

# CONNECTIONS MAGAZINE



**CONNECTIONS**  
ACADEMY®

by Pearson  
2026 Issue

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## Where Are They Now?

Follow recent grads as they navigate life after graduation —and explore the tools and experiences that can help your student do the same.

School & Student Spotlights | College & Career Partnerships | Future Ready Resources

# Build confidence with real-world experiences.



# Welcome

Whether you're joining our community or returning for another year, we are thrilled to have you with us. This year promises to be one of discovery, growth, and meaningful connections.

We know parents are always thinking about their child's future—and so are we. That's why we're excited to share the expansion of our College and Career Readiness Program, launched in 2023. This program blends traditional courses with career-focused learning, giving students real-world experiences, practical skills, and confidence to pursue their unique paths.

This issue of Connections Magazine offers a snapshot of what's possible—featuring inspiring stories from students, teachers, and industry partners. You'll learn how the program works and how your student can get involved.

Together, we're opening doors and empowering the next generation of thinkers, creators, and leaders. We hope this issue leaves you informed, inspired, and ready for what's ahead.



Sincerely,  
Dr. Lorna Bryant

*Lorna Bryant*

Head of School Success  
& Career Readiness

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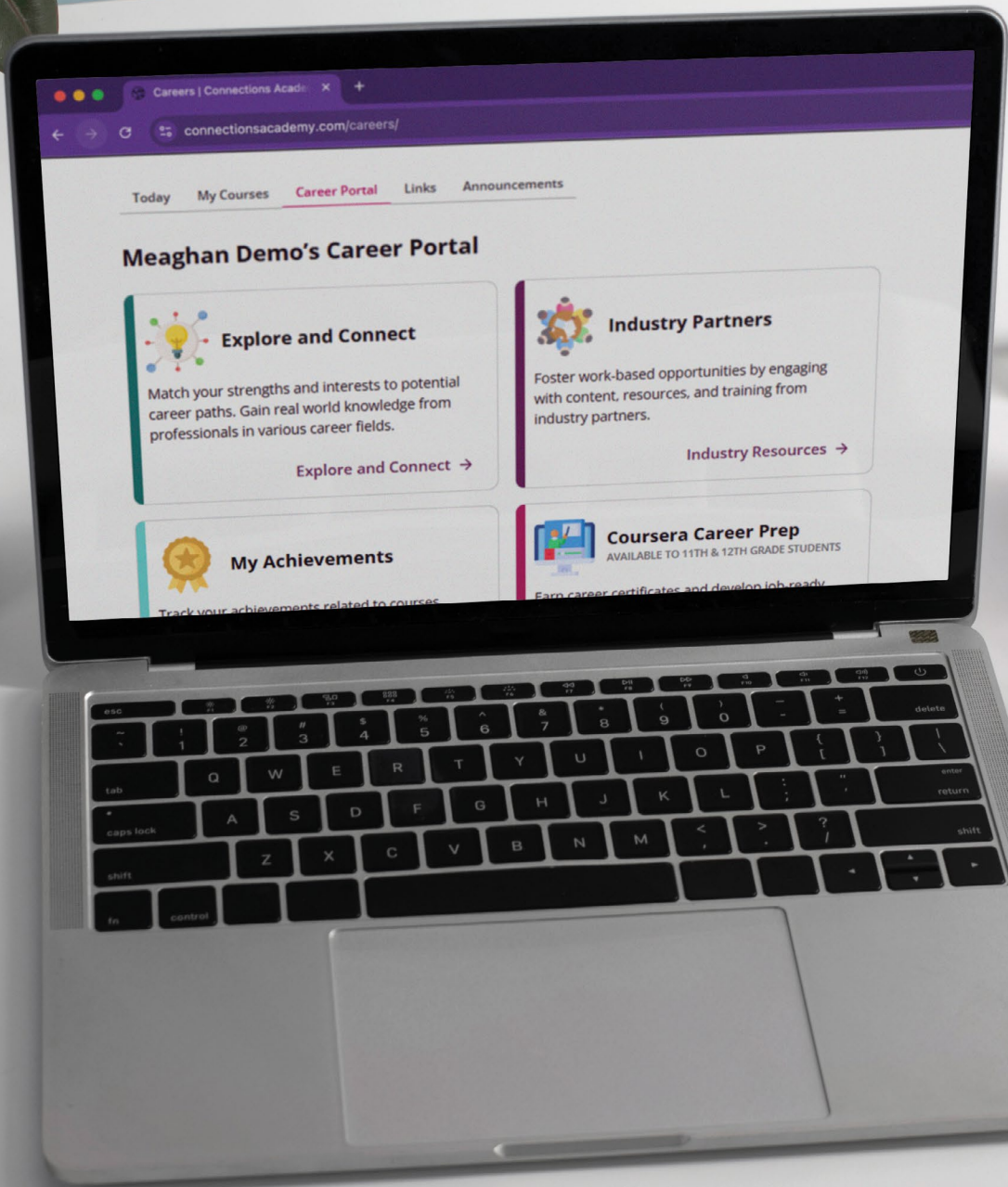
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Careers | Connections Acad... x +

connectionsacademy.com/careers/

Today My Courses **Career Portal** Links Announcements


### Meaghan Demo's Career Portal



**Explore and Connect**

Match your strengths and interests to potential career paths. Gain real world knowledge from professionals in various career fields.


[Explore and Connect →](#)



**Industry Partners**


Foster work-based opportunities by engaging with content, resources, and training from industry partners.

[Industry Resources →](#)



**My Achievements**

Track your achievements related to courses



**Coursera Career Prep**

AVAILABLE TO 11TH & 12TH GRADE STUDENTS

Earn career certificates and develop job-ready

# Connect to Your Future

## With Our College and Career Resources

By **Samantha Meyer** / Director of Career Program Product Management, Pearson Virtual Schools



Connections Academy's latest rollout of college and career tools gives students and their parents vision for the future, access to the skills necessary to launch successfully, and the opportunities to connect with real professionals from a growing list of industry partners.

The 2025–26 school year marks the beginning of the comprehensive rollout of tools and resources to help students and their families navigate the tricky post-high school waters. Every student can now use Connections Academy to develop **(1) clear direction** for the future, **(2) confidence** that

they possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities businesses look for, and **(3) connections to professionals and businesses** that will help them gain traction. "I wish I'd had this when I was in school," is often the first thing parents say when they see the resources available in Connections Academy's College and Career Readiness Program. And when students discover how their interests or favorite subjects line up to careers, they usually add, "I never knew that was something I could do."

► **Here's everything you need to know to get started.**

### Get to know your interests

When students visit the Career Portal, the process starts with an interest assessment. The assessment, which is part of a service called Pathful, is a crucial step because after students articulate their personality, skills, work values, work interests, and desired lifestyle, the Career Portal then translates those unique identifiers directly into programs of study and career recommendations. Thus, instead of bombarding students with hundreds of career options, the assessment produces a customized list of recommended programs and jobs tailored to the individual.

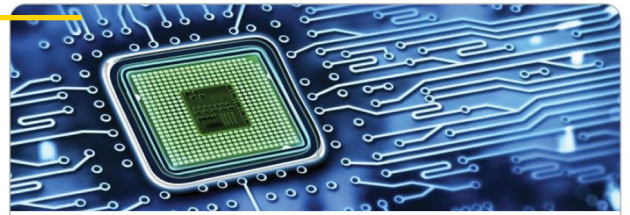
## Select your favorite careers and connect to industry partners

Armed with this customized list, the student embarks on career exploration. We offer videos featuring real workers, their work spaces, and their testimonials, giving students a detailed look at various work activities and environments, and explaining the required knowledge, skills, and abilities for each career.

Students can also explore careers and necessary skills through Connections Academy's growing partnerships with businesses. And through our partnership with IBM SkillsBuild, students can gain cutting-edge skills and verified digital credentials in areas like AI, blockchain, cloud computing, design thinking, and professional skills (e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork).

## Develop career skills via career-oriented courses

Students have the opportunity to explore 37 career pathways and take pathway courses, which equip them with industry-required skills and credentials. Additionally, students can earn professional certificates through Coursera, which offers career-oriented courses from partners like Google and IBM. The career pathway courses and Coursera allow Connections Academy students to participate in job-relevant learning and develop in-demand skills sought by businesses. The skills represented in these courses cover everything from foundational human



### Semiconductor Careers Propel the World Forward

Shape the future with the SEMI Foundation—explore semiconductors, build skills, and find your path!

#### Skills You Can Learn

Engineering Manufacturing Business Acumen  
Microelectronics Semiconductor Device

#### Available Resources

- Career Matching and Mapping
- Industry Resources
- Education and Training



### Get Into Energy

Get Into Energy provides facts, stats, and next steps to explore in-demand, essential energy careers.

#### Skills You Can Learn

Energy Technology Wind Power Hydroelectric Power  
Geothermal Energy Solar Energy Energy Policy + 6

We desire to help students graduate with confidence, knowing they are ready to take the next step.

skills (soft skills) like time management, teamwork, communication, and leadership, to sought-after technical skills in areas like AI, data science, and more.

## Create individualized plans, receive badges, build resumes

Finally, as students refine their interests and explore careers, they can save all this personalized information in an individualized career plan. Here, they record their goals, keep track of careers they want to pursue, and develop a post secondary plan.

As students complete courses and other activities, their learning and participation is recognized through digital credentials issued through Credly. Credly, a Pearson company, is the largest and most connected digital credential network. This means that as students participate in the Career and College Readiness Program, they have the opportunity to gain verified digital credentials that can then be shared with businesses and colleges. These digital credentials help business leaders and educators understand the knowledge, skills, and abilities the student has developed.

## Connecting the world of education to the world of work


Connections Academy's goal is to give students a smooth transition from secondary education to post secondary education and work. We desire to help students graduate with confidence,

[Career Portal](#) > My Achievements

### Amanda's Achievements


🔍 Search achievements

#### All Achievements




**Future Focused (October)**  
ISSUED 10/23/2025

Goal Orientation Goal Setting +3 more



**Applied Health Assistant 1A**  
ISSUED 1/3/2025

Ethical Conduct Patient Care +5 more



**Anatomy and Physiology 1A**  
ISSUED 1/3/2025

Anatomy Biology Human Biology +3 more

knowing they are ready to take the next step into a great career they love and are equipped for.

