

# CTE Connects Mentor Toolkit



## CTE Connects

Developing Educators for a Workforce-Ready Illinois

**This toolkit is designed to support mentors participating in CTE Connects, the Illinois State Board of Education's statewide mentoring program for new Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers. It is aligned directly to the CTE Connects program design and expectations and is intended to be a practical, ready-to-use guide mentors can return to throughout the year.**

The toolkit has two core purposes:

1. Help mentors clearly understand program logistics, structures, and expectations
2. Provide targeted guidance and tools for mentoring new CTE teachers, especially those transitioning directly from industry into the classroom

The [CTE Connects website](#) serves as the primary, up-to-date hub for the program. It houses the most current resources, guidance, and program materials for both mentors and mentees, including toolkits, webinars, calendars, and announcements. Participants are encouraged to refer to the website regularly, as materials may be updated throughout the year to reflect new supports, upcoming professional learning opportunities, and refinements informed by participant feedback. Using the CTE Connects website as the centralized source of information helps ensure mentors and mentees are accessing consistent, accurate, and timely resources to support their work.



# Understanding CTE Connects

## Vision & Goals

CTE Connects is designed to provide new CTE teachers with the support, resources, and community they need to thrive, innovate, and inspire the next generation of learners.

CTE Connects seeks to do this by:

- Empowering new CTE teachers to build confidence and autonomy in their teaching practice
- Fostering meaningful mentor-mentee relationships that encourage trust and shared learning
- Ensuring equitable access to high-quality resources and help to create industry connections tailored to CTE instruction
- Supporting career longevity and satisfaction by addressing early challenges and burnout
- Celebrating innovation and excellence in teaching through shared best practices

## Mentor Expectations

Mentors play a critical role in CTE Connects by providing consistent, content-informed, and relationship-based support to early-career teachers. As a mentor, you are expected to:

### **Commit to two academic years of participation**

Mentors are asked to commit to CTE Connects for a minimum of two academic years to provide sustained, consistent support to their mentee during their most critical early period in the profession. This two-year commitment allows mentors to build strong, trusting relationships with mentees, support them through the full cycle of an academic year, and continue guiding their growth as they gain confidence and refine their practice in year two.

### **Maintain monthly communication with each assigned mentee**

Mentors engage in reflective dialogue with mentees and provide timely, constructive feedback through regular check-ins. Mentors also review and respond to monthly mentee reflections and submit brief monthly interaction reports that document mentor-mentee conversations, highlight achievements, and note challenges or areas where additional support may be needed.

### **Participate actively in the online community discussion forum**

Mentors will monitor posts from assigned mentee(s) and ensure their questions or reflections receive timely, thoughtful responses. Mentors are encouraged to engage not only with their own mentees' posts but also, when appropriate, to contribute to broader discussions by sharing insights, resources, and encouragement to build a supportive professional community.

## Participate fully in required program engagements

Mentors attend ISBE-hosted webinars and scheduled in-person activities outlined in the program calendar. Mentors will complete a mid- and end-of-year program evaluation and submit all required forms and documentation by established deadlines. Mentors are also encouraged to attend optional ISBE office hours and engagements designed to support mentors.

Mentors receive an annual stipend of \$1,000 for the first mentee and \$500 per additional mentee (paid in fall and spring), with travel costs covered for required conferences and in-person engagements.

## Program Timeline & Key Milestones

### Monthly Mentor Responsibilities

Each month, mentors should:

1. Review the program calendar and upcoming engagements
2. Meet or connect with mentee (virtual or in person)
3. Discuss the focus topic for the month
4. Respond to mentee reflections
5. Share relevant strategies, real-world examples, or resources

ISBE will also offer monthly office hours that are optional for mentors and mentees to attend. These should be used to support, not replace, monthly mentor-mentee meetings.

### Key Milestones

- May: Mentor Training and New CTE Teacher Orientation
- July/August: Program Kickoff and First Meeting
- January: Midpoint Reflection and Survey
- February: Illinois Association of Career and Technical Education Conference
- May: Career Connections Conference
- June: Year-End Reflection and Survey

### Program Calendar

This calendar provides additional details on monthly focus topics, in-person engagements, and webinars.

