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JUNE 17, 2026

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# The basics of vocational and trade schools

The educational landscape is shifting, and those shifts are wide-ranging. One of the more notable shifts to occur in recent years involves an increase in student interest and enrollment in vocational and trade programs. According to the National Student Clearinghouse, enrollment in vocational and trade programs grew by nearly 20 percent between the spring of 2020 and the spring of 2025.

Students and families interested in vocational and trade schools may have questions about what these institutions offer and how they can benefit graduates going forward.

## Are vocational schools and trade schools the same thing?

While many people assume vocational and trade schools are the same thing, there is a subtle distinction between the two. According to Advanced Technology Institute (ATI), a trade school generally focuses on skilled trades like carpentry, HVAC, and plumbing. Vocational schools tend to offer a wider range of programs, including courses in business, health care and technology.

## What is a trade school?

Trade schools teach students the skills necessary to work in a specific career or profession. College and university curricu-



la are broad-based and not necessarily as career-focused as a trade school curriculum, which does not offer humanities or liberal arts courses. Trade schools do not typically offer degrees like an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree. Students who complete a program at a trade school typically earn a certificate, diploma or a credential recognized within the industry in which they hope to work.

## What is a vocational school?

ATI notes that vocational school curricula

focus on job-related training. Similar to trade schools, vocational school is unlikely to offer courses in the humanities. Vocational schools may award certificates or diplomas, but some also offer associate's degrees or applied bachelor's degrees.

## What about community colleges?

Many students may learn about vocational or trade programs offered at local community colleges. Such programs have grown in popularity, and the National Student Clearinghouse reports that

interest in vocational and trade programs drove an increase in community college enrollment during the 2024-2025 school year. Students interested in vocational or trade programs are urged to investigate the offerings at local community colleges in addition to exploring the programs at vocational or trade schools that are not necessarily affiliated with a community college. The more options students explore, the more prepared they are to choose the best school for them.

## How long is vocational and trade school?

Schools and programs vary, but students who enroll in vocational and trade school and who remain in good standing can expect to graduate in less than four years, which is the average time it takes to earn a bachelor's degree at a traditional college or university. Such programs tend to be shorter because they do not require students to take prerequisites unrelated to a student's primary interest, which is common at four-year colleges and universities.

Vocational and trade schools are growing in popularity. Students who feel such institutions might be for them are urged to explore their options.

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# Older Americans are working longer How do we support them?

People are working later in life for many reasons. And as a result, older workers represent a growing share of the U.S. workforce. But despite this growing representation, older workers may be struggling to compete in today's workforce.

## Why are people working later in life, and what challenges do they face?

The U.S. workforce is changing. In fact, the percentage of older workers (55 and up) increased from 15% to 23% of the workforce in the last 20 years.

So why are so many older people working later into life? There are a number of reasons—some based on necessity and others on choice. Longer life expectancy, higher educational degrees, and increases to the age for receiving full Social Security benefits may play a role.

We also interviewed some older workers who told us that they needed to save more for retirement before quitting work. Others said they kept working to maintain health insurance coverage. And some older workers simply wanted the social engagement within their communities.

When seeking new employment, older workers told us they preferred jobs that addressed their financial needs and gave them a sense of purpose and com-

munity connection. They also said they sought jobs that offered medical benefits, flexible work arrangements, and work that was less physically demanding.

For example, one woman said, "Neither my husband nor myself are old enough for Medicare yet. I'm going through ... the [health insurance marketplace] right now, and it's expensive."

Another woman told us, "I have a mortgage, and my son ... started at [a] university ... So I'd like to support him if he needs extra money."

But despite the need for continued employment, many workers we spoke with noted obstacles to securing and keeping their dream jobs. Older workers also described challenges searching for and obtaining a job. These challenges included navigating the job search and application processes, developing new skills (particularly with technology), and potential age discrimination by employers.

Older workers often face challenges in navigating the job application process, developing new skills, and managing potential age discrimination.

