



feedback

On Track to Career Success Participation Feedback Results

Key insights on how the OTCS partnership impacted
students in New Mexico

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation provided funding to the Center for Social Organization of Schools (CSOS) for the purpose of advancing On Track to Career Success, and thereby greater equity in educational outcomes. The CSOS worked to develop a framework that educators can widely use to collaborate with students' academic, college/career, and social-emotional milestones. This approach uses student success indicators, proactive intervention, and partnership development to improve high school connection, graduation, and workforce readiness in Louisiana and New Mexico.

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The On Track to Career Success Project Overview

The [On Track to Career Success \(OTCS\)](#) project is an effort to co-create a framework that seamlessly combines elements of high school redesign, youth development and engagement, workforce development, and career preparation and readiness using evidence-based practices that build skills and open pathways to jobs and careers through educational and workplace experiences.

The three elements of the OTCS framework that have guided collaborations with school partners include:

1. Milestones: evidence-based academic, social-emotional, college and career milestones for students in grades 9-12
2. Student Success Systems: to monitor and respond to keep all students on the path to career success.
3. Pathways to Career Success: providing all students with a series of college and career explorations, experiences, applications, and engagements.

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Objective

To understand the experiences and the impact of participation, providing insights that will guide the evolution of the framework and its national implementation. The results may serve in shaping the future and ensuring it effectively supports broader use.

Six school sites participated in the survey, including students, teachers, counselors, administrators, and key community partners.

Key Insights

- 100% of respondents feel that the program improved student engagement
- 91% of respondents indicated an increase in student participation in college/career activities
- 82% of respondents shared an increase in connections made between students and school/community/employment partners
- 73% of respondents reported the greatest impact was the use of the National Milestones to improve college and career readiness

In what ways has your partnership with OTCS supported student progress in the following areas?

Area of Student Progress	Percentage of Respondents
Improved school attendance	63.6%
Positive shifts in student engagement	100%
Increase in course acquisition	45.5%
Increased participation in college/career activities	90.9%
Enhanced connections between students and staff	81.8%
Greater clarity or progress toward goals	72.7%
Other (please describe)	0%

Which OTCS strategies do you believe had the greatest impact on improving graduation outcomes for your students?

Strategies Used to Improve Graduation	Percentage of Respondents
Use of college and career readiness milestones	73%
Regular monitoring of student attendance, behavior, and academic progress	73%
Work-based learning opportunities (e.g., internships, job shadows)	46%
College exposure activities (e.g., campus visits, info sessions)	46%
Partnerships with community and employer organizations	55%
Other	9%

This section from the reflection feedback results includes summarized long-form and short-form responses:

OTCS Approaches Supporting Student Success

Respondents highlighted several strategies and supports as particularly impactful, including guidance for future planning, student leadership development, and meaningful time spent with students. Key approaches included active communication, engaging students in the Profile of a Graduate framework, and fostering stronger connections among stakeholders. Design Thinking was noted for promoting empathy, creativity, collaboration, and a culture of continuous improvement. Additional supports included Early Warning Systems, career pathway exploration, school redesign initiatives, frequent college visits, and hands-on student engagement activities.

Strategies Supporting Diverse Student Groups

Four key themes emerged from the feedback

Proactive Engagement

- Early outreach and regular contact had a significant positive impact, especially for at-risk students.
- Helped students feel valued and connected to the school community.

Student Empowerment

- Partnerships and student convening events encouraged student voice and active participation.

Early Warning System (EWS)

- Particularly effective for students identified as students with disabilities, English learners, and students at risk of dropping out.
- Enabled timely interventions and improved academic and social-emotional outcomes.

College and Career Readiness

- Most beneficial for English learners and students with disabilities.
- Expanded exposure to college and career opportunities for students who had limited prior access

Student Success Stories and Groups Experiencing the Greatest Impact

This section highlights the specific examples of students and student groups who experienced positive outcomes through their participation in OTCS programs, illustrating the impact of the partnership.

“When we had the focus group it allowed us insight on how students were viewed by the community.”

“The students who went to DC to present have blossomed. The last two years has seen incredible growth, maturity and prescience for the student who presented their work.”

“I believe students at risk of dropping out of school experienced a significant positive impact with this project.”

“The students who were actively involved in the Design Team were engaged and accomplished many things that they were very proud of.”

