

Career Connections Conference: **The Path to Peak PERFORMANCE in CTE** June 16-17, 2025

Tinley Park Convention Center | Tinley Park, Illinois



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Career Exploration and Development

Exploring the Game of Life: Making it Fun, But Keeping It Real

Description: How do you make career exploration and development fun? Well...you dress up for your career, put up a wheel, and create a GIANT-sized Game of Life! Our CTE team will share our experiences engaging with high school students and captivating audiences through student-focused events. Utilizing key concepts from The Game of Life, students enter the game, pick a career card, spin the wheel, and answer questions to further their knowledge about what their future could look like. Keeping the spirit of the game alive, but making conversations real is the true key to our success. Resources as well as tips for modification in various settings and audiences will be shared with the group.

Presenter(s): Kathy Wight, Brittany Stegall, Emily Smith

What is SkillsUSA?

Description: SkillsUSA empowers its members to become world-class workers, leaders, and responsible American citizens. During this time, we will deliver an overview of SkillsUSA's history, program elements, and membership benefits to get to the root of how we achieve that mission. Founded as Vocational Industrial Clubs of America, SkillsUSA has come a long way since its founding with the support of engaged chapters and advisors; we will find out how.

Presenter(s): Christopher Anderson, Katie Bye

Claim Your Future: Linking Today's Educational Choices to Future Careers and Financial Stability

Description: Claim Your Future (CYF) is a proven, engaging educational game that encourages students to explore career pathways, financial decision making, and the future return on investment of postsecondary education and training. The game can be played online or in-person with elementary, middle, and high school students. Join this session for a live demonstration of the newly enhanced CYF game and learn how you can get access to your FREE kit today!

Presenter(s): Manuel Talavera

Alumni Career Connection

Description: The purpose of Alumni Career Connections is multi-faceted. The site connects students with alumni in career fields of interest. It allows the district to celebrate success and heritage, and allows alumni to create connections. The site introduces parents and students to emerging career fields and opportunities to help them find their pathway. The site allows businesses to locate alumni to recruit for employment.

Presenter(s): Travis Mackey

The GPEAK System: Essential skills resources, assessments, and training for educators

Description: Join us for a session on GPEAK, an initiative developed by Illinois Central College in collaboration with key stakeholders including Peoria's CEO Council, Regional Workforce Development Alliance, Greater Peoria Economic Development Council, and the Illinois Community College Board. The GPEAK system aims to develop and validate Illinois' ten essential employability skills through a system of curricular resources, assessments, and badges. GPEAK students can earn badges by demonstrating mastery of the key performance indicators aligned to the essential skills. Discover how these resources have been transformed into an educator facing training site with easily digestible modules to empower instructors to cultivate college and career readiness by nurturing the development of essential employability skills. This session will be interactive with time to explore how you can incorporate GPEAK into your courses and programs to prepare students for college and career.

Presenter(s): Heather Penczak, Jessica Winn

Introducing SkillsUSA Illinois' Work-based Learning Platform

Description: During this session, we will explore how SkillsUSA is the solution provider to support you in guiding students from middle school through early adulthood as they explore, engage with, and prepare for careers. From career discovery through transition to employment, SkillsUSA supports each stage with activities, outcomes, and community impact.

Presenter(s): Christopher Anderson, Katie Bye

Reimagining Internships: Portfolio-Based Approaches

Description: Portfolio-Based Internships will present an in-depth exploration of a collaboration between Round Lake Area School District 116 and Lake County Tech Campus, as the organizations developed a pilot program for HBS students to complete a portfolio-based internship in the Human and Public Service Pathway, specifically Law Enforcement and School Safety. The internship was built through a portfolio of School Safety and Law Enforcement experiences facilitated by Round Lake District Safety personnel, who acted as the employer and team of industry experts. Students developed HBS Technical Competencies and Essential Employability Skills through their experiences with diverse facets of School Safety and its role in supporting a positive school and community climate. The experiences collectively totaled 60 hours. Issues around transportation equity were addressed with students completing the internship in their home district. The Portfolio-Based Internship is a valuable model for districts and CCR Stakeholders to potentially customize and scale across all seven Career Pathways.

