



## Quality Roadmap for Student Apprenticeship and Career Navigation

Apprenticeship, a form of work-based learning, and career navigation are two tools increasingly used by educators to provide students with both career-related skill development and awareness of career pathways after high school. While these tools seek to expand student opportunities, implementation of these programs can also heighten expectations for student success measure and alignment to in-demand skills.

Curated by ACT and numerous mission-strategic partners, this roadmap provides strategies for revitalizing or launching apprenticeship and career navigation initiatives. ACT understands this ecosystem is complex, and we are here to support your efforts. You are also encouraged to seek expert guidance as needed with local advisors and/or licensed professionals.

	 <b>Good</b>	 <b>Better</b>	 <b>Best</b>
<b>Skill Targets</b>	Apprenticeship benchmarks comprise job task inventory	Integrated Competency Model framework	Job tasks and curriculum outcomes linked to skill levels
<b>Credentials</b>	Completion of apprenticeship as primary goal	Implement foundational credentials to demonstrate work readiness	Integrate stackable credentials to gain industry-specific skills
<b>Job Pathways</b>	Apprenticeship completion into gateway occupation	Pathway goals set to enter destination occupation	Student seeks credentials that advance to destination occupation
<b>Learning Pathways</b>	Time-based completion integrates competency standards	Utilize full competency-based model for instruction	Implement degree credit for credentials earned
<b>Performance</b>	Completion of required hours for Work Process Plan	Skills gain demonstrated in progress and readiness benchmarks	Credentials and linkages to retention, earnings, and other metrics
<b>Completions</b>	Integrated workforce ecosystem partners address barriers	Quality monitoring of apprenticeship systems and worksites	Supportive services integrated with skills-based career navigation
<b>Equity and Inclusion</b>	Increased employer awareness on benefits of skills-based hiring and advancement	Employers participate in pilot initiatives to implement skills-first best practices	Skills-first initiatives empower employers to utilize new labor pools
<b>Employer Engagement</b>	Workforce ecosystem organizes for collaborative employer services	Two or more workforce partners integrate and co-broker solutions	Employer champions lead and actively inform ecosystem partnerships
<b>Community Growth</b>	Ecosystem partners unite for skills-first career navigation	Ecosystem partners train and deploy Work Ready Communities model	Certified ACT Work Ready Community competes for new jobs and investment

# Skill Targets

Time-based apprenticeships contain an inventory of job tasks in the Work Process Schedule. Progress is measured by the duration of time spent in training over a fixed period. Competency based apprenticeships measure progress by the apprentice's mastery of competencies, allowing them to complete the program as soon as they meet all the required standards, regardless of the time taken.

