

Early Career Experiences: The Starting Point for Success Ready Graduates

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Introduction



Effective March 2023, [Arkansas LEARNS](#) enacted comprehensive changes aimed at expanding quality education statewide. A pillar of the law, [Readiness](#), prioritizes that every Arkansan is on a pathway to prosperity and graduates with the skills needed to succeed in the workforce. To ensure readiness, the Arkansas Department of Education commits to:

- **Promoting Early Career Experiences Beginning in the Middle Grades** by providing a framework for students in middle school with age-appropriate activities that expose them to academic, career, and technical fields of study that enable them to explore a wide range of postsecondary and career choices.
- **Aligning Student Success Plans with Success-Ready Pathways** by utilizing LAUNCH for Students that guides educators and students through documenting academic and extracurricular activities that align with success-ready pathways.
- **Building Success-Ready Pathways to a Diploma** by developing processes and requirements for success-ready pathways that align with high-wage, high-demand careers for all high school graduates. This includes processes to manage approved pathways over time, ensuring that pathways offered are based on current labor-market information.

Early Career Experiences



Arkansas LEARNS requires students to incorporate career awareness and exploration activities (§ 6-16-1802) to expose them to academic, career, and technical fields of study. As students progress towards high school graduation, it is crucial to offer opportunities for career-connected learning that are tailored to student interests and involve hands-on experiences. This approach can give students a valuable head start in planning their academic and career paths. This progression for early career experiences is designed to guide districts and schools in facilitating age-appropriate activities that enable students to explore a wide range of career choices that resonate with student interests.

Career Awareness Progression



Elementary School

Career Awareness

Students become familiar with careers through learning that connects classroom instruction to future work. Career awareness strategies show students various types of careers and stimulate interest in future work.

Middle School

Career Exploration

Students learn about themselves, including their interests, values, and personality types, and their career options. Students also begin to explore the world of work and begin to plan for their futures.

High School

Career Preparation

Students learn how to be successful in their future career pathway, including deepening their understanding of how to be successful in the workplace. Students have more opportunities to learn through workplace experience.

Middle School Career Exploration



Students must complete four early career awareness and exploration activities per year **and document them in grades 6, 7, and 8.**

These include any activity that creates links to:

- what a student does in school
- what a student wants to achieve in life
- **AND** exposing students to career and technical and academic fields of study.

Activities may include, without limitation, the following:

- field trips,
- guest speakers,
- community services,
- dedicated curricula,
- And activities **designed to introduce students to occupations that are in demand in Arkansas.**

CTE Accelerated Learning Opportunities



Accelerated CTE Pathways

- Offering level one courses in the 8th grade
 - No approval required
 - Minimum equipment is still required
 - Course standards still remain the same
 - Pathway completer by end of grade 10
- Secondary Career Center Pathways
 - Students should be earning a certificate of proficiency (CP) or technical certificate (TC) at minimum if they attend two years.
 - Post-secondary credit is the most common credit awarded.

Vision of a Success-Ready Arkansas Graduate



Arkansas success-ready students graduate K-12 education with the **knowledge, skills, abilities, and habits** to be successful on their chosen path, with options including **enlistment** in military service, **enrollment** in a postsecondary training or degree program, and **employment** in a career that provides a family-sustaining wage.

Case Studies



Around the room there are 6 case studies. Please break into groups and each group will:

1. Identify career exploration opportunities
2. Identify results of career exploration opportunities



Creating a Career Readiness Environment



- How does your school currently help students achieve the vision of a Success-Ready Graduate?
- What are your schools beliefs and assumptions that will lead to long term success and change?
- What is the life cycle of career exploration and fulfillment in your school?

Early Career Experiences Fall Training

Training Information

Who:

- ✓ Building Administrator
- ✓ Counselor
- ✓ Up to 4 Team Members



Where:

- ✓ Regionally
- ✓ Education Service Coops

What:

- ✓ Career Readiness Guide
- ✓ Grant Opportunity
- ✓ Hands-On Learning Lab



When:

- ✓ September 2026
- ✓ Half-Day Training
- ✓ See you there!

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Early Career Experiences

Career Exploration

helps students connect their interests and skills to future opportunities.

Middle School is the ideal time to begin discovering pathways that prepare them for enlistment, enrollment, and employment.



Register Here!



Professional Development opportunity for Middle School Teams

Teams focused on building:

- Career Awareness
- Career Exploration
- Community of Career Readiness

Training @ Each ESC September 2026

Early Career Exploration Agenda

Time	Topic
9:00 AM to 9:30 AM	Introduction
9:30 AM to 10:00 AM	Hearing from Experts (Masterclass)
10:00 AM to 11:00 AM	Creating Career Readiness Culture Self-Evaluation Rubric
11:00 AM to 11:30 AM	Hands-On Learning: Paxton & Patterson Demo
11:30 AM to 12:00 PM	Grant Opportunity

- Two trainings at each ESC
 - AM Training
 - 9AM-12PM
 - 1PM-4PM
- Select Date [Here](#)
 - Coordinate date with CTE Coordinator
- Attendees must include
 - Building Admin
 - Counselor
 - Team of 4 other staff
- Must attend to be eligible for grant opportunity.

Grant Opportunity Paxton & Patterson



- College & Career Readiness Lab
 - Level 2 Exploration
- Grant Includes
 - Lab Materials
 - Lab Curriculum
 - Instructor Training
- Grant Application Due
 - November 1st
- Grant Notification
 - December 1st
- Lab Installation
 - January 2027
- Teacher Training
 - January 2027

Middle School Invitations



- Any campus serving grades 6,7,8 will receive the following invitation kit.
- Kits will be delivered by CTE Coordinators beginning in July.
- Kits Include
 - Update Career Cluster Posters
 - Letter discussing Early Career Experiences
 - Invitation to Early Career Experiences Training
 - Success Ready Graduate Promotional Items

Q & A

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