Presenter(s): Carolyn Carcoran

PaCE Yourself with CIS360's Work-Based Learning Tracker

Description: The path to peak performance for students is to pace themselves and run a race designed by them with tools provided by us as educators. The goal to empower students and strengthen our workforce system and economy is one of these reasons why the Illinois Department of Employment Security's Career Information System created the Work-Based Learning Tracker. Our work-based learning tracker provides guidance for students as they record and maintain data from their own real-world experiences, networking opportunities and employer engagement. The WBL benefits for students is increased readiness needed for the professional world, industry relevance, and increased potential of securing the job they want. As a work-based learning continuum activity, the Tracker meets the guidelines for the Postsecondary and Career Expectations framework and supports ISBE career readiness indicators. Attend this session and learn more about how you can help your students over their own personal finish lines.

Presenter(s): Troy McMilan

Policy to Practice: Guidelines, Strategies, and Challenges of Applying for and Implementing CCPEs

Description: This session is designed to guide participants through the process of applying for and implementing College and Career Pathway Endorsements. Participants will gain an understanding of the essential guidelines and theoretical foundations behind these endorsements.

In addition, the steps in the application process will be broken down and application experiences and tips will be shared. The session will also address common challenges faced by schools in obtaining and implementing endorsements.

By the end of the session, attendees will be better equipped to support the development of college and career pathways in their districts. Attendees will also be provided with resources and templates to assist in the process.

Presenter(s): Ben Owen, Joe Sieczkowski

Taking Back the Trades! Trades School Grant Program Recipient Panel

Description: Learn how Illinois Community Colleges utilized State of Illinois Trades School Grant Program funding to prepare in-school youth for opportunities in trades programs in some of the following sectors: Architecture and Construction, Energy, Healthcare, Information Technology, Manufacturing, Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics, and Transportation, Distribution & Logistics. Through grant funding, programs were designed to serve students enrolled in high school, particularly those in their junior and senior years intending to transition to additional training and employment in the trades following graduation. Programs also created partnerships and pathways with middle schools for career awareness and exploration activities for middle school-age students.

Presenter(s): Janelle Washington

Explore Multiple Paths: D128's Multi-Prong Approach to College & Career Readiness

Description: Learn how District 128 (Libertyville & Vernon Hills High Schools) is building district-wide college and career readiness systems and programs for its students. Our collaborative work includes weaving together College & Career Pathway Endorsements, a dual credit strategy, a career exploration framework, workplace internships, the PaCE Framework, and more. We'll touch on using the digital platform SchoolLinks and how it is critical to ensure our systems and efforts align.

Presenter(s): Benjamin Rodriguez

Curriculum Enhancement

CTE and SEL

Description: There is a clear link between CTE and SEL. The hands-on, active, and “authentic” nature of CTE coursework helps address the social emotional challenges our students face. Research tells us we retain more learning, relieve stress, and transfer more knowledge over time when CTE incorporates selected SEL routines and activities in our courses.

Presenter(s): Brian Gordon, Mary Waters

Give Me TEN: A Business-First Approach to Work-Based Learning

Description: Engaging businesses in work-based learning requires more than just offering internship opportunities—it demands a partnership that respects the realities of running a business. Schools often focus on educational outcomes, while businesses prioritize profitability and workflow. How can these two worlds align to create sustainable, meaningful partnerships?

Enter the Give Me TEN programs, a business-first approach to work-based learning. This innovative model flips the script, allowing businesses to dictate what they can realistically offer based on their job flow and profitability, while still providing students with valuable real-world experiences. By prioritizing business needs, the program ensures partnerships are practical, productive, and long-lasting.

Join us to explore how educators and administrators can simplify school-business relationships, engage local industries, and create work-based learning programs that truly work for everyone. Leave with actionable strategies to implement this forward-thinking approach in your own community.

Presenter(s): Susan Dickson

How to Operate a Student-Run Apparel Decorating Business

Description: Interested in starting a School Based Enterprise? This session will teach you everything you need to know, start to finish, to begin the operation of an apparel decorating business within your school. Learn about the necessary equipment, vendors, managing the classroom, common problems and their solutions, and more! Content can be used to teach a full year course or can be implemented into a club like FBLA, DECA, FCCLA, etc. Tricia Campbell has implemented this course at two schools and has taught over 400 other educators across the US how to do so in their schools.

