignment.
Rockford has a formal structured continuous improvement process with annual pathway reviews assessing student interest and workforce needs, followed by collaborative curriculum

revision with industry partners, teachers, and advisory committees meeting multiple times per year.

South Beloit focuses on community partnership through the College and Career Director attending monthly Greater Beloit Chamber of Commerce meetings, monthly CTE meetings at Hendricks CareerTek, and monthly Chamber Ambassador meetings.

Winnebago combines internal coordination (a CTE Coordinator-led review plan) with regional collaboration through CEANCI – including three meetings per year with regional directors, an annual department-wide meeting, and teacher participation in CEANCI's monthly advisory committees.

Nearly all districts participate in CEANCI's advisory committee structure and regular engagement with industry partners, though the frequency and formality of that engagement varies significantly from district to district.

*CLNA QUESTION: Based upon PDR data, Enrollment Trend data, LNA summative statements, and discussion regarding Progress Toward Implementing Quality Programs of Study, what are our goals and strategies, including timelines, to address those CTE programs that ARE NOT meeting the following requirements? Additionally, include goals and strategies for continuous improvement in CTE programs that ARE meeting the following requirements.*
*Providing guidance and instruction on the concept of career clusters and support for student selection of a cluster of interest*
CEANCI hosts an annual middle school career expo called PATHWAYS PROJECT. All middle schools are invited to attend, but not all are able to do so. During this event, students are exposed to many pathway options in all the main career clusters, including the ones that are offered at the high school they will attend. High school students also have an opportunity to help middle school students understand the different career clusters and pathways available to them by demonstrating something they've learned in the high school program. CEANCI also hosts middle and high school counselor CTE workshops annually. During this professional learning, career clusters and the PaCE framework are main topics. Career discovery and exploration resources are made available to counselors during these workshops after they experience them themselves. In 25-26, middle school and high school counselors were also taken on site visits, to facilities that house many different pathways under one roof. Middle school counselors were taken to Anderson Gardens, which features Business, Human Resources, Tourism, Culinary, Retail, and Horticulture pathways. High school counselors were taken to Hard Rock Casino, which features Business, Human Resources, Events, and Culinary pathways. When an opportunity arises to do so, CEANCI participates in career fairs at schools and helps students narrow down their career interests by using questionnaires or Holland Code surveys.

DISTRICT-LEVEL GUIDANCE AND INSTRUCTION ON CONCEPT OF CAREER CLUSTERS

Belvidere has a clear grade-by-grade progression — students begin exploring careers via SchooLinks in 8th grade, receive intentional instruction in a 9th grade Careers course, and formally select a career cluster in 10th grade. Counselors use a live CCPE tracking document to monitor progress, and CTE teachers actively promote their programs to help students connect courses to future opportunities.

Byron implements a 6-12 PaCE framework with consistent survey and career cluster data collection, and all students build a personal portfolio as part of the process.

Harlem uses a multi-layered approach — counselors and Work-Based Learning Coordinators meet with all high school students throughout their four years, 8th graders receive pathway information, and career awareness is embedded in advisories through the Xello software. CEANCI also supports middle school exploration through its annual Pathways Project and counselor workshops.

Hononegah focuses on alignment rather than exploration specifically — programs are horizontally aligned within the building and vertically aligned with postsecondary through dual credit agreements with Rock Valley College, helping students see a clear path forward.

Meridian relies heavily on CEANCI resources, with at least one counselor and the College & Career Coordinator attending the annual HS counselor workshop and middle school Pathways Project each year.

North Boone similarly leans on CEANCI's annual counselor workshops and middle school Pathways Project, along with cohort-style professional development for new CTE teachers to strengthen pathway instruction.

Rockford has a structured 9th grade entry point where all students take a College & Career Readiness course, explore pathways through projects and events like the Academy Expo, and select their Academy and Pathway for grades 10-12, with flexibility to change before 11th grade.

South Beloit starts early, with career exploration sessions beginning in 6th grade through monthly events. They also hold 8th grade presentations and a parent night to help students and families make informed course selections.

Winnebago does not have a clear approach to career cluster guidance at this time.

Most districts engage students during the middle school to early high school transition as the primary window for career exploration, with CEANCI's Pathways Project and counselor workshops serving as a common support resource across several districts.

*CLNA QUESTION: Including an orientation course within their course sequence*

All districts except one have an orientation course within their course sequences. Most are career exploration courses so students have exposure to many different pathway options.

*CLNA QUESTION: Including an advanced course within their course sequence*

Most CTE programs in all districts have advanced course(s) within their course sequences. Many of these are in the form of articulated or dual credit courses with our community college. Some offer an advanced placement course through the College Board in addition or in lieu of dual credit.

