

Next Generation Career Pathways Update (NGCP) 2026

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DRAFT

2026 Update: Next Generation Career Pathways (NGCP)

This cycle, The Next Generation Career Pathways subcommittee refined its vision into a concrete promise that every Nevada learner—wherever they live—can explore careers early and often, gain real work experience, and graduate with real options: college, training, or a good job they are ready for.

To that end, the Commission continues to recommend strengthening Next Generation Career Pathways for all Nevada learners and enhancing partnerships with business and industry. In 2025–26, the Next Generation Career Pathways Subcommittee focused on translating that recommendation into more concrete “roadwork”. Specifically, the subcommittee’s activities included clarifying what Nevada should guarantee students before they enter high school, what implementation supports would make that guarantee feasible, and what additional advising and employer-participation conditions must be strengthened to achieve the goals outlined in the roadmap.

In this cycle, the subcommittee focused its attention on middle school career exploration as a priority opportunity space in Nevada’s pathway system. While middle school career exploration is valued and supported through several existing policies, tools, and programs, it is not yet structured as a clear, common statewide student experience. Nevada already has important building blocks, including Academic Learning Plans for middle school students, four-year academic plans for ninth-grade pupils, the NDE Career Guidance resources and CCR Toolkit, middle school CTE standards for districts that offer middle school CTE, broader career pathways and work-based learning infrastructure, career coach authority through AB 539, and middle school NSPF indicators related to Academic Learning Plans and eighth-grade credit requirements. At the same time, the subcommittee found that Nevada does not yet have a codified middle school career exploration definition, and existing building blocks do not articulate a universal grades 6–8 developmental continuum, a universal middle school completion expectation, a lightweight common student reflection or evidence component, a statewide quality expectation, a direct middle school career exploration reporting routine, or a dedicated recurring middle-school-specific implementation / incentive structure.

The subcommittee produced a number of analytic briefs over the course of this cycle:

- [Understanding advising capacity in grades 6-12](#)
- [Understanding employer friction in career-connected learning](#)
- [Nevada middle school career exploration ecosystem scan](#)
- [Cross-state policy scan on middle school career exploration](#)

These artifacts capture key elements of the subcommittee’s work and learning in 2025-26 and provide more granular analysis to support implementation of the roadmap’s priorities moving forward. In the next cycle, the subcommittee will consider how best to socialize these briefs or portions thereof with the field.

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Recommendation: Establish a Middle School Career Exploration Guarantee with Flexible Delivery

The Commission recommends that Nevada establish a [Middle School Career Exploration Guarantee with a Flexible Delivery Model](#).

This means the State should guarantee that every Nevada learner completes a developmentally appropriate middle school career exploration experience set across grades 6–8, culminating by the end of grade 8 in reflection and supported transition planning that can inform the move into high school. This experience set includes the following:

- A. Students identify interests, strengths, preferences, and emerging goals;
- B. Students understand career clusters, local and statewide high school pathway options within and beyond their zoned districts, CTE opportunities, dual credit, work-based learning, postsecondary training, apprenticeships, and other future options;
- C. Students connect middle school exploration to high school selection, ninth-grade course selection and the four-year academic plan;
- D. Students engage with at least one employer, industry, community, or near-peer experience;
- E. Students complete structured reflection with a trusted adult and, where feasible, a family member or caregiver; and
- F. Students produce a portable middle school career exploration reflection, portfolio entry, or plan component that captures what the student learned and can inform the transition into high school.

The guarantee is not intended to make grade 8 the first or only point of career exploration. Rather, grade 8 should serve as a culminating transition moment where students reflect on what they have explored across middle school and carry that learning into high school planning.

In this recommendation, a guarantee of student experience does not mandate one statewide delivery model.

Districts should be able to meet the expectation through locally appropriate approaches, including a course, course-equivalent, advisory sequence, embedded classroom units, middle school CTE, counselor-led workshops, career coach programming, partner-supported programming, virtual or hybrid experiences, or another equivalent model.

The subcommittee recommends this flexible guarantee model because it creates a clearer statewide floor while preserving local flexibility. Implementing schools and districts must consider factors such as time, cost, opportunity costs for students, staffing questions, and conflicts with other middle school goals and course offerings when selecting a delivery model.

