

New CTE Teacher Mentoring Program: CTE Connect

Overview for
Statewide
Public Comment



CTE Connect

Developing Educators for a Workforce-Ready Illinois

www.isbe.net/CTE

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 **ILLINOIS**
STATE BOARD OF
EDUCATION

Executive Summary & Purpose

CTE Connect is a statewide Career and Technical Education (CTE) Teacher Mentoring Program proposed by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to support new CTE educators, strengthen teacher retention, elevate instructional quality, and expand access to resources. The program establishes structured mentor–mentee relationships, a robust professional learning calendar, and an online platform to ensure every new CTE teacher can access high-quality materials, webinars, and access to ISBE support.

Program Access, Platform, and Continuous Improvement

ISBE will maintain a dedicated online platform designed to centralize all program-related materials, including recorded webinars, resource documents, and interactive discussion boards. This platform will serve as the primary hub for mentors and mentees participating in the mentoring program, ensuring that essential tools and supports remain easily accessible throughout the year. In addition to the internal platform, ISBE will also maintain a public-facing webpage that provides open access to key resources for all new CTE teachers across the state, regardless of whether they are formally enrolled in the mentoring program. Through this webpage, any new CTE teacher may join ISBE-sponsored webinars, attend virtual office hours, and explore curated instructional supports.

While the platform is designed with CTE-specific needs in mind, it will also connect new teachers to a wider range of pedagogical resources that benefit all educators. These supplemental materials will include guidance on effective classroom management, foundational instructional strategies, and other universal tools that help new teachers strengthen their overall practice.

To support a responsive and evolving program, ISBE has established an advisory committee that brings together CTE stakeholders from across Illinois to review program outcomes and guide future refinements. This group will regularly review participant feedback, analyze implementation insights, and recommend refinements to the program's structure, content, and supports. Their work will play a critical role in shaping Year Two offerings and informing long-term sustainability and scalability.

Participant Eligibility, Requirements, and Expectations

Mentors

To qualify as a mentor for the program, applicants need to have completed a minimum of three years of teaching in their field and demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting new teachers. Each mentor must provide a recommendation letter from a building principal or department head, confirming both their instructional expertise and their readiness to take on a leadership role in developing emerging educators. These requirements help ensure that mentors bring both credibility and practical classroom insight to their work with mentees.

Once selected, mentors are expected to commit to the program for a minimum of two academic years. Their responsibilities extend beyond occasional check-ins; mentors are asked to actively cultivate an ongoing, supportive relationship with their assigned mentee. This includes maintaining consistent monthly communication and reviewing and discussing the mentee’s monthly reflections that highlight challenges, successes, and instructional needs. Mentors are also required to participate in the broader online community by contributing to discussions and sharing resources. To prepare for their role, mentors attend the required ISBE training at the Career Connections Conference each May or complete the virtual training alternative if they are unable to attend in person. ISBE will cover travel costs for the Career Connections Conference.

To recognize the substantial time, expertise, and leadership mentors contribute, ISBE will provide an annual stipend of \$1,000, disbursed in two payments at the end of the fall and spring semesters. Those who support more than one mentee may receive an additional \$500 per extra mentee, acknowledging the expanded scope of mentoring responsibilities. Mentors are encouraged to recommend refinements to the program’s structure, content, and supports. Their work will play a critical role in shaping Year Two offerings and informing long-term sustainability and scalability.

Mentees (New CTE Teachers)

Eligible mentees include CTE teachers in their first two years of teaching, with special consideration given to educators who are moving directly from industry into the classroom, as they often require additional guidance during this transition. This eligibility requirement helps ensure that the mentoring experience is targeted toward those who are still acclimating to the profession and can benefit most from structured guidance, pedagogical support, and access to statewide resources.

Participation in the mentoring program involves a two-year commitment, during which mentees are encouraged to take an active role in their professional growth. While attendance at the New CTE Teacher Orientation during the May Career Connections Conference is not required, it is strongly recommended because it offers foundational training, opportunities to meet other new teachers, and early exposure to the tools and resources they can use throughout the program. ISBE will cover mentee travel costs for the Career Connections Conference.

