

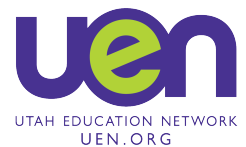
FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

A summary of focus group interaction with parents addressing college and career education beliefs and preferences for their children—to inform the American Graduate and UtahFutures programs.

Submitted to
Utah Education Network (UEN)
by James Marshall Consulting, Inc.

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UtahFutures



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Utah Education Network (UEN) commissioned three focus groups to explore the ideas, attitudes, and perceptions of Utah parents specific to college and career planning for their children. Focus groups were intentionally located in three communities to pursue demographics that included variables of income, ethnicity, and rural vs. urban settings. A total of 29 parents with children ages 13 through 20 participated in this effort.

Parent Perceptions about Career and Technical Education (CTE): Focus group interaction established that parents are limited in their knowledge of CTE. This includes both the range of careers that CTE offers and especially the preparation they require. It is not surprising that the career-planning explorations these parents have conducted with their children favor the traditional four-year pathway—because that pathway is both familiar to them, and typically perceived as having a higher level of prestige, regardless of earnings potential and anticipated demand in Utah.

While parents admit to lacking knowledge, it is promising that they also recognize that CTE pathways have historically held negative or “lesser” connotations relative to the four-year path. That parents perceive this stigma as changing and are generally open to including this pathway in future career explorations with their children suggests an important opportunity that can be addressed through UEN’s efforts to communicate with parents, and through the use of the UtahFutures suite of tools.

Parent Perceptions about UtahFutures Resources and Tools: Specific to UtahFutures, parents responded favorably to the availability of the college and career planning tools described by the moderator. They also suggested that the appeal of this information would vary based on whether the user is a parent or a child, with parents wanting more return on investment data and students wanting more information about how a career aligns with their passions and interests. This is a parent-perceived dichotomy that should be tested through interaction with students who represent the targeted UtahFutures user.

Parent Preferences for College and Career-related Communications: When it comes to communication channels, parents expressed high levels of trust of the information from their children’s schools. Of all the communication sources, schools and the adults therein (teachers, principals, counselors) were perceived by most parents as both trusted and authoritative (possessing accurate information and advice). Thus, it was no surprise that parents suggested UtahFutures information and career information in general are best distributed through school channels. With regard to that communication, parents expressed a clear preference for marketing pieces that included career-related data. Again, this finding is well-aligned with UEN’s existing access to statewide school systems and established communication approaches.

In sum, we typify the focus group results as confirming existing beliefs and generally amplifying complementary data sources that preceded this effort. Parent acknowledgement of changing times and the need to reverse the historical stigma attached to technical trades and careers suggests a beachhead that UEN and its partners can leverage to the ultimate benefit of Utah’s future workforce. The guidance for communication channels and formats offered in this report, coupled with valuable planning resources including UtahFutures, provides a powerful system of support. This evolving system stands to support the realization of a vision that includes well-matched, fulfilling careers for those who will enter the workforce in the coming years, and increased economic prosperity for Utah.

INTRODUCTION

The state of Utah is experiencing a renaissance of sorts. With a growing, technology-fueled economy, the state is bracing for an increased demand in a range of key occupations over the next 20 years. That demand necessarily includes technical as well as professional careers.

The Utah Education Network (UEN) plays a key role in supporting the state's economy. From its support of K-12 schools to the resources it makes available for college and career planning, UEN provides vital services that directly influence the future of all Utahns.

UEN has received funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to enhance its communication and messaging around workforce education. There is no shortage of fodder for messaging. From previous investments in tools and resources such as UtahFutures, UEN has much to promote. While these focus groups addressed more global workforce topics, the results certainly inform work being done as part of UEN's due diligence with UtahFutures.

The question is how to best disseminate the existing—and planned—resources related to college and career. UEN seeks to understand its audience to actively increase the chances that future messaging will not only catch the attention of targeted audiences, but result in them taking action. For this inquiry, we have focused on parents of young people ages 13 through 20.

While at first glance, the prospect of reaching parents and influencing their behaviors related to college and career planning for their children may seem straightforward, it is indeed a complex system that encompasses multiple dimensions. For example: How can parents become receptive to college and career options that may not be “first choice” or “traditional” pathways—such as technical schools and careers?

FOCUS GROUP INQUIRY

In May 2019, we conducted three focus groups to better understand the current perspectives and preferences of Utah parents. This inquiry sought to understand how UEN might change perceptions and prompt parent action toward more complete and robust concepts of college and career planning possibilities.

The three focus groups locations were selected with purpose.

- Glendale Library: Targeted lower income parents, including the Latinx sub-population that is steadily increasing in Salt Lake City
- Anderson-Foothill Library: Targeted middle-to-higher income parents
- Heber City, Wasatch County Library: Targeted parents in rural communities

THIS REPORT

This report provides a topline summary of focus group interaction.

On the following pages, we summarize the key themes that emerged in response to our established focus group protocol. The focus group interaction revolved around three key lines of inquiry:

1. Testing Parents' Perceptions about Career Technical Education
2. Testing Parents' Perceptions about the Utility of *UtahFutures* Tools
3. Testing Parents' Preferences for Communication Channels and Tools

KEY TERMS

Throughout this report, we utilize a number of terms that may be unfamiliar to the reader. What follows is a summary of key terms along with their usage within the focus group and this summary.

American Graduate	Public media's long-term commitment, made possible by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, to help young people succeed in school, career, and life.
UtahFutures.org	A comprehensive online web portal that helps Utah students and job seekers to make informed education and career decisions.
Launch My Career	A forthcoming tool to complement UtahFutures.org that allows users to examine earnings potential for different career paths and compare the return on investment among different Utah programs based on cost of preparation and earning potential.
Career and Technical Education (CTE)	Coursework and programs to prepare students for work, and more particularly for work in skilled trades, applied sciences, and modern technologies.
Trade Education	Trade Education refers to programs designed to prepare individuals for work in a specific job or skilled trade career through hands-on training.
Vocational Education	Vocational Education prepares people to work in a specific occupation, typically a trade or industry.