Month	ISBE Expectations	Mentor Expectations	Mentee Expectations
<b>August</b>	Office hour for mentees and mentors to meet or for ISBE to answer new CTE teacher questions if no mentor is present.	Connect with mentee (during ISBE office hour or proactively) to review the “First 30 Days Plan” (unit and lesson planning, classroom management tips, lab safety as applicable, syllabus, helpful contacts at school/nearby).	Meet with mentor to review the “First 30 Days Plan” (unit and lesson planning, classroom management tips, lab safety as applicable, syllabus, helpful contacts at school/nearby). Optional: attend ISBE office hour.
<b>September</b>	Host webinar: “Differentiated Instruction + 504s and IEPs explained.”	Attend ISBE webinar and networking; reflect on webinar content with mentee and discuss best practices.	Attend ISBE webinar and networking; reflect on webinar content with mentor and discuss best practices.
<b>October</b>	Office hour for mentees and mentors to meet or for ISBE to answer questions.	Connect with mentee (during office hour or proactively) to discuss student engagement and assessment.	Meet with mentor to discuss student engagement and assessment.  Optional: attend ISBE office hour.
<b>November</b>	Office hour for mentees and mentors to meet or for ISBE to answer questions.	Connect with mentee to discuss classroom management and check on how the year is going.	Connect with mentor to share any challenges/ questions about classroom management and reflect on how the year is going.  Optional: attend ISBE office hour.
<b>December</b>	Office hour for mentees and mentors to meet or for ISBE to answer questions.	Optional check-in to discuss any priority topics for mentees.	Optional check-in to share priority items or questions with mentor.

Month	ISBE Expectations	Mentor Expectations	Mentee Expectations
<b>February</b>	Office hour for mentees and mentors; IACTE Conference (highlighted sessions tailored to new CTE teachers; exclusive session for new CTE teachers).	Connect with mentee to debrief IACTE Conference takeaways and plan spring priorities; meet during office hour or proactively.	Meet with mentor to debrief IACTE Conference takeaways and plan spring priorities. Optional: attend ISBE office hour.
<b>March</b>	Host webinar: "CTSOs + Intro to Work-Based Learning."	Attend ISBE webinar and networking; reflect on webinar content with mentee.	Attend ISBE webinar and networking; reflect on webinar content with mentor.
<b>April</b>	Office hour for mentees and mentors to meet or for ISBE to answer questions.	Connect with mentee (during office hour or proactively) to discuss "Connecting with Industry."	Meet with mentor to discuss "Connecting with Industry." Optional: attend ISBE office hour.
<b>May</b>	Career Connections Conference: highlighted sessions tailored to new CTE teachers, including preconference workshop; exclusive session for new CTE teachers. Host a reflective, Year One celebration virtual webinar.	Connect with mentee (during office hour or proactively) to reflect on the year and begin planning for next year; complete annual survey.	Meet with mentor to reflect on what went well and what to do differently next year; complete annual survey; begin planning for next year. Optional: attend ISBE office hour.
<b>June</b>	Office hour for mentees and mentors to meet or for ISBE to answer questions.	If not completed in May, connect with mentee to reflect on the year and begin planning for next year.	If not completed in May, meet with mentor to reflect on the year and begin planning for next year. Optional: attend ISBE office hour.

# Mentoring New Teachers Coming From Industry

## What Effective Mentors Do

Trust is foundational to effective mentoring relationships. When trust is present, new teachers are more willing to take risks, raise questions, and reflect honestly on their practice, turning mentoring into a meaningful driver of professional growth rather than a casual support conversation.

To build and maintain this trust, effective mentors consistently use five evidence-based practices:

1. Being accessible and present through regular, reliable check-ins and focused attention
2. Acting non-judgmentally, framing feedback as inquiry and growth rather than evaluation
3. Maintaining confidentiality and integrity so mentees feel safe sharing challenges
4. Modeling humility and vulnerability, including sharing personal learning experiences
5. Viewing learning as mutual, positioning mentoring as a collaborative partnership

By intentionally applying these trust-building practices, mentors foster relationships where new teachers feel supported, capable, and confident to grow.

## Resources

- [The Complex Art of Mentoring and Relationship Development](#)
- [Facilitative Coaching Stems](#)

## Common Transition Challenges

A majority of the CTE Connects mentees will have entered teaching directly from industry. These teachers often bring strong technical expertise but may need support in areas that are new to them

Industry-to-classroom teachers may struggle with:

- Classroom management and student behavior
- Lesson planning and pacing
- Assessment and grading practices
- Navigating differentiated education including IEPs and 504s
- Instructional language and pedagogy
- School systems, policies, and culture

ISBE will provide mentors with curated resources, toolkits, webinars, and office hours aligned to these common challenge areas. Mentors are encouraged to draw on these supports as conversation starters and practical tools. Equally important, mentors should intentionally spend time getting to know their mentee, their background, school context, and comfort level with teaching to identify which challenge is most pressing at any given moment and tailor support accordingly.

