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Powering Potential

Duval County's Career-Connected Learning Landscape

Highlighting what's on the horizon

2026

INTRODUCTION



Duval County has made meaningful progress in building a career-connected learning ecosystem that spans early learning, K–12 education, postsecondary institutions, workforce development, and industry engagement. In recent years, and the Jacksonville Public Education Fund (JPEF) and its partners have produced a series of reports, initiatives, and cross-sector convenings that examine this landscape from multiple perspectives, including prior research mapping the region's science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and career and technical education (CTE) ecosystem.

A critical component of this ecosystem begins in early childhood. Organizations such as the Early Learning Coalition of Duval (ELC of Duval) play a foundational role in preparing young learners and their families for long-term educational and workforce success by strengthening school readiness, supporting early

educators, and coordinating access to early learning services.

Experiential learning programs such as the Junior Achievement of North Florida Experiential Learning Center will provide immersive, hands-on opportunities for students to explore careers, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship in simulated real-world environments.

Building on these efforts, and informed by prior STEM landscape research, Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) is also investing in innovative models that expand access to career exploration, including a new Career Lab mobile launching in 2027.

This report synthesizes existing research to provide a clear, shared understanding of the opportunity ahead, and how stronger alignment can better support students, families, and the region's future workforce.

WHAT CURRENTLY EXISTS



A Robust Foundation of Career Pathways and Programs

Duval County benefits from a strong statewide and regional foundation for career-connected learning. Florida's career pathways framework spans 17 career clusters and supports progression from middle school exploration through secondary CTE, postsecondary credentials, and workforce entry. This system includes hundreds of courses and credentials statewide, offering multiple on- and off-ramps aligned with workforce needs and supported by centralized resources such as CPALMS and statewide articulation agreements.

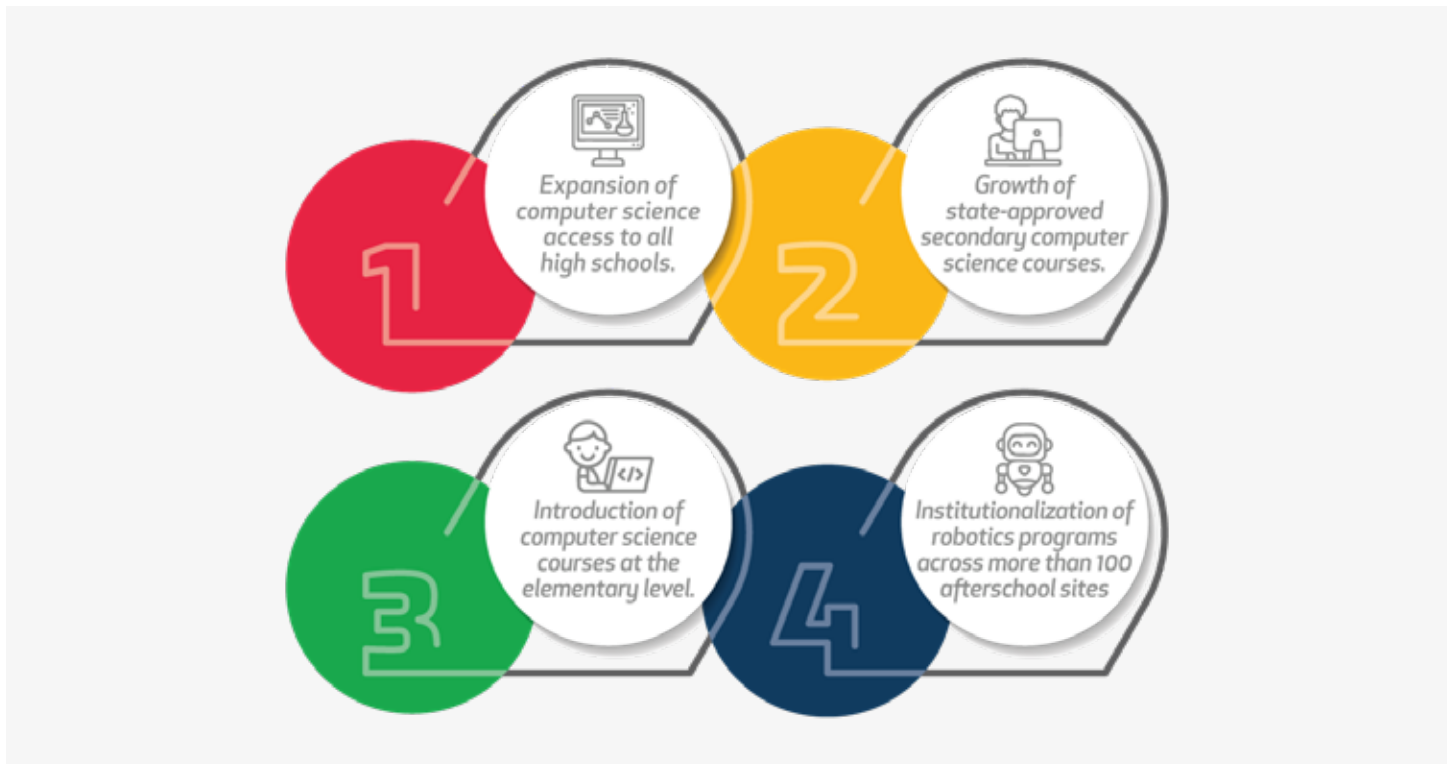
In Duval County, this framework is reflected in career-themed middle and high school courses, registered career academies, postsecondary certificates and degrees, and work-based learning opportunities such as internships and apprenticeships. Students and families can access planning and navigation tools such as Xello and FloridaShines, while broader awareness efforts like Get There Florida and Future of Work Florida highlight high-demand careers and pathways.