DEFINING CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

For purposes of this focus group effort, we have chosen to use a "big tent" description of Career and Technical Education (CTE), such that it encompasses all aspects of trade and vocational education. Focus group participants may have used these terms interchangeably to carry the same meaning, though CTE is the preferred term referenced herein.

FINAL CONTEXTUAL NOTE

To reiterate points made earlier, this report is intended as a topline summary of key points. As such, it is subjective, yet responsive to UEN's pursuits, priorities, and ponderings that provided the initial charge for our inquiry.

FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Before presenting our summary of focus group interaction, it is important to define the process and participants. Our focus group session locations and participants were intentionally selected to balance demographics.

RECRUITMENT

Based on partner input, UEN worked with the Utah State Libraries, Salt Lake City Public Library, and Wasatch County Library to host and recruit focus groups. Library partners advised on optimal locations for focus groups in areas with high population for each of the targeted demographic groups: Latinx, Middle-Class, and Transitional/Rural.

In the weeks leading up to the focus groups, recruitment materials included emails and posters customized for each location and audience that were distributed within zip codes served by each library site. UEN also ran paid Twitter content geo-tagged to relevant zip codes.

Interested individuals were asked to visit a website where they completed a short screener questionnaire. Information provided was used to confirm participants met the targeted, key demographics (i.e., parents of youth aged 13-26, ethnicity, location, and income).

Responses for the pre-screening survey were robust for two of the focus groups. With only four responses to the online questionnaire suitable for the Glendale focus group, UEN staff engaged in on-site recruitment at the library in the hours leading up to the session, which resulted in the desired number of participants.

PARTICIPANTS

The following information provides the reader with a picture of the focus group participants in each of the three locations. We also provide the total number of focus group applicants alongside the number of individuals selected based on desired demographics and available space. One person who was recruited on site did not complete the screener prior to participation. Throughout this report, we use colored shading to denote a particular focus group participant's membership in one of the three groups.

	Glendale ■ Group 1	Foothill ● Group 2	Heber City ◆ Group 3
Participants			
Total Applicants	10	8	15
Final Participants	10	8	12
Income			
Mode	\$30,000-\$49,999	\$75,000-\$99,999	\$50,000-\$74,999
Gender			
Female	6	7	11
Male	1	1	1
Did not state	3	—	—
Age			
30-39	4	—	3
40-49	3	1	7
50-59	—	6	2
Did not state	3	1	—
Ethnicity			
Asian	1	—	1
Latinx	4	—	2
White	2	7	9
Did not state	3	2	—
Number of Children			
1	1	2	—
2	1	5	5
3	5	1	2
4	1	—	1
5	2	—	4
Setting			
Classification	Urban	Urban	Rural

Symbols in table header (■●◆) are used to identify groups in the Findings section of this report.

ANALYSIS

Each focus group recording was transformed into a written transcript used for data analysis. Our qualitative analysis approach relied upon the constant comparative method to identify and hone key themes. During analysis, key quotations illustrative of themes were noted, some of which are used in this report to instantiate the themes that arose. A comparison of themes was made among the three focus group sessions in an attempt to flag significant differences among participants. Overall, few such differences existed, as we describe in the following paragraph.

COMPARISON OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS FINDS MORE SIMILARITIES THAN DIFFERENCES

Each focus group session was established to explore potential differences in the perspectives and actions of individuals based on the focus group-targeted demographics (e.g., Latinx, rural, income). Yet, we observed that there were far more commonalities than differences in the perspectives of these parent participants.

In fact, the primary defining difference was financial—with parents in the Glendale group more frequently mentioning financial factors and limitations specific to college and career, relative to parents in the other two groups.

In the summary that follows, we use three colored shapes (Glendale = ■, Foothill = ●, Heber City = ◆) to indicate the correspondence between a given theme and the focus group, or groups, in which it emerged. As a result of the general agreement we describe, the reader will typically find themes with three dots—indicating the theme's presence in each focus group's discussion.

I. TESTING PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Our first line of inquiry pursued the perceptions of parents specific to Career and Technical Education (CTE). As previously defined, we used a “big tent” definition of CTE encompassing both trade and vocational education. Our intent was to document participants’ concepts of CTE, determine whether they had explored this pathway with their children, and press them to self-assess their existing knowledge about CTE.

Overall, parent sentiment toward CTE was positive. Several participants had some rudimentary knowledge of technical/trade careers, while most were largely unfamiliar. Regardless of participant base knowledge of CTE, there was a general consensus among parents that these fields are necessary and important and should be further promoted to children in the Utah education system.

The following summarizes participant comments based on key CTE topics.

■●◆ CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION EXAMPLES

Before exploring parent college and career planning efforts with their children, it was important to understand their existing concepts of CTE. Participants were asked what fields came to mind when they think about technical trades and careers. The following list of job titles were mentioned by participants as careers associated with CTE:

Computer technician	HVAC
Construction worker	Mechanic
Cosmetologist	Plumber
Culinary arts	Radiologist
Electrician	Veterinarian tech
EMT	Welder

■●◆ LACK OF ATTENTION TOWARD CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Next, our discussion turned to CTE awareness and a discussion that allowed parents to express their current understandings and beliefs. In each focus group, participants discussed the systemic lack of attention toward CTE as an obstacle toward realizing a balanced exploration of careers—beyond the traditional four-year pathway.

Participants felt that children should be encouraged to explore technical trades, but that schools place most of their focus on the “traditional” four-year university trajectory. Due to the lack of publicity and attention given to CTE, parent and child knowledge of technical career options is simply less than that of the four-year university degree.

