Illinois’ Career Cluster Model

Illinois adopted the States’ Career Clusters Framework (see: http://www.careerclusters.org/) that offers 16 Career Clusters, aligned with 79 Career Pathways and numerous Programs of Study. Each of these elements is further defined below.

What are Career Clusters, Career Pathways, and Programs of Study?

Career Clusters are groups of occupations and industries that have in common a set of foundational knowledge and skills. There are 16 nationally recognized clusters, within which are multiple Career Pathways.

Cluster Level Knowledge and Skills: The cluster level knowledge and skills set is built on a common core required for career success in the multiple occupations included in the cluster. This shared core consists of the following elements: academic foundations; communications; problem solving and critical thinking; information technology applications; systems; safety, health and environmental; leadership and teamwork; ethics and legal responsibilities; employability and career development; and technical skills.

Career Pathways are multi-year programs of academic and technical study that prepare students for a full range of postsecondary options within each of the 16 clusters. Currently, there are 79 nationally recognized pathways, each with specific pathway knowledge and skills. These pathways provide a context for exploring career options at all levels of education and a framework for linking learning to the skills and knowledge needed for future education and employment.

Pathway Level Knowledge and Skills: The pathway level knowledge and skills set is built on a common core of knowledge and skills required for career success in all Programs of Study aligned with the pathway. This core is specific to the pathway and consists of elements selected by secondary and postsecondary educators with input from business and industry and other stakeholders.

Programs of Study (POS) are sequences of courses that incorporate a non-duplicative progression of secondary and postsecondary elements that include both academic and career and technical education content. Programs of Study should start no later than the ninth grade and continue through at least two years of postsecondary education. Programs of Study include opportunities to earn college credit (dual credit) in high school, an industry-recognized credential or certificate at the secondary/postsecondary level, and an associate or baccalaureate degree.

Why a Career Clusters Framework?

The framework of career pathways, career clusters, and Programs of Study organizes educational preparation and occupational choices into a unified concept. By combining rigorous academics with career preparation, students have a clear path to their future. Career clusters:

- are for all students
- create distinct educational plans of study students can follow from secondary to postsecondary education to employment
- create smooth transitions in the educational pipeline and reduce duplication
- empower students through information and experiences they need to make informed educational choices
- help counselors, teachers, parents, and students design individual plans of study
- comprise a key element in enhancing economic development by connecting schools with business and industry

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