*CLNA QUESTION: Culminating in the attainment of an industry-recognized credential(s),*

In general, most schools report that programs feature an industry-recognized credential. The most common ones are:

- Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) Certification appears across Belvidere, Hononegah, and North Boone, and is likely present in other districts given how broadly business/technology pathways are offered.
- OSHA 10 is explicitly mentioned by Belvidere, Hononegah, and South Beloit, making it the most consistently named safety credential across districts.
- Food Safety Certification shows up at Hononegah (Safe Food Handler) and South Beloit (Food Safe/Food Allergen), and is likely offered elsewhere given how common culinary and family consumer science pathways are.
- ASE Certification (Automotive) is referenced by Belvidere and Hononegah.

CEANCI plans to conduct an audit of all programs and the certifications they offer. If there are programs that do not offer a credential, suggestions and deadlines will be made (likely within the 26-27 school year).

*CLNA QUESTION: Incorporating credit transfer opportunities (e.g., dual credit, articulation agreement,*

Byron reports that 100% of their programs of study are either articulated or offer dual credit with a higher education institution. Belvidere is similarly well-developed, with dual credit or articulated credit available across Agriculture, Automotive, Business, Drafting, Education, Health Sciences, IT, Manufacturing, and Welding through Rock Valley College, Highland Community College, and NIU. Meridian students can potentially earn up to 55 college credits through dual credit courses at SVHS. Harlem offers articulated and/or dual credit in most pathways but is actively working to expand into Welding, Automotive, Construction, and Health Sciences. Rockford offers dual credit across many pathways and supplements with AP courses and Transitional Math and English. South Beloit has built partnerships with multiple institutions — BTC, Rock Valley College, Beloit College, and University of Illinois Urbana — providing broad access. Hononegah has a formal dual credit agreement with Rock Valley

College and has seen 435 credits earned by students since 2023. North Boone offers dual credit in most pathways through their community college partnership.
Winnebago's dual credit is currently limited to Health Science through Rock Valley College, articulated credit in Accounting still in final stages, and ongoing exploration of Computer Science opportunities.

Rock Valley College serves as a key post-secondary partner for several districts in the region, making regional coordination around dual credit a natural opportunity.

*CLNA QUESTION: Including instruction and evaluation in safety*
In general, all programs incorporate instruction and evaluation in safety. Some are credentialing opportunities. The following are the most commonly named from LNA reports:

- OSHA 10 – mentioned explicitly by Belvidere, Harlem, Hononegah, Rockford, South Beloit, Meridian, and Winnebago, and implied by most others
- ServSafe Food Handling – cited by Belvidere, Harlem, Hononegah, Meridian, North Boone, and Winnebago
- Mandated Reporting – mentioned by Belvidere, Harlem, Hononegah, and Meridian
- CPR/First Aid – referenced by Belvidere, Harlem, Meridian, and Winnebago

Most districts embed safety instruction within specific pathway courses (automotive, agriculture, culinary, construction, health sciences, etc.) rather than as a standalone course. Rockford specifically notes that OSHA 10 or equivalent training occurs during course orientation, ensuring safety readiness before hands-on participation begins.
Winnebago proactively identified a gap worth mentioning – specifically noting the need to ensure safety instruction reaches IEP and special population students in CTE courses.

*CLNA QUESTION: If you have districts without approved CTE programs, what are your strategies for providing access to CTE for those students?*
There are no districts without approved CTE programs in this region.

# SECTION 7: RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, TRAINING

CLNA QUESTION: What do educators report as needs and preferences for professional learning and supports?
1. Supporting Special Populations (IEP Students): Nearly every district needs additional training and strategies for supporting students with IEPs, making this the most universally cited need.
2. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): Multiple districts (Harlem, Rockford, Winnebago, North Boone) specifically call out SEL training as a priority for staff.
3. Business/Industry Partner Engagement: Many districts have a need for support in building and maintaining meaningful connections with employers and community partners, including work-based learning and certifications that are relevant to industry.

4. Employability Skills: Several districts request that the state clearly define employability skills and provide guidance on how to teach and integrate them into CTE courses.
5. Post-Secondary Student Tracking: Multiple districts need a system to track students after graduation. CEANCI is developing a survey to address this, but is limited by students needing to opt-in.
6. Content-Specific / Pathway PD: Districts like Byron, Hononegah, and Meridian highlighted the importance of professional development that is specific to CTE content areas and industry standards, including dual credit alignment and post-secondary certifications.
7. Accessible, Low-Cost PD Options: South Beloit needs affordable local training, and Byron and many other districts have an interest in virtual learning.
8. Grant Planning & Purchasing Support: Simplifying grant processes was a shared theme, allowing educators to spend more time on instruction.