Presenter(s): Tricia Campbell

Tailoring Career and Technical Education (CTE) for ALL Learners

Description: In order to truly serve all students, CTE programs must be inclusive, accessible, and equitable. This session will explore strategies for creating adaptable CTE programs that meet the diverse needs of every learner, including those with varying abilities, backgrounds, and learning styles. Participants will learn how to implement inclusive practices, such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiated instruction, and culturally relevant pedagogy. We will discuss how to engage nontraditional learners, support students with disabilities, and foster diversity in CTE offerings. Through practical tools and success stories, attendees will gain insights into making CTE programs more inclusive, helping students achieve success and prepare for high-demand careers.

Presenter(s): Katie Trier, Erica Paulsen, Erin McMorrow, Jan Garcia

First Impressions Matter: Equipping Teachers to Guide Students for Job Interviews

Description: Equipping youth with the skills and knowledge needed to make a great first impression is the initial step in helping youth ace their first interview. Join 4-H Youth Development Educators, Martha Ebbesmeyer and Kelly Lafferty, for an active workshop experience and explore activities designed to help build your student's confidence while preparing for an apprenticeship application or a summer job interview. Help youth showcase their skills effectively through preparation and practice with simple, ready-to-use resources.

Participants will also gain knowledge about free workforce development programs available statewide from University of Illinois 4-H Extension staff. By the end of the session, attendees will be equipped with practical tools and ideas to enhance their classroom lessons.

Presenter(s): Martha Ebbesmeyer, Kelly Lafferty

Law and Public Safety Pathways - everything you need to know (and then some)!

Description: Pathways in the Law and Public Safety (LPS) areas are growing and changing! This session is for administrators and instructors in these pathways. The new national legal studies pathway will be introduced. Updates on fire, emergency medical services and public safety pathways will be provided. New resources in law enforcement pathways will be covered including the new investigation and forensics courses. The new tech such as the addition of drones to LPS as well as simulators will also be addressed.

Presenter(s): Thomas Washburn

AI & the Future of Work: Preparing CTE Students for the New Economy

Description: This workshop explores the transformative impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the future of work and equips CTE educators with the knowledge and tools to prepare students for AI-driven careers. Participants will gain an understanding of the current state of AI, future trends, and the evolving career landscape. The session will delve into practical applications of AI in various CTE fields, offering concrete examples and demonstrations of how teachers can integrate AI concepts and tools into their curriculum and daily instruction.

Presenter(s): Eric Santos

Building Skills That Add Up: Mathematics Integration in CTE

Description: Unleash the potential of Career and Technical Education (CTE) by integrating mathematics into your programs. This session will explore the natural alignment between math and CTE disciplines, highlighting how these connections can deepen student understanding and foster real-world applications. Participants will gain practical strategies and implementation tools to incorporate math seamlessly into CTE instruction, making it both accessible and meaningful for students. With a focus on actionable takeaways, this session will provide real examples you can bring directly to your classroom, helping students see the relevance of math in their career pathways. Whether you're looking to strengthen math integration in your existing curriculum or searching for new ideas, this session offers the support, inspiration, and resources needed to make it happen. Prepare to transform your approach to teaching and empower your students to connect math concepts to their future success!

Presenter(s): Charmell Stoxstell, Gina Fulton

CTE Instructional Design: Horace Mann Meets ChatGBT

Description: Discover the transformative intersection of timeless educational philosophy and cutting-edge artificial intelligence in this provocative session designed for forward-thinking educators and instructional designers.

Join us as we explore how the foundational principles of educational pedagogical practices can be reimaged and amplified through emerging AI technologies. This session will challenge you to:

- Critically examine the evolving landscape of educational technology
- Understand the potential and limitations of AI in instructional design
- Develop strategies that blend traditional pedagogical wisdom with innovative digital tools
- Bring your insights, skepticism, and imagination. Together, we'll navigate the complex terrain where time-honored educational principles meet the potential of artificial intelligence.

This is not just a session about technology—it's a conversation about the future of learning itself. Note - this session is focused on law and public safety CTE programs, but other CTE pathways are welcome to attend.