We are excited to share this program with you because as students develop a clearer picture of career opportunities and how to pursue them, they will recognize the value in their current studies, and gain energy, focus, and intentionality as students.

# Virtual Internships

## Bridging the Gap to Your Child's Future

By **Mia Barlett** / Head of Impact, Pearson Virtual Schools



In a job market that is notoriously difficult for recent grads, giving your child a head start is more crucial than ever. Connections Academy understands this, which is why we've launched a brand new program called Pearson Virtual Internships. The internship program provides Connections Academy students with practical experience, skill development, and connections that will help them successfully navigate their way to the careers they want.



**Connections Academy students are placed with employers in short-term 4 week internships that give them hands-on experience with those businesses.**

### Why virtual internships?

Virtual internships are work-based learning opportunities, completely online so that students can participate as part of their normal school day. In Pearson Virtual Internships, Connections Academy students are placed with employers in short-term 4 week internships that give them hands-on experience with teams at those businesses. Mentors at the participating company assign projects in areas such as marketing, technology, finance, and others to help students develop new skills. Some of the businesses we have partnered with so far include IBM, Wellnest Fertility, Airbnb, and the Aviation Institute of Maintenance.

Virtual internships provide all the same benefits of an in-person internship—with the added benefit of helping interns gain skills without needing to commute or find a good mentor in their own ZIP code. Essentially, the new program helps Connections Academy students tap into a worldwide network of industry professionals. For instance, in the initial rollout of the program, some students worked for the IBM AI sales expert in Milan and an innovation engineer in London. The virtual offering also allows for the flexibility that young students have grown accustomed to. Gaining fluency in the tools used in remote work



is itself a tremendous advantage that students gain through this experience. Internships in general, both virtual and in-person, are one of the best ways for students to gain experience, which helps students overcome a chief complaint from businesses about recent graduates—namely, that they lack experience. Students gain this experience by learning how to hit deadlines, delivering on tasks, and working on real-world projects. Internships test a student’s grit and force them to do a lot of problem-solving.

Students must communicate and be proactive about seeking help while they work on their assignments. They must also be good colleagues, eagerly collaborating with their project managers and the other interns. Such experiences give students durable skills sought after by employers.

## How does the program work?

Pearson Virtual Internships are offered twice a year (October and March) for four weeks each cycle. Students are connected with mentors across a diverse range of career fields—from social work to product development, from marketing to finance. Throughout the four weeks, students work on a mix of scenarios, research assignments, and real-world projects, meeting through Teams at least once a week with their mentor and the other students in their cohort.

Each intern has 4–6 interns in their cohort. This helps them develop valuable communication and teamwork skills. Plus, because the program is virtual, students get the chance to interact with other students from all over the nation. As interns complete projects, they receive feedback and coaching from their mentors, with a retrospective project that they present in the final week of the program.

**Students gain this experience by learning how to hit deadlines, delivering on tasks, and working on real-world projects.**

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The student’s mentor, a professional from Aviation Institute of Maintenance, shared that the most rewarding part of being a mentor was “seeing the student’s writing skills grow and witnessing her knowledge of the aviation maintenance industry grow.”



### What do students gain by participating?


Students gain important practical skills, build professional networks, and achieve greater clarity about their career paths. As one former intern put it, “My internship was an invaluable experience. I not only learned a great deal, but also felt like a true member of the team.” The student’s mentor, a professional from Aviation Institute of Maintenance, shared that the most rewarding part of being a mentor

was “seeing the student’s writing skills grow and witnessing her knowledge of the aviation maintenance industry grow.” One of the most notable impacts of the new virtual program is that students often become interested in pursuing careers with the businesses where they interned. This is the beauty of internships.

**Interested in a virtual internship? Let us know.**





A portrait of Taj Lee, a young man with short dark hair, wearing a dark blue suit jacket, a white dress shirt, and a red and blue striped tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a solid blue color.

Alumni Spotlight

# Taj Lee

## Tennessee Connections Academy Class of 2025

As a kid, Taj Lee, a self-described class clown, struggled to focus in school. And his prospects as a student only grew dimmer in 2020 when schools quickly tried to pivot to remote learning during the nation-wide lockdowns. Taj's mom knew it was time for a change. After researching various options, she found Tennessee Connections Academy. In 2021, she enrolled Taj at the school for ninth grade, his first year of high school.

According to Taj, the school made a massive difference. The first thing he noticed was that he started making better grades. "In my other school, I would get easily distracted and often ended up in detention," he said. "But at Connections Academy, I was able to stay more focused. I developed healthy routines. I liked that."

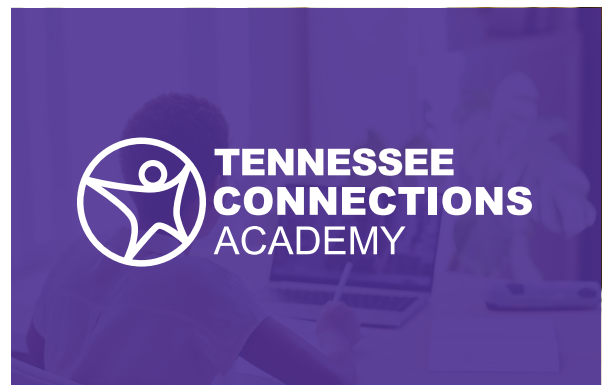
“

In my other school, I would get easily distracted and often ended up in detention,” he said. “But at Connections Academy, I was able to stay more focused. I developed healthy routines. I liked that.

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For Taj, a typical day was far more disciplined and orderly. He would wake up, get ready, log in to his Live Lessons sessions, and complete his work. At the end of each week, he would email his teachers with questions about assignments, and always found them to be incredibly responsive. Thanks to his productive mornings, he had more free time in the afternoons. He belonged to a local travel baseball team where he played left field and short stop. He also participated in drama club in his junior and senior years, as well as the newly created internship program, where he was a standout.

In his internship, he wrote essays about the City of Memphis and how the government operated, offering solutions to various problems faced by the municipality. Part of his research process included interviewing the Chief of Police of Memphis. “Going into it, I was pretty nervous,” Taj admitted. “But once I got there, it went well, and I enjoyed the interview process.” His biggest takeaway? He learned a ton about his hometown and was able to refine his communication skills.



When asked about what he wants to do next, Taj quickly replied that he would like to become a doctor. Healthcare runs in his family, after all. His mother was a paramedic, and his grandmother worked as a nurse for an impressive 50 years.

Today, Taj is a freshman studying pre-med at the University of Mississippi. None of this would have happened, he said, were it not for the habits of discipline, focus, and perseverance he formed at Tennessee Connections Academy.

His advice to current students: “Stay on top of your work, don’t be afraid to ask questions, and get into a routine that will help you succeed.”

# New Website Helps Students Access Hundreds of Scholarships



Connections Academy has partnered with Scholarship America, a non-profit dedicated to eliminating the financial barriers that often keep students away from post secondary education. Since its founding over 60 years ago, Scholarship America has awarded \$6 billion in scholarships to more than 3.5 million students.

To kick things off, we are sharing hundreds of scholarships, which represent over \$300 million! These opportunities are now available on Pearson Futures ([pearson.com/futures](https://www.pearson.com/futures)), a new website dedicated to helping students access resources designed to help them with direction (figuring out what path they

want to take), confidence (developing skills and experiences that will help them build their resume), and real-world connections (access to professional networks).

To help you get a better handle on scholarships, here is a quick interview with Scholarship America.

**Question: Connections Academy**  
**What is a scholarship? Why do they exist?**

**Answer: Scholarship America**

Scholarships are financial aid that does not need to be repaid. They come from a variety of sources, including the colleges and universities. Scholarship America administers what are known as private scholarships, funded by businesses, community foundations, and other organizations. Funders create scholarships for lots of reasons, but the main reason scholarships exist is to help students fund their education beyond high school.

**CA: Who are scholarships for?**

**SA:** There's a persistent idea that some students are "scholarship material" and others are not. At Scholarship America, we believe that every student can be scholarship material! If you have a dream for your future that involves continuing your education after high school—no matter what kind of school or career

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you're looking for—we encourage you to check out the hundreds of scholarships we have on offer and apply for those that look like a fit.

### **CA: How competitive are they? Is there a low chance I would qualify?**

**SA:** Our scholarships vary in the level of competition. A good strategy is to look for a range of different scholarships to apply for. A nationwide scholarship is often very competitive, but a statewide or county-level scholarship will have fewer applicants, and scholarships for your specific major or interest might be a perfect fit. We also support Dollars for Scholars, which is a grassroots, volunteer-led movement that raises funds for local students. You can find out if there's a Dollars for Scholars chapter in your area on the Scholarship America website. Be sure to check with your high school guidance counselor as well—there may be scholarships specific to your town or school district to apply for.

### **CA: What are they for? Just college?**

**SA:** Almost 89% of the scholarships administered by Scholarship America can be used toward vocational-technical education. We also administer other forms of financial aid, like support for professionals who are taking additional courses to improve their career prospects and emergency grants for students facing short-term financial hardship.



### **CA: Are scholarships only for straight-A students or for those trying to get into elite colleges?**

Scholarships are for every student! Each scholarship funder sets their own grade thresholds; if you have at least a 2.0, you'll be able to find opportunities to apply to. And most of our scholarships are open to students attending vocational-technical and two-year colleges.

### **CA: When do you apply for them? Are they only available once a year?**

**SA:** There are scholarships open for applications year-round, although the busiest times of year for applications are October-December and January-April.

## CA: How do you win one? Are there key steps?

The most important step is to apply! You cannot win a scholarship unless you apply for one. Be sure to read the eligibility requirements and application requirements carefully. If there's an essay, consider it an opportunity to help the evaluators get to know you better. If the scholarship considers your financial need, work with your parent or guardian to get the necessary documentation. Finally, some scholarship applications require a recommendation, so be sure to coordinate with a teacher or coach who knows you well and give them plenty of time to complete their part of the application, too.