Participants explained how trades “aren’t pushed” in spite of the wide variety of career options available in these fields. One parent went so far as to say that the lack of attention that K-12 educators give to technical trades and vocational fields is “unfair.” Another parent shared how even talking about an alternate pathway was taboo:

I think, sadly, there's still a little bit of a stigma out there when people say I'm not going to go to [a four-year] college. That's what everybody's asking seniors in high school all year... I can imagine some of my friends that have kids that are not going to be able to handle a four-year university, they're really struggling.

• Foothills Focus Group Participant

◆●■ STIGMA TOWARD CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Across all three focus groups, there was a general consensus that although “students should be encouraged to explore technical trades,” there is a societal stigma toward trade and vocational careers. The shame of children “not going to college” or “not wanting to go to college” was also discussed. For example, one parent shared the following sentiment: “I think sadly, there is still a little bit of a stigma out there when people say ‘I’m not going to go to college.’” The following scenario was also provided by another participant to further illustrate such biases:

You can imagine the scenario of a mother with her child walking down the street ... and they see someone working on the electrical lines. And the mother, rather than talking about those trades in a positive light, will sometimes say, “Do you want to have a job like that? Well, if you don’t... you better go to college,” rather than recognizing the critical role that working class jobs play in our society.

• Glendale Focus Group Participant

Parents suggested that this stigma toward CTE and the preference toward the traditional four-year university trajectory is propelled—and reinforced—by education systems and parents alike. In fact, several participants shared their own biases against CTE, which they also suggested they should try to eliminate.

◆●■ SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS OF CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

While the stigma toward vocational and trade careers was raised multiple times, in Focus Group 2, there was also a discussion of how this stigma may be changing or “receding” given today’s economy. Similarly, in Focus Group 3, one participant described how educators need to “focus on kids’ strengths instead of pushing everyone into the same mold... [as] not everyone is meant to go to a four-year university.” Another parent addressed his own bias during this discussion:

One of the things I've had to realize over the past decade or so is that my perceptions of technical trades and working-class industries have had to shift. I've spent so long [being] biased [in thinking] that those things are less than [four-year college careers] ...

• *Glendale Focus Group Participant*

Speaking broadly, most participants tended to agree that there remains some amount of CTE-related stigma, but also remain hopeful that it has and will continue to dissipate.

It must also be noted that there were opposing viewpoints that still weighed the traditional four-year university pathway as the most beneficial to children. "In my mind, college is elite... working with your mind is better than working with your hands," stated one parent. Similarly, another participant shared how her daughter wants to be a brain surgeon; thus, it was agreed that CTE is not a perfect match for every student.

◆ HIGH COST OF TRADITIONAL UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Despite having one of the lowest higher education costs in the nation, focus group participants nevertheless cited the high cost of four-year universities as a drawback, especially when compared to the cost of CTE for trade and vocational careers. One participant shared concerns about the cost of a traditional college education, and how CTE can often cost less, and lead to similar, or even greater, salary schedules: "Sometimes, you go into something technical, and you can make a lot more money, without getting a lot of debt for school."

Likewise, the affordability of community colleges was discussed by several participants in Focus Group 1 (Glendale). For example, as an alternative to the high costs of traditional higher education institutions, one parent mentioned how Salt Lake City Community College has "great programs in trade," where students take a six-month course and can begin making a salary of \$60,000.

Again, we note that financial considerations were the primary topic that varied among focus groups. Glendale parents emphasized financial concerns and constraints much more frequently than participants in the other focus groups. While financial concerns were expressed in the Heber City group, they were emphasized less often relative to the Glendale group.

◆ MINIMAL PARENT KNOWLEDGE OF CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION CAREER PATHS

Across the three focus groups, there were very few participants who stated that they were comfortable discussing CTE career paths with their children. It should be noted that one of those participants was an employment counselor (Foothill, Focus Group 2). Aside from this subject matter expert, focus group participants in Foothill and Heber City expressed more comfort in preparing their children for a four-year university education because that aligned with their own experience and educational background.

In Focus Group 2, for example, nearly all parent participants had earned a four-year degree.

In that same group, those who felt comfortable discussing CTE pathways with their children stated that it was due to having someone in their immediate family in a technical or vocational trade career as a resource for their children. In Focus Group 3, most parents stated that they are willing to talk about CTE with their children, but in terms of their own knowledge about technical career options, they could only speak generally. Additionally, in Focus Group 1, one participant shared how she was not sure of “what’s really going on” when it came to all potential career pathways – both traditional and vocational.

KEY FINDINGS: PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

1. Parents acknowledge their limited knowledge of the career and technical education pathway, which is especially lean when compared to their knowledge about the traditional, four-year college pathway.
2. Because parents tend to speak with their children about topics that are familiar to them, CTE receives much less airplay when it comes to college and career discussions.
3. Parents acknowledge the past and present stigma associated with CTE-facilitated careers, with some even illustrating their own negative connotations—while noting that such viewpoints are likely outdated.
4. Parents generally believed that this stigma is changing, and suggested that by learning more about these careers and the return on investment and quality of life they provide, their own beliefs would change, allowing them to more effectively share them with their children.
5. Coupled with UEN’s communications with parents across the state, the UtahFutures resources provide well-matched opportunities to both re-educate parents about CTE and CTE-facilitated careers and to support their exploration of the full range of careers—rather than those requiring a traditional four-year degree.

II: TESTING PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE UTILITY OF *UTAHFUTURES* TOOLS

After parents discussed their beliefs about CTE, the next line of inquiry pursued the suite of college and career planning tools offered by UtahFutures. This necessarily included discussion around the *Launch My Career* tool currently in development.

Overall, participants reacted favorably to UtahFutures—in concept. Having a dedicated set of tools and career planning advice specific to Utah's anticipated career demands was viewed positively by both parents and their children. They also posited that some amount of CTE stigma could be reduced as a result of using UtahFutures tools.