## What supports are available to help older workers?

The federal government has ways it helps older workers manage the chal-

lenges that could affect their ability to find and retain jobs. For example, the Departments of Labor and Education administer several programs through a network of state and local partners. These programs provide career counseling, job search help, skill training, and more. The Labor Department also supports older workers by funding research and providing online tools and resources for them.

Some programs are offered through job centers. Officials at these centers told us that older workers had unique employment needs. For example, some older workers have never owned a computer or rarely used them. Some job center officials also told us that when older workers transition from physically demanding jobs into other work, they may need computer skills training to be competitive in the job market.

Some officials also told us that part of their role is helping people transfer their existing skills to new job fields. For example, officials at one job center told us about a former sewing machine repair technician who got a job as a manager for a small engine repair company. They did so by emphasizing their existing skills and taking some basic computer classes to broaden their computer literacy skills.

Many older workers we spoke with said that job center staff gave them strat-

egies for creating resumes and preparing for job interviews—increasing their chances of being hired. And three older workers with disabilities said workforce programs helped them find jobs they could perform or helped them arrange necessary accommodations with their employer.

We also learned about initiatives at the state and local level to support older workers. For example, one state offered online career-building seminars in which older workers could network with one another and learn strategies to become more competitive in the job market. In other states, job centers offered hands-on digital literacy classes for people 55 and older.

Older workers told us these opportunities were important to them. However, we found that the Labor Department has not helped state and local partners share information on the results of these initiatives. Sharing lessons learned could help all partners improve their strategies for serving older workers and better address the challenges many older workers face. In turn, the Labor Department would be helping these older workers support themselves financially, maintain a sense of purpose, and prepare for retirement while contributing their knowledge and experience to the workplace.

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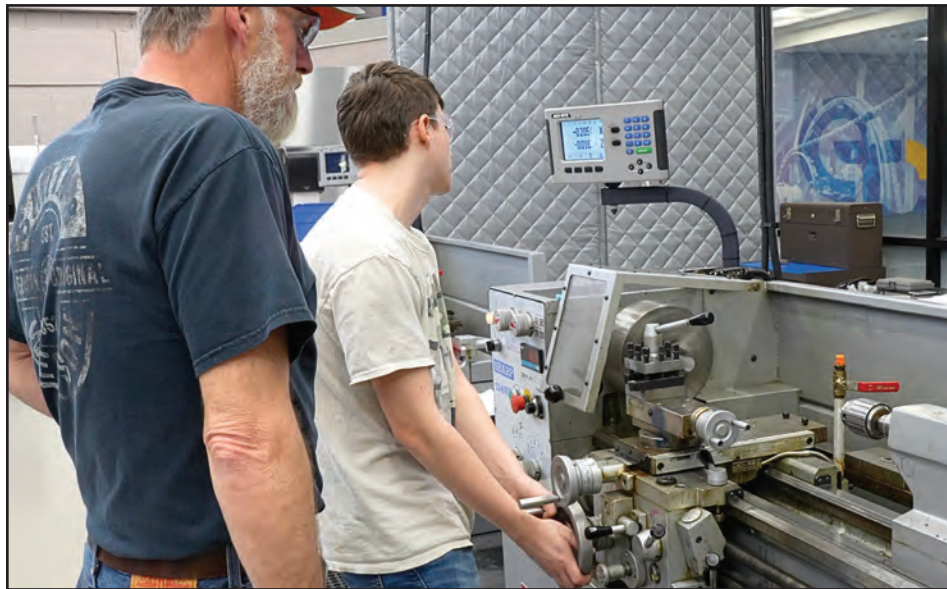
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# Pitt-Titusville expands workforce opportunities

*Education & Training Center at Pitt-Titusville strengthens workforce development through CareerFocused Training*

TITUSVILLE, PA –The Education & Training Center at Pitt-Titusville focus on collaborative efforts to strengthen workforce development across North-western Pennsylvania. These initiatives directly support highdemand fields such as manufacturing, nursing, dental hygiene, nurse aide training, industrial maintenance, and criminal justice, aligning with regional labor needs highlighted

in recent employment data.