## Structured Tools for Mentors

Use this checklist during your first formal meeting to establish clarity, trust, and shared expectations for the year. This initial conversation helps set a strong foundation for the mentoring relationship by clarifying roles, communication norms, and priorities while also creating space to learn about the mentee's background, goals, and immediate needs. A thoughtful first meeting supports relationship-building, aligns expectations, and ensures that mentoring begins with a shared understanding of how you will work together throughout the year.

### Relationship & Orientation

- Introductions and relationship building
- Share your own pathway into teaching, including early challenges and learning moments
- Discuss what the mentee is most excited about and what feels most intimidating

### Program Overview

- Review overall program expectations and responsibilities
- Review the program calendar, including required meetings, webinars, and key milestones
- Review how the mentoring relationship fits within the broader CTE Connects supports

### Planning & Instructional Support

- Review the First 30 Days Plan
- Assist with planning for beginning-of-year lessons, routines, and community-building activities
- Discuss immediate classroom priorities and anticipated early-year challenges

### Communication & Logistics

- Discuss and agree on communication preferences (e.g., email, text, calls, shared documents)
- Exchange contact information
- Establish a regular meeting schedule and send invites for the school year

### Goal Setting

- Review the mentee's completed self-assessment identifying areas of concern or interest
- Use the self-assessment to discuss strengths, questions, and priority needs
- Collaboratively identify three goals to focus on throughout the year

### Immediate Supports

- Identify any immediate support needs (instructional, classroom management, systems, or curriculum)
- Determine next steps and share any relevant ISBE or school-based resources

## First 30 Days Plan Worksheet

Prior to the first formal mentor–mentee meeting, mentees should begin completing their First 30 Days Plan. This worksheet is designed to help new teachers identify and prioritize early-year needs, clarify areas where support would be most helpful, and anchor focused, productive conversations with their mentor. During the first meeting, mentors should plan to review the mentee’s draft together. When possible, mentors are also encouraged to share an example of how they structured their own first 30 days of teaching, as this can help normalize the process, spark discussion, and provide a helpful reference point for mentees.

The first 30 days are about establishing routines, relationships, and confidence. Use this plan to prioritize early needs, identify support, and guide conversations with your mentor.

### What excites you about teaching this year or about your program/course(s)?

### What feels most challenging right now?

(Select up to three.)

- Classroom management and routines
- Lesson planning and pacing
- Lab/shop safety and procedures (if applicable)
- Assessment and grading
- Supporting students with IEPs/504s
- School systems and expectations
- Work-life balance
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Of these, which feels most urgent in the first few weeks? Why?

## First 30 Days: Priorities

In the first 30 days, everything can feel important at once. This section is designed to help you decide where to put your energy first. All areas below matter, but you are not expected to master them all at the same time.

For each area, check the applicable box where you feel you are right now.

Area	Feels Manageable	Somewhat Challenging	Very Challenging
Classroom routines and management			
Building relationships and community			
Safety procedures and expectations (if applicable)			
Lesson planning and pacing			
Staying organized and managing workload			

Looking at your ratings above, select up to two areas that you want to prioritize in the first 30 days of the school year. Remember that perfection is not the goal! Use the space below to describe what “good enough” progress would look like by the end of your first month.

By the end of 30 days, I would feel more confident if:

## Meeting With Your Mentor

Before meeting with your mentor, identify up to three goals you want to explore early in the year. These are starting points that you and your mentor will workshop together to refine and prioritize to identify supports and resources that align with your needs.

Goal	Why this matters to me

In the space below, capture the questions you'd like to discuss with your mentor at your first meeting:

## Reminder

You do not need to have everything figured out in the first 30 days. This plan is a starting point to help you focus on what matters most and access support early.