## CA: Do I have to be able to write a long essay to win a scholarship?

The length of the essay varies from scholarship to scholarship. Most Scholarship America opportunities with an essay component are pretty short—you'll probably spend more time editing your story down to fit in under the maximum length than trying to fill space!

## CA: How much money are we talking about?

**SA:** Our scholarships range from \$1,000 to \$15,000—we even have a few that are full rides! Most of our scholarships fall into the \$3,000–\$4,000 range. And some of the scholarships we offer are renewable, which means that if you keep your grades up in college, you can continue getting funding year after year.



## CA: If I am rejected, what should I do?

**SA:** Rejection means you're trying. Scholarships are in demand, and no one gets every scholarship for which they apply. Try to reframe a rejection as a challenge to keep going and find your next application opportunity. And remember, some scholarships are open to students already in college, so you can try again! Keep track of your activities and accomplishments, keep honing your essays, and keep going—you are scholarship material.

To access scholarships, follow these steps:

1

Visit [pearson.com/futures](https://www.pearson.com/futures)



2




Create an account – sign up takes less than two minutes

3

Click the Find Scholarships tab

- ✓ Use filters to find best fitting opportunities. You can filter by location, amount, and grade level.
- ✓ Save your favorites and we'll notify you via email as your saved scholarships open and close.
- ✓ Come back often to check out new opportunities.

# Partner Spotlight

University Background:	Partnership Details:
 <p><b>Southern New Hampshire University</b></p> <p>Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) is one of the fastest-growing universities nationwide with 135,000 online students and 3,000 on campus. SNHU has flexible learning options with fully online, flexible courses, no set class times and 24/7 access to coursework. It is accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education, and offers several hospitality, health, education, and business degrees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Dual Enrollment opportunities</li> <li>✓ Credit for Prior Learning opportunities</li> <li>✓ Tuition discount (for Connections Academy students, graduates, and their families)</li> </ul>
 <p><b>University of North Texas</b></p> <p>University of North Texas (UNT) is ranked a Tier One research institution by the Carnegie Classification, UNT is one of the nation’s largest public research universities with more than 46,000 students who push creative boundaries and graduate with credentials of value so they can become tomorrow’s leaders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Credit for Prior Learning opportunities</li> <li>✓ Dedicated admissions counselor for Connections Academy students</li> </ul>
 <p><b>University of Maryland Global Campus</b></p> <p>For more than 75 years, University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) has been a leader in online education. We were founded to make a respected, accredited university education accessible to learners everywhere—including motivated students like you at Connections Academy. You’re the reason we’re here—and why we’ve grown to become the largest public university in the country. At UMGC, we recognize your drive, independence, and commitment to learning online, and we’re here to help you take the next step toward your college and career goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Credit for Prior Learning opportunities</li> <li>✓ Tuition discount for dual enrollment (tuition will vary from state to state)</li> </ul>



# Talk to your school counselor to start earning college credit now.

**Dual Enrollment** gives high school students the opportunity to take college courses while still enrolled at Connections Academy. Through our university partners, you can earn both high school and college credit at the same time—often for courses that transfer to many colleges and universities. Dual Enrollment helps you get a head start on your degree, explore college-level learning, and build confidence for your future education and career goals.

**Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)** is a way for colleges and universities to give you college credit for what you've already learned—before you even start college. For Connections Academy students, this means that some of the high school courses you complete may count toward college requirements with our University partners. By earning CPL, you can save time and money on your degree, start college ahead, and get recognition for the hard work you've already done in your online classes.

# Early College and Career Exploration at Iowa Connections Academy

By **Scott Giraud** / Director - Career and Technical Education, Iowa Connections Academy



Here at Iowa Connections Academy, we've been quick to embrace the College and Career Readiness Program. The program is designed to help students think about and prepare for life after graduation. This has a lot to do with the fact that I, like most people, didn't have a super clear vision for my future when I was in high school. When it came to understanding things like

college and career, I wandered around like a visitor in an unfamiliar town without a map app. At Connections Academy, we're working hard to make sure students have the support they need to clearly articulate what they want and navigate to their best possible future. When I started at Iowa Connections Academy, a major priority was to give students resources and tools to help them plan their futures. By providing access to career information, internships that foster real-world connections, and courses that give hands-on experience, we are helping students get over the initial hurdles in career exploration.

## Finding strengths, interest, and direction for the future

Students think a lot about their future and many feel pretty anxious about it. Yet, it's all too easy to get caught up in our work without taking the time to actually sit down with students to help them learn more about their future aspirations. We needed a way to fix this problem.

# Students can figure out who they are and what they want for their future

By dedicating time and resources early in the game, we remove much of their confusion and stress about what's next after high school.

Launchpad is our main method for helping students discover their strengths, interests, and possible career paths long before graduation. This means students can figure out who they are and what they want for their future. By dedicating time and resources early in the game, we remove much of their confusion and stress about what's next after high school. This helps Iowa Connections Academy better understand and serve our students as well as their families.

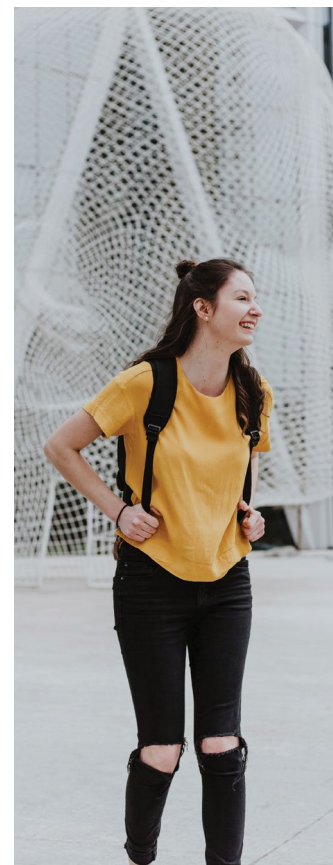
I think it's important to show students their options early in their educational journey. They need to know facts like which college programs they might be interested in, the availability of technical training, and their options for career exploration. In each case, we help students set goals, make better choices about the classes they should take, and ultimately give them confidence about their present and future.

## **Coursera, CTSOs, and internships are helping our students prepare for life after high school**

Coursera courses—which include Google Cybersecurity, Google Digital Marketing and eCommerce, Salesforce Sales Operations, and Keller Real Estate Agent Professional—have been a huge hit with our families. We began in 2021 as a pilot school offering four industry-recognized certifications, and today we've grown to offer 12 different certifications for students to pursue.



By providing access to career information, internships that foster real-world connections, and courses that give hands-on experience, we are helping students get over the initial hurdles in career exploration





“ In each case, we help students set goals, make better choices about the classes they should take, and ultimately give them confidence about their present and future.

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To date, over 75 students have participated in the Coursera programs and received certificates. Without these programs, there is little chance that students would get such good exposure to these in-demand careers and the related skills that businesses look for. What’s even better is that the Coursera programs allow the students to walk away with an industry-recognized certificate— something they can take to businesses or colleges to prove that they’ve gained in-demand, skill-based education.

We are also working with Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA). The idea of becoming a business owner or manager is very popular with many of our students, and the FBLA chapter provides them with first-hand experience that helps them lay the

groundwork for future success. The skills and networking opportunities afforded by FBLA are also game-changers for life after high school—whether students decide to become business owners or choose other paths. This business experience really is one of the most valuable things a student can pursue while in high school because the soft (or durable) skills translate to every area of work.

Finally, we participate in the internship and work study program, which connects students with jobs in their communities where they earn high school credit as they work, on average, 10 hours a week during the school year. Currently, 44 students are enrolled in such internships, and over the past two years, 71 students have earned high school graduation credit through workplace experience programs.



## Connecting learning to work

We are seeing students getting jobs, apprenticeships, and job offers throughout Iowa. Here are a couple examples: One high school student joined the internship program as well as FBLA. She excelled in both programs and stood out as a leader. With the help of our College and Career Readiness Program, she chose both a college and a major, and she now attends University of Northern Iowa where she is majoring in English. Further, through the internship and FBLA, she developed a key set of skills that helped her land an on-campus job in the English department—as a freshman, no less—which is outstanding. She also joined the college FBLA chapter.

Another student participated in the Coursera program while she was in high school. After she graduated, she went straight into the workforce and secured a manager-level job at a local sporting goods store in her hometown. She told us that her

Coursera certification stood out to the business owner and helped her win the job. We'd love to see hundreds more stories like this.

## Growing more opportunities for students

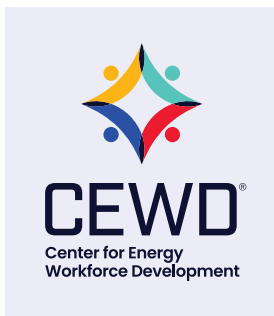
The College and Career Readiness Program has helped articulate the “why” of the school, and it's helped us explain how we are different from other educational opportunities.

Growing access to phenomenal work-based learning programs makes us stand out when families are looking for solid education options for their kids. I'm excited to take on more of these opportunities and to offer them as early as middle school. We have a new opportunity with the CAPS Network, a profession-based learning program, to expand job shadowing and more work-based learning programs to more families. In addition, we are working to let K-5 students start to explore different career ideas via Pathful Junior, a career exploration program designed for younger students.

All of this helps engage students and parents while guiding them toward stronger direction and focus. Ultimately, our work with these programs is about giving students a confident vision about what they want to do in life—and how to get there. We will continue to invest in these programs, and are eager to roll out more great options to our students in the coming years.



# The Energy Sector IS CALLING



**Energy sector employment is projected to outpace many other industry sectors for years to come. Meeting this demand requires a host of prepared, future-ready students in areas like engineering, the skilled trades, business, and more**

When you wake up in the morning, what's the first thing you do? Hit your alarm? Scroll your phone? Hop in the shower? Make coffee?

All those activities have one thing in common: they all require electricity. Mentally scroll through the modern conveniences you depend on each day. Your life is dominated by countless electronic gadgets and modern technologies. It's hard to imagine functioning without them. Lights, heat, air conditioning, the internet, phones, computers, tablets, household appliances, scooters, cars, trains, planes, and every bit of infrastructure we interact with (lights, doors, water heaters, security systems, and more)—all require electricity. Without electricity, life would be pretty rough.