The Education & Employment report published last year, emphasizes that “companies often need help producing goods” and that “health care and social assistance... numbered nearly 1.6 million” older workers in 2025, underscor- ing the ongoing demand for skilled profes- sionals in manufacturing and health services (Education & Employment, 2025, pp. 2–3). The report also notes the importance of “industrial maintenance apprenticeship” programs and the region’s strong employer base in manufac- turing, health care, and public service.

machining and mechanical systems, pre- ventive maintenance, safety, and trouble- shooting—skills that match the region’s strong industrial base.

Nursing, Nurse Aide, and Dental Hy- giene Pitt’s longstanding health programs and NPRC’s allied health offerings pre- pare students for immediate employment in hospitals, longterm care facilities, and dental practices.

Criminal Justice & Public Safety NPRC’s criminal justice curriculum supports pathways into law enforce- ment, corrections, and community safe- ty roles.

## Expanding access to CareerReady programs

ETC together with its partners are working to ensure that both traditional and non-traditional students across rural and smalltown Pennsylvania have access to affordable, flexible, and industry- aligned training pathways:

Manufacturing & Industrial Main- tenance Pitt and NPRC offer handson technical training aligned with regional employers’ needs. Programs emphasize

## Meeting regional workforce needs

Northwestern Pennsylvania’s top employers include medical and manu- facturing sectors. These employers rely on a steady pipeline of trained workers in technical, health, and public service fields. These organizations rely on edu- cation and training in preparing individu- als for career advancement.

## A unified commitment to community and economic growth

Through shared resources, coordinat- ed programming, and partnerships with employers, ETC at Pitt-Titusville is cre- ating clear, accessible pathways for indi- viduals seeking new careers, upskilling opportunities, or reentry into the work- force.

“Our institutions are committed to strengthening the region’s workforce by offering programs that directly respond to employer needs,” said Dr. Stephanie Fiely, executive director for the Educa- tion & Training Center at Pitt-Titusville. “From health care to manufacturing to public safety, we are preparing students for meaningful careers that support the economic vitality of Northwestern Penn- sylvania.”



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# How to create a business succession plan

(StatePoint) For many business owners, succession planning is often pushed aside by day-to-day demands. But having a clear plan for what happens to your business once you're ready to step back is one of the most important ways to protect what you've built.

PNC's Business Owner Wealth Insights Report shows that nearly 70% of owners agree planning for the future is important, but 1 in 3 have not yet formalized their succession plan. One of the biggest barriers: its perceived complexity.

## Start with alignment, not mechanics

The most effective succession plans start with clarity on outcomes – not mechanics.

Start by clarifying your priorities, including financial goals, business direction, and stakeholder expectations. This alignment will guide key decisions, from choosing a successor to structuring the transition.

Jim Benedict, head of Business Owner Solutions, PNC Private Bank, said: "We tell clients to 'begin with the end in mind.' How would they like their family wealth and business to be structured? What do they want to accomplish? What's important to them? Once we know the answers to those questions, we can look at succession methods and wealth structures."

## Identify and develop future leadership

The next step is determining who could eventually lead the business.



Potential successors may include family members, partners, employees or outside buyers.

Each option brings distinct considerations, including whether the successor has the skills to lead, how the transfer will be structured, and what level of involvement the current owner will retain.

## Create a transition timeline

A phased transition over several years allows for:

- deliberate leadership development and mentoring;
- gradual transfer of responsibilities and relationships;

- reduced operational disruption; and
- greater flexibility in structuring ownership transfer.

Get a realistic business valuation

A professional valuation provides a clearer picture of financial health and helps guide retirement, tax, and other transition decisions.

It also gives an owner a reliable value to incorporate into personal financial planning and a framework to evaluate whether unsolicited offers are credible and worth pursuing.

## Communicate the plan

One of the most overlooked aspects of succession planning is communication.

Businesses successfully navigating succession tend to focus on three areas:

**Clarity:** defining roles, expectations, and the future leadership structure.

**Alignment:** ensuring key stakehold-

ers share a common understanding of direction.

**Consistency:** establishing regular opportunities to revisit and refine the plan.

## Review and update regularly

Review your plan regularly, especially after major business changes, leadership shifts, or personal life events. Keeping the plan current helps ensure it stays aligned with your goals and your company's needs.