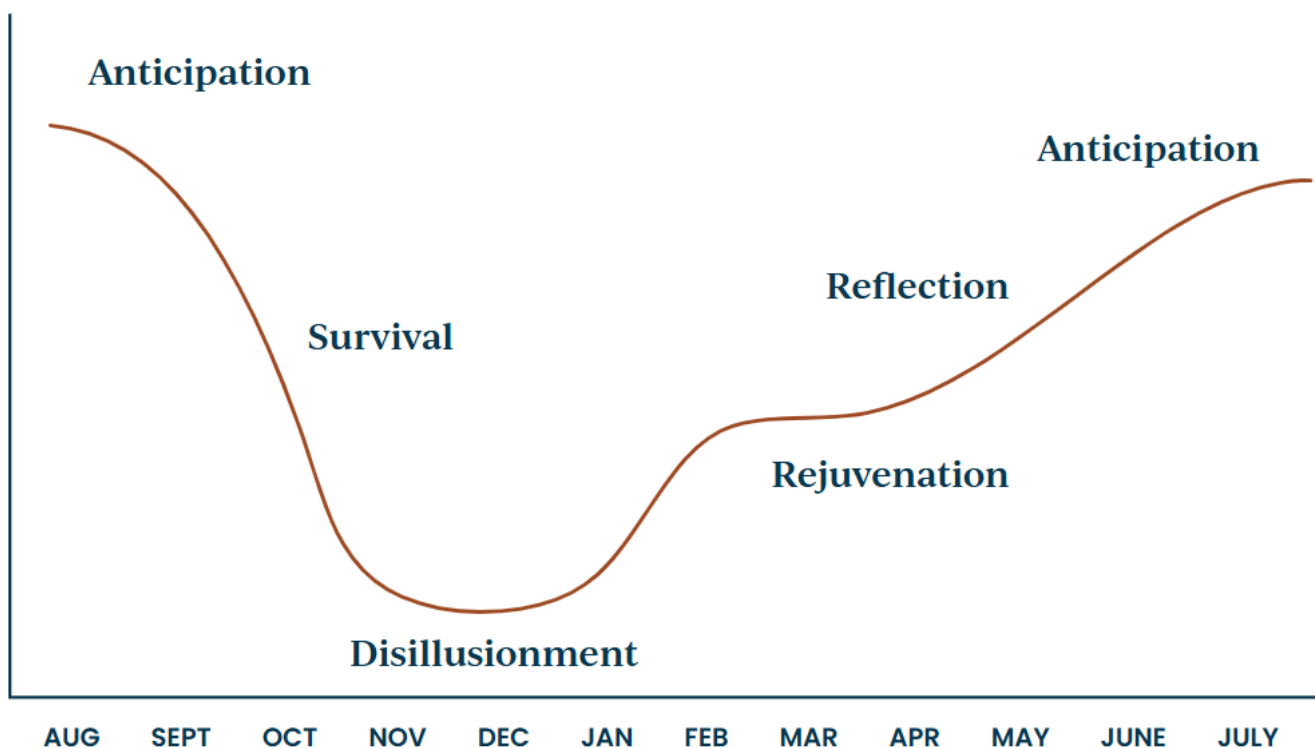
## A Mentor's Quick Reference to the Phases of the First Years Teaching

*Adapted from the New Teacher Center (Ellen Moir)*

New teachers' challenges shift over the course of the year. Understanding these predictable phases helps mentors normalize struggles, time supports appropriately, and avoid misinterpreting stress as lack of ability. New CTE teachers, especially those entering directly from industry, experience many of the same developmental phases as other new teachers but with additional layers of transition. These include navigating youth development, school systems, instructional planning, and classroom management while simultaneously shifting from industry norms to educational practice.

Understanding these phases helps mentors anticipate needs, normalize challenges, and provide developmentally aligned support at the right time.

Phase	Time of Year	Core Mentor Focus
Anticipation	May–August	Orientation, reassurance, preparation
Survival	August–September	Stabilization, routines, safety
Disillusionment	October–December	Emotional support, problem-solving
Rejuvenation	January–March	Instructional growth, refinement
Reflection	April–June	Consolidation, planning for year two



## Anticipation

When: Hiring → first weeks of school

What new CTE teachers often feel:	What mentors can do:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Excitement about teaching their craft or trade</li><li>• Strong confidence in content knowledge</li><li>• Anxiety about classroom control, planning, and “doing it right”</li><li>• Unrealistic expectations about how quickly teaching will feel comfortable</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Normalize uncertainty about teaching practice (this is a new profession)</li><li>• Emphasize safety, routines, and relationships over perfect lessons</li><li>• Support completion of the First 30 Days Plan</li><li>• Begin relationship-building before instruction starts. Optimism is high – this is a great time to build trust!</li></ul>