## The energy sector needs new talent

Because our appetite for electricity isn't going away anytime soon, the energy sector is looking for millions more talented individuals for many vital and well-paying jobs. Energy sector employment is projected to outpace many other industry sectors for years to come. Meeting this demand requires a host of prepared, future-ready students in areas like engineering, the skilled trades, business, and more.

This is why Connections Academy is helping students learn more about this important sector. Through new educational and work-experience opportunities, students now have a chance to explore the energy workforce, gain relevant technical skills, and meet business leaders looking to hire.

## Our newest partner: Get Into Energy with The Center for Energy Workforce Development

Much of this work will be done via our new partnership with the Center for Energy Workforce Development (CEWD). The nation's leading non-profit consortium representing the energy sector, CEWD is composed of more than 150 energy companies, associations, unions, educational institutions, and government agencies supporting the development of a skilled energy workforce.

If you would like to learn more, the first step is to explore [getintoenergy.org](https://www.getintoenergy.org), which you can also access through the Industry Partners page in the Career Portal. Get Into Energy is a dedicated portal with materials, resources, and information designed to help you understand your pathways and options to pursue the world of energy.

### With Get Into Energy, students get the following:

- Detailed information on areas to study, including recommended STEM classes and college programs to consider.
- The Next Gen Energy Blueprint—a guide to help students chart their path into an energy career.
- Features including Cutting-edge STEM and Energy Trends and Myths and Misperceptions of Careers in Energy.
- Opportunities to explore jobs in energy—from renewable energy to business, electric, and more.



Students who are ready to further their future energy career can enroll in the Energy Industry Fundamentals 2.0 (EIF 2.0) curriculum—a robust, free virtual course offering 120 hours of instructor-led training, including labs and interactive exercises, or approximately 35–40 hours of instruction for those who undertake the curriculum through self-study. Students who complete the program earn an industry-recognized credential that demonstrates workforce readiness and a competitive edge for internships and jobs in the energy sector.

When asked about the program, Missy Henriksen, the executive director of CEWD, added: “As the energy evolution continues, it’s critical that we have a robust workforce in place to power America’s energy future. There is a wide range of roles essential to making that happen, but an awareness gap still exists. It’s a gap we’re working to close with programming like EIF 2.0 and through this strategic partnership with Pearson, who shares our goal of helping students discover energy careers through expanded and accessible education.”

And finally, we will also be creating more chances for students to get connected to internships, scholarships, and energy industry business professionals and businesses as part of this partnership. Stay tuned! If you are interested in this opportunity, contact your school counselor.



“

As the energy evolution continues, it's critical that we have a robust workforce in place to power America's energy future.

Missy Henriksen,  
Executive Director of CEWD





## Joining clubs connects students with their interests and one another!

- From arts and crafts to Esports to leadership, we have a club to spark the curiosity of students at all grade levels.
- **All clubs are optional, non-credit, have no impact on student grades, and are 100% virtual and free.**
- Our certified teacher-led clubs are a great way to encourage students to explore new interests.
- Participation in global clubs helps students feel connected to their school and to their classmates.
- Research proves that involvement in clubs can also improve academic achievement and graduation rates.

Find out more at:  
[connectionsclubsandactivities.com](https://connectionsclubsandactivities.com)






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At Connections Academy, Global Clubs and Activities help students build meaningful connections with peers across the country while exploring their interests more deeply and discovering new ones. Each session opens doors to future possibilities—whether through creative projects, hands-on learning, or exposure to real-world career paths. Internal program data shows that students who participate perform better academically and report greater satisfaction with their social opportunities.

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Cindy Carbajal,  
Manager of Student Clubs and Activities

A young man with dark hair, wearing a blue denim shirt, is shown in profile, looking towards a woman whose back is to the camera. She is wearing a white shirt. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor setting.

Connections Academy Insights

# How Students Can Develop Skills Before They Graduate From High School

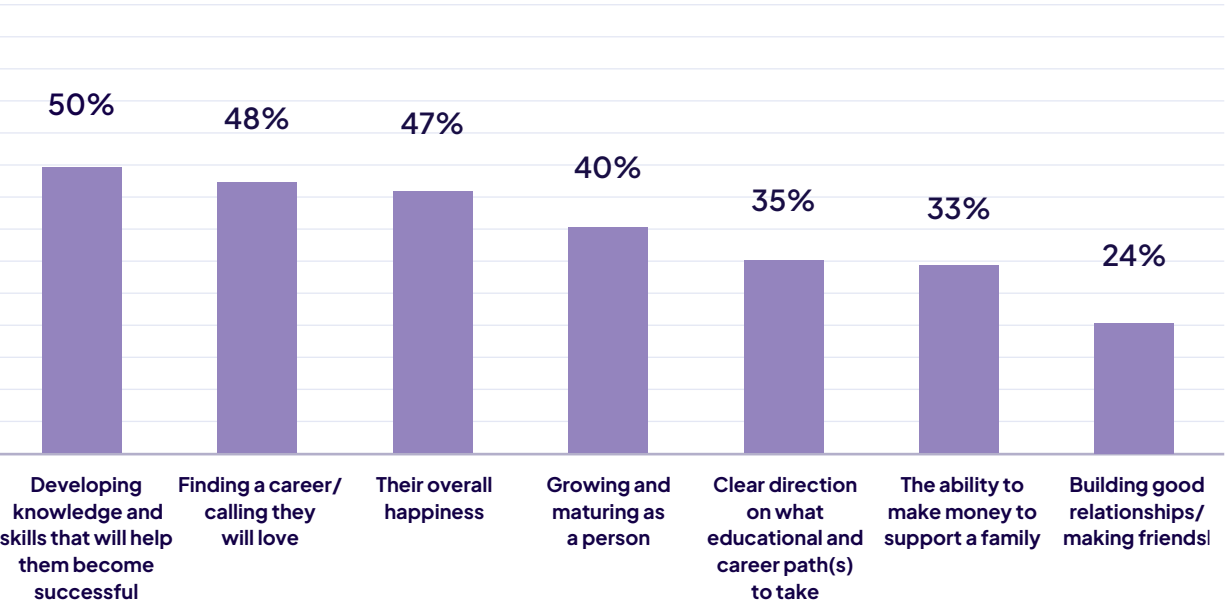
The data is clear: parents know it's important for their children to develop skills that businesses want while students are still in their formative years of education. As a result, Connections Academy is investing in programs, partnerships, and experiences that give every student opportunities to develop in-demand skills during their K-12 years so they can build confidence and connections that will help them succeed—no matter where they go after high school.

Last year, we asked over 1,200 parents what they consider to be the most important factors in setting up their students for success after high school. Fifty percent said that the key ingredient is developing the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. This answer reveals that parents are invested in providing their children with a strong foundation for life.

# 50% of parents believe career success is related to developing skills

What is most important to you when you think about the future success of your child?

(Up to 3)



Connections Academy - 2025 Parent Career Tools and Exploration Study

Similarly, we asked parents about their top concerns for their children after high school. Many (+46%) said that their child's career success is top of mind, worrying they won't find a career that will help them be successful. Again, the takeaway here is that parents are thinking a lot about how their child's education will lead to good outcomes.

**+ 46%**

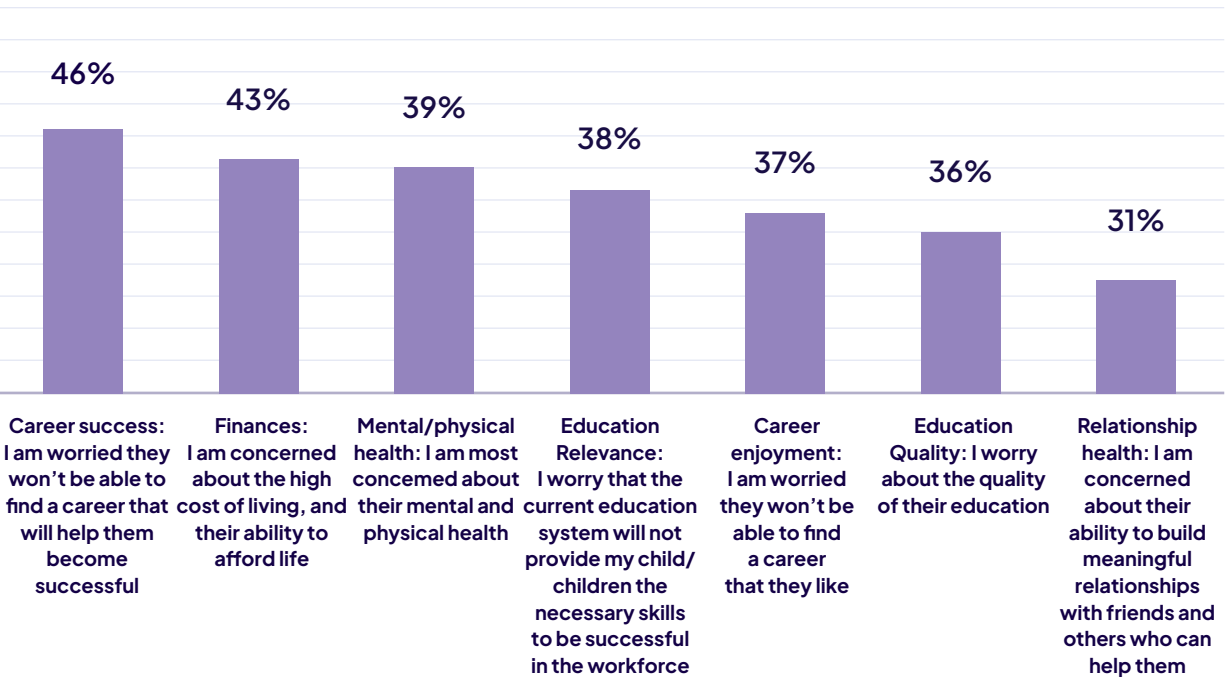
Said their child's career success is top of mind, worrying they won't find a career that will help them be successful.



# Parents are most concerned about career success

What are your top concerns for your child for their life after high school?