◆●■ PRAISE FOR SETTING FOCUS ON “RETURN ON INVESTMENT”

Among targeted outcomes, UtahFutures provides the user with a range of data to describe the earnings potential of specific careers. These data include future demand for a particular career, and estimates of return on investment (ROI) based on the anticipated cost of preparing for a given career.

The overwhelming majority of parent participants agreed that ROI data was a critically important and useful piece of information. Salary was important to most, but not all, parent participants when considering career paths for their children. For example, one parent explained that his child's future salary was important to him, so he would be interested in knowing what the salary would be, and what he would need to invest in order for his child to earn a particular lifestyle.

There was also a discussion in the Foothill (Focus Group 2) group regarding how ROI could dissuade students from following their passions toward certain careers. For example, one participant in this group pointed out the disadvantage of showcasing ROI for “public sector careers” (i.e. police officers and teachers) – which do not compare well to other fields in terms of salary, and could discourage potential students from entering into these “necessary jobs.”

While the majority of participants discussed ROI as a key element of career consideration, there were outlying opinions as well. For example, in the Glendale group (Focus Group 1), a participant took a more holistic view, stating that ROI was not as relevant to her. She shared that she “doesn't care what [her] kids do, as long as they know they can do it,” and stated that parents should focus more on being positive and less on the numbers.

◆●■ DETERMINING “WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?”

After the moderator described UtahFutures, one Glendale (Focus Group 1) participant immediately responded with the following question: “[Who] is going to be the target audience? The kids or parents?” There was a general consensus across the three focus groups that consideration of ROI is something most parents will deem important. Put

simply, parents want to know how much their child's education is going to cost and what their future salary would be.

I would like to see how much it's going to cost, number one.

• *Glendale Focus Group Participant*

A participant from Heber City (Focus Group 3) suggested that the UtahFutures tools could “[save] some of the legwork for parents,” and that “[he] would be a fan of that.” The overall reaction to this tool and its ability to help parents was overwhelmingly positive.

The discussion also explored the notion that if children are the targeted audience for UtahFutures, “inspiration” should also be a focus. Words and phrases such as “passion,” “motivation,” “something you love,” “motivating,” and “positivity” were all used when discussing the nature of career exploration for their children—regardless of whether they’re following a CTE or four-year pathway. When asked to provide an example of how to foster such inspiration, one participant in the Glendale group (Focus Group 1) suggested that real-life case studies of individuals who went through CTE and were successful in their careers is one way to make this tool resonate more with children.

While following your passion was emphasized by parents, ROI was still mentioned as important to a student audience, as described by a parent in the Foothill group (Focus Group 2): “I know for my son, he wanted to make sure he chose a career that was going to fit the standard of lifestyle he wanted... [one] that’s going to support a family.” Other participants in Focus Group 2 also discussed how this tool should give children a “realistic view” of the job force.

With regard to audience, the overall consensus was that if parents are the audience, the message should focus on the “head;” if students are the audience, the message should focus on both the “head” and the “heart.”

■●◆ **UTAHFUTURES AND THE POTENTIAL TO DESTIGMATIZE CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION, AND CAREERS**

A recurring discussion point across the three focus groups was the potential for UtahFutures to help destigmatize CTE careers. One participant explained how it could “[open] a door to show [children how they] might progress” into other fields or positions that they had not thought of before. The discussion continued on how these tools could bring about awareness among children who have been conditioned to attend a four-year university, but perhaps may find a CTE trade that would be “a really great fit.”

Some parents shared how information and data from these tools could motivate children to explore these other career avenues and get excited about entering into the workforce:

I think it would be interesting because I feel like my kids, when they think about careers, [they] always think a four-year college career.

• Heber City Focus Group Participant

Parents also suggested that information provided by UtahFutures could bring to light the discrepancies in wages between certain fields and factor into career considerations and decisions. The cost of higher education programs and the overwhelming amount of student loans required by certain careers (i.e. doctors and lawyers) were mentioned in this discussion. Ultimately, parents suggested that raising awareness of opportunities in a more representative and inclusive range of fields could destigmatize CTE as a lesser-than option to the traditional higher-education route.

[This] tool could actually be useful in destigmatizing alternative pathways, because if [students] can compare the return on investment to the salary and different things, that would really help to destigmatize it... [Students could realize], “ I don’t have to invest this much money to make as much as I want for my quality of life or [to work] in a field that I really enjoy.

• Heber City Focus Group Participant

● CONCERN REGARDING FUTURE CAREER PROJECTIONS

The most significant concern raised during these discussions related to the accuracy of any career projections UtahFutures might provide. One participant in the Foothill group (Focus Group 2) used the example of the currently “booming” tech industry in Salt Lake City to question whether or not this industry would be the same in 20 years. Another participant was skeptical about the accuracy of any projections, pondering “how can [they] possibly keep up with how quickly technology is changing,” and thus, how the job economy will change? Participants wanted to know how the *Launch My Career* implementers would gather and maintain current and accurate career data over time.

I really adhere to the idea that there's so many jobs that we can't even know about because technology is changing so fast and the economy is going to keep changing that I think that there are a lot of jobs that will be obsolete, a lot of people will not be able to find work in things that they would have assumed that they could have done and really there's going to be other opportunities out there that we really can't [imagine]... It could be useful but to say that this is going to set you up great for the next 20 years— it might, but I just think that's true for some people but it's definitely not going to be true for everybody.

• Foothills Focus Group Participant

KEY FINDINGS: UTILITY OF UTAHFUTURES RESOURCES AND TOOLS

1. Parents responded favorably to the description of the resources and tools UtahFutures currently provides—and those planned for the future.
2. Participants praised the data these tools could provide and believed they would use that data as the foundation for career discussions with their children.
3. Parents suggested that the appeal of the information provided by UtahFutures would vary, with parent-users seeking more data (i.e., return on investment), and students seeking more information about the alignment between a career and their passions and interests.
4. UtahFutures continues to provide a resource that parents perceive as valuable both to themselves and their children, which includes well-received upcoming enhancements such as the *Launch My Career* return on investment tool.