Throughout the year, mentees are expected to maintain consistent monthly communication with their assigned mentor. These interactions provide a space for problem-solving, reflection, and planning as mentees navigate classroom responsibilities. To support meaningful dialogue with mentors, mentees complete monthly reflections that summarize their challenges, successes, questions, and professional learning needs. These reflections serve not only as a tool for personal insight but also as a structured way for mentors to track growth and tailor their support. Mentees also engage in the program’s online community by participating in discussions, accessing shared resources, and contributing to a collaborative learning environment.

In recognition of the time and effort required to fully participate in these activities, ISBE will provide an annual stipend of \$500, disbursed in two payments at the end of the fall and spring semesters.



Primary Recruitment Channels

Recruitment for CTE Connect is carried out through several coordinated statewide channels to ensure broad awareness and equitable access. A primary driver of this outreach are the Education for Employment (EFE) directors and Regional Offices of Education (ROEs), who serve as the central connection point to local schools and districts. They will conduct direct outreach, verify interest and eligibility, and assist ISBE in assembling a strong and diverse pool of participants.

In addition to these regional networks, professional associations play an essential role in extending the program's reach. ISBE will share communications with the Illinois Principals Association (IPA) and Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA) to amplify the message across school and district leadership networks statewide. Through these channels, administrators will be encouraged to nominate high-quality mentor candidates and support new teachers in enrolling as mentees, ensuring that districts understand the benefits of participation and actively promote the opportunity.

Statewide conferences are also an important recruitment venue. Both the Illinois Association for Career and Technical Education (IACTE) Annual Conference and the Career Connections Conference will highlight the mentoring program during sessions, presentations, and networking events. ISBE will provide informational materials, host conversations with prospective applicants, and offer on-site sign-up opportunities.

To support districts with late hiring timelines, ISBE will hold a limited number of mentee slots open through July, though all participants must be confirmed no later than Aug. 15 to be eligible for that school year's cohort. This ensures that new hires, especially those joining the field directly from industry, still have an opportunity to benefit from the program.

State-Level Communication

Beyond direct recruitment, ISBE will use multiple statewide communication channels to publicize the program. Targeted messaging will be delivered through the CTE Newsletter, including direct invitations to educators on the new CTE teacher listserv, with particular attention given to those with no prior classroom experience. Additional announcements will be featured in the Superintendents Weekly Message to ensure district-level leaders are aware of expectations and timelines. Licensing communications will also be utilized to reach educators during certification or renewal processes, expanding the program's visibility and ensuring that new teachers understand the resources available to them as they enter the profession.



Matching Process

The process for pairing mentors and mentees is designed to create the strongest possible instructional match and ensure that new CTE teachers receive support that is directly relevant to their content area and classroom responsibilities. Whenever possible, mentees are paired with mentors who teach within the same CTE career cluster so that the guidance they receive reflects the specific technical, curricular, and industry-aligned expectations of their field. ISBE will also consider geographic proximity when finalizing matches, as closer placements increase opportunities for in-person collaboration, classroom visits, and deeper relationship-building. While content alignment and proximity guide the pairing process, the program also maintains flexibility to make cross-content matches when needed. In cases where a perfect one-to-one alignment is not available, ISBE may pair a mentee with a mentor from a related cluster or complementary specialization to ensure that every new teacher receives ongoing support, supplemented as necessary with additional resources tailored to their unique instructional context.

Communication Timeline

In early April, ISBE formally notifies mentors and mentees of their pairings by sending official confirmation emails that outline the expectations of the program, provide links to the mentor and mentee resources, and clearly describe the next steps each participant should take before the start of the school year. This communication ensures that both parties enter the program with a shared understanding of their roles and have immediate access to the resources they need to begin building a productive mentoring relationship.

During this same period, ISBE will also begin preparing participants for the Career Connections Conference, which serves as a key orientation and training opportunity for both mentors and mentees. ISBE will reserve space for all confirmed participants to attend the conference and will cover their travel expenses. In advance of the event, ISBE will distribute registration instructions, highlight important agenda items, and share logistical details so that participants can make informed decisions about sessions to attend and arrive prepared to engage fully in the professional learning experiences offered.

