

Guidance for Middle Schools on Student Access to Career Technical Education

August 2025

Pedro Martinez
Commissioner



Introduction

In May 2025, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) adopted amendments to the regulations governing the recruitment and admission of students to career and technical education (CTE) schools and programs across the Commonwealth, beginning in School Year 2025-2026.¹ The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is issuing this guidance to help sending middle schools improve student awareness of CTE pathways. Please see the [Career Technical Education Recruitment, Admission, and Retention Policies and Practice Guidance](#) for additional information.

CTE prepares students for success in college, career, and life by integrating academic instruction with hands-on learning in high-skill, high-demand fields. CTE programs are aligned with industry standards and designed to help students explore their interests, develop technical and employability skills, and earn industry-recognized credentials.

Access for middle school students

Sending districts shall offer career and technical education schools and programs opportunities to provide middle school students with information about career and technical education programs. Sending districts are districts in municipalities that are members of regional school districts. Sending districts are required to develop a Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy.

Districts that are not members of a regional school district, and where students have access to state-designated CTE programs within their own district, should consider developing a Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy to support students in their understanding of high school options.

Under the revised CTE regulations, sending districts must:²

- Offer CTE schools and programs opportunities to provide information about CTE programs and careers to middle school students, by October 15 of each school year, in the following ways:
 - On-site at the middle school;
 - Through mail and email; and
 - On the middle schools' public-facing websites.
- Develop and maintain a districtwide Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy that explains how:
 - Middle schools will collaborate with CTE schools and programs in their district, regional, agricultural, and other public high schools to inform students of opportunities;
 - The district will provide middle school students with an opportunity to tour CTE schools and programs during regular middle school hours; and
 - Transportation costs would be assumed by the school hosting the tours.³

¹ The regulations are available at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr4.html>.

² 603 CMR 4.03(6)(i).

³ DESE expects sending districts and CTE schools and programs to collaborate, coordinate, and act reasonably when planning these tours.

- Exploration and awareness of secondary school options⁴ (including CTE) is connected to a student's secondary and post-secondary academic and career planning.
- Submit⁵ the Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy to DESE by November 1, 2025 and as amended.
- Sign an annual attestation that the Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy is implemented.
- Make the Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy available on their district website and provide written copies to students and parents upon request.

Under the revised CTE regulations, middle schools must not:

- Count student tours of CTE schools and programs as unexcused absences if the CTE school or program confirms the student's participation; or
- Withhold student access to tours of CTE schools and programs during the school day.

Middle schools must also:

- Continue to comply with the regulatory requirement to release the names and addresses of seventh and eighth grade students no later than October 15 of each school year.
 - This requirement applies to middle schools in cities and towns that are members of regional CTE districts;
 - The release must be made to authorized school personnel of that regional CTE district; and
 - Middle schools must give public notice that they release this information and allow parents and eligible students a reasonable time after such notice to request that this information not be released without the eligible student's or parent's prior consent.

Considerations:

- It is important to provide meaningful and substantive opportunities for students to learn about CTE.
 - Leaving out pamphlets or sending written information home in students' backpacks are not, by themselves, meaningful and substantive opportunities.
- Ideas for providing students with such opportunities include:
 - Inviting a CTE school or program to give a presentation at a school assembly;
 - Scheduling a chaperoned field trip to a CTE school or program; and
 - Hosting a high school and career awareness event, inviting the district's high school, area CTE schools and programs, and employers.
- Utilize tools already available through MyCAP⁶ to help students plan their high school and career goals.

⁴ Career-connected learning opportunities, including CTE, Innovation Career Pathways, Early College programs, advanced coursework, and other locally-developed programs, such as Career Connections, provide additional ways for students to explore and prepare for careers through work-based learning, dual enrollment, and structured pathway experiences.

⁵ All submissions to DESE should be made through the Communication Hub and Monitoring Portal (CHAMP). DESE will be providing technical assistance to districts on using CHAMP.

⁶ [My Career and Academic Plan \(MyCAP\)](#)

- Coordination among middle school and CTE counselors can improve student access to important information, especially for students with disabilities and English learner students.
- Some students may apply to CTE schools and programs outside their district of residence. Middle school counselors should be familiar with the CTE Non-resident Application and Tuition Process can help students navigate this process more easily.
- Consider holding an annual planning meeting with the sending CTE school so that middle school and CTE staff can coordinate schedules and logistics.
- Designating a contact person in middle schools and making their contact information easily-accessible can help students and families navigate the admission process more easily.

Middle school records

The revised CTE regulations require admission lotteries where there are more applicants than available seats. Weighted admissions lotteries are permitted, subject to certain requirements.

Not every CTE school or program will use admission weights, and not every CTE school or program that does will use the same ones. The only available admission weights relate to student interest, attendance, and discipline.

Consistent with the process that has been in place historically, the middle school will send the CTE school relevant information regarding students who applied. Middle schools and CTE schools should align the process to identify what information the CTE schools need and when they need it.

- Student interest
 - CTE schools and programs that adopt this weight must allow students to demonstrate their interest by participating in any of the following:
 - A non-evaluative interview with a CTE school or program staff member;
 - Submission of an audio or video presentation, personal essay, or letter of recommendation from a non-family member; or
 - Other measure proposed by a CTE school or program and approved by DESE.
 - Students may ask middle school staff to provide a letter of recommendation.
 - Consider creating a process within the middle school to make this easier for all involved. Some CTE schools and programs may already make template letters available for use.
- Attendance
 - CTE schools and programs that adopt this weight may only assign it to students with fewer than 27 unexcused, full-day absences over the 270 school days prior to the date of their application. They may not consider any data before seventh grade.
 - Middle schools may be asked to confirm that students applying to CTE schools and programs satisfy this weight.
- Discipline

- CTE schools and programs that adopt this weight may only assign it to students who have not been suspended or expelled pursuant to M.G.L. c.71 §37H or §37H1/2 for either of the following on school premises or at school-sponsored or school-related events over the 270 school days prior to the date of their application:
 - Possession of a dangerous weapon; or
 - Assault of educational staff
- Provided that:
 - Such suspensions or expulsions were in connection with felonies that have been adjudicated or in which the student has made an admission of guilt in court; and
 - No data before seventh grade may be considered.
- If a CTE school or program requests documents related to this weight, please remember that the only relevant information permitted to send to the CTE school/program is confirmation that a student was suspended or expelled because of their admitted or adjudicated felonies, as listed above, over the relevant time period.
- Grade promotion
 - After a CTE school or program has admitted students, middle schools may also be asked to provide confirmation that students have ultimately been promoted to ninth grade.

Reminders:

- CTE schools and programs that require student awareness as part of a completed application may not score the student awareness activities. For example, a student who completes a video module satisfies the student awareness requirement just as a student who participates in a tour.
- If a CTE school or program receives more applicants than spots, all students who submit a completed application to a CTE school or program will be entered into its lottery, regardless of attendance or discipline history. Attendance, discipline, and interest may be used as additional weights in the lottery, if used.
- Admission weights may not be assigned a score.

CTE schools and programs that use a weighted admission lottery may not assign scores to any of the admission weights. For example, a student with perfect attendance receives the same weight as a student with 10 unexcused absences in seventh and eighth grades. Student interest also may not be assigned a score.

Additional Guidance and Resources

- [Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy: Model Policy Template](#)
- [Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy Superintendent Attestation Form](#)
- [Career Technical Education Recruitment, Admission, and Retention Policies and Practices Guidance](#)
- [Nonresident Access and Tuition](#)