Sector-specific analyses reinforce this alignment. For example, the Transportation and Logistics Curricular Recommendations Report identified 12 secondary transportation and logistics programs across Northeast Florida, shaped by direct employer input to emphasize hands-on, industry-relevant learning.

Existing STEM and CTE Infrastructure at the Elementary Level

Previous JPEF STEM landscape research documented a growing ecosystem of STEM and CTE-related opportunities across Duval County, including elementary-level initiatives. Through partnerships such as STEM2Hub, Microsoft TEALS, Code.org, and district-led efforts, DCPS has expanded access to computer science and STEM learning across grade levels.

Key milestones include:



Recent outcomes reflect significant scale:

- Tens of thousands of elementary students enrolled in computer science courses
- Thousands of secondary students participating in Advanced Placement and foundational coding courses
- Hundreds of teachers trained in computer science fundamentals and principles

This existing infrastructure demonstrates that meaningful STEM and CTE foundations are already in place, including at the elementary school level. At the same time, prior landscape findings also highlighted ongoing challenges related to cohesion, shared visibility, and equitable distribution of opportunities across schools.

Florida's focus on hands-on, industry-relevant learning is directly shaped by employer inputs.

Expanding Access Through the CTE Mobile Unit

Launching in January 2027, the Career Lab is a first-of-its-kind mobile lab designed to bring high-quality, hands-on career exploration directly to students across Duval County.

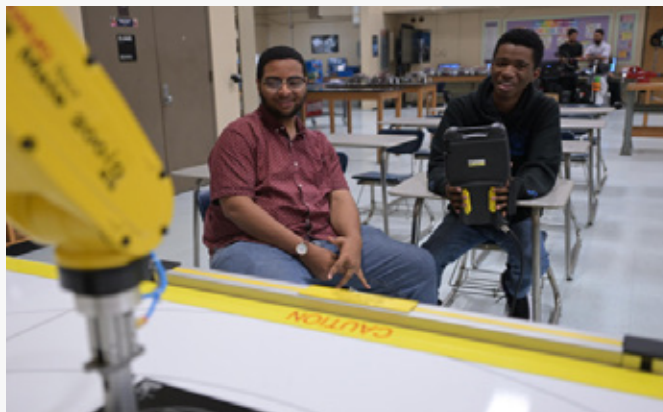
Developed by DCPS CTE department with the support of the Florida Legislature and JPEF, the Career lab will primarily serve early elementary students and bring immersive career-connected learning experiences directly to school campuses that may not have dedicated CTE labs or specialized equipment.

The mobile lab will feature interactive, simulated experiences in fields such as:

- Corporate operations and finance
- Manufacturing and construction
- Health and wellness
- Environmental science and agriculture

- IT and cybersecurity
- Architecture, engineering, and energy
- Transportation and logistics

By prioritizing younger learners and schools without existing CTE infrastructure, the Lab strengthens access by ensuring that early exposure does not depend on geography or school-level capacity. The Career Lab builds upon the region's existing STEM and CTE ecosystem, reinforcing early exposure and helping students make informed decisions as they progress into middle and high school pathways.



GROWING EDUCATOR-INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT



Recent initiatives have strengthened direct connections between educators and industry. In 2025, the Jacksonville Public Education Fund supported 40 Duval County educators and school counselors to participate in an Educator Industry Immersion experience, offered by the Florida Chamber Foundation, this experience provided exposure to local workforce environments, emerging technologies, and evolving skill needs.

These educators are now positioned to extend those insights through professional learning communities and peer coaching. Cross-sector convenings during the 2024–2025 period further emphasized the importance of adaptability, collaboration, digital fluency, and problem-solving in response to rapid technological change, including generative AI.