“One example that stands out is a group of students who were identified as being off-track for graduation. Through our partnership with OTCS, they received targeted support in career exploration, academic planning, and access to community resources. Several of those students not only re-engaged in their coursework but also participated in internships that gave them hands-on experience and a clearer vision of their future. As a result, they demonstrated improved attendance, academic growth, and a stronger commitment to completing their high school diploma.”

“ELL and IEP students were able to utilize milestones in their capstone projects and digital portfolios.”

“The biggest impact, in my opinion, was student we are not normally involved in school activities, sports or clubs. It gave a voice to the students who don’t usually get a voice.”

Impact of OTCS Participation on Students' Post-Secondary Exploration and Preparation

Respondents shared that participation in the OTCS framework has given students greater confidence and clarity about their post-secondary options. They noted that students now see multiple pathways -college, career, trade, or military – as real and attainable. Exposure to internships, dual credit courses, and career exploration activities helped students connect school to future goals while building communication, leadership, and decision-making skills. Several respondents highlighted improved advising, stronger graduation rates, and more students enrolling in college. Overall, students are more optimistic about their futures and better equipped to pursue the pathway that fits them best.

Expanding Student Opportunities and Involving Them in Post-Graduation Pathways

Two key themes emerged from the feedback

Expanded and Refined Opportunities

- Increased access to dual credit and concurrent enrollment courses
- New internship placements with local businesses and community organizations
- Career exploration integrated throughout the school year
- Coursework concentrations and CTE course development to align with student interests
- Teacher cadet program connected to child development classes
- Use of post-graduation transition planners to guide next steps
- Continued longstanding offerings with expanded reach and participation

Student Involvement

- Students provided input on which dual credit courses and internships to offer
- Feedback from students shaped program selection and implementation
- Students chose/invited colleges, trades, and businesses to participate in career events
- Students investigated social issues, identified community resources, and presented solutions to peers, parents, and the community
- Expanded voice and choice compared to previous years; students central to planning and decision-making

Supports and Resources That Helped – and What's Still Needed to Expand Post-Graduation Options

Supports That Helped

Partnerships & Pathways: Dual credit, internships, career fairs, and college visits

Guidance & Advising: OTCS coordinator, Student Success Advisors, and trusted adults

Student Voice & Leadership: Opportunities to influence programs, present ideas, and build confidence

Flexible Options: Credit recovery, high school, and expanded credit opportunities

Supports Still Needed

Sustained Staffing: Coordinators or trained personnel to lead and maintain efforts

Employer & Community Engagement: More local businesses, leaders, and paid work-based learning

Expanded CTE & Exposure: Additional teachers, course offerings, and post-secondary application support

Inclusive Student Input: Broader opportunities for students to shape programming

Student Design Teams' Impact on School Programs and Policies

Student design teams played a central role in shaping school practices, programs, and policies by placing student voice at the heart of decision-making. They contributed insights from their own experiences, co-created solutions with staff, and piloted new initiatives, ensuring that programs were relevant and responsive to student needs. Their influence extended to advisory programming, career exposure activities, digital portfolios, attendance initiatives, school events, course offerings, and policy updates. By involving students directly, the teams shifted the school culture from making decisions *for* students to making decisions *with* students, fostering greater engagement, connectedness, and a sense of ownership among the student body.

Shifts in Perspective on Student Voice and Leadership Through Design Team Collaboration

Working with student design teams demonstrated the powerful and practical role of student voice in school decision-making. Respondents noted that intentionally including students in leadership and planning increased self-confidence, engagement, and ownership among students. Staff observed that students brought unique insights, co-created solutions, and highlighted areas adults might overlook. The experience reinforced the importance of embedding student voice at all levels, expanding decision-making to include staff, students, and community partners, and underscored high-impact practices that strengthen school culture and student leadership.

Final Reflections: Impact of the Partnership on Practice and School Culture

Respondents shared that the partnership had a significant impact on both their practice and school culture. Many highlighted that communication improved greatly among staff and with students, and that the structured opportunities for collaboration and problem-solving helped them implement meaningful changes quickly.

Staff noted that student leadership and engagement were strengthened through team-building activities, expanded responsibilities, and experiences that broadened students' perspectives. The passion and commitment of the OTCS coordinator was frequently cited as a key factor, with students responding positively to their dedication.

Respondents also emphasized that the partnership encouraged intentional, student-centered decision-making and aligned supports across academics, behavior, and post-secondary readiness. Working with peers from other schools further fostered collaboration and a culture of continuous improvement. Overall, staff felt the partnership empowered students, enhanced school culture, and provided practical strategies to better support every student's success.

