



Career and Technical Education

Arkansas law requires that “A rigorous career and technical education program of study that links secondary education and postsecondary education and combines academic and technical education in a structured sequence of courses that progresses from broad foundation skills to occupationally specific courses shall be made available” (§ 6-5-1002(b)(1)).

School and District Requirements

Under ADE’s Rules Governing Standards for Accreditation of Arkansas Public Schools and School Districts, schools serving K-4 students are required to provide instruction each year in practical living skills and career exploration, while schools that serve students in grades 5 through 8 are required to annually provide instruction in career and technical education (CTE).

High schools are required to teach nine units of CTE, representing at least three of 16 occupational areas, called career clusters. Each career cluster is divided into career pathways and further into programs of study. For example, the Hospitality and Tourism career cluster is divided into two career pathways: 1.) Restaurant & Food & Beverage Svs. and 2.) Travel and Tourism. The Restaurant & Food and Beverage pathway is then divided into two programs of study: 1.) Culinary Arts and 2.) Food Production, Management and Services.

Arkansas school districts collectively offered a total of 58 programs of study in 2016-17, though individual districts offered only a selection of those programs of study. There is significant variation in the number of programs of study offered by each high school, ranging from three programs of study in seven of the state’s traditional high schools to 24 programs in one high school.

According to ADE’s course code management system, there are 601 separate CTE courses districts can offer high school students. Examples of these courses include Aerospace Engineering, Beef Science, Cabinetry, Keyboarding and Turf Grass Management.

On average, traditional school districts taught about 43 CTE courses each in 2016-17, while the 16 open enrollment charter schools that had high school students taught an average of about eight CTE courses. The following table shows the most popular CTE courses based on the number of students enrolled in 2016-17. The most popular CTE course was Computerized Business Applications, which was taught in 270 schools.

| 2016-17 Course | # of Students |
|--|---------------|
| Computerized Business Applications | 15,947 |
| Family & Consumer Sciences | 13,300 |
| Food & Nutrition | 8,683 |
| Survey of Agriculture Systems | 8,168 |
| Child Development | 7,370 |
| Parenting | 6,685 |
| Keystone* | 6,192 |
| Financial Literacy | 5,096 |
| Digital Communications I-Digital Layout & Design | 4,578 |
| Driver’s Education | 4,249 |

Graduation Requirements

Just as high schools are required to *teach* CTE courses, students are required to *take* career courses as a component of their graduation requirements. To graduate from high school, all students are required to take six Career Focus units.

Career Focus credits and CTE courses are generally similar in concept. However, students can receive Career Focus credits toward their graduation requirement for courses that are not considered CTE courses.

High school guidance counselors or other school staff work with students to create a “Career Development Portfolio” that contains their personal career planning information. Courses that align with students’ career plans can be counted as their career focus units even if the classes are not generally considered CTE courses.

Delivery of CTE Instruction

School districts can offer career and technical courses in two ways.

- They can offer the courses on their own campus, using their own teachers or online digital learning courses, or
- They can send students to the closest Secondary Area Career Center.

Districts may offer some courses on their own campus and send students to Career Centers for others. Career centers draw students from multiple high schools, allowing them to provide high-cost career and technical programs more efficiently. The programs of study districts most frequently offer through Career Centers are:

- Medical Professions
- Welding
- Automotive Service Technology

The career centers are typically sponsored by high schools or two-year colleges and are designed to serve high school students within a defined geographical region. State law calls for the establishment of at least one area vocational center in each of the 15 education service cooperative service areas and one in Pulaski County. There are currently 25 Career Centers with 27 satellite locations and 2 pilot centers.

To support the Career Centers, the General Assembly provides about \$20.1 million, which is distributed to the centers based on the number of students enrolled in each center’s courses.