Presenter(s): Thomas Washburn

Guiding Teen Girls to Leadership Success: Strategies for Developing Leader Identity

Description: Discover practical strategies to help teen girls develop their leader identity and reach their full potential. This session equips educators with tools to guide students in recognizing their strengths, building confidence, and embracing leadership roles while exploring career pathways. Participants will explore research-based techniques to foster a growth mindset, promote self-advocacy, and encourage meaningful goal-setting.

Through interactive discussions and real-world examples, attendees will explore toolkits and resources that inspire young women to lead with purpose and resilience. This session offers actionable insights to empower the next generation of female leaders. Join us to uncover the path to peak performance while helping students develop their career pathways and thrive in leadership and beyond.

Presenter(s): Kimberly Clayton-Code

The Power of Partnerships: Enhancing Postsecondary Success Through Dual Credit and Career Academy Collaboration

Description: This session will explore successful models for collaboration between community colleges and high schools, with a focus on the Northeast Consortium for College and Career Success (NECSS) and the Power of 15 program at Harper College. Attendees will gain insights into effective partnership frameworks, dual credit initiatives, career academies, and collaborative curriculum development strategies that bridge secondary and postsecondary education.

Presenter(s): Joanne Ivory, Dr. Yolonda Barnes

Math Pathways and Corequisites for Technical Math

Description: Illinois has been implementing multiple initiatives to reduce the need for developmental (remedial) courses and increase completion including the DERA legislation and the PWR Act. Both impact technical math positively when utilized as intended. This session will focus on how math pathways and corequisite support can be implemented at community colleges to increase student outcomes and experiences in technical math courses. Attendees will learn about colleges using these practices and the impacts.

Presenter(s): Kathleen Almy

New Resources for Educators Planning Team-Based Challenges

Description: The NIU Illinois CTE Project, in collaboration with ISBE, will present three new resources for educators that provide clarity on how to deliver high-quality Team-Based Challenges. Presenters will share information and review the Team-Based Challenges Library, the Companion Guides, and the Authentic Task vs. Authentic Question resources.

Presenter(s): Sophie Nuding, Bill Rose

Data and Program Implementation

Integrating Career and Technical Education Pathways and Instructional Leadership Team: A Case Study at Curie High School

Description: Curie High School, a Chicago Public School (CPS), is the third largest CPS school and leads in the number of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and serves more Hispanic and English Language Learner (ELL) students than any other CPS school. Students enroll in Curie by living in the neighborhood or by selecting one of Curie's programs including Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), International Baccalaureate (IB), the Arts, or one of 10 Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways. The individual CTE pathways can appear to be in isolation given that most pathways consist of only one teacher. In this session, participants will learn how Curie CTE teachers collaborated with the Instructional Leadership Team to shift instructional practices and take steps to develop cohesion in the curriculum across the school's CTE pathways by focusing on reading.

Presenter(s): Alexander Kmicikewycz, Araceli Aponte

PaCE Overview

Description: This presentation provides an in-depth overview of the Illinois Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) Framework that the Illinois Student Assistance Commission was tasked with developing as a result of the Postsecondary Workforce Readiness (PWR) Act. Topics covered include: PWR legislation, an overview of the IL PaCE framework, the PaCE implementation process, as well as ISAC resources and support options.

Presenter(s): Salma Uribe

16 and 17 Year olds: The Truth About Employment and Internships

Description: Examine Illinois state and US Department of Labor employment law concerning 16 and 17 year-olds. Learn what the law allows 16 and 17 year-olds to do in employment and internships in a variety of industries. Leave with written guidance from Illinois and the US DOL to support your requests with employer partners to host interns and employ 16 and 17 year-olds.

Presenter(s): Cassie Blickem

Maximizing EFE Systems: Roles, Benefits, and Collaboration Strategies

Description: This presentation provides an in-depth exploration of Illinois' Education for Employment (EFE) systems and their pivotal role in advancing Career and Technical Education (CTE). Attendees will gain insights into the essential services EFEs offer, including fiscal oversight, program approval, teacher and student support, and fostering partnerships with industry and education stakeholders. The session highlights strategies to maximize EFE system collaboration, such as leveraging grants, engaging in professional development, organizing career events, and developing innovative programs tailored to local workforce needs. Participants will learn practical tips for connecting with EFE Directors, sharing success stories, and enhancing their involvement to create impactful CTE experiences for students. Real-world examples of successful EFE initiatives, such as dual credit agreements, industry advisory committees, and career exploration events, will be shared. This presentation is ideal for educators, administrators, and industry partners seeking to elevate their understanding and use of EFE systems.