## Steps You Can Take Today

- Document your top two or three succession goals;
- Identify at least one potential successor; and
- Schedule a conversation with a trusted financial or legal advisor.

Creating a succession plan may feel like a future concern, but planning ahead can help protect your business, support your employees, and make the next chapter smoother for everyone involved.



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# The unexpected perks of extracurriculars

Once a new school year begins, students soon find themselves back in the hustle and bustle. Extracurricular activities likely will figure prominently in students' and parents' schedules.

Extracurriculars offer many benefits to students, but also come with a considerable commitment of time and even money. The University of Florida notes that a study of more than 13,000 tenth graders found that, on average, the teens participated in two to three extracurriculars and spent about five hours per week on them. While moderate involvement in these extracurriculars was found to improve academic performance, at very high levels of involvement (more than 14 hours a week), teens' academic well-being declined.

The most obvious benefit of extracurriculars is spending time with like-minded peers who share the same interests. But there are many additional and lesser-known benefits of extracurricular activities.

**Take healthy risks.** Extracurriculars enable students to try something out of their comfort zone. This is low-stakes risk-taking where students can try, sometimes fail, and brush them-



selves off to try again to build confidence.

**Become civically minded.** The University of Florida also notes a study of 1,000 teens who were followed from high school into young adulthood as a testament to the potential benefits of extracurriculars. Study participants who were involved in extracurriculars were more likely to vote, volunteer and be

psychologically healthy, well-educated adults.

**Strengthen executive functioning skills.** Extracurriculars can help students coordinate complex, non-academic tasks, such as organizing a play or musical performance. They also help to rewire the brain to handle stress, collaborate and manage multifaceted projects.

**Motivate kids to exercise.** Though not

all extracurriculars are physical in nature, many are. Sports help kids be more active in ways that may not seem like the work of heading to the gym, according to WebMD. Those who regularly exercise are at lower risk for many health conditions, including high cholesterol and obesity.

**Students can reinvent themselves.** Extracurriculars offer students a chance to get a break from how they may be seen at home or in school. If a student is dubbed "the science kid" in a different setting, an extracurricular may afford him or her a chance to try on a creative persona. Similarly, a typically quiet student may be gregarious when participating in the school play. Extracurriculars enable reinvention and can help kids find their real voices.

**Make learning fun.** School can be taxing on students, especially by the time they reach high school. Extracurriculars can renew students' passions, especially when they choose an activity for themselves that they truly enjoy.

Extracurricular activities enable students to adopt new personas, make friends, boost physical and mental health, and realize long-term advantages as they age.



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View the public information disclosed by the ACEN regarding this program at [www.acenursing.org](http://www.acenursing.org).

Approved by: Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing (Initial approval)

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The most recent accreditation decision made by the ACEN Board of Commissioners for the diploma nursing program is continuing accreditation.

View the public information disclosed by the ACEN regarding this program on the ACEN website.

Approved by: Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing (Initial approval)

