

# *SABBATICAL REPORT*

*Building a CTE Framework That Enhances Career  
Pathways for K-12 Students Transitioning to the  
Community College*

*Winter 2025*

*Donald Easton*

*Lane Community College | Computer Information Technology*

## **I. Executive Summary**

This sabbatical project focused on planning a Career and Technical Education framework for students in grades 6 through 12, with the goal of eventually linking it to community college. By working directly with Lane County school districts, the project connects middle school exploration with actual college and career readiness. This partnership helps students move between grade levels without getting lost. It gives them a clear route that turns early interests into the specific certifications and industry skills they will actually need once they graduate and enter the workforce.

A central pillar of this framework is integrating career exploration with foundational technical skills as early as middle school. The project identified that students in grades 6 through 8 benefit significantly from early exposure to various career industries, allowing them to develop a sense of direction before they reach high school. The research examined how middle school curricula could better incorporate technical skill development through hands-on activities, such as workshops and labs, to build competencies early. Including this skill development will ensure that by the time students begin their high school careers, they already possess a functional understanding of the technical expectations and opportunities within their chosen fields.

Beyond purely technical abilities, the framework emphasizes the development of "soft skills," including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are essential for employability across all sectors. The project sought to identify the most effective strategies for implementing and expanding these CTE programs at the middle school level while promoting equity for all students. By the time students transition into higher education or the workforce, they are

equipped with not only industry-specific training and knowledge but also the professional mindset necessary to succeed in a competitive modern economy.

*NOTE: This project is very ambitious, and that this is just the preliminary phase of a much larger endeavor.*

## **II. Purpose and Objectives**

The project was driven by the need to develop a structured plan that promotes CTE education beginning in middle school (grades 6-8) and continues through high school and into college or professional careers. Key objectives included:

- **Skill Foundation:** Helping students develop strong technical and employability skills that serve as a building block for future education.
- **Equity and Access:** Promoting equity by ensuring all students have equal opportunities to explore diverse career industries.
- **Strategic Implementation:** Identifying the most effective strategies for expanding CTE programs at the middle school level.
- **Alignment:** Ensuring CTE pathways align closely with student interests and long-term career goals.

## **III. Methodology and Timeline**

The project followed an 11-week structured evaluation and data collection process within the participating districts

- Assessed current career exploration opportunities and whether students were adequately introduced to various career options.
- Evaluated existing technical skill development, including hands-on activities like workshops and labs, and investigated how these could be introduced to younger students.
- Analyzed the instruction of "soft skills" such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, and their efficacy for middle school learners.
- Examined career-specific training opportunities offered beyond the traditional classroom setting.
- Evaluated preparation for higher education (college applications/major selection) and career-bound requirements (licensure and industry experience).
- Completed data collection, finalized discussions, and compiled observations for the framework.

#### **IV. Key Findings and Areas of Focus**

The research highlighted that a successful grade 6-12 framework must integrate:

1. **Early Intervention:** Introducing career exploration at the middle school level allows students to develop interests before reaching high school.
2. **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Effective pathways require a partnership between K-12 educators, college partners, and industry professionals. Involvement of these stakeholders is crucial to the success of a career pathway.
3. **Comprehensive Guidance:** Students require specific guidance on the licensure and requirements of their chosen fields, rather than just general academic advice. This

advising should be intentional and provided by qualified professionals familiar with the discipline in question.

## **V. Conclusion**

Beginning Career and Technical Education pathways in middle school provides students with a vital head start in developing both technical and employability skills. By introducing these pathways as early as grade 8, students gain a comprehensive understanding of various career options and the foundational skills—such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication—required to succeed in the modern workforce. This early exposure allows for practical, hands-on learning through workshops and labs, ensuring that students are better prepared for the more rigorous and advanced coursework they will encounter in high school and post-secondary education.

More importantly, starting CTE pathways at the middle school level is a powerful tool for promoting equity and enhancing long-term academic success. Providing all students with equal opportunities to explore their interests early in their educational journey helps them make more informed decisions about their future career goals, leading to more focused and engaged learners by the time they reach higher education. This strategic alignment creates a seamless transition across grade levels and can have a profound effect on diversity in higher education by reaching non-traditional students before they finalize their academic trajectories.

## **V. Final Reflection**

This sabbatical project holds significant value for Lane Community College and the BTT division by strengthening the educational pipeline and enhancing student readiness. By

establishing a guided pathway framework starting in grade 8, the project fosters deeper collaboration between K-12 educators and LCC faculty, creating a more cohesive transition for students entering our technical programs. For the BTT Division specifically, this alignment ensures that students arrive with a foundational understanding of technical and soft skills—such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication—allowing faculty to focus on advanced coursework rather than remedial introductory concepts. This early engagement results in more focused and engaged learners who have a clearer understanding of their long-term academic and career goals within the division.

At the institutional level and within the discipline of computer science, the significance of this work lies in its commitment to equity and the modernization of technical training. Reaching students during their middle school years has a profound effect on diversity by introducing non-traditional and underrepresented groups to CTE pathways before they finalize their academic trajectories. This framework would also address the critical need for a diverse and well-prepared cohort of students capable of meeting the demands of high-growth, high-skill industries. By aligning early education with college-level curricula and market data, the framework ensures that Lane Community College continues to lead in community workforce development, providing all students with equitable access to the credentials necessary for success in the modern economy.