Presenter(s): Kaleb Smith

Achieving a 100% Quality Program of Study: The Nine Components

Description: This presentation focuses on optimizing and completing the nine essential components of a Program of Study submission to ensure a comprehensive, high-quality educational experience that leads to 100% quality achievement. This session should help guide the Educator for Employment System Directors (EFE) and administrators to elevate their program and ensure that students achieve their career and academic goals. ISBE staff will also share information about the upcoming roll out of the digital platform to support continuous improvement for each component of the Program of Study Submission system.

Presenter(s): Shaista Saiyed

CTE for All Students

Urban Roots: Cultivating Urban Agriculture for a Sustainable Future

Description: In this dynamic 50-minute presentation, participants will explore cutting-edge advancements in urban farming that are revolutionizing food production in metropolitan areas. We will delve into innovative techniques, such as vertical farming, hydroponics, rooftop gardening, and aquaponics, and examine their impact on sustainability, food security, and community well-being. Through practical examples, attendees will gain insights into the latest technologies and best practices driving the next generation of urban agriculture. Whether you're just getting started, a seasoned urban farmer, an advocate or simply passionate about sustainable living, this presentation will equip you with the knowledge and inspiration to contribute to the growth of urban farming in your community.

Presenter(s): Carolyn Vazquez

Building Rural CTE through Energy & Climate Resilience

Description: Rural areas around Illinois struggle to grow and sustain strong CTE programs. However, rural schools and communities live in the intersection of key sectors that are critical to the future success of Illinois and the world: energy and the environment. Rural communities are at the frontlines of clean energy production, and are also disproportionately impacted by the changing climate. In this panel discussion, The Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools & The Rural IL CTE Project will host Trane, Inc., rural education leaders, and rural CTE educators to discuss how rural schools can utilize energy and the climate to build innovative and robust CTE opportunities for all students.

Presenter(s): John Glasgow

The Dual Credit Equity and Access Grant Experience

Description: This session will discuss the experiences of various community colleges that received the Dual Credit Access and Equity Grant. Panelists will focus on how the grant benefited students and share their experiences with the grant funding.

Presenter(s): LeNie Adolphson

Leverage Free Statewide EdTech Services to Maximize Impact

Description: Join the Learning Technology Center (LTC) as we introduce you to free and low-cost services and support available to all K-12 educators and districts. Partially funded by the Illinois State Board of Education, the LTC helps districts, schools, and educators harness the power of technology to empower student learning. This session will provide resources to address specific technical needs in a variety of CTE areas and will also address implementing CTE across the content areas. The LTC provides a wide range of services, including custom professional learning for staff, consulting, and district planning on topics like technology integration, computer science, and makerspaces and manages EdTech cooperative purchasing to save districts money. Whether your classroom focus is in a particular CTE area or you are a district leader, this session will equip you with the knowledge to enhance technology-enhanced teaching and learning for your whole organization.

Presenter(s): Melinda Fiscus

The Current State of CS CTE in Illinois: Findings and Future Directions

Description: This session will share findings and future directions from a state-wide analysis of high school computer science (CS) coursework. We will highlight CTE's pervasive influence on CS education in Illinois. We first outline the prevalence of CTE in the most enrolled CS courses, identify the CS CTE sequences, and compare enrollment patterns across student groups to CS non-CTE courses. Further, our work identifies potential "gateway" courses that can diversify CS CTE sequences, highlighting their role in shaping equitable student access. Lastly, we discuss who teaches CS CTE, including a student's likelihood of having a qualified teacher. Our research underscores that CTE serves as an important and viable pathway to engage students in CS that broadens access to high quality education.