III: TESTING PARENTS’ PREFERENCES FOR COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND TOOLS

In the final focus group segment, we asked participants to discuss preferred communication venues for receiving career-related information, as well as the perceived trustworthiness of each. In addition, we tested parents’ reactions to the following career-related pieces of collateral to identify their best features and anticipated uses:

1. Postcard promoting UtahFutures
2. Poster promoting a technical college nursing program
3. Brochure promoting CTE pathways



AVENUES OF PUBLICITY FOR CAREER-RELATED INFORMATION

Our first line of inquiry addressed communication around career-related information in the broadest sense. Participants were asked to consider their own personal knowledge of career information and resources for their children—and how they originally developed that knowledge.

When participants were asked how they learn about things relevant to their child’s education and career, myriad sources were brought up as examples, including but not limited to:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Advertisements on YouTube | Pediatrician’s Office |
| Canvas or Power School | Principal Newsletters |
| Career Fairs | School Community/Career Centers |
| College & Career Readiness (CCR) Courses | School Counselors |
| Colleges | Social Media (Facebook, Instagram) |
| E-mails from Teachers | UtahFutures |
| Job/Career Searches | YouTube |
| National Magazines | |

When focus group responses were combined, the following career-related sources proved to be the most commonly cited:

- School resources
- Social media
- State-sponsored websites

By far, the most frequently discussed sources of career-related information were school-related. Therefore, our inquiry pursued multiple aspects of career information disseminated through schools, as summarized in the following sections.

■●◆ SCHOOL-PROVIDED CAREER INFORMATION: WORKING IT INTO THE CURRICULUM

Parents across the three focus groups expressed confidence in their child’s school teachers, counselors, and administrators as sources of information about their children. It is likely because of this that school entities were the most frequently mentioned as credible communication sources for career-related tools and information.

... one of the sources that we have used is the high school. We’ve learned so much about the [career] opportunities that are out there for my children that are entering high school

• *Heber City Focus Group Participant*

Several participants expressed how they would trust tools and related data most when provided by their child’s school. To ensure that parents receive information on UtahFutures resources, participants suggested incorporating the use of the website’s tools as a part of class curriculum, or as a mandatory assignment. For example, in Heber City (Focus Group 3), one parent suggested that UtahFutures be presented to students in class, followed by a homework assignment in which students use the planning tools at home with their parents or guardians, who would sign a completion document to be submitted back to the teacher. These “mandatory” requirements would help ensure that parents utilize the UtahFutures resources and take the time to review the planning results with their children.

When asked why they look to school entities for career information, parents indicated that they trust the education system as a credible source more than any other source of career information. One parent described “e-mails from [her] kids’ schools” as trustworthy. Another parent described school counselors and teachers as “trusted sources.” Principals, school districts, and school-held career fairs were all suggested as reliable avenues for exposing parents and children to career planning resources.

■●◆ IMPORTANCE OF TRUST AND CREDIBILITY IN SOURCES

Trust and source credibility were two dimensions of career planning resources that parents stressed during focus groups. For example, during discussions with the Foothill and Heber City groups (Focus Groups 2 and 3), the moderator was asked to explain the source of the *Launch My Career* data. Specifically, in Focus Group 2, one parent asked, “Where are you getting your information from for this database?” Once it was shared that this information came from the State of Utah, the apprehension seemed to lessen.

For some participants, transparency was also an important precursor in raising receptiveness to the UtahFutures tools. In fact, in the discussion of the marketing materials, one parent expressed appreciation for how the “sponsors” of this program were listed on the UtahFutures postcard example. This listing allowed her to immediately know where the information was coming from—and quickly deem the sources trustworthy.

FEEDBACK ON MARKETING MATERIALS

Across the three focus groups, the physical marketing materials were greeted with both positive and constructive feedback. Overall, the UtahFutures postcard received the most positive feedback, largely because of the center-stage statistics that it featured. Following is a summary of participant comments.

These three collateral pieces have been included as Appendices I-III to this report.



UTAHFUTURES POSTCARD FEEDBACK

Participants found the postcard to be an engaging marketing piece. They highlighted elements that caught their attention—including the resume builder, the list of tools for different stages of career planning, the fact that the sponsors for the tool were listed so parents could check for credibility, and the fact that it included a call to action.

Specifically, one participant shared how the postcard makes you “want to go to the website and check it out.” Across the three sessions, participants praised it for being the “easiest to understand,” comprehensive, and providing a lot of “centralized” information—all in a single postcard. This piece was also described as being “inclusive” by providing information about both college (traditional) and technical careers. Other adjectives used to describe the postcard included “well-designed,” “professional,” and “concise.” A Foothills focus group participant summed it up like this:

When I was [high school] age I remember somebody saying, "What motivates you?" I was thinking we can do all the [internet career] searches and all these things, but it's about your passion and what you feel good doing. So if something could make a lot of money and then when you say, "Could you imagine doing this every day?" it sparks these conversations... because my son has done some of this. He goes, "Do you know how much surgeons make?" I'm like, "I do." You have to go to it and do [the research] and then something you really want to do doesn't make much money. Okay. You have to eat. But does money motivate you? So this gives you all these different choices. I just like the [postcard] because [of] that visual.

• Foothills Focus Group Participant

The size of the card was a disputed point. For example, a few parents in different focus groups mentioned they liked the size, as it’s “easy to refer to” and can be “put on the side of the fridge.” On the other hand, two parents in the Foothills group (Focus Group 2) shared that they felt the postcard looked like and was also the typical size of a “political piece of information,” and that it would be quickly thrown away. When probed about what made the postcard look like a political piece, the participants stated it was the size and the “candidate-looking photo” on the postcard that led them to believe, at first glance, it could be a political piece. One parent suggested changing the photograph on the postcard to something “less generic – something more tellingly technical.”

