

MIDDLE SCHOOL CAREER EXPLORATION STATE PROFILES: METHODOLOGY

ASA commissioned ESG to analyze the efforts of all 50 states and Washington, D.C. to effectively prioritize and facilitate meaningful career exploration experiences for middle school students. These findings are included in a more detailed report, [Extending the Runway: A National Analysis of Middle School Career Exploration](#), and outlined in state profiles with a more thorough description of each state's approach to middle school career exploration.

Our analysis was driven by **three broad research questions** intended to unpack states' overall efforts to prioritize and facilitate quality middle school career exploration:



STATE VISION

How has the state defined and prioritized career exploration for middle school students?



POLICY

What policies and practices have states put into place to enable student access to meaningful career exploration experiences?



INFRASTRUCTURE

What supports have states put in place to help schools provide meaningful career exploration experiences for middle grades students?

To further refine our understanding of the depth and breadth of states' efforts in each of the research areas, we classified each state's current work using three descriptive indicators as shown in the following **rubric**:



BUILDING

States in this stage are beginning to establish the basic elements of vision, policy, and/or infrastructure.



EMERGING

States in this stage demonstrate noticeable growth and development, but still have room for meaningful growth in vision, policy, and/or infrastructure.



ADVANCED

States at this stage have reached a high level of execution in terms of their vision, policy, and/or infrastructure.

More information on the full evaluation rubric used to assess the states' current work on middle school career exploration can be found on the next three pages.

STATE BADGES

To supplement our analysis, we conducted interviews, sought out the student voice, and assessed the accessibility of middle school career exploration from each state. These are indicated on state profiles with the following badges:



Student Voice:

Indicates a state where a student offered their experience with middle school career exploration



Access: Indicates a state that has policies that facilitate quality middle school career exploration for all students.



Deep Dive: Indicates a state where we spoke with a representative from a state agency, school district, school, or intermediary.


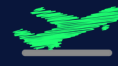

COMMON TERMS & ACRONYMS

Standard terms and acronyms for middle school career exploration in multiple states are used throughout the state profiles.

- **Career and technical education (CTE):** Career and Technical Education are courses and programs that focus on the skills and knowledge required for specific jobs or fields of work.
- **Perkins V Plan:** Legislation requires each eligible agency desiring assistance for any fiscal year under the Act to prepare and submit a State Plan to the Education Department. Each eligible agency must develop its State plan in consultation with key stakeholders, the Governor, and other State agencies with CTE authority.


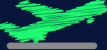



STATE VISION RUBRIC

Category	 Building	 Emerging	 Advanced
LEADERSHIP Does the state formally define career exploration for middle school students?	The state has worked to define concepts that are related to 'career exploration.	The state has defined career exploration in public-facing resources, including frameworks, plans, etc.	The state has codified the definition of career exploration in policy documents.
CAREER EXPLORATION DEFINITION Does the state leadership include career exploration as a valued or prioritized component of students' middle school experience?	The state has no explicit public commitments in support of middle school career exploration; however, the state's Department of education does support career pathways for middle school students or high school students.	The state has stated that middle school career exploration is a priority in official government documents, and alignment exists across agencies and organizations.	Along with a stated commitment to middle school commitment, the state agencies have committed money, exhibited cross-agency coordination and alignment, and have included it as a priority within official government documents.
ADVOCACY Are there organizations within the state that are advocating for middle school career exploration?	The organization prioritizes career exploration, but not specifically for middle school students.	The organization champions middle school career exploration.	The organization partners with the State Education Agency to advocate for and progress middle school career exploration



STATE POLICY RUBRIC

Category	 Building	 Emerging	 Advanced
<p>STANDARDS Does the state have policies that establish standard practices for career exploration in middle schools?</p>	<p>The state has policy standards and guidance related to career-connected learning, such as career and technical education, but not specifically for middle school career exploration.</p>	<p>The state has policy standards and guidance related to middle school career exploration; however, the state's policies aren't aligned with students' high school experiences.</p>	<p>The state's policy standards and guidance regarding middle school career exploration are connected to clear outcomes and aligned with students' high school experiences.</p>
<p>ACCOUNTABILITY Does the state integrate career exploration into its accountability systems?</p>	<p>The state does not use accountability systems to evaluate schools on middle school career exploration, but career-connected learning is mentioned in an official accountability lever, i.e., Perkins or WIOA.</p>	<p>The state formally includes middle school career exploration in its Perkins or WIOA state plan.</p>	<p>Middle school career exploration is formally included in state or federal accountability system.</p>
<p>STUDENT REQUIREMENTS Does the state have policies that require middle school students to complete career exploration activities?</p>	<p>State has college and career readiness requirements (e.g., ACT, other activities) for high school students, but does not include middle school students.</p>	<p>Some middle school exploration is required, but not connected to high school graduation.</p>	<p>Student requirement begins in middle school and is connected to high school graduation.</p>
<p>INCENTIVES Does the state have policies that incentivize career exploration in middle schools?</p>	<p>The state has incentive structures in place (e.g., recognition, financial incentives) but not specifically for middle school career exploration.</p>	<p>The state recognizes schools and districts that have done exemplary work on middle school career exploration.</p>	<p>The state has created financial incentives for middle schools to incorporate career exploration programming into their schools. This can include bonus funding for middle schools based on career exploration participation and outcomes, the number of teachers and counselors with career exploration certifications and training, and competitive grants.</p>



STATE INFRASTRUCTURE RUBRIC

Category	 Building	 Emerging	 Advanced
FUNDING Does the state use state and federal funding sources to support career exploration for middle school students?	Funding is used for career-related activities, but not specifically for middle school career exploration.	Federal funds leveraged for middle school career exploration.	The state uses a diverse portfolio of funds for middle school career exploration.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT Does the state support the training of school counselors (and other school staff) in career exploration?	The state supports school personnel to pursue professional development in career-related areas.	The state encourages middle school staff to access professional development training around career exploration materials. The state provides at most training materials that can be accessed at the user's own discretion and pace.	The state provides training/ professional development opportunities to school staff related to middle school career exploration, including webinars, in-person training, conferences, etc.
MATERIAL SUPPORTS Does the state provide material support for the implementation of middle school career exploration?	The state provides resources related to career activities (e.g., exploration, awareness, planning), but not specific to middle school exploration.	The state provides lists and links to middle school career exploration resources online for school leaders and educators (i.e., does not provide additional guidance on how to implement quality middle school career exploration, frameworks, etc).	The state provides material resources that emphasize best practices.
DATA COLLECTION Does the state collect data on middle school career exploration opportunities in the state?	The state collects data around college and career readiness, but not necessarily related to middle school career exploration.	The state collects data on middle school career exploration programs/courses, however, the data is limited (e.g., does not speak to the quality of middle school career exploration.	The state has data collection mechanisms to ensure the quality of middle school career exploration programs.
CTSOs Does the state support student participation in career and technical student organizations?	The state has CTSO chapters in its high schools.	The state encourages middle schools to provide CTSO opportunities.	The state supports and encourages student participation in CTSOs through policy or resources.
ORGANIZATIONS Are there organizations within the state that support career exploration in middle schools?	There are organizations within the state that support career development in schools generally.	There are organizations within the state that support career exploration in district, but not specifically for middle school.	There are organizations within the state that support middle school career exploration in school districts.