Presenter(s): Chen Ying

Embracing the Power of Cooperative Purchasing with the Illinois Learning Technology Purchasing Program (ILTPP)

Description: Tired of the cumbersome traditional bid process for technology procurement? Join us for an informative session on the Illinois Learning Technology Purchase Program (ILTPP), a service of the Learning Technology Center (LTC)! This session is perfect for anyone in a purchasing role at their building. Witness firsthand how ILTPP simplifies your district's technology acquisition, empowers you to leverage the strength of collective agreements, and ultimately optimizes your technology landscape. This session will reveal the easy-to-navigate path to membership and unlock a world of technology solutions. Get hands-on guidance through the user-friendly joining process and explore the vast partner directory. Say goodbye to time-consuming bidding processes and embrace the efficiency and convenience of cooperative purchasing with the NEW ILTPP Marketplace, streamlining procurement and taking the manual work out of using a purchasing cooperative.

Presenter(s): Melinda Fiscus, Hope Hardin-Borbely, Amanda Bruns

Bridging Skills and Opportunities: Integrating the Seal of Biliteracy within CTE programs

Description: In this presentation, we will provide an overview of the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy, a valuable credential recognizing students' bilingual skills. We will explore how school districts can integrate students' bilingual abilities and world language studies into CTE programs. By aligning CTE with bilingualism, districts can create unique opportunities that promote bilingual career pathways, helping students stand out in an increasingly diverse, global, and competitive workforce. This session will highlight the benefits of bilingualism in CTE, offering strategies for administrators to enhance their programs and prepare students for successful, bilingual careers.

Presenter(s): Karen Skinner

Work-Based Learning

Lessons Learned Building a Regional Work-Based Learning HUB

Description: In an uncertain economy, local industries are fighting to recruit and retain a capable workforce. In response, one innovative collective in Illinois is navigating a course to empower its employable community. Employ Central Illinois (ECI), once a distant aspiration of local educational leaders, will share its strategic vision to converge diverse goals and resources, paving the way for vital career pathways. The ECI region is one of the most disparate areas in the Midwest, where many face systemic challenges. This includes learners who identify as Black or Latina, women from various backgrounds, individuals from low-income households, and first-generation students pursuing higher education. This conference session will be an informative journey exploring Employ Central Illinois' vital discussions, braided funding, and robust infrastructure, all focused on envisioning a promising future for work-based learning in the region. Together, we can reshape the landscape of opportunity for all.

Presenter(s): Kevin McClure

Framework for Standing Up and Growing a Work-Based Learning/Internship Program

Description: Join us for an insightful session that will describe how one Illinois school district is standing up and growing their WBL/Career Internship program. Our WBL/Career Internship course is designed for students in career pathways working toward an Illinois College and Career Pathway Endorsement (CCPE). Explore how our district aligned our program to state initiatives and the many resources we use, including Schoollinks and AI, to ensure that our students have unique and meaningful Work-Based Learning experiences. This session is designed for educators, administrators, and career development/WBL professionals wanting to build and/or grow their Work-Based Learning/Internship program.

Presenter(s): Brett Thompson, Jill Hlavacek, Peter Hostrawser

Finding Free and Easy Resources for Developing Work-Based Learning Plan

Description: The demand for work-based learning (WBL) opportunities for students is growing rapidly. With ADVANCE CTE new National Career Cluster Framework, schools and businesses recognize the need and value of expanding the hands-on, real-world experience in preparing students for the workforce. Establishing a high-quality WBL program has become a priority. However, creating these programs can seem overwhelming. It doesn't have to be daunting—what's needed is a strong community plan.

Presenter(s): Everett Grady

Instructional Engagement

Taking Career Readiness to New Heights with Drones

Description: In this hands-on session, attendees will explore the use of drones as powerful tools for teaching career and technical education (CTE) in fields like agriculture, construction, media, and engineering. Drones provide unique opportunities for students to engage in coding, engineering design, and problem-solving, skills that are directly aligned with career readiness in emerging industries. Through live demonstrations, educators will learn how to incorporate drones into their classrooms, from autonomous flight coding to exploring drone applications in multimedia and other CTE-related fields. Participants will understand key drone terminology, career pathways, and FAA certification requirements. This session will also cover resources and project ideas to get started, ensuring that drones enhance student learning and better prepare them for the workforce. By the end of this session, CTE educators will have practical knowledge on integrating drones into their programs and be equipped with strategies to elevate student engagement and career readiness.