(Up to 3)



Connections Academy - 2025 Parent Career Tools and Exploration Study



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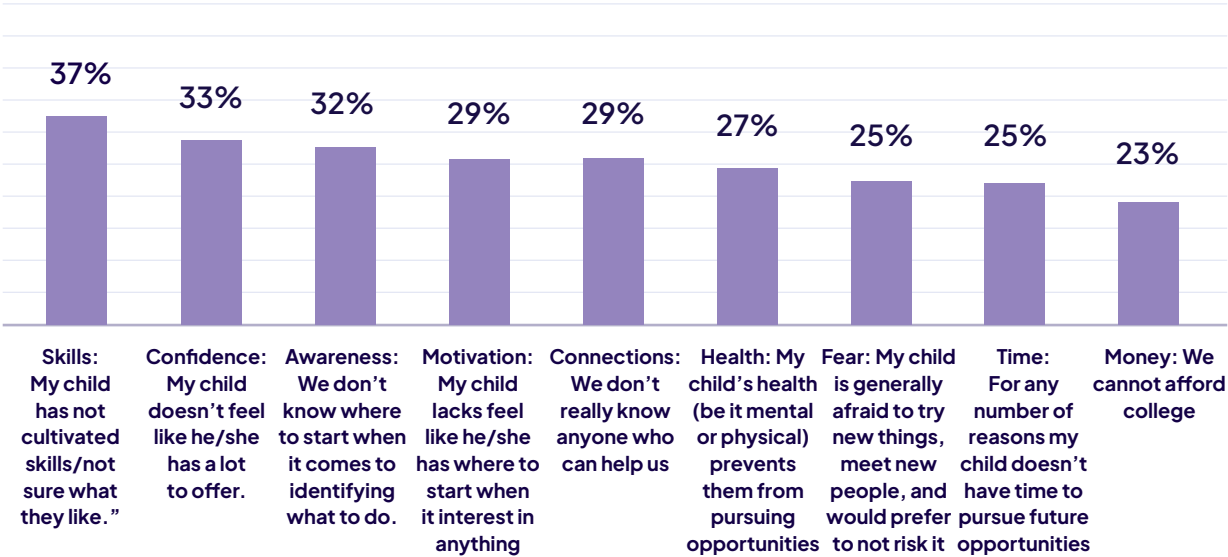
Most parents want to know how to help their kids build the right skills. The formula is actually simple: focus on the basics of education, get involved with extracurricular activities, and seek out work and work-based learning while you are still in high school.

Casey Welch,  
Vice President of Career, Pearson Virtual Schools

# The top roadblocks to meaningful work are skills, confidence, and career awareness

When you think about your child finding meaningful work, what are the top roadblocks?

(Up to 3)



## Connections Academy – 2025 Parent Career Tools and Exploration Study



And, to drive the point home, when we asked about the biggest obstacles to finding career success and meaningful work, parents told us that their top concern was students' having the right skillsets.

# What do we mean when we say “SKILLS”?

By “skills,” we generally mean the abilities that businesses look for when they hire people. These abilities fall into two camps: human skills and technical skills:

**(1) Human skills** – Human skills (also referred to as soft skills, durable skills, transferable skills, or interpersonal skills) are the broad collective of traits core to how humans live, work, and relate to each other. They are the skills taught when you were little—leadership, collaboration, critical thinking, communication, judgment, ethics, flexibility, emotional intelligence, and creativity. Human skills are vital in the workplace because they allow us to interact with others in a productive, professional, civil, and relatable manner. Indeed, without such skills, businesses couldn’t function.

When it comes to the curriculum young students engage in, human skills tend to emerge from our most foundational forms of education – reading, writing, and arithmetic. These subjects help students learn how to communicate (via speaking and writing) and problem solve via math classes. According to a Pearson study of millions of job postings, human skills are very much in-demand in every business sector, and it seems they are often in short supply.\*

\**Pearson Skills Outlook: Power Skills*

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**(2) Technical skills** – These are the more specialized skills associated with the work activities that define various careers or industry sectors. Whereas human skills are broad and foundational (often referred to as horizontal skills because they flow across all areas of work), technical skills are developed in the context of a particular career and are therefore more vertical and aligned to that sector. Here are a few examples of technical skills:

- **IT / software skills** – programming languages, machine learning, AI, cybersecurity
- **Construction skills** – plumbing, electrical, framing, carpentry
- **Healthcare skills** – medicine, nursing, surgery, physical therapy
- **Business operations skills** – finance, digital marketing, sales strategy, customer service

Technical skills are most often gained via courses, college programs, and work-experience related to specific disciplines and subject matters. Today there is a wide array of options designed to help students achieve technical skills such as online programs, short-term classes, and work-based learning.



# Parents see value in both human skills & technical skills

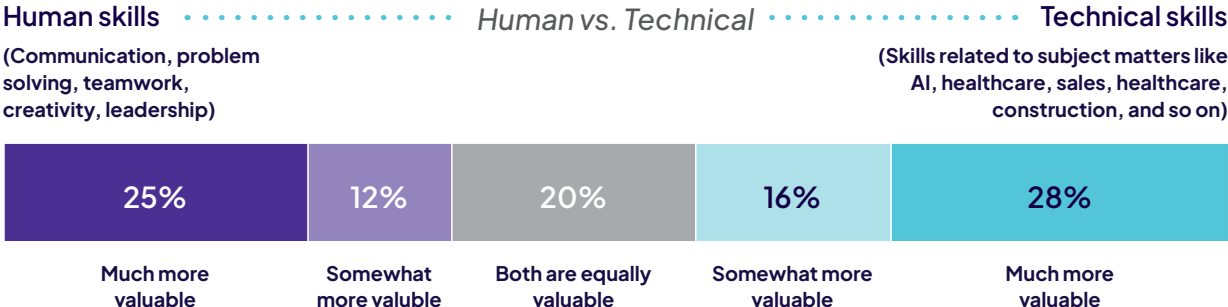
Most importantly, it is critical that students have the ability to combine both human and technical skills if they want to be successful. This is often referred to as being the T-shaped individual, meaning someone who possesses deep expertise in at least one subject matter (i.e., technology, healthcare, construction, business, etc) but balances this expertise with

a broader, adaptable set of human skills that allows them to lead, communicate, problem-solve, and relate well to others.

Last year, parents weighed in on the skills they thought were most important or valuable. We see a tremendous amount of balance in their answers which is a good thing.

# Parents are interestingly split on if human skills versus technical skills are more important, highlighting the need to teach both

Based on what you know of the job market today, what skills do you think would be most valuable for a student getting into the workforce?



## Connections Academy – 2025 Parent Career Tools and Exploration Study

20% of parents believe human skills and technical skills are of equal value—an opinion which runs consistent with the goal of the T-shaped individual. Parents of early high school students especially tend to prefer the balance. This data validates our conviction that students should develop a strong set of human skills via their studies and classwork and an equally strong set of technical skills via industry/career focused programs (which we will talk about next). However, 44% of parents feel that technical

**44% of parents feel that technical skills are more valuable, while 37% feel that human skills are more valuable.**

skills are more valuable, while 37% feel that human skills are more valuable. In this case, there really isn't a right answer because depending on what field you want to enter, a set of technical skills or a set of human skills might make a big difference. If a student is a little stronger or more interested in technical areas like software development, construction, or engineering, the parents may prefer that they develop more human skills. And if a student is social, belonging to a lot of clubs and activities, the parents may wish that the student gain some more technical or vertical skills in an area like healthcare or marketing.

# What is the Best Way to Develop These Skills?

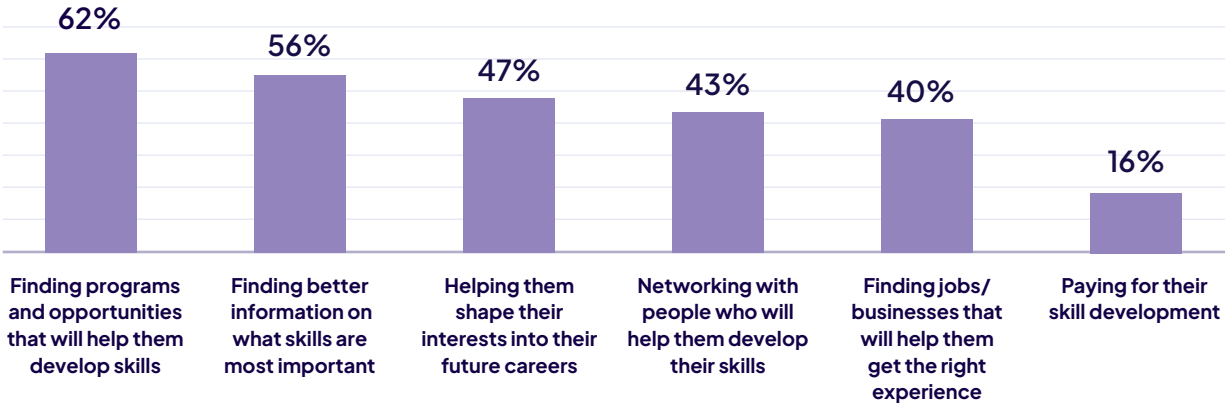


Parents also told us that their children could use a little more help developing these skills. Sixty-two percent said they need help finding programs and opportunities for skill-development, and 56% said they need better information on what skills are most important.

## 62% of parents say their students need the most help when finding programs

What does your child need the most help with when it comes to developing skills and/or their future educational needs?

(Up to 3)



When it comes to how a CA student should develop these skills, here is how we recommend they think about it.

**(1) Focus on their studies.** Developing the foundation of human and technical skills begins in the classroom. This is because the basics of education allow students to practice and blend a lot of these skills all at once. Classroom learning gives students the basic building blocks of skill development. For instance, courses like English and Literature help students become good readers and writers—the starting blocks to being a good communicator. Math classes like Algebra and Calculus are where students learn the basics of problem solving, not to mention where they learn the core of many STEM skills. The classes and courses designed by Connections Academy feed the young mind and get students on the right path to building the types of knowledge, skills, and abilities that will last a lifetime.

