



Meet Brian Cashman

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Goodhue County Education District
SE MN Workforce Development Board Member since 2017



What is Career and Technical Education (CTE)?

CTE refers to learning pathways at the high school and post-secondary levels that allow students to learn academic and technical skills and knowledge and training in six different career fields: (1) Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources, (2) Arts, Communication, and Information Systems, (3) Engineering, Manufacturing, and Technology, (4) Health Science Technology, (5) Human Services, and (6) Business, Management, and Administration.

These learning pathways typically start in high school and aim to give students options to pursue post-secondary training (at both 2- and 4- year institutions) and/or employment in high-demand and high-wage careers.

I understand that you are the Coordinator of Alternative Programs for the Goodhue County Education District (GCED). Why did you decide this career choice?

My undergraduate degree is in Life Science Education, with teaching licensure in grades 5-12. I have also earned a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership and have a K-12 principal license. My interest in education was due to the great teachers and role models I had while going through school. It seemed natural to give back in a field that had been so supportive of me.

Of the various roles I have had in public education, my current role with GCED is one that I probably enjoy the most. I have the opportunity to work in multiple areas of education - Alternative Learning, Career and Technical Education, English Learner Programming, State Testing. In particular, I have enjoyed the regional collaboration that is emphasized in Alternative Learning, Career and Technical Education, and English Learner Programming.

Are CTE courses only for students who are planning to work after high school or can a student who is planning on attending college take courses too?

Great question! The answer is “yes”...CTE is definitely an area that can be beneficial to every learner – the learner that is ready to enter the workforce right after high school, the learner ready to jump into a two-year institution, and the learner wanting to go to a four-year institution. There are also nuances within each of these options. For example, a student may enter the workforce

right after high school and be part of an apprenticeship program where he or she gains the skills necessary to make a livable working wage. Or the student may work and concurrently attend a post-secondary school. Likewise, a student might complete their associate degree at a two-year institution and then transfer to a four-year school to finish their undergraduate degree.

This is the advantage of CTE programming – when done correctly, it leads to short-term and long-term options for students.

How can CTE help students be college and career ready?

There are multiple ways...here are a few of the more prominent ones:

1. CTE gives students the technical skills that business and industry is looking for. This makes these students employable and able to take advantage of a labor market that is short on skilled technicians within the various CTE fields.
2. CTE includes an emphasis on “21st Century Skills” (sometimes called “Soft Skills”). Things like showing up on time, being ready to work, problem solving, critical thinking, communication, and innovation are key foundations of an effective CTE learning pathway.
3. CTE offers an opportunity for students to pursue an area of study that is relevant to their interests and skill sets. Instead of having to go through four years of post-secondary schooling to leave with a degree that may or may not be offer ready employment, plus the stress of a large debt, in many instances CTE offers a shorter path from education to meaningful employment.

One key message is that it is not an “either” “or” situation. In other words, there is value to attending a four-year school and there is value to attending a two-year school while concurrently, there is value in entering employment/apprenticeships/internships/etc. right after high school.

Instead of thinking that all students need to attend a four-year institution, often there is benefit in reviewing the opportunities that, for example, two-year institutions offer and employment offers. In other words, I would suggest that all of the various options be on the table for students as they look to their next steps after high school.

What are some of the career pathways or CTE areas you offer students?

I work in a supporting role for CTE programs in 22 school districts in Southeastern Minnesota. Among all of these school districts, there are numerous career pathways being offered. A couple highlights include:

- Kingsland High School and Red Wing High School both offer career pathways within the Engineering, Manufacturing, and Technology career field through Project Lead the Way course offerings;
- Plainview-Elgin-Millville offers an internal Program of Study Certificate, which is gained through student choice of courses and experiences within the six CTE Career Fields;

- Rushford-Peterson High School, in conjunction with their local assisted living center, offers students a pathway to become a Certified Nursing Assistant;
- Winona High School, in conjunction with the Winona Chamber of Commerce and business community, offers a multi-year pathway in manufacturing that includes specific coursework, industry tours, internship opportunities, and college credit (plus skills employers are looking for).

Do CTE instructors work with employers and/or colleges to offer work-based opportunities for students?

Yes, CTE instructors work with employers and/or colleges to offer work-based opportunities for students. Some of these opportunities are formal Work-Based Learning programs while other opportunities address different aspects of Experiential Learning – like business and industry site tours.

An example of some exciting work going on right now is the collaboration among the Houston County Community and Economic Development, Workforce Development Inc., the Southeast Perkins Consortium, and the schools and business and industry folks in Houston County. Put briefly, the goal of this collaboration is to produce a menu of Work-Based Learning/Experiential Learning options between the Houston County schools and Houston County businesses. As a means of jump starting this process, there is a Houston County “Economic Summit” scheduled for February 27th in Caledonia. This is just one example of what collaborative work looks like in Southeastern Minnesota – there are other really exciting partnerships occurring elsewhere in the region.