Unpaired Mentors/Mentees

In situations where a mentee cannot be paired with a mentor, ISBE will still ensure that these teachers have access to meaningful support and high-quality resources throughout the year. Unpaired mentees will be provided direct links to the independent materials available on ISBE's CTE webpage, including instructional guides, classroom management strategies, and other tools designed to address the common challenges new teachers face. They will also continue to receive invitations to all ISBE-sponsored webinars and will be welcome to participate in the New CTE Teacher Orientation held at the Career Connections Conference. In addition, unpaired mentees will be encouraged to join the online community, where they can connect with peers, ask questions, and access shared resources, ensuring they remain part of a broader professional network even without a formal mentor assignment.

Unpaired mentors will likewise remain connected to the program. ISBE will offer them the opportunity to stay on the active mentor roster, allowing them to be matched with a mentee if one becomes available later in the year or to be prioritized for pairing in the next program cycle. Their engagement ensures that ISBE can respond quickly to mid-year staffing changes while maintaining a strong pool of qualified mentors for future cohorts.

Administrator Training – Required



ISBE provides a virtual, one-hour administrator training designed to ensure that school and district leaders clearly understand the goals, structure, and expectations of the CTE Connect program. This training prepares administrators to effectively support both mentors and mentees throughout their participation. The session is recorded for those unable to attend live, and all administrators with participating teachers are required to confirm that they have viewed the material and understand the expectations associated with the program.

Attendance at this training is required for any principal, assistant principal, or CTE director who has a teacher involved as either a mentor or a mentee, ensuring that the individuals most directly responsible for supporting participants are well informed. The session is also open to EFE staff and other district-level leaders who may be involved in program implementation or who wish to better understand the model.

The training provides a thorough understanding of the program’s purpose and the ways in which it supports teacher retention, instructional quality, and overall educator development. ISBE will share guidance on how administrators can support their teachers, such as offering scheduling flexibility for mentor-mentee meetings, encouraging participation in webinars and in-person conferences, and helping ensure that teachers have the time and resources needed to fully engage in the program. Additionally, administrators will be walked through the program timeline, key checkpoints, and the reporting and stipend processes associated with mentor participation.

To reinforce these expectations and serve as an ongoing reference, ISBE supplies a one-page Administrator Quick Guide summarizing program goals, participant responsibilities, and recommended support strategies that administrators can use throughout the year.

Mentor Training – Required



The mentor training is designed to thoroughly prepare experienced CTE teachers for the responsibilities and relationships they will build throughout the CTE Connect program. During the training, mentors are equipped with the knowledge, tools, and strategies necessary to effectively support new CTE educators and cultivate strong, productive mentoring relationships. The training provides a comprehensive overview of the program’s structure, goals, and timelines, ensuring mentors understand how their work fits into the broader vision for new CTE teacher support. It also clarifies the expectations placed on mentors, including maintaining a consistent communication cadence, documenting interactions, and engaging with mentee reflections in meaningful ways.

A significant portion of the training focuses on the interpersonal aspects of mentorship. Mentors learn strategies for building trust and rapport with new teachers, offering constructive feedback and facilitating reflective dialogue that encourages growth and professional self-awareness. The session also addresses common challenges that early-career CTE teachers face and prepares mentors with approaches to help mentees navigate these hurdles effectively.

The training is offered in person at the Career Connections Conference to foster deeper engagement and collaborative learning among mentors, although a virtual option is available for those unable to attend. The session typically lasts two to three hours and includes digital copies of all training materials, access to the online mentor community, and ISBE contact information for additional assistance throughout the year. Before concluding, the training also reviews stipend eligibility and reporting requirements so mentors understand the documentation needed to receive their annual compensation.

New CTE Teacher Orientation – Optional for Mentees



(MAY)

The New CTE Teacher Orientation is designed to provide early-career educators with a strong foundation as they enter the teaching profession, offering the knowledge, resources, and connections they need to navigate their first years with confidence. The session introduces participants to the overall structure and purpose of CTE Connect and highlights the wide range of resources and supports available to them, whether or not they are paired with a mentor. This includes an overview of the program’s benefits, expectations, and year-long professional learning opportunities.

ISBE will offer this orientation in two formats to ensure accessibility for all new CTE teachers. An in-person session is held during the Career Connections Conference in May, providing opportunities for live interaction and networking. For those unable to attend in person, ISBE also hosts a virtual version of the orientation, and all recordings and materials are made available for later viewing. Whether delivered in person or online, the session typically lasts two to three hours and is recommended for all mentees in the mentoring program. It is also open to other new CTE teachers who may not have been paired with a mentor but still wish to access the program’s foundational supports.