## Survival

When: First month of school (August–September)

What new CTE teachers often feel:	What mentors can do:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Overwhelmed with planning, pacing, and daily demands</li><li>• Surprise at student behavior and motivation levels</li><li>• Heavy time commitment creating lessons from scratch</li><li>• High mental load managing labs, tools, and safety</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help mentees prioritize: safe environment → routines → relationships</li><li>• Reinforce “good enough” lessons</li><li>• Encourage use of ISBE resources rather than creating everything alone</li><li>• Debrief the First 30 Days Plan and adjust expectations</li></ul>

## Disillusionment

When: Mid-fall to early winter (October–December)

What new CTE teachers often feel:	What mentors can do:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emotional and physical exhaustion</li><li>• Doubting their teaching ability (despite strong industry expertise)</li><li>• Frustration with classroom management and student engagement</li><li>• Stress related to parent communication or evaluations</li></ul> <p>This phase is often harder for industry-to-education teachers who may be encountering school norms and expectations for the first time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listen more than talk</li><li>• Reassure mentees that this phase is normal and temporary</li><li>• Help separate:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Instructional challenges (within the mentee’s control)</li><li>◦ Systemic challenges (scheduling, policies, class composition)</li></ul></li><li>• Encourage connection to ISBE office hours and resources</li></ul>

## Rejuvenation

When: January–early spring

What new CTE teachers often feel:	What mentors can do:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Renewed energy after winter break</li><li>• Improved routines and classroom flow</li><li>• Increased confidence in front of students</li><li>• Greater openness to instructional improvement</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shift conversations toward instructional refinement</li><li>• Support integration of CTSOs, work-based learning, and industry connections</li><li>• Encourage long-term planning</li><li>• Debrief conference learning and help prioritize takeaways</li></ul>

## Reflection

When: Late spring (May–June)

What new CTE teachers often feel:	What mentors can do:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pride in making it through year one</li><li>• Increased self-confidence as a teacher</li><li>• Clear ideas about what to adjust for year two</li><li>• Renewed anticipation, now grounded in reality</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Facilitate reflection on:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ What worked well</li><li>◦ What they would change</li><li>◦ What they want to develop next year</li></ul></li><li>• Help set priorities for year two</li><li>• Celebrate growth and resilience</li></ul>

### Supporting Difficult Moments

If a mentee is struggling, mentors should take a structured, supportive approach that prioritizes understanding before problem-solving:

**Listen first; avoid providing immediate solutions.** Create space for the mentee to fully describe the situation without interruption. Use clarifying and reflective questions to help them articulate their concerns, reinforcing that navigating challenges is a normal part of early teaching.

**Clarify the underlying issue.** Work with the mentee to determine whether the challenge stems from instructional practice (e.g., lesson design, classroom routines), systems and structures (e.g., scheduling, policies, class size), or external expectations. This distinction helps ensure support is targeted and appropriate.

**Break challenges into manageable steps.** Help the mentee identify one or two immediate, achievable actions rather than attempting to solve everything at once. Focus on small adjustments that can lead to visible improvement and build confidence.

**Encourage mentees to reach out to their administrators when appropriate.** When challenges extend beyond the mentor's role or expertise, help the mentee prepare to engage with building or district leadership for additional guidance or support.

Mentors are not expected to solve every problem alone. Their role is to support reflection, guide next steps, and help mentees access the broader systems of support available to them.

## Using ISBE Supports Effectively

Mentors should actively encourage mentees to engage in the full range of ISBE-provided support throughout the year, including attending required ISBE webinars, participating in monthly virtual office hours, and engaging in online discussion boards. These resources are designed to complement mentor-mentee conversations and ensure new CTE teachers have access to timely guidance, shared learning, and statewide expertise beyond their individual mentoring relationship.

Mentors may also deepen their own practice by participating in mentor-specific ISBE office hours and professional engagements, which provide opportunities to discuss common challenges, share strategies, and strengthen mentoring skills. In addition, mentors are encouraged to contribute to the broader professional community by sharing resources, insights, and effective practices with peers, helping to build a collaborative network of support across the CTE Connects program.

*Your role matters. By sharing experience, listening deeply, and guiding thoughtfully, you help ensure that new CTE teachers, and their students, thrive.*

*Thank you for your part in strengthening CTE across Illinois!*

## Contact Information

For program questions or support, contact:

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