**(2) Pursue clubs and activities.** Next, while students are still young (and certainly as they get older), clubs and activities like sports teams or recreation, hobbies, drama, artistic pursuits, and technical clubs (like robotics or writing) are hugely beneficial. These activities and experiences help students develop teamwork, confidence, leadership, and a wide range of technical skills that are hard to find in other places. Plus, such activities are where many make their closest friends and fondest school-year memories.



**(3) Embrace Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs).** CTSOs are an excellent place for students who want to develop professional skills while they are still in high school. Over the past three years, Connections Academy has invested heavily in partnerships with the best student-led organizations in the nation. These organizations give students an incredible mix of technical and human skills, and it is hard to overstate the dramatic impact that such organizations provide. CTSOs have been around for decades and have built impressive networks for students to tap into, competitions that allow students to gain recognition, and professional development that they will remember and reference for a lifetime.



**(4) Take advantage of work-based learning.** The Connections Academy team is hard at work building partnerships with a growing list of education providers and business sectors to help students gain technical training, internships, and access to in-demand careers. The overall theme here is work-based learning. Work-based learning allows students to combine class work with hands-on experience in the context of a particular industry or occupation. The most well-known example of work-based learning is the internship.

To help expand these work-based learning opportunities, we are developing a set of career pathway courses and partnerships with businesses and associations that have developed student-oriented career programs.

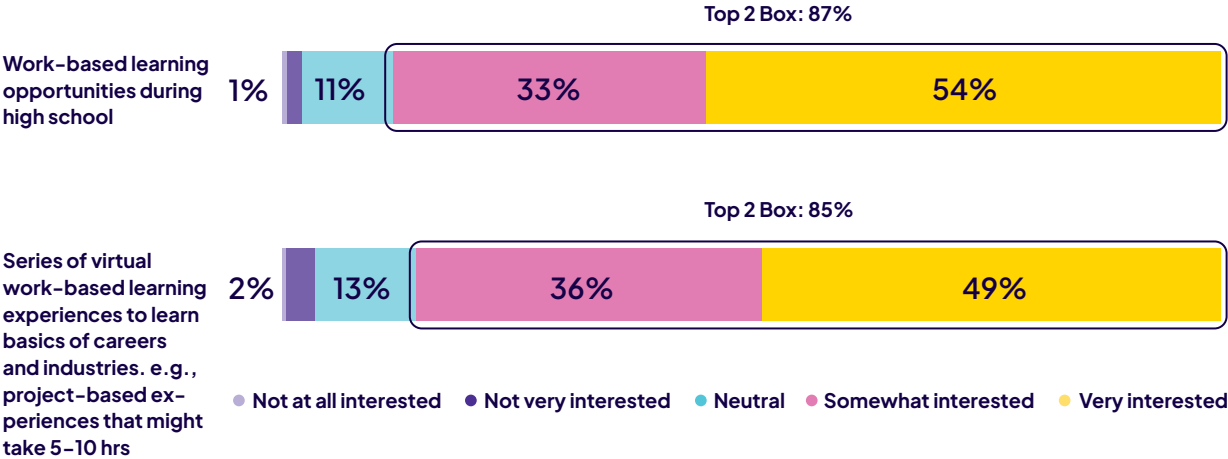
# 90%

**of parents are interested in their students participating in virtual or in-person work-based learning activities.**

The response to our efforts to offer work-based learning opportunities has been tremendous. Nearly 90% of parents are interested in their students participating in virtual or in-person work-based learning activities. This is because parents appear to be aware of the importance of internships and getting a chance to work in a professional setting while students are still in high school.

# Nearly 90% of parents are interested in work-based learning experiences

How interested would you be in work-based learning opportunities during high school for your child if they were available?



Connections Academy - 2025 Parent Career Tools and Exploration Study

Time to get started on your skill development journey...



Career Partnership

# An IBM collaboration to prepare students for success

## IBM SkillsBuild

With IBM SkillsBuild, students can learn AI with cutting-edge skills and digital credentials to give them a head start as they enter the workplace. All Connections Academy students (ages 13+) can access IBM SkillsBuild for free in the Career Portal.

With IBM SkillsBuild, learn AI, cybersecurity, cloud computing, design thinking, and professional skills (like critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork) and explore how these skills relate to your interests. Courses available: Agile Explorer,

Artificial Intelligence Fundamentals, Digital Literacy, Digital Mindset, Explore Emerging Technologies, Lifelong Professional Skills, Project Management Fundamentals.

You earn IBM-branded digital credentials after course completion. These industry-backed credentials help you represent your skills in a way that businesses value. To get started, visit the Career Portal and look for IBM SkillsBuild. There, you can explore the courses and figure out which one(s) you'd like to try.

## Get started

Visit the Career Portal and look for IBM SkillsBuild. There, you can explore the courses and figure out which one(s) you'd like to try.

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*Caretaker opt in is required*

In collaboration with  
**IBM SkillsBuild**

# CTSOs

## The Best Intro to the World of Work

By **Emily Todd** / Senior Partnerships Manager, Pearson Virtual Schools



When students hit their secondary education years (7th–12th grade), thoughts quickly turn to life after high school. This means students are eager for activities and experiences that go beyond the classroom to help them build professional skills and connections that can be leveraged after graduation. They are also looking for a testing ground, a way to weed out what they don't like and to validate what they do. To that end, Connections Academy is partnering with a variety of nationally recognized and respected Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) to help students gain the much needed and much desired skill-based opportunities.

### What are CTSOs?

In the early to mid-1900's, Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) were created to give students practical skills in sectors like agriculture, business, and the trades. Over time, they have expanded to include STEM fields, healthcare, and family/consumer sciences, reflecting the changing job market and student interests.

CTSOs were created to give students hands-on experience that allows them to put their classroom knowledge to work. These experiences help students grow, explore, and develop interests via a structured environment that coaches, mentors, and even judges their abilities. Such experiences allow them to build human skills like leadership, communication, and teamwork and career-based technical skills.

Practically speaking, CTSOs are national professional associations that students can join as early as middle school. A CTSO exists in a school setting and combines classroom learning with real-world work experience. To do this, CTSOs use competitions, career exploration, mentoring, and networking events. Students who join a CTSO participate



in a mix of hands-on learning, skill-building activities, competitions, and leadership opportunities. It's a way to make learning more engaging and to prepare for life after graduation. Importantly, CTSO chapters are student-led, which encourages students to step up. In school settings, CTSOs are often connected to career and technical (CTE) programs. There are eight nationally recognized CTSOs in the U.S. Each is focused on a particular industry sector, and all help students explore careers, develop leadership skills, and apply classroom learning.

## There are eight nationally recognized CTSOs in the US. Each is focused on a particular industry sector

### **Business Professionals of America (BPA)**

– Helps students build skills in business, finance, IT, and leadership, offering competitions, professional development, and career-focused opportunities.

### **Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA)**

– Prepares students for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management through competitions, projects, and leadership experiences.

### **Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA)**

– Focuses on family, consumer sciences, and community leadership, helping students strengthen life skills and leadership.

### **Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA)**

– Focuses on business and entrepreneurship, giving students real-world experience in planning, teamwork, and professional skills.

### **Future Farmers of America (FFA)**

– Focused on agriculture, food, and natural resources, helping students gain leadership, technical, and community skills.

### **HOSA-Future Health Professionals**

– Helps students interested in healthcare develop technical skills and leadership through events and community service.

**SkillsUSA** – Supports students in trade, technical, and skilled service careers, emphasizing hands-on skills, teamwork, and career readiness.

### **Technology Student Association (TSA)**

– Encourages students interested in STEM and technology to innovate, compete in challenges, and grow leadership skills.



While each CTSO focuses on a specific career area, they all major in helping students develop human skills like leadership, communication, collaboration, and problem solving. These skills provide a strong foundation that makes it easier to develop technical expertise in their chosen field. For example, HOSA students practice teamwork alongside clinical skills, TSA students build collaboration skills while learning technology, and FBLA students strengthen communication while exploring business. These experiences help students graduate with real skills, stronger resumes, and clearer career goals.

My experience with CTSOs began when I was a high school science and IT teacher in South Carolina. Each year, my students and their parents had the same big questions: What comes next after graduation? How do I prepare for college or a career? As a teacher, I was always looking for meaningful ways to help them find those answers. That's what first led me to connect my students with our school's CTSO chapters.

What started as an extension of classroom learning quickly became something more powerful. I saw my students take what they were learning in class and apply it to real projects and competitions. They gained hands-on experience, discovered new

interests, and built lasting friendships. For many, it was the first time they truly saw how their education connected to future careers. The value of CTSOs became even more personal when I learned that it was through a CTSO that my mother had discovered her own career path. She joined HOSA-Future Health Professionals in college, where she found her passion for nursing. Realizing that her journey began through a CTSO helped me see how these programs can shape lives across generations. They don't just teach skills—they open doors and help students see what's possible for their futures.

## **Strategic partnerships to help our students**

To date, Connections Academy has partnered with HOSA, FBLA, and SkillsUSA to give students opportunities that go beyond the classroom. We are invested in these partnerships because there really isn't a better way for students to simultaneously develop skills and professional connections while they are still in high school. Over the years, I've interacted with many students who have participated in CTSOs and the results are impressive. Here are a handful of the things you will quickly notice about students who have served in CTSO chapters.



The value of CTSOs became even more personal when I learned that it was through a CTSO that my mother had discovered her own career path. She joined HOSA–Future Health Professionals in college, where she found her passion for nursing.

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**(1) Confidence** – First, they are confident in their abilities. Students who go through CTSOs are more confident in presenting their ideas and jump into problem-solving without anxiety. This confidence stems from the fact that they have spent a lot of time developing leadership, communication, and teamwork skills. They learn how to set goals, manage projects, and take initiative. Students don't always gain such skills on their own, and CTSOs give them the chance to develop a foundation of skills in a fun and highly engaging environment before they have to figure it out the hard way (when they enter their first job).

**(2) Career exploration** – CTSO students frequently talk to me about all their different career ideas. They constantly shape and reshape their career aspirations. I see a lot of vision for the future combined with plenty of conversations with peers, teachers, and professionals—all which help them mold their perspectives on what they can do and what they want to do. It's really powerful and encouraging to see students armed with a strong sense of direction when they leave high school.