■●◆ BROCHURE FEEDBACK

The four-page technical career brochure received positive feedback for its inclusivity. For example, one parent liked how the brochure outlined a range of different careers, and provided awareness of different career paths and industries. Similarly, other parents commented on how it provided a plethora of “in-depth information” and had “lots of information in one place.” One parent in the Glendale group (Focus Group 1) even commended the size of the brochure as being “eco-friendly” in providing the most amount of information in a reasonably-sized deliverable.

Some parents questioned the layout, including the density of the text on the brochure. For example, parents in the Glendale group (Focus Group 1) said the amount of text could challenge a complete read, with one suggesting it read “like literature.” A parent in the Foothill group (Focus Group 2) described the brochure as “a little too wordy.” Multiple participants suggested making the brochure larger to provide additional white space and allow each featured individual to stand out.

Interestingly, perceptions regarding the diversity of featured individuals were mixed. For example, one parent in the Foothill group (Focus Group 2) felt that there should be more diversity in the stories of the children highlighted in the brochure, while another parent in Heber City (Focus Group 3) applauded the brochure for its “good diversity.”

Among the three pieces of collateral, the brochure was met with the widest range of opinions and reactions.

■●◆ POSTER FEEDBACK

Several participants reacted to the visual command of the poster, with one terming it “eye-catching.” However, many felt the poster needed a clear call to action—for example, where to go for more information.

One participant in the Glendale group (Focus Group 1) suggested including more data or “charts” on the poster to enhance credibility and foster engagement. Another participant in the Foothill group (Focus Group 2) suggested making several different versions of the poster, all with different success stories or featured individuals, to provide variety and diversity. Lastly, a Heber City participant (Focus Group 3) noted that the CTE career fields highlighted on the poster (EMT/CNA) are not “high-paying jobs,” and suggested that emphasizing higher-paying career fields could be more enticing from an CTE/ROI perspective.

■●◆ DELIVERY OF MARKETING MATERIALS

The delivery of these materials was a point of discussion in the Foothill group (Focus Group 2), which had a lengthy conversation about the size of the postcard and how it resembles other marketing materials they receive via mail, which they categorized as “clutter.” Because of the amount of “junk mail” parents receive, the participants in this focus group were concerned that UtahFutures materials could be accidentally overlooked or ignored.

...if this came in my mailbox, I would just throw it away right away.

• Heber City Focus Group Participant

I get so many of [these postcards] in the mail that are just trash... this size, the same kind of look, that I just bundle all of the stuff that I don't want... and just throw [it] away.

• Heber City Focus Group Participant

Multiple participants in Focus Group 2 agreed that if these materials were sent home with children from their school or teachers, they would be more likely to read them and thus increase their chances of becoming interested in learning more.

KEY FINDINGS: PARENT COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

1. Parents overwhelmingly identified the school as a preferred source of information for all things related to their children's education and future.
2. They suggested high degrees of trust for any communication coming from teachers, counselors, and the school principal.
3. Parent participants suggested that UtahFutures information is best disseminated through these channels—to which UEN has existing and privileged access.
4. They imagined the integration of UtahFutures into existing curricula, including career exploration units, while envisioning a home component where students would engage with their parents using UtahFutures data and output.
5. Participants expressed a preference for print materials to include hard data, including the availability and earnings potential of careers.

CLOSING SUMMARY

Overall, the general sentiment of parent participants presented with a balanced approach to career planning was positive. There was support behind promoting and designating Career Technical Education (CTE) as an alternative pathway to a successful career. Although the four-year university route was still touted as elite, when comparing the ROI of CTE to that of a four-year university, participants in each of the three focus groups concluded that the CTE route can be more economical.

Despite support of CTE, participants were mostly unaware of the pathways to trade and technical careers, and were excited at the idea of using UtahFutures to explore a more complete range of career opportunities in the state of Utah.

When considering the best communication channels for career-related information, participants largely agreed that their child's school was the most credible and reliable source. Some went so far as to say that the local school channel was the most trustworthy relative to other sources such as state-sponsored websites and social media.

At the closing of each focus group, participants were asked which approach is more riveting to them:

- Appealing to the "head" (i.e. data, statistics, ROI), or
- Appealing to the "heart" (testimonials, the idea of "changing lives," "following dreams," etc.)

The majority of parents stated that the "head" approach was more enticing and convincing. For example, when asked which approach would catch her attention first, one participant in the Foothill group (Focus Group 2) said, "probably the money... the numbers." There were responses that argued to the contrary, including "it depends on the audience," and several parents believed both approaches matter ("I don't think they're exclusive"). However, the general sentiment favoring data was expressed as the most convincing approach across all three sessions. At a minimum, it was recommended that communications lead with data to gain a targeted audience's immediate attention.

Our work with these focus groups was to give voice to parents and share highlights of resulting discussions to inform the future work of UEN and its partners. Throughout this report, we have noted a number of opportunities that UEN is uniquely positioned to address—or is already addressing, which include efforts that:

- Can change or evolve parent perceptions of CTE;
- Support informed, data-based planning of college and career decisions through UtahFutures resources and tools;
- Reach and inform parents through existing, school-based communication channels; and,
- Leverage well-established, statewide partnerships that involve multiple dimensions of college and career—from planning through reinforcing the state economy.

APPENDIX I: POSTCARD (8.5" X 5.5")

Track your college and career planning with the **UtahFutures dashboard!**

Explore: Create a free account and discover interests.

Decide: Prepare for tests and write an awesome resume.

Do: Enroll in school and apply for jobs.