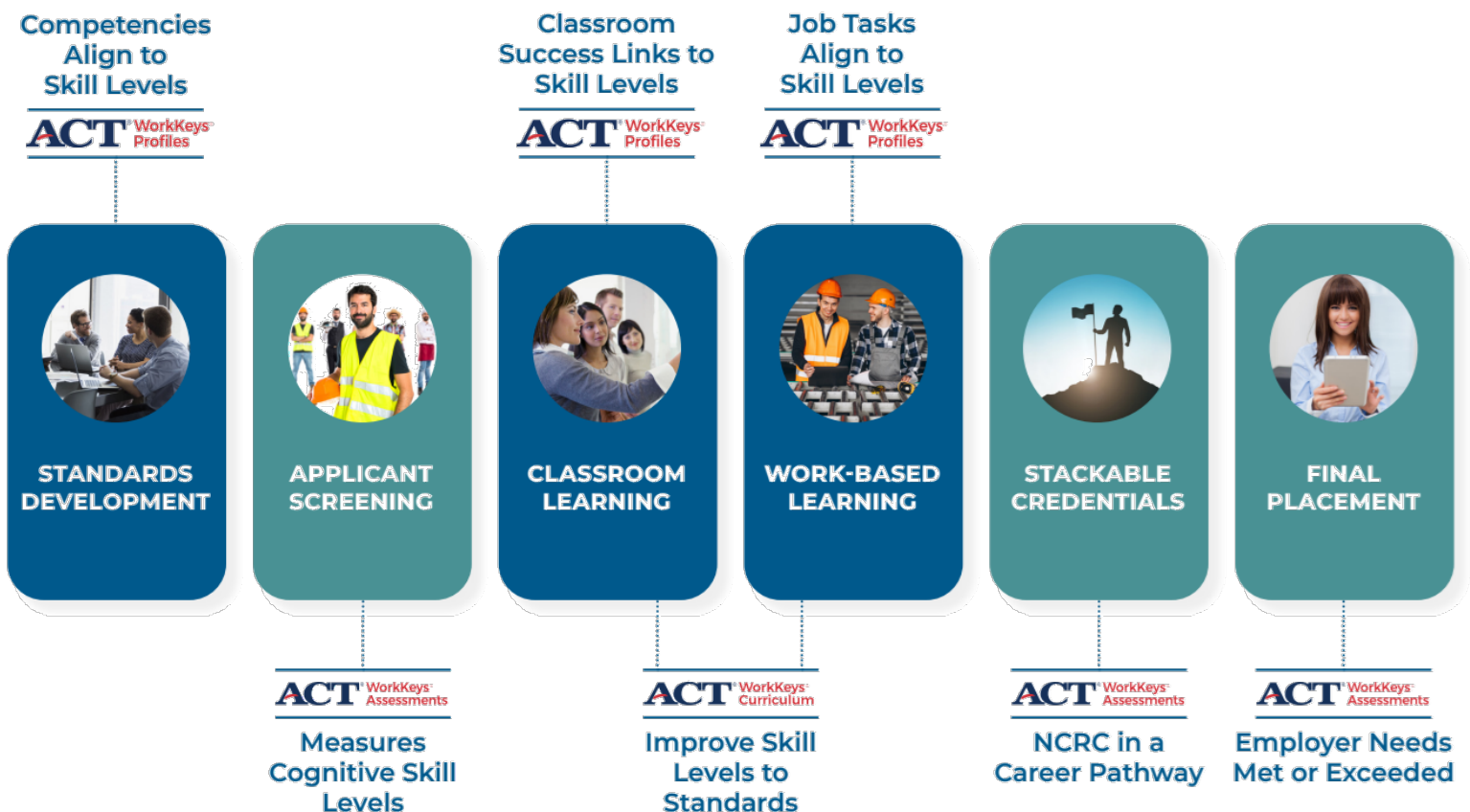
ACT® WorkKeys® Estimator and ACT® WorkKeys® Job Profiling pinpoint specific skill levels needed to master training and perform job tasks. This valuable intel helps employers establish benchmarks for skills-based hiring and career progressions. Educators also use WorkKeys Job Profiling to establish entry and exit benchmarks to measure performance, progression, and readiness.

# Credentials

Students participating in apprenticeships can earn a completion certificate that conveys occupational proficiency. Credentials are important to the career pathways of students and to the employers seeking talent. More than 27,000 employers endorse the ACT® WorkKeys® National Career Readiness Certificate® (NCRC) as a signal of workforce quality and readiness to earn additional credentials in high demand.

The Manufacturing Skill Standards Council's (MSSC) family of certifications and training outcomes align to WorkKeys and recently expanded into logistics and supply chain automation. The NCRC is a predictor of success on MSSC exams taken with apprenticeships.

## WorkKeys Solutions Enhance Each Phase of Apprenticeship Life Cycle



## Job Pathways

The apprenticeship pathway is essentially a career pathway with training activities, work progression, and credentials built into the structure of work hours and related instruction. Employers and educators may collaborate to build advancement pathways that expand positive impact long after the apprenticeship has been completed. Successful career navigation leads to improvement in postsecondary career training, job fit, job performance, career stability, and confidence.

