



Career and Technical Education

CTE DIRECTIONS

Career and Technical Education (CTE) News and Information

January 2026

Career and Technical Education provides all students access to high-quality, rigorous career-focused programs that result in attainment of credentials with labor market value.

Utah Durable Skills

In today's rapidly evolving job market technical skills alone are often not enough. Employers consistently emphasize the need for graduates who can lead teams, solve complex problems, communicate effectively, and adapt to new technologies and work environments. Utah CTE wants to ensure that students are not only technically proficient but also possess the invaluable durable skills that will set them apart from their competition in the workforce.

As Utah CTE continues to share a durable skill each month, this month we highlight the skill of **innovation**. Innovation combines entrepreneurial creativity and critical thinking to solve problems by using imaginative approaches and evaluating ideas with analytical skills. Key components of innovation include risk-taking, problem-solving, critical thinking, and curiosity.



Why Innovation Matters in CTE

Our CTE students will enter industries that are constantly evolving due to new technology and market demands. The ability to innovate ensures they can:

- **Adapt to Industry Changes:** Quickly apply problem-solving skills to new equipment, processes, and challenges that emerge in their career field.
- **Drive Improvement:** Not just follow instructions, but look for better, more efficient, and more creative ways to complete tasks and projects.
- **Bridge Theory and Practice:** Use critical thinking and analysis to translate complex concepts into practical working solutions.
- **Develop Career Resilience:** Students who can innovate are less likely to be displaced by automation, as their unique creative input becomes their primary value.

Below are some practical ideas for teaching:

- **Design Sprints or "Hackathons":** Dedicate a short, intense period (e.g., 50 minutes or a full class block) where teams must rapidly conceive, prototype, and test a solution to a specific challenge. This forces quick, creative decision-making and rapid iteration (risk-taking).
- **"What If..." Scenario Planning:** Present a disruption in the field and require students to innovatively plan for it. This fosters critical thinking and problem solving under pressure.
- **Reverse Engineering and Deconstruction:** Provide students with a finished product or process and challenge them to take it apart (physically or conceptually) to understand how it works and then propose three distinct ways to make it better. This is excellent for building analytical skills.
- **The "Five Whys" Technique:** When troubleshooting or analyzing a problem, teach students to consistently ask "Why?" five times to dig past the symptoms and uncover the root cause. This deep dive encourages sustained critical thinking.
- **Student-Led Failure Analysis:** Implement a "Failure Log" or "Lesson Learned" board where students anonymously post project failures and what they learned from them. Recognizing and analyzing failure is the foundation of risk-taking and iteration in innovation.

Advice to Students

Utah high school seniors were asked, “What advice would you offer to future students about taking CTE courses during high school? Bentley gives this advice.

Bentley: Future Nurse

“From the moment I took my first health science class I knew I had discovered my future career. The subjects of anatomy, patient care, and the intricacies of the medical world not only brought me immense joy but also instilled in me a profound sense of purpose. These classes served as essential steppingstones towards my future, inspiring me to absorb every bit of knowledge I could before embarking on my college journey. This passion has fueled my determination to pursue a career in nursing, and I have been working diligently ever since to transform that dream into reality.

“To future students who are planning on taking CTE classes, I would totally recommend it to help you grow your future and expand your knowledge for a career. Start early while you’re in high school and get a head start on your career. From personal experience, my biggest advice to any future student is to take CTE classes seriously. Looking back, I’m incredibly grateful for the opportunities CTE provided, and it even made me love school in a way I never thought possible.”



Pathful

Have you heard of the work-based learning program called Pathful?



[Pathful](#) is a powerful virtual work-based learning platform that is now available to all Utah middle and high school students and educators. Whether you are seeking ways to increase high-quality industry engagement in the classroom, or need quick effective career exploration activities, Pathful delivers. The program provides schools with a work-based learning platform that connects 7-12 grade students currently enrolled in one or more CTE courses with professionals in a variety of industries. To get started, or learn more, complete the [Pathful Access Form](#) and a Pathful representative will contact you.

Pathful Professional Development

CCA teachers, plan now to join the Pathful virtual professional development session. The session will cover what Pathful is, how it benefits students and teachers, and how to integrate it into CCA standards.

Date: Thursday, January 15, 2026

Time: 3:15–4:00 PM (Zoom link will be sent to registrants)

RSVP by Friday, January 9, 2026: [Pathful Professional Development Form](#)

Questions? Contact Breckon.Heywood@schools.utah.gov

2026 Utah Legislative Session

The 2026 Utah Legislative Session begins Tuesday, January 20 and continues through Friday, March 6. You can track the education bills via the Utah State Board of Education Bill Tracking document at <https://tinyurl.com/3e3v773n>.



@UtahCTE Social Media Highlights

- Do you have a great lesson that integrates STEM subjects? The Utah STEM Action Center is calling for teachers to submit a proposal for the STEM Best Practices conference on June 18, 2026. Share your lesson with K-12 educators statewide by submitting a proposal at <https://tinyurl.com/yrv95jr2>.
- Jordan School District highlights graduates who went from studying to become firefighters in the classroom to the fighting fires on the front lines in Utah. Listen to their story in Supercast Episode 324 <https://tinyurl.com/ye59u2et>.
- Do you need a smile or a jump-start to your day? Weber School District in collaboration with CTE provides the Happiness Hotline. Dial 833-88HAPPY (833-844-2779) and hear elementary kids give life advice, encouragement, and tell their favorite joke.
- In a Tooele School District podcast, listen to three educators who share how their careers in industry influences their teaching and preparing students for life after high school <https://tinyurl.com/kh2wx8f8>.

Calendar:

January 7: [Utah State Board of Education Meeting](#) – 250 East 500 South – Salt Lake City, UT

January 8: [Utah State Charter School Board Meeting](#) – 250 East 500 South – Salt Lake City, UT

[Utah CTE Calendar](#) | [ACTE Calendar](#)

Utah CTE classes are open to all qualified students without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age.