<div style="background-color: #76b82a; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> Explore Careers What Sokanu to find careers that match your interests </div> <div style="background-color: #76b82a; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> Occupation Search Explore a database of job information </div> <div style="background-color: #76b82a; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> Degree Finder Learn about degree options and requirements </div> <div style="background-color: #76b82a; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> Search for Schools Research postsecondary institutions </div> <div style="background-color: #76b82a; padding: 5px;"> Scholarship Search Finance your education </div>	<div style="background-color: #76b82a; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> Reality Check Calculate the income to match your lifestyle </div> <div style="background-color: #76b82a; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> LearningExpress Library Prepare for college and career exams like the ACT, AP and more </div> <div style="background-color: #76b82a; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> Resume Builder Create a resume </div> <div style="background-color: #76b82a; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> Career Assessments Determine which career fields interest you </div> <div style="background-color: #76b82a; padding: 5px;"> Return On Investment Use Launch My Career to calculate the best use of your time and money </div>
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COMING SOON

PERSONALIZE
Launch My Career
with your lifestyle goals and experience

DISCOVER
Utah's hot jobs, top majors, employment outlook and more

FIND
schools and compare costs, average first year wages and satisfaction rates

Compare pathways and programs with **Launch My Career**, a free service provided by **UtahFutures.org**

LAUNCH MY CAREER

★★★★★

COMPUTER SYSTEMS ANALYSTS

Analyze software, engineering, business, and other data processing problems to implement and improve computer systems. Analyze user requirements, procedures, and problems to automate or improve existing systems and review computer system capabilities, workflow, and scheduling limitations. May analyze or recommend commercially available software.

WAGES <div style="background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">\$51,916</div> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Average FTE Year Wages</p>	FILTER BY LOCATION <input type="text" value="Statewide"/> <input type="text" value="KPCV"/>	FUTURE EARNINGS <p>Select a related career path to see your potential:</p> <input type="text" value="Select Related Major"/> <input type="text" value="Select School Offering Major"/> <input type="button" value="LEARN MORE"/>	EMPLOYMENT <div style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">21,213</div> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">CURRENT JOBS</p> <div style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">26,054</div> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">PROJECTED JOB GROWTH BY 2022</p>
SKILLS & DUTIES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★★★★★ Collect data about consumer needs or opinions. ★★★★★ Research technology designs or applications. ★★★★★ Monitor operation of computer or information technologies. ★★★★★ Test performance of computer or information systems. ★★★★★ Estimate project development or operational costs. 	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>MEDIAN</p> <div style="background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">\$78,873</div> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">job median</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Median Earnings</p> </div>	REQUIREMENTS <p>DEGREE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HS or Equivalent 4.3% Certificate or Associate 21.2% Bachelor 48.0% Graduate Degree 26.5% 	

Sample data - Individual search results will vary

UEN FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY | Page 21

APPENDIX II: POSTER (11" x 16")



**REGISTERED NURSE
SURGICAL TECHNICIAN
PHLEBOTOMIST AVID HIKER
HALLOWEEN AFICIONADO
DEVOTED MOTHER**

**MEGAN
CARROLL-MUÑOZ, RN**

CNA

**EXPERIENCE THE POWER
OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION**

APPENDIX III: BROCHURE (8.5" X 11")

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION



Career and Technical Education (CTE) provides all students access to high-quality, rigorous career-focused programs that result in attainment of credentials with labor market value.

Our story includes the success of students across the state and how they have been affected by Career and Technical Education.



In Utah, there are more than 226,000 secondary and postsecondary CTE students.

What Students Are S

CTE provides hands-on learning opportunities for students in a variety of settings and levels, including middle school/junior high career exploration, secondary programs, postsecondary certificates and degrees, and customized training for employees in the workplace. CTE has created more than 50 Career Pathways for every secondary student by providing him or her with the technical skills and academic knowledge needed to prepare for future employment and/or a successful transition to postsecondary education.



"Because of the CTE courses I have taken, the safety certifications I have earned, and my internship, Jiffy Lube hired me on the spot."

*Trever Gardner
Skilled and Technical Sciences Education*



"By taking the CNA and EMT courses in high school, I'm better prepared to enter the workforce. These courses allowed me to gain hands-on learning and on-the-job training through internships, and receive instruction from teachers who work in the field."

*Taylor Brown
Health Science Education*



74 percent of students who concentrated in a CTE Career Pathway placed in postsecondary education, advanced training, military service, or employment. (October 1 - December 31, 2016-2017)



"The CTE courses I have taken prepared me for my chosen career path because I have received knowledge and training in business management and restaurant fundamentals."

*Alexis Kingery
Business and Marketing Education*

CTE reduces the workforce gap by providing long-term job education and skills training for students, enabling them to reach their full potential.

"My CTE classes and my leadership experience in 4-H and FFA laid a strong foundation which I can build upon. I plan to go to college to complete a teaching degree"

*Kaitlin Hallam
Agricultural Education*



CTE uses a hands-on approach that teaching experts believe is more effective with many students than reading or listening to lectures alone.



Saying About CTE



"CTE courses prepared me for entering my chosen field of study. The knowledge from these classes has been and will be beneficial to my success in college."

Thomas Jones
Information Technology Education

There are many high-tech jobs in Utah that students can perform as a result of taking CTE courses while in high school.

In 2017-2018, 57 percent of students concentrated in a CTE Career Pathway. A concentrator is a student who has completed 1.5 credits in a single CTE program of study.

20% of students completed a CTE Career Pathway. A completer is a student who has completed 3.0 credits in a single CTE program of study.

More than 85 percent of CTE students are planning to continue on to postsecondary education.

myCollegeOptions.org/ACTE Cooperative Research Program, 2015.

"I have chosen to work toward a bachelor's degree in marketing because of the CTE Pathway I was involved in throughout high school."

Madison Warner
Business and Marketing Education

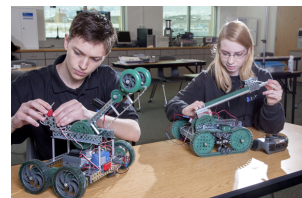


A Utah CTE Career Pathway is a method of searching for a career that fits a students' interests and lifestyle and allows him or her to build academic courses around it. Career Pathways ensure that students will be prepared to take advantage of the full range of postsecondary options, including on-the-job training, certification programs, and two- and four-year college degrees.