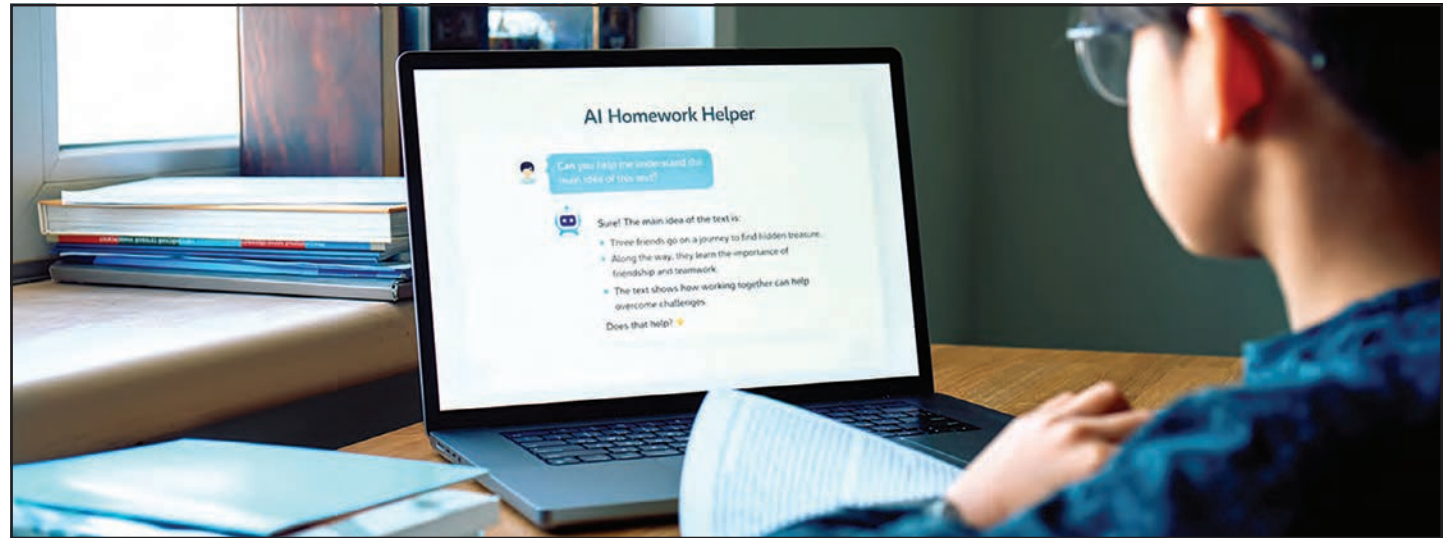


# What to know about AI use in the classroom

Artificial intelligence (AI) has been foremost on the minds of millions of people in recent years. While much of the public discourse around AI has focused on the uncertainty and anxiety it has instilled in people concerned about their jobs, use of the technology in classrooms has garnered considerably less scrutiny.

That AI in the classroom has not been the central focus of public discourse should not be mistaken as a sign that academia has proven immune to the technology. In fact, educators know quite the opposite is true. A 2024 Common Sense Media survey of more than 1,000 teenage students found that seven in 10 reported using generative AI for schoolwork. The students' most common reason to use it was for homework help. If that surprises parents or people without school-aged students at home, then some additional information about AI use in the classroom might be even more eye-opening.

**AI has had a presence in classrooms for a long time.** While the public discourse surrounding AI might only have ratcheted up over the last couple of years, the technology has had a presence on many campuses for far longer than that. Computer-aided educational systems have been used in classrooms for decades



to help students in subjects including math and language. While the release of ChatGPT in late 2022 might have revolutionized and complicated the use of AI in educational settings, the popular platform did not mark the first time educators and students accessed AI-driven tools.

**Many students use AI with permission from their teachers.** The Common Sense Media study found that AI is not necessarily being used without the knowledge of educators. Roughly half of

the students who responded to the survey indicated they used AI with permission from a teacher.

**AI has helped lots of students.** Parents may be suspicious of AI tools like ChatGPT because they feel kids will employ such applications to get around doing their schoolwork by themselves, it's important to recognize that AI has helped countless students improve their academic performance. Companies such as Carnegie Learning, Khan Academy and McGraw Hill offer AI tutoring tools to help students better understand subjects they might be struggling with. Tools vary, but many are capable of personalizing the learning experience in much the same way effective but sometimes expensive tutors have done to help struggling students for years.

**There are safeguards in place.** AI detection software is not foolproof, but many educators use such programs to

check the work students submit to ensure they are handing in their own work. As AI tools are tweaked and strengthened, detection software might become an even more reliable and accurate way to check students' work.

**AI is helping some educators offer even more.** The American Psychological Association notes that educators are utilizing AI to generate new lesson plans and in-class activities. This can make learning more fun for students, and can even allow educators to adapt on the fly if their existing lesson plans are not resonating with their students.

AI has been in classrooms for quite some time. Though parents are not wrong to question the potentially adverse effects of AI on their school-aged children, it's equally important to recognize the many positive effects of AI on students and educators.

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18	Valley Grove School District	Clarion Laminates LLC	Dolgencorp LLC
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Source — pa.gov

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