EXISTING DATA AND SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE



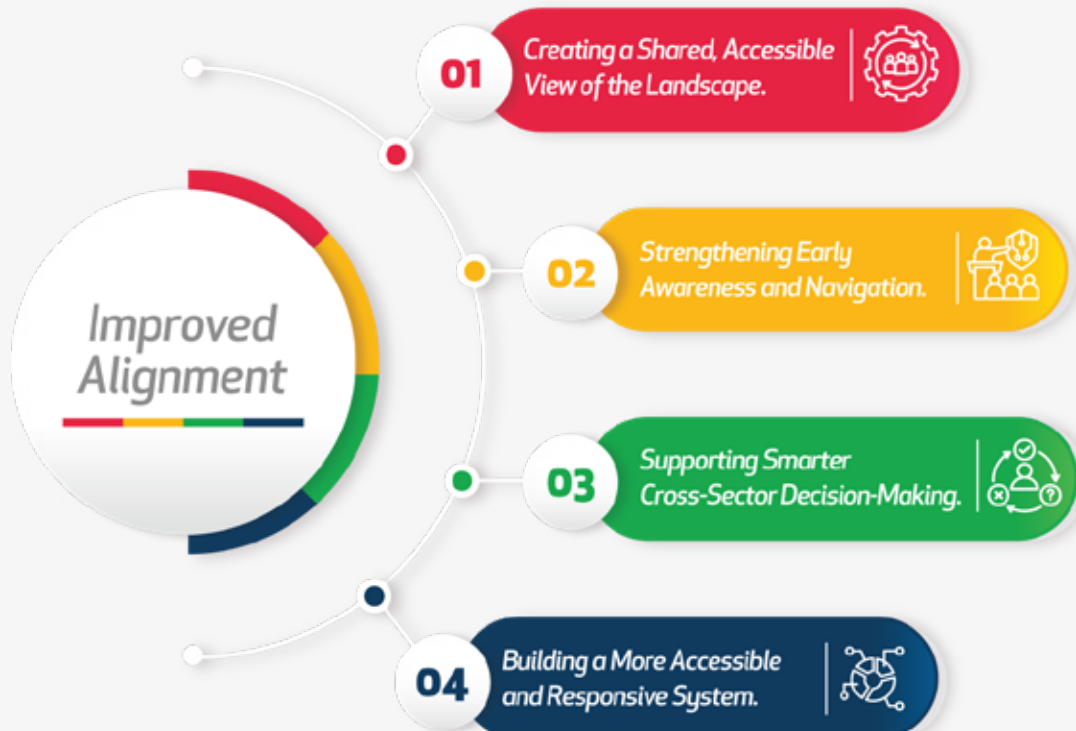
Florida and Duval County have invested in multiple platforms and systems designed to support students and families, including career planning tools, workforce portals, and financial aid programs.

The state's career pathways system includes nearly 1,000 CTE programs cataloged through centralized platforms that connect academic standards, credentials, and articulated credit pathways.

Across early learning, K-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems, substantial data are collected related to enrollment, participation, credentials, and outcomes. Targeted supports exist for students with disabilities, first-generation college students, and those pursuing credentials in high-demand fields.

However, prior research, including JPEF's earlier STEM landscape analysis, suggests that while data exist, integration and strategic use remain ongoing opportunities for improvement.

HOW IMPROVED ALIGNMENT CAN BETTER SUPPORT STUDENTS AND FAMILIES





Creating a Shared, Accessible View of the Landscape

A common, visual understanding of how early learning, K–12 pathways, postsecondary options, and workforce systems connect would reduce fragmentation and clarify transition points.

Such a shared view can help leaders understand:

- What programs exist at each stage
- How students move between them
- Where drop-off risks occur
- Where gaps persist

Strengthening Early Awareness and Navigation

Building on existing elementary STEM infrastructure and reinforcing it with coordinated initiatives like the Career Lab can ensure that career exploration begins early and connects meaningfully to future pathways.

Continuity across platform and institutions is especially critical for families unfamiliar with CTE or workforce credentials.

Supporting Smarter Cross-Sector Decision-Making

Synthesized insights enable leaders to make strategic investments rather than fragmented ones. Alignment clarifies shared goals, supports cross-sector metrics, and strengthens continuous improvement efforts.

Building a More Accessible and Responsive System

When systems are easier to navigate and better aligned, students are less likely to miss opportunities due to lack of information or access. Employers benefit from a more prepared and diverse talent pipeline, and families gain confidence in supporting their children's pathways.

CONCLUSION

Duval County's career-connected learning ecosystem is robust and expanding.

The opportunity now is not to create parallel systems, but to strengthen alignment, visibility, and cohesion across what already exists. By synthesizing data, reinforcing early exposure, and clarifying connections across grade levels and sectors, Duval County can move from a collection of strong programs to a fully integrated, more accessible education-to-workforce ecosystem.

This moment presents an opportunity to move from isolated efforts to collective action, ensuring that every student, beginning in the earliest grades, can see, understand, and access a clear pathway to future careers.



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