**(3) Credentials** – CTSO students earn recognition through competitions, awards, and honors. This recognition is super helpful when they build resumes, meet with potential employers, or apply to college. Many students leave CTSOs feeling better prepared for college, careers, and leadership opportunities in any part of their life.

**(4) Connections** – And finally, the biggest surprise to many students and parents relates to the fantastic way that CTSOs help students build connections with peers, teachers, and perhaps most importantly industry professionals.

## ► Get Involved!

Interested in learning more? Scan here to get more information about CTSOs offered at your Connections Academy.

Get started today by scanning this QR Code



# CTSO Spotlight

# SkillsUSA



When it comes to Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs), it is hard to think of one with a bigger, more long-lasting impact than SkillsUSA. Founded in 1965, the organization operates in every state, two territories and Washington D.C., has over 2,500 business and educational partners, and serves over 440,000 high-school, middle-school, and college students and teachers each year. Over its 60-year history, it has reached more than 15 million students.

SkillsUSA has built this impressive resume as the leading workforce development organization for students and a proud champion of the skilled trades. This means it is squarely focused on helping students explore and gain access to a broad set of in-demand occupations in fields like engineering, electronics, telecommunications, construction, manufacturing, transportation, and logistics.

Such sectors are worth students' attention because each sector tends to suffer a shortage of skilled workers. For this reason, SkillsUSA connects students with businesses eager to hire, eager to train, and eager to help young people develop their talents into great careers.

When asked about the mission, SkillsUSA executive director Chelle Travis commented: "SkillsUSA is vital to addressing the growing skills gap by ensuring the future workforce has the qualifications and skills that business and industry demands. SkillsUSA develops students' personal, workplace, and technical skills grounded in academics to help them become career-ready from day one."



“

SkillsUSA is vital to addressing the growing skills gap by ensuring the future workforce has the qualifications and skills that business and industry demands. SkillsUSA develops students' personal, workplace and technical skills grounded in academics to help them become career-ready from day one.

Chelle Travis,  
Executive Director of SkillsUSA

  
SkillsUSA®



The divisions are called program of work (PoW) categories. They cover the following:

1. Advocacy and marketing
2. Community engagement
3. Financial management
4. Leadership development
5. Partner and alumni engagement
6. Workplace experiences

In addition to these PoW categories, a variety of tools and resources are offered to help chapters and the participating students succeed.

A well-run chapter is a lot like a well-run business, so by leading their chapters, students get the opportunity to develop skills related to running a company.

SkillsUSA chapters are focused on providing students with technical skills (like computer and technology literacy, job-specific skills, etc), workplace skills (like communication, decision making, teamwork, etc), and personal skills (like integrity, work ethic, professionalism, responsibility, etc). Such skills are the foundation that students can build on for years to come. Further, after years of research and development, SkillsUSA has strong evidence that the SkillsUSA Framework helps each student achieve far greater career success because they are getting a strong mix of what business and industry leaders look for.

## How SkillsUSA Works

SkillsUSA starts with school-based chapters. Some meet after school, while others are part of existing middle or high school courses. All chapters are student-led, giving members the chance to plan activities, run meetings, and build leadership skills.

The chapters' activities are designed around career exploration, work-based learning, and building a strong human and technical skills foundation. Just like within a business, a chapter contains various roles, responsibilities, and divisions of labor.

## The Skills USA Framework

### What it does:

- Provides a common language for students to articulate what they gain from SkillsUSA participation to employers, school administrators, parents and other students
- Assesses student skill development along a learning continuum of awareness, demonstration and mastery
- Creates a vision for SkillsUSA programs at the local, state and national levels to ensure quality student-led experiences that build skills in all members

### Why it works:

- Empowers every student to achieve career success
- Delivers a skill set demanded by business and industry but lacking in many employees today
- Ensures that every student member receives a consistent and specific skill set





## SkillsUSA Competitions

As students get established in local chapters and move through the curriculum and program, they have the opportunity to sign up for a wide array of skills-based competitions. Some examples include 3D visualization and animation, audio production, architectural drafting, aviation maintenance, baking, cabinetmaking, arts and communication, business management, welding.

There are two levels of competition:

### **(1) Local, regional, and state competitions**

- Students are first entered into local events. The local events are designed around the school year. In this format, students interact with their own teammates and receive help from business volunteers. Local winners then advance from the local level to district or regional events, then to state leadership

and skills conferences. State gold medalists then progress to the National Leadership & Skills Conference (NLSC).

**(2) National Championships** - The NLSC is held every June in Atlanta, which is one of the largest workforce development events in the world. It is a premiere showcase of America's "most highly skilled career and technical education students," and features over 6,800 state champions from across the U.S. These students compete in one of 115 competitions which are designed, overseen, and measured by some 2,000 industry volunteers. Students compete for gold, silver, or bronze medals as well as for scholarships and other prizes. And with so many industry professionals present, it is not uncommon for students to receive job offers at the conclusion of the championships. According to Travis: "Students who compete at the state



or national level can test their skills against industry standards, meaning students are ready for work and hireable right off the competition floor.”

**Judged by industry professionals, these competitions allow students to develop and display skills related to some of the most in-demand and highly skilled professions.**

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## **How is Connections Academy Working with SkillsUSA?**

Connections Academy created a partnership with SkillsUSA in 2025. Through this partnership, SkillsUSA’s leadership development, technical skills training, and workplace readiness courses will be available to Connections Academy students

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**Students can expect to find a community that is committed to their success and development.**

via the College and Career Readiness program. SkillsUSA collaborated with the Connections Academy team to develop guidelines and resources specifically for virtual chapters across Connections Academy. Participating Connections Academy students have the opportunity to receive industry recognized credentials as well as all the skill development that comes with being a member of a SkillsUSA chapter. When we asked Travis what students should expect when they join, she told us: “Students can expect to find a community that is committed to their success and development. They will be able to explore various career paths and find their passion. Skilled professionals are in demand and SkillsUSA is experiencing record growth as Gen Z is increasingly seeing skilled careers as a path to a stable and rewarding career. With this continued growth, we’re strengthening connections between industry and education and creating even more impact for our members. It’s an exciting time to be part of SkillsUSA. There is no better time than now to be skilled!”

► **If you would like to sign up, please contact your school counselor or CTE teacher.**

# Missouri Connections Academy Assistant Principal Receives National Recognition

## in the DoD STEM Ambassador Program



Missouri Connections Academy high school assistant principal, Ashley Carter, was recently selected as one of only a few dozen educators nationwide for the Department of Defense's STEM Ambassador Program. The recognition highlights her ongoing work to expand STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) opportunities and bring more hands-on, career-focused learning experiences to students.

Ashley Carter, Missouri Connections Academy's high school assistant principal, has always loved math and science. And she is constantly looking for creative ways to share that interest and excitement with students and teachers in the hopes that they, too, will develop a similar passion. According to Carter, one of the big reasons for her efforts is the job market. "Here in Kansas City, there are so many STEM jobs available, and there never seems to be enough people to fill them," she said.

When Carter heard about the Department of Defense's STEM Ambassador program, she knew it could help her efforts. She quickly applied, and to her delight, was awarded a position in the prestigious national program, which accepts a mere 20 to 30 participants each year.

The role of the ambassadors is to design and test hands-on STEM learning experiences for students, create opportunities that spark curiosity, and connect young people with the kinds of creative, collaborative

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problem-solving skills used in real careers. While ambassadors can support educators, the primary goal of Carter's work this year will be to directly benefit students by giving them access to more STEM resources, activities, and experiences that build creativity, design-thinking skills, and confidence. The STEM ambassador program is part of a larger effort by DoD STEM to develop more talented individuals to enter these in-demand and high-paying jobs.

## First Steps

Carter's work will begin with developing awareness of the many, varied STEM careers. To do this, she and her team are creating field trips and other hands-on activities that engage students in experiences that spark their imagination and creativity. Activities like building bridges, exploring the Northern Lights, and launching stomp rockets bring abstract topics like math and science to life. Students quickly realize they are interested in STEM careers after all.

Carter is connected to a large community of educators who hail from around the country, along with partners from the Defense STEM Education Consortium (DSEC). DSEC includes numerous federal agencies, colleges, and career development organizations like FIRST Robotics, Arizona State University, and TIES. This partnership puts Carter at the center of national conversations on STEM education, and gives her access to valuable resources that she can bring back to Connections Academy students. According to Carter, "Ultimately, this is all

about helping students realize that there are many new, emerging careers out there. It helps them realize that they aren't limited to just a few options when it comes to finding a career."

## Why is this important for Connections Academy?

Connections Academy schools are already at the forefront of virtual education. Strengthening STEM opportunities ensures that Connections Academy continues to prepare students for the rapidly evolving workforce, including jobs that don't even exist yet. A strong STEM focus helps students build the problem-solving, creativity, and adaptability skills essential for future careers in fields like robotics, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing, and more. This initiative highlights Connections Academy's commitment not just to keeping up with the future, but to leading it.

## What should families and teachers look forward to?

Parents, students, and teachers should look forward to more opportunities than ever for students to explore and discover their passions, through hands-on field trips, design challenges, partnerships, expanded STEM activities, and creative experiences that nurture curiosity. There are many pathways to success, and this STEM expansion adds another exciting pathway for Connections Academy students to find what inspires them, build real-world skills, and imagine their future.

# How to Build, Validate, and Showcase Your Skills



The currency of the labor market is skills. And when it comes to successfully navigating between the worlds of education and work, developing the right skills is a chief concern for high school students and their parents alike. Pearson and Connections Academy's are all in on helping students and parents do just that.

Connections Academy's dedication to skill development ensures that high school students have plenty of chances to discover subject matters they enjoy,

to explore those subjects in hands-on, real-world scenarios, and to develop skills through courses and experiences that will carry into college and work.

The opportunity to pursue work-based learning and other skill-building educational experiences during one's years in secondary education is a game-changer, giving students a massive leg up. Communicating those skills clearly and concretely is another top priority. A central part of transitioning from education to work is articulating, displaying, and validating the skills you've gained so that employers and colleges can value and trust the work you've done.