Experience Set	Evidence	Review	Flexibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interest/skills inventory ● Career clusters + Nevada Industries ● Local High School pathway options ● Employer, community, or near peer exposure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflection or portfolio entry ● Culminating artifact (e.g., career exploration reflection, portfolio entry, or plan addendum) ● Connect to grade 9 course selection and 4-year plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Trusted adult conversation ● Family/caregiver engagement where feasible ● Revisable, not locking students in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Course, advisory, embedded units, CTE, counselor/career coach, partner program, or equivalent model

Immediate Next Steps : 2026 collaborative exploration and proof-building

In the short term, the subcommittee recommends that the Commission, NDE, school districts, charter schools, counselors, CTE leaders, workforce development partners, employer partners, and other relevant stakeholders collaborate to make the Middle School Career Exploration Guarantee more concrete, implementation-ready, and evidence-informed before pursuing a binding statewide mandate.

1. Operationalize the components of the guarantee through clear implementation guidance

The recommendation above establishes the proposed statewide floor for the Middle School Career Exploration Guarantee. In Summer and Fall 2026, the Commission should work with NDE, districts, charter schools, counselors, CTE leaders, workforce partners, employer partners, and other relevant stakeholders to translate that floor into practical implementation guidance. This work should clarify what counts for each component of the guarantee, how those components can build across grades 6–8, how completion can be documented without creating unnecessary compliance burden, and how districts can meet the same student-experience expectation through different local delivery models.

At a minimum, this operational guidance should answer the following questions:

- What qualifies as a career interest or skills inventory?
- What qualifies as meaningful exploration of local and statewide high school pathway options?
- How should career awareness, exploration, early exposure, and reflection build across grades 6, 7, and 8?
- How should the experience connect to ninth-grade course selection and the four-year academic plan?
- What kinds of employer, industry, community, or near-peer exposure are sufficient, including virtual or rural-access options?
- What does structured reflection look like, and who can facilitate it?
- When is family or trusted adult review feasible, and what alternatives should be acceptable?
- What minimum elements should be captured in a culminating career exploration reflection, portfolio entry, or plan addendum?

The goal is to make the guarantee concrete enough that every student receives a meaningful experience, while allowing schools and districts to organize delivery in locally appropriate ways.

2. Review and incorporate lessons from NDE's middle school career exploration pilots

The Commission should review, synthesize, and incorporate the results of the district grant funded collaboration project with NDE related to middle school career exploration pilots as those results become available. That review should identify what, if anything, the pilots suggest about:

- feasible delivery models within the context of CTE courses;
- student engagement and student artifacts;
- staffing and training needs;
- counselor, teacher, CTE, career coach, and partner roles;
- use of technology or virtual experiences;
- family engagement;
- employer / community participation;
- data or evidence that can support improvement without creating unnecessary compliance burden.

The pilot synthesis should be used to refine the guarantee's minimum components, the implementation menu, and any future policy-development pathway.

3. Develop a grades 6–8 implementation menu and culminating student reflection tool through coordinated partnership

In Horizon 1, the Commission should support collaborative development of a practical grades 6–8 implementation menu and a model culminating student reflection, portfolio entry, or plan addendum. This should be coordinated among the Commission, NDE, districts, charter schools, counselors, CTE leaders, workforce partners, employer partners, and other relevant organizations, rather than assigned to a single agency as an additional stand-alone responsibility.

The implementation menu should show how different districts could meet the guarantee through different models, such as:

- a dedicated course;
- a course-equivalent;
- advisory;
- embedded classroom units;
- middle school CTE;
- counselor- or career-coach-led workshops;
- partner-supported programming;
- virtual or hybrid employer / industry exposure;
- portfolio or project-based evidence.

The culminating reflection or evidence component should be simple enough to use statewide but flexible enough to fit local tools, platforms, portfolios, and Academic Learning Plan processes. Nevada's current policy spine already includes NRS 388.165 for middle school Academic Learning Plans, NRS 388.205 for ninth-grade four-year academic plans, and NRS 389.041 for occupational guidance and counseling in grades 7–12. The immediate task is to determine how these existing structures can support a coherent middle school exploration continuum that culminates in a stronger grade 8 to grade 9 transition.

4. Hold joint collaborative conversations with World-Class Teaching and Learning

The Commission should support joint collaborative conversations between this subcommittee and World-Class Teaching and Learning subcommittee members and partners to explore instructional strategies, teaching and learning implications, and staff preparation needs related to the guarantee.

These conversations should examine:

- what strong middle school career exploration looks like instructionally;
- how career exploration can be embedded in advisory, core content, CTE, project-based learning, learner-centered practice, or other structures;
- how teachers, counselors, career coaches, CTE staff, and partners should be prepared to facilitate reflection, self-knowledge, career literacy, and pathway awareness;
- what professional learning or facilitation supports may be needed;
- how to ensure the guarantee does not feel like “one more thing” layered onto educators;
- how professional learning for adults can model the learner-centered and competency-based experiences Nevada wants students to have.