Following the orientation, participants are invited to join ISBE webinars throughout the school year and to engage with the program’s online community, where they can connect with colleagues, ask questions, exchange resources, and continue their professional learning beyond the initial session.

Program Kickoff



(AUGUST)

The program’s official kickoff serves as the formal launch of the program and provides an important opportunity for mentors and mentees to begin building their relationships ahead of the academic year. This event is designed to orient participants to the program, introduce them to the tools and expectations that will guide their work together, and create space for early networking and connection. By convening mentors and mentees before school begins, ISBE helps ensure that each pair starts the year with clarity, shared understanding, and a foundation for effective collaboration.

ISBE offers several options for attending the kickoff to accommodate participants' schedules and geographic locations. Those attending in person may participate in a networking event held in conjunction with the Career Connections Conference, typically scheduled the night before or the evening of the conference. This setting allows mentors and mentees to meet face-to-face, begin establishing rapport, and ask questions in a supportive, informal environment. Another in-person option is participation through the New Teacher Bootcamp Strand hosted at Illinois State University in August, which provides dedicated time for new CTE teachers and includes structured opportunities for mentor-mentee introductions, program overview sessions, and connections with peers entering the profession.

For individuals unable to attend either in-person event, ISBE will host a virtual kickoff session lasting approximately two hours. This online option includes participant introductions, a comprehensive overview of the program and its expectations, and time for questions and discussion. The virtual format ensures that all mentors and mentees, regardless of schedule, distance, or school context, can begin the program with a shared baseline of information and orientation.

Following the kickoff, ISBE provides each participant with a structured checklist to guide their next steps. This checklist prompts mentors and mentees to schedule their first meeting, review the program toolkits and growth tracking tools, and join the online community where ongoing discussion, resource sharing, and peer support will take place. These follow-up actions help ensure that the momentum established during the kickoff is carried into the school year and that each mentor-mentee pair begins the program well-prepared and connected.

Resources and Supports

Mentor Resources

Mentors participating in the program will have access to a comprehensive suite of resources designed to support their work with new CTE teachers throughout the year. Central to these supports is a mentor toolkit, which includes structured reflection prompts, discussion guides, and goal-setting templates that align directly with the program calendar. These tools help mentors facilitate meaningful, consistent conversations with mentees and provide a clear framework for guiding new teachers through key milestones in their first years of teaching.

In addition to the toolkit, mentors receive the full program calendar, which contains direct links to ISBE-hosted webinars, office hours, and other professional learning opportunities that take place over the course of the year. This ensures mentors can easily access session details, stay updated on program activities, and integrate these resources into their ongoing work with mentees.

Mentors are also provided with a dedicated mentoring training guide that outlines best practices for effective mentorship. This guide offers strategies for communication, relationship building, feedback, and reflective dialogue. To encourage collaboration and resource sharing among mentors statewide, the online platform includes active discussion boards where mentors can pose questions, exchange materials, and upload helpful resources of their own.

To further strengthen mentor support, ISBE hosts a set of virtual office hours and professional development sessions specifically for mentors at several key points in the year: early August, just before mentors hold their initial meeting with mentees; in January, as the program reaches its midpoint; and again in May, as mentors reflect on the year and prepare for future cycles. These structured opportunities for connection and learning help ensure that mentors feel confident, prepared, and supported throughout their participation in the program.

Mentee Resources

Mentees have access to a robust collection of resources designed to support their growth and confidence during their early years in the classroom. Central to these supports is a comprehensive toolkit that includes reflection prompts, discussion guides, and goal-setting templates. Each component of the toolkit is intentionally aligned to the program calendar, helping mentees stay organized, reflect meaningfully on their progress, and engage in focused conversations with their mentors throughout the year.

In addition to the toolkit, mentees receive the full program calendar, which includes direct links to ISBE webinars, virtual office hours, and other learning opportunities offered across the year. These embedded links ensure that mentees can easily access professional learning experiences that supplement their classroom practice and broaden their understanding of instructional strategies, CTE-specific content, and statewide expectations.

Mentees are also introduced to the Mentee Growth Tool, a structured resource that supports goal setting, progress monitoring, and self-advocacy. This tool encourages early-career teachers to take ownership of their development by helping them articulate needs, track growth over time, and reflect on successes and areas for continued improvement.