## But how? — Enter Credly

Credly—the world's leading digital credentialing platform trusted by over 3,500 employers globally—lets students validate the skills they've gained through trusted third-party programs, packaging them in a professional skills portfolio with digital badges. Badges are validated digital certifications that indicate a student has learned and is proficient in a specific skill or set of skills. These validated skills are key when you build a resume, interview for a job, talk to an enrollment team at a college, or just want to explain what you can do.

Essentially, a solid skills portfolio gives the student a ton of confidence when they venture out into the labor market.

## How should Connections Academy students use Credly?

Connections Academy students can begin earning Credly badges as young as 13 years old. The best way for a Connections Academy student to get started is by successfully completing the Career Readiness Program course. Upon completion of the CRP course, students will receive a Future Explorer badge, which indicates they have participated in career development and discovery. To access the badge, students sign in to Credly via SSO from the Apps in Pearson Online Classroom using their Connections Academy ID. The badge appears in the Achievement Viewer in Pearson Online Classroom and on the Credly platform.

Great. You've earned your first official badge! But now you want to do more. Here's an example of how you can do that. Imagine a Connections Academy junior has always been intrigued by how the apps on his phone operate. He wants to build his own app one day, and would be very interested in working for a company that specializes in software and app development. But how does he get started?

When he explores Connection's Academy's Career Portal, he sees courses related to information technology within his school's College and Career Readiness program.



The best way for a Connections Academy student to get started is by successfully completing the Career Readiness Program course.



**1. Starting a pathway.** He enrolls in Principles of Information Technology 1A, a foundational course that introduces students to IT concepts, systems, and careers. He loves the course, earns a Credly badge (Principles of Information Technology, which he can view in his newly created skills portfolio on Credly), and adds the badge to his resume and his LinkedIn profile.

**2. Building skills and earning more badges.** Encouraged by the IT course and the ability to show off his newly acquired skills, the student enrolls in the next IT course (Principles of IT 1B). Armed with his new and increasing skills, he signs up for an internship through the CAPS Network, where he works with real companies on real-world problems. As part of the internship, he is introduced to a cybersecurity awareness program, which earns him yet another badge on Credly. In this case, the cybersecurity program covered topics like time management, collaboration, communication, and professionalism in addition to cybersecurity principles. At the end of the course, he walks away with a badge that indicates he has the basics of cybersecurity, plus validated human skills like communication, collaboration, team

work, and professionalism. Now the student possesses a mix of technical and human skills he can share with prospective businesses.

**3. Exploring industry certifications.** At the beginning of his senior year, the student enrolls in IBM SkillsBuild (another Connections Academy partner), and earns a certificate in Cybersecurity Fundamentals, yet another course and set of skills he can add to his growing digital portfolio on Credly.

**4. Understanding and showcasing achievements.** Now the student has gained a variety of skills that he can review on Credly. In this case, he can use Credly to better understand how the courses and experiences he has participated in have taught him skills, which skills he has gained, and how he should communicate his skills to business and academic leaders. When he logs into his account, he sees the following badges:

- ✓ Principles of IT 1A and 1B
- ✓ CAPS Cyber Internship
- ✓ IBM Cybersecurity Fundamentals
- ✓ Time management, communication, and collaboration

Each badge is tagged with a set of relevant skills and is linked to the student's profile. His skills profile includes the following:



- ✓ Leadership
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Collaboration
- ✓ Time-management
- ✓ Career and self development
- ✓ Professionalism
- ✓ Critical thinking
- ✓ Technology (information technology basics and cybersecurity basics)

With this skills profile, he visits colleges and interviews for more internships and jobs with other technology companies. When he talks to the colleges and businesses, he shows them his skills portfolio. Businesses are pleased, seeing the student has earned not only technical skills, but also a number of crucial soft skills. Now, play this example out in any number of areas you find interesting—the arts, healthcare, construction, business management, marketing, writing, agriculture, engineering, accounting, and so on. Credly has thousands of badges and can tag just as many skills so that you can understand and communicate your abilities to the world.

## What badges have been most popular with Connections Academy students?

From July through October of last year, here are the badges Connections students participated in the most:

- Over 10,000 students received the Future Explorer badge in a two-month period, which gives them skills in career and self-development.
- Nearly 2,000 students participated in Principles of Business, Marketing, and Finance (1A and 1B).
- 1,500 students took Entrepreneurship 1A and 1B.

## What's next for Credly and Connections Academy?

A major recent development is the ability for students to include non-school-based achievements in their skills portfolio. This includes things like achievements in athletics (you played a varsity level sport in high school), the arts (you worked for months as a stage manager in a play), community service (you volunteer at the local animal shelter), professional experience (you work at McDonalds), and industry certifications (you participated in Home Depot's Path to Pro program) In each case, Credly helps you identify the skills you've gained from each experience and add these accomplishments to your skills profile—the kind of evidence future businesses want to see.

## Partner Update

# National Technical Honor Society

Connections Academy is excited to partner with the National Technical Honor Society (NTHS), a nationally recognized organization that celebrates achievement in career and technical education (CTE). Through this new initiative, Connections Academy schools across the country can now establish their own NTHS chapters to honor outstanding CTE students for their leadership, skill, and dedication to career pathways.

“Partnering with Pearson’s Connections Academy aligns perfectly with our mission to empower students through career and technical education,” said Peyton Holland, executive director of NTHS. “We are excited to work together to recognize and support efforts that encourage technical skill, employability skill, and leadership development. Through this collaboration, we’re helping to bridge the gap between education and industry, while shining a light on the importance of CTE.”

Students who join their school’s NTHS chapter gain access to these national scholarships, along with additional resources to help them continue their education and career development. To learn more, students can connect with their school counselor or **visit [nths.org/scholarships](https://nths.org/scholarships)**.



## Benefits of the partnership

- **Recognition and Prestige:** Membership in NTHS recognizes students for their academic excellence and dedication to CTE, adding prestige and serving as a mark of distinction on their resumes or college applications.
- **Scholarship Opportunities:** NTHS offers scholarship opportunities to its members, making learning more cost-effective and helping them pursue further education or training in their chosen technical fields.
- **Career Development:** The partnership provides students with access to career-focused resources that support their growth in Career & Technical Education and beyond, from career-exploration portals to scholarships that can support education, tools, and supplies for their career path.



## Want to participate? Here's how.

**(1) Eligibility:** Students interested in joining NTHS should ensure they meet the eligibility criteria, which typically includes academic excellence and engagement in career and a commitment to career and technical education.

**(2) Application:** Eligible students can apply for membership through their Connections Academy school. (Please contact your school counselor for more information.) The application process may involve submitting academic records and demonstrating involvement in CTE activities.

**(3) Engagement:** Once accepted, students should actively participate in NTHS activities, including leadership development programs, community service projects, and scholarship opportunities.

**(4) Utilize Resources:** Students are encouraged to take advantage of the resources provided through the partnership, such as career development tools and connections to post-secondary education.



Students who join their school's NTHS chapter gain access to over \$330,000 in scholarships, along with additional resources to help them continue their education and career development.

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Today, NTHS has chapters in all 50 states and serves more than 100,000 currently enrolled members annually, representing every career and technical education cluster

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## The Premier Society for Career and Technical Education

NTHS is the premier honor society for secondary and postsecondary CTE students. The goal of the organization is to honor, recognize, and empower student achievement in CTE programs that prepare learners for highly skilled, in-demand careers.

Through local school chapters, students are inducted into NTHS based on their outstanding performance in their CTE coursework. Membership provides them with benefits that not only support them while enrolled in their programs but also throughout their career journeys. While national recognition for their accomplishments is a hallmark benefit, members also have access to more than \$330,000 in exclusive scholarship opportunities each year, as well as career-readiness tools, partner programs, discounted credentialing opportunities, and other valuable resources.

Today, NTHS has chapters in all 50 states and serves more than 100,000 currently enrolled members annually, representing every career and technical education cluster, from health sciences and information technology to construction and transportation.



## What is the mission?

NTHS celebrates outstanding CTE students. The mission is to advocate for and empower all students to pursue the skills needed to build their careers and strengthen the global workforce.

NTHS does this by honoring student achievement, promoting higher standards in workforce education, cultivating excellence in tomorrow's workforce, and supporting continued learning through scholarships, partnerships, and career development opportunities. Through our Core Four Objectives—career development, leadership development, service, and recognition—NTHS chapters provide students with meaningful, well-rounded experiences that prepare them for success in both career and life.

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NTHS celebrates outstanding CTE students. Our mission is to advocate for and empower all students to pursue the skills needed to build their careers and strengthen the global workforce.

Peyton Holland,  
Executive Director NTHS



National Technical  
Honor Society



### Is there a quick story that highlights what NTHS does for students?

Danielle Dawson grew up in Trinidad and discovered her passion for architecture by watching people in her community build their own homes. After moving to the United States, she served in the Army and later studied Architectural Technology at Fayetteville Technical Community College. Through NTHS and a partnership with Build Your Future, Danielle earned a scholarship that helped her continue her education and pursue her goal of designing affordable, sustainable homes. Her story reflects the heart of NTHS: recognizing hardworking students and supporting their dreams through education and opportunity.

**NTHS chapters provide students with meaningful, well-rounded experiences that prepare them for success in both career and life.**

### What are the outcomes of NTHS?

- **Confidence.** For many students, being inducted into NTHS is the first time they have been recognized for their skills and learning style. Teachers frequently share that students gain confidence, self-worth, and a new belief in their ability to succeed once they are celebrated for their talents.
- **Career Opportunities.** NTHS scholarships make it possible for students to pursue careers they love, opportunities they might otherwise have delayed or bypassed due to financial barriers.
- **Changing Perceptions of CTE.** NTHS induction ceremonies often reshape how families and communities view CTE. Parents are often surprised by how rigorous and respected CTE programs actually are.

Student Spotlight

# Annelise Akers Iowa Connections Academy Class of 2025

University of Northern Iowa, Class of 2029



Connections Academy changed my life.



Learn more about her story  
by scanning this QR Code

Sample A Sample  
Address Line 1  
Address Line 2  
City, State Zip +4

# Powerful connections prepare students for what's next

Watch for exciting updates on our college and  
career readiness partners and new opportunities.