5. Hold joint collaborative conversations with Measuring What Matters

The Commission should also support joint collaborative conversations between this subcommittee and Measuring What Matters subcommittee members and partners to explore what measurement, reporting, accountability, and continuous-improvement structures may support implementation of the guarantee. These conversations should explore the appropriate purpose, timing, and use of potential measures, including:

- access to the guarantee;
- completion of the grade 8 artifact or plan component;
- quality of student experience;
- disaggregated participation and access data;
- rural, frontier, and small-school implementation realities;
- student and family understanding of pathway options;
- downstream connections to ninth-grade course selection, CTE participation, CCR Diploma planning, work-based learning, credentials, and postsecondary pathways.

6. Translate subcommittee briefs into next-phase tools and decisions

The NGCP Subcommittee developed a number of analytic briefs this cycle:

- [Understanding advising capacity in grades 6-12](#)
- [Understanding employer friction in career-connected learning](#)
- [Nevada middle school career exploration ecosystem scan](#)
- [Cross-state policy scan on middle school career exploration](#)

These artifacts capture key elements of the subcommittee’s work and learning in 2025-26 and provide more granular analysis to support implementation of the roadmap’s priorities. In summer and fall 2026, the Commission will work with NDE, workforce development partners, employer partners, districts, counselors, CTE leaders, chambers, regional development authorities, and other relevant partners to develop tools derived from or recommended in the briefs.

Priority derivative products could include:

- a middle school career exploration implementation menu and grade 8 artifact template;
- a student / family career navigation conversation guide for the grade 8 to grade 9 transition;
- a cross-role advising functions map ideating on strategic staffing configurations and the roles of counselors, career coaches, teachers, CTE staff, WBL coordinators, workforce partners, and intermediaries;

- an employer “Ways to Say Yes” ladder and starter pack;
- a no-wrong-door partner map for employer and school participation;
- one or two sector-specific employer participation prototypes that clarify youth labor, supervision, safety, scheduling, and pathway-specific constraints.

Policy-development pathway for the 84th session and beyond

The Commission should also prepare a specific policy-development pathway for the 84th Session and beyond. The recommended direction is to pursue a statutory and administrative framework that codifies the Middle School Career Exploration Guarantee while preserving flexible delivery. The strongest potential policy pathway is to build from Nevada’s existing academic planning spine. The Commission should explore legislative action that would:

1. **Define middle school career exploration in statute:** Nevada should establish a clear statewide definition of middle school career exploration that includes self-knowledge, career literacy, pathway awareness, developmentally appropriate connection to future course and pathway decisions, employer / community or near-peer exposure, reflection, and a portable student artifact.
2. **Amend or clarify NRS 388.165 to include a middle school career exploration component culminating by the end of grade 8:** A potential statutory amendment could require every middle school student to complete a career navigation component or artifact by the end of grade 8, connected to the student’s Academic Learning Plan and transition into the ninth-grade / four-year academic plan.
3. **Connect the culminating middle school exploration reflection to NRS 388.205 and the ninth-grade four-year academic plan:** The Commission should explore language requiring the grade 8 career navigation artifact or plan component to inform ninth-grade course selection and four-year planning. The goal is to make career exploration consequential at the point when students begin making high school pathway decisions, without locking students into a single pathway prematurely.
4. **Clarify the role of NRS 389.041 occupational guidance and counseling:** NRS 389.041 already requires the State Board to establish a course of study in occupational guidance and counseling, coordinated by licensed school counselors with support from teachers, administrators, pupils, parents, and the business community, and requires that instruction be made available to pupils in grades 7–12. The Commission should explore whether this provision should be updated, aligned, or referenced to support the grade 8 guarantee more directly.
5. **Authorize equivalent delivery models:** Any statutory or regulatory approach should explicitly allow districts to meet the guarantee through multiple models, including course, course-equivalent, advisory, embedded units, CTE, counseling, career coaching, partner-supported programming, virtual / hybrid delivery, or another approved equivalent. The guarantee should define the required student experience and evidence but refrain from prescribing one schedule design.
6. **Pair any mandate with implementation supports:** The Commission should explore a dedicated implementation support structure, which could include competitive grants, braided use of existing CTE / Perkins / workforce funds where allowable, technical assistance, professional learning, rural / virtual access supports, career coach or navigator capacity, and partner-supported employer / community exposure.

7. **Create a low-burden measurement and continuous-improvement framework:** Any future reporting expectation should be designed with MWM collaboration and should avoid premature high-stakes accountability. Potential options include local attestation of completion, component-level documentation, disaggregated access data, periodic quality review, student / family feedback, or inclusion in a future dashboard once implementation is stable. The Commission should determine whether reporting should focus on completion only, completion plus core components, completion plus disaggregated access and quality indicators, or something else entirely.