CLNA QUESTION: Summarize regional CTE programs recruitment efforts and outcomes.
1. Recruiting Directly from Industry: Belvidere and Harlem both have many CTE teachers from industry backgrounds. Belvidere has current teachers help recruit former colleagues and industry contacts – essentially using staff as informal recruiters.
2. "Grow Your Own" Pipelines: Byron has formalized this approach by creating an education pathway where students rotate through the CTE department, exposing them to teaching as a career early on.
3. Incentives & Compensation Perks: Several districts use financial incentives to attract candidates, including signing bonuses and bonus steps on the pay scale (Belvidere), tuition assistance programs (Harlem), and paid training and certifications (Meridian).
4. Alternative Licensure Pathways: CEANCI's "Straight from Industry" cohort program offers training for candidates who come from industry but don't yet hold a Professional Educator License (PEL).
5. College & University Partnerships: Multiple districts actively connect with colleges and universities – attending job fairs (Hononegah), networking at teacher conferences (Byron), consulting on graduate pipelines (Byron), and reaching out to CTE-specific programs (Harlem).
6. Dedicated HR & Administrative Coordination: Rockford has a more formalized approach, with HR staff working alongside CTE leadership and industry partners to actively recruit and retain quality candidates.

CLNA QUESTION: Summarize regional CTE programs retention efforts and outcomes.
1. Mentorship Programs: Byron, Harlem, and Hononegah all pair new teachers with veteran educators. Hononegah's program is especially structured, with bi-weekly meetings, classroom visits, and collaborative professional learning activities.
2. Induction Programs: Hononegah and Harlem both offer formal multi-year induction programs that help new teachers acclimate to school culture, pedagogy, and expectations – reducing the feeling of being "thrown in" without support.

3. Administrative Support & Communication: Belvidere's bi-weekly meetings between the CTE Director and Content Leaders ensure teacher needs are addressed quickly. Byron's Director of Teaching and Learning actively supports curriculum development and assessment design, reducing the burden on individual teachers.
4. Adequate Funding for Equipment & Resources: Access to Perkins and CTEI funds – allowing teachers to purchase equipment and platforms they actually need – plays a direct role in retention. Rockford echoed this by highlighting state-of-the-art facilities as a factor in job satisfaction.
5. Professional Development Opportunities: Multiple districts say ongoing PD is a retention tool, helping teachers feel supported in their growth rather than stagnant.
6. Industry-to-Teacher Support Systems: CEANCI's "Straight from Industry" cohort and Rockford's collaboration with industry partners specifically address the unique challenges faced by teachers transitioning from non-education backgrounds.

CLNA QUESTION: What are the goals and strategies, including timelines, for professional learning?

## EFE 150/CEANCI GOALS AND STRATEGIES

CEANCI annually offers professional learning to new teachers from industry in a cohort called "Straight from Industry." The training is comprehensive and continues over time, an entire school year. It meets four times per year for full-day training to cover 30+ essential teacher skills including classroom management, lesson plan writing, and using technology in any CTE program. CEANCI also co-hosts an annual professional learning opportunity, designed for seasoned CTE teachers. The focus for this training typically focuses on the performance measures that the region is struggling in or new concepts or challenges for teachers such as artificial intelligence.

Based on district answer regarding professional learning and supports, CEANCI plans to offer formal professional learning on the top of Grant Planning and Purchasing in addition to Program Quality components in the 26-27 SY.

## DISTRICT GOALS AND STRATEGIES

1. Work-Based Learning & Industry Connections Belvidere is focused on embedding WBL and community partnerships into curriculum. Rockford offers teacher externships so educators stay current with workplace skills. Byron would like to offer more field-based experiences, though substitute shortages make this difficult.
2. Dual Credit & Postsecondary Alignment Meridian and Rockford both highlighted professional learning aimed at increasing the number of teachers qualified to offer dual credit and postsecondary opportunities, including summer learning sessions to keep course content current.
3. Instructional Practice & Pedagogy Byron has focused recent PD on block scheduling best practices and effective feedback and assessment strategies. Meridian noted a general goal of

improving overall pedagogical skill. Hononegah is developing a department-wide writing rubric aligned to college and career readiness standards.
4. Supporting Diverse Learners Rockford specifically cited PD around supporting IEP students, social-emotional learning, and employability skills — driven by teacher feedback and student outcome data.
5. Collaborative Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) Winnebago and North Boone both emphasized structured PLC processes, with weekly or regular collaborative team meetings where teachers review data and plan instruction together.
6. Employability Skills Integration North Boone and Rockford both referenced developing systemic approaches to teaching students employability skills, with teachers needing PD to effectively deliver this content.
7. New Teacher Support & Cohort Programs CEANCI's "Straight from Industry" cohort provides structured PD specifically designed for teachers transitioning from industry careers.