"CTE classes have helped me think more like an engineer and helped me open my mind to the new things that are possible."

Michael Peters
Technology and Engineering Education



Today's best CTE programs do a better job of preparing many students for college and career than traditional academics-only programs.

Harvard Graduate School of Education Pathways to Prosperity Project, 2011.



"The CTE classes I have taken throughout high school have introduced me to my dream career path. After taking child development I decided I wanted a career working with children."

Kayla Clopten
Family and Consumer Sciences Education



Students in Career and Technical Education have the opportunity to participate in Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs), thus engaging in leadership activities as an integral part of the instructional program.

CTSOs present organized activities for students to gain personal and leadership skills, making them more employable, preparing them to become productive citizens, and assisting them in assuming positive roles in the home and community. They are not after-school clubs where only a few CTE students belong, but a powerful instructional tool integrated into the CTE classroom. CTOS help students develop leadership skills and positive work values, while reinforcing the Career and Technical Education curriculum.

DECA—An association of marketing students. DECA is a student leadership organization that provides hands-on leadership development. Students learn how to develop, price, place, and promote products in the right business setting. The organization builds self-confidence, positive work attitudes, and communication skills. [Utah has 2,578 members in 70 chapters.](#)

In 2018, a group of DECA student members participated in competitive events at the DECA International Career Development Conference. Two secondary student members placed in the top ten, with fourteen additional members as finalists.

FBLA—Future Business Leaders of America. FBLA provides students with opportunities for leadership, community involvement, business partnerships, and competition with other students in events ranging from Public Speaking to Job Interview to Parliamentary Procedures. [Utah has 3,022 members in 125 chapters.](#)

In 2017, thirty-five secondary student members placed in the top ten in the nation for their extraordinary achievement in their FBLA events at the FBLA National Leadership Conference.

Many postsecondary institutions in Utah offer technical programs, including universities, colleges, technical colleges, and other public and private two- and four-year colleges.

FCCLA—Family, Career and Community Leaders of America. FCCLA provides students with opportunities to attain knowledge, skills, and leadership characteristics necessary to succeed in life and careers through Family and Consumer Sciences education. [Utah has 2,944 members in 121 chapters.](#)

In 2018, 185 student members competed in 30 different STAR Events at the FCCLA National Leadership Conference. Of these students, 71 received gold medals, 92 received silver medals, and 22 received bronze medals.

FFA—The organization for agricultural education students. FFA is dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of young people by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education. [Utah has 6,567 members in 89 chapters.](#)

In October 2018, at the National FFA Convention and Expo student members were recognized for individual accomplishments. 132 members received the American FFA degree—the highest recognition an FFA member can receive.

HOSA—Health Occupations Students of America. HOSA provides students with opportunities to attain the knowledge, skills and leadership characteristics necessary to succeed in a health care profession, through leadership training, career training, and service projects. [Utah has 3,969 members in 104 chapters.](#)

In 2018, more than 200 student members participated in competitive events at the HOSA National Leadership Conference. Thirty-two secondary and post-secondary student members placed in the top ten in a variety of healthcare-related competitions.

SkillsUSA—Skilled and Technical Sciences Student Organization. SkillsUSA provides quality education experiences for students in leadership, teamwork, citizenship, and character development. The organization builds and reinforces self-confidence, work attitudes, and communication skills. It emphasizes total quality at work, high ethical standards, superior work skills, lifelong education and pride in the dignity of work. [Utah has 2,164 members in 104 chapters.](#)

In 2018, 164 secondary and postsecondary SkillsUSA student members competed in 74 of the 100 hands-on occupational and leadership skill area competitive events at the SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference. Forty-three of these students were medalists, with 16 receiving gold medals. Utah ranked eighth in medals received for any one state.

TSA—Technology Student Association. TSA is the only student organization dedicated exclusively to students enrolled in technology and engineering classes in grades 7-12. TSA fosters personal growth, leadership training, career development, teamwork, community service, competitive events, and student recognition to supplement the curriculum in technology and engineering. Leadership opportunities are available at the local, state, or national levels. [Utah has 2,432 members in 62 chapters.](#)

In 2018, forty-two middle/junior high and high school TSA student members placed in the top ten in the nation for their exceptional achievement in 10 of the 65 technology-based competitive events at the National TSA Leadership Conference. Each event was based on principles and concepts learned through projects during the school year in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects.

Career and Technical Education makes an impact on youth and adults while preparing them for successful careers. CTE is an essential component of the total educational system in Utah and is critical to the country's ability to compete in a global economy.

Our vision is to see that every student has the opportunity to explore a variety of Pathways that will equip him or her with the academic knowledge, technical and employment skills vital for entry into the evolving workforce of the 21st century. Thus, CTE will be a driving force in the economic development of Utah.

February 2019



Utah State Board of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, UT 84114-4200
Sydnee Dickson, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Thalea Longhurst, State Director of Career and Technical Education

ABOUT THE FACILITATOR

Dr. James Marshall is a Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at San Diego State University and an independent consultant to corporate business entities and school systems. He teaches graduate-level courses in program evaluation, human performance technology, instructional design, and organizational performance.

Dr. Marshall has been responsible for evaluating over \$60 million of federal-, state- and locally-funded programs for purposes of optimizing their design and quantifying their impact. His work studying public media for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has changed the way the over 165 public television stations work within their local markets to assess community needs and measure impact. He is particularly passionate about informal learning, and regularly consults with zoos, aquariums, museums and libraries to enhance visitor learning experiences.

Dr. Marshall's client list includes Bank of America, San Diego Zoo Global, Court TV, McGraw Hill Companies, Museum of Photographic Arts, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Reuben H. Fleet Science Center, The Princeton Review, The Transportation Security Administration, TIAA-CREF, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, San Diego County Office of Education and the U.S. Department of Education.

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