Students gain experience in origin jobs while high-performing apprenticeships build skills for gateway jobs. Skills-based career navigation puts students on a trajectory to grow into future destination-caliber jobs.



## Learning Pathways

Building on the frameworks of time-based and competency-based apprenticeships, a hybrid approach of the two lead to more opportunities for measurable and observable skill demonstration. Credentials like the ACT WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate allow students to earn college credit while still in high school and providing an early foothold into postsecondary degree programs. This provides not only a pathway to lower student debt but also stronger development and alignment of student career goals.

## Performance

Apprenticeship and other forms of work-based learning are among the highest-performing economic strategies for strengthening communities, according to the U.S. Labor Department. On average, every dollar invested by the employer nets a return on investment of \$1.47. Each public dollar invested yields a return of \$28 in benefit to the community.

By integrating skills-based hiring into apprenticeship, employers and educators can track progress and readiness of students through measures such as hiring efficiency, retention, productivity, safety, participant placement, and earnings gain.

## Completions

As rigor increases throughout an apprenticeship framework, students may excel in the beginning, but face challenges in later phases as complex skills surpass the students' preparation. If employers and program providers miss the mark on identifying the skills needed to succeed, students are unable to set and meet their goals. Lack of purpose, feedback, and development opportunities are among top drivers of turnover that can affect newly placed apprentices.

Research is not widely available on factors that affect apprenticeship completion rates. Fortunately, the workforce development field provides insights to help improve program completions by removing student barriers and monitoring system quality. Programs that address foundational readiness skills, career coaching, and transportation needs can positively impact student success measures.

## Equity and Inclusion

When underrepresented populations participate and succeed in apprenticeship programs, employers reach a larger and more diverse talent pipeline, and more students have access to new career pathways and can help foster innovation.

Apprenticeships help employers find diverse, skilled talent for hard-to-fill roles. In the past decade, apprenticeship and work-based learning programs have expanded to over half of all occupations. Today, 40% of workers in new apprenticeships are entering jobs that historically required a bachelor's degree, creating access to higher-wage jobs for students.

ACT's Center for Equity in Learning coordinates efforts to optimize opportunity and outcomes in education and workforce. The Center builds collaborative relationships and integrates DE&I to enhance and improve the education and workforce spectrum.

## Employer Engagement

The post-pandemic economic recovery left employers coping with unprecedented skill shortages and related challenges. Rather than depending on obsolete screening factors and exclusive pipelines, employers need a way to pinpoint the necessary skills for job tasks and training outcomes to enable educators to hit the target. Fortunately, for employers and educators who understand how to take advantage of them, well-organized schools stand ready to assist employers in maximizing the effectiveness of each hire.

With improved aim, educators can provide students with opportunities to develop career related skills as well as provide potential talent pipeline to local employers. Students who participate in work-based learning may become potential hires who have already been either pre-measured for the skills needed or on a pathway to boost skills quickly to keep pace with onboarding. Employer-driven leadership with data-driven strategies provide the clearest path for educators to hit the mark. ACT WorkKeys is one tool that can help to unify employers and educators for aligned work-based learning programs and scalable skills-based hiring.

## Community Growth

Communities depend on a qualified emerging talent pipeline to retain employers, help them grow, and attract new sector investments into the economy. Communities that win new jobs compete with a toolbox of data on workforce quality and a responsive system to help employers recruit and train in a potentially rapid ramp up. Site Selection magazine tracks workforce and economic competitiveness across regions and states, using the ACT WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) as its preferred metric of workforce quality.

Economic development professionals use the WorkKeys NCRC to benchmark competitiveness of the local workforce, including the emerging talent pipeline. Locations can show alignment of the workforce to specific skill demands of the prospect and align work-based learning programs and student skills to quickly adapt to new opportunities. The ACT® Work Ready Communities designation further leverages workforce ecosystem partnerships, strategies, and resources to chart a path to community prosperity.