



How Can Missouri Get More Out of Its CTE Programs?

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It's an alarming statistic. Even though more than [90 percent of Missouri high school students graduate](#), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) reports that just [42.5 percent](#) (page 4) are prepared for college or a career after graduation. For students headed to college, this lack of preparation can lead to a rude awakening. But students who are interested in a career that does not require a traditional college degree also face problems when their high school education doesn't teach them the skills they need to make themselves attractive to employers

Hundreds of career and technical education (CTE) programs across Missouri offer practical training in fields such as agriculture, business, health care, culinary arts, construction, computer science, and others. In many cases, students who complete the required coursework are issued certificates to that effect. But a school-issued certificate alone isn't always enough to ensure students can access the workforce; they need credentials that carry weight with employers in the world beyond school.

Private-sector employers have everything to gain by ensuring that new graduates are ready to start work right away. That's why many professional associations issue their own industry-

recognized credentials (IRCs), such as Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) or Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certification. CTE students don't have to take IRC exams to graduate, but passing an exam can save students time and money at the outset of their careers. For example, a CNA certificate that could be earned as part of a student's high school coursework might otherwise require about 5 months of coursework and several hundred dollars in tuition at a community college.

To promote IRC attainment among high school students, several states have begun offering teachers bonus pay for every student of theirs who passes an IRC exam. For example, for every student who leaves high school ASE certified, the auto shop teacher might receive \$25 to \$50.

Linking teacher bonuses to IRCs has boosted student IRC attainment in states that have adopted the policy. For example, Florida awards a \$50 bonus to a teacher for each student who earns an IRC after taking a course that could earn them college credit in the relevant subject, and \$25 for each student who earns an IRC after taking only high-school-level classes. IRC attainment has grown from 803 graduates in 2008 to over 86,000 in 2017.

Similarly, since offering CTE teachers bonus pay when students earn IRCs, North Carolina has seen a 53 percent growth in five years. In the 2016–2017 school year, over [160,000 IRCs](#) were earned. By comparison, there were 8,566 IRCs earned in Missouri the same year (according to information provided by DESE), meaning that Missouri has plenty of room for improvement. Unbelievably, just six high school students passed the Masonry IRC exam and just five passed the Construction IRC exam in Missouri last year.

More students getting IRCs could create a stronger workforce for our state. Other states are finding creative ways to make this happen—shouldn't Missouri?

About the Author



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Abigail Burrola graduated from Azusa Pacific University with a bachelor's degree in political science in 2018.

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