Presenter(s): Eric Santos

Stay Lit: Unlocking the Secret to Keeping High Schoolers Engaged

Description: "In this interactive session, educators will explore the LIT method, Listen, Interact, and Transform, as a powerful approach to engaging high school students. Khayla will walk attendees through practical strategies for transforming their lessons to meet the needs of today's learners, while encouraging an environment where mistakes are embraced as opportunities for growth. The session will tackle common challenges such as balancing engagement without overdoing it, updating outdated lessons, and navigating the fine line of being the "cool" teacher. Participants will collaborate, sharing lessons they struggle with and learning ways to make them more engaging and impactful. Khayla will discuss how education has evolved from pre-COVID to now and offer handouts that include the LIT method along with resources for finding trending teaching ideas. Teachers will leave with tools and strategies to better understand and meet the diverse needs of their students."

Presenter(s): Khayla Kelley-Morton

Illinois Business Education Association Updates for all Business and Computer Science Educators

Description: Stay in touch with offerings from the Illinois Business Education Association (IBEA). Discover professional development offerings, webinars, mentoring programs, membership, regional affiliates and many more resources available through IBEA. Great resource for all business and computer science educators.

Presenter(s): Rod McQuality, Heather Borowiak

Supporting the Transition of Future Teachers Through the Redbird Educator Scholars Program

Description: This session will focus on actionable strategies and best practices for preparing future educators to transition to college and the teacher education field successfully. The strategies are directly connected to the Post-secondary and Workforce Readiness Act's Essential Employability Competencies and focus on communication, problem-solving, decision-making, planning and organization, and initiative. In this interactive session, participants will engage with pre-service educators and program staff to explore specific interventions and initiatives implemented within the Redbird Educator Scholars Program. Attendees will gain insights into approaches to enhance academic and social preparedness, ensuring students possess the requisite skills to navigate the university and teacher education community. Join us to discover how you can build a strong foundation for your future educators and help effectively address the multifaceted challenges faced by pre-service educators, fostering their success and resilience in higher education and the teaching profession.

Presenter(s): Maria Luisa Zamudio-Mainou, Dr. Stacey Jones-Bock

Social Emotional Learning - Broken to be Made

Description: In today's classrooms, addressing students' social-emotional needs is just as important as academic instruction. This workshop will equip educators with the knowledge and strategies to foster emotional well-being, build resilience, and create a supportive learning environment.

Presenter(s): Charwana Morgan

ISBE Technical Assistance

ISBE Technical Assistance

Description: Join ISBE Principal Consultants for an open, come-and-go technical assistance session. This is your opportunity to ask questions, engage in discussions, and seek guidance on topics relevant to your work. There is no formal presentation—just a collaborative space to connect, clarify, and gain insights directly from ISBE experts. Whether you have specific questions or just want to listen and learn, stop by at your convenience!

Presenter(s): ISBE Principal Consultants

Additional information: This session will be offered twice.

Vendor Showcase

Exploring STEM Careers with Learning Blade: A Free Resource Illinois Educators

Description: Discover how Learning Blade can transform STEM education by engaging students with real-world missions and career pathways. This free supplemental resource, available to all schools in Illinois, connects classroom learning to real-world challenges, helping students understand how their interests and academic skills directly relate to STEM careers. Through online lessons and offline hands-on activities, Learning Blade introduces students to a wide variety of STEM professions, illuminating connections between classroom concepts and industry applications while expanding access to STEM opportunities for historically underrepresented populations. Fully-funded for Illinois schools by a collaboration with the U.S. Navy's Maritime Industrial Base and BlueForge Alliance, Learning Blade can also support Illinois students in exploring career opportunities in the state's submarine manufacturing sector.

Presenter(s): Colleen Ross, Learning Blade

Validate Your Student's Skills with Certification

Description: Navigating the landscape of industry-recognized certifications can be overwhelming, especially when there are so many options. Join us to learn about the role and value of certifications and how you can empower your students on their journey. Discover the most in demand industry-recognized certifications, explore resources for seamless classroom implementation, and see how you can set your students up for success. Whether your students are stepping into a career or pursuing further education, certifications hold great value to their future.

Presenter(s): Justin Barker, Certiport