The graphic below articulates the phased policy pathway for establishing this guarantee statewide:

- **Phase 1:** Clarifying recommendations and guidance.
- **Phase 2:** Establishing expectations, and statutory/regulatory.
- **Phase 3:** Statutory and regulatory codification.

Potential Phased Development Pathway

Element	Phase 1: Clarify and encourage	Phase 2: Set expectations and test authority	Phase 3: Codify the guarantee
Policy pathway	Near-term guidance; no new mandate.	Regulatory / administrative pathway, subject to legal review.	Statutory pathway for the 84th Session and beyond.
Core move	Build shared guidance and tools that districts can adopt or adapt.	Clarify what can be expected through existing authority and what may require regulatory or statutory change.	Establish a durable statewide middle school career exploration guarantee in statute.
What happens	The Commission, NDE, districts, counselors, CTE leaders, workforce partners, employer partners, and other stakeholders collaborate on a practical grades 6–8 implementation menu.	State Board / NDE, with Commission and partner input, clarify the minimum components of a complete middle school career exploration experience.	Nevada codifies a middle school career exploration guarantee, building from the existing planning spine rather than creating a disconnected new requirement.
Purpose	Create a common Nevada model that districts can use while preserving local flexibility.	Define what counts as a meaningful student experience while preserving flexible local delivery.	Guarantee a statewide student experience without requiring one statewide course or schedule design.
Implementation products	Grades 6–8 implementation menu; sample delivery models; sample reflection routines; trusted adult / family conversation guidance; ALP and four-year plan connection points; low-burden evidence options.	Minimum common components; guidance on what counts; legal / regulatory analysis; possible administrative clarification; low-burden documentation or attestation options.	Statutory definition; required culminating reflection, evidence, or plan component by the end of grade 8; equivalent delivery authorization; implementation supports; measurement / continuous-improvement expectations.
Delivery flexibility	Districts may use course, advisory, CTE, embedded instruction, counselor / career coach programming, partner-supported programming, virtual experiences, or other equivalent models.	Flexibility is preserved while the state clarifies the minimum student experience that any delivery model should provide.	Statute or regulation should explicitly authorize equivalent delivery models rather than requiring one course or schedule structure.

Authority / policy questions	What guidance and tools can be developed now without creating a new mandate?	What can be advanced through existing authority under NRS 388.165, NRS 388.205, NRS 389.041, NAC 389.187, and NAC 389.195? What requires legal review or regulatory clarification?	What statutory changes may be needed to define the guarantee, connect it to existing planning structures, authorize equivalents, and pair any requirement with supports and low-burden measures?
Sequence discipline	Build proof, shared language, and field uptake.	Clarify expectations, authority, and implementation feasibility.	Codify only after the field has usable tools, tested models, and a reasonable evidence routine.

Requested Commission action for June 2026

- I. The Commission should endorse the Middle School Career Exploration Guarantee with Flexible Delivery and approve its inclusion in the June 2026 report and roadmap update.
- II. The Commission should also endorse the following 2026–27 implementation and exploration actions:
 1. Collaboratively define the minimum common components of the guarantee and how they can build across grades 6–8.
 2. Review and incorporate lessons from NDE’s middle school career exploration pilots as results become available.
 3. Coordinate development of a grades 6–8 implementation menu and model culminating student reflection, portfolio entry, or plan addendum with NDE, districts, counselors, CTE leaders, workforce partners, employer partners, and other relevant stakeholders.
 4. Support joint collaborative conversations with WCTL partners on instructional strategies, teaching and learning implications, and staff preparation needs.
 5. Support joint collaborative conversations with MWM partners on measurement, reporting, accountability, and continuous-improvement structures.
 6. Use the advising capacity and employer friction briefs as source material for next-cycle field-facing tools, policy refinement, and partner action.
 7. Prepare a sharper Horizon 2 statutory and administrative policy pathway for the 84th Session that builds from Nevada’s existing academic planning and occupational guidance structures while preserving flexible local delivery.

Together, these actions position Nevada to move from valuing middle school career exploration to guaranteeing it as a shared statewide experience. The next cycle should refine a grades 6–8 exploration continuum, test flexible delivery models, develop practical implementation supports, and clarify the policy and evidence routines needed for durable implementation. The goal is for students to encounter possibilities earlier, try on interests in developmentally appropriate ways, and carry what they learn into high school planning with greater purpose and possibility.