To foster collaboration and encourage peer-to-peer learning, the online platform features active discussion boards where mentees can participate in ongoing conversations, ask questions, exchange insights, and upload resources they find helpful. This online community offers a valuable network of support that extends beyond each individual mentor-mentee pairing.

Finally, ISBE provides monthly virtual office hours specifically for mentees, ensuring that support remains available even when they are unable to connect with their mentor. These office hours offer a space for new teachers to ask questions, seek guidance, and receive timely assistance, reinforcing the program's goal of providing continuous, accessible support throughout the school year.

Year One Program Calendar



(AUGUST-JULY)

Month	ISBE Expectations	Mentor Expectations	Mentee Expectations
August	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.
September	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.
October	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.
November	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.
December	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
January	Host webinar: "Teacher Evaluations: What to Expect" (including reflections and examples of evidence). Administer midpoint survey.	Attend ISBE webinar and networking; reflect on webinar content with mentee; support completion of midpoint survey.	Attend ISBE webinar and networking; reflect on webinar content with mentor; complete midpoint survey.
February	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.
March	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.
April	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.
May	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.

Month	ISBE Expectations	Mentor Expectations	Mentee Expectations
June	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.
July	Office hour for mentees and mentors to meet or for ISBE to answer questions.	Meeting with mentee optional.	Meeting with mentor optional; ISBE office hour available for support.

Year Two – Continuous Improvement and Potential Topics

Year Two of the CTE Teacher Mentoring Program is intentionally designed to be flexible and adaptive, allowing ISBE to refine the program based on real-time feedback and insights gathered during the initial year of implementation. The focus of the second year will be shaped by data from annual surveys, ongoing feedback from mentors and mentees, and patterns observed throughout Year One. This responsive approach ensures that the program continuously evolves to meet the emerging needs of new CTE teachers and their mentors, while also providing opportunities to explore certain topics in greater depth, particularly those introduced during the first year that participants identify as areas where additional support or advanced learning would be valuable.

To support this deeper learning, ISBE anticipates offering a series of targeted webinars that build on foundational topics while expanding into more specialized areas of CTE practice. Potential Year Two webinars include sessions on assessing student learning in CTE classrooms, integrating problem-based learning into instruction, understanding best practices for establishing and sustaining advisory boards, incorporating math and reading competencies into CTE coursework, and navigating the structure of CTE programs, including course sequences and matrices. These webinar topics are designed to help teachers refine their instructional approaches, deepen their understanding of program design, and strengthen their connections to industry and academic standards.

Evaluation, Feedback, and Data Use

The mentoring program incorporates several feedback mechanisms designed to ensure that ISBE can continuously monitor effectiveness, respond to participant needs, and refine the program over time. After each webinar, mentors and mentees complete brief feedback exit slips that capture immediate reactions, learning needs, and suggestions for improvement. These quick reflections help ISBE adjust upcoming content, address areas where participants seek additional clarity, and ensure that professional learning sessions remain relevant and responsive.

Midway through the school year, ISBE administers a more comprehensive survey to assess participant progress, the quality of mentor-mentee interactions, and the usefulness of program resources. The midpoint survey plays an important role in identifying what is working well and where additional support may be needed during the second half of the school year. At the end of the program cycle in May, all participants complete an annual survey that provides deeper insight into overall program impact and highlights priorities for shaping the design of Year Two. This annual evaluation serves as a cornerstone of the program's continuous improvement process.

In addition to formal surveys, feedback is gathered throughout the year through ongoing engagement with ISBE's advisory committee, which reviews statewide data and participant comments and offers recommendations for program refinements. The advisory committee's role ensures that decisions about program evolution reflect diverse CTE perspectives from across Illinois.

Informal, qualitative feedback also emerges organically through discussion boards on the online platform and during monthly ISBE office hours. These spaces allow mentors and mentees to share experiences, raise questions, and identify areas where additional guidance may be helpful. Collectively, these feedback channels create a dynamic and responsive model that enables ISBE to monitor program implementation closely and support teachers more effectively.

Program Contact

For questions about this proposal or the pilot implementation, please contact:

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After reviewing the proposed plan for Illinois CTE Connect, please use this form to share your feedback on the program's goals, structure, resources, and overall implementation.



Fill out the
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