



Lowell Public Schools Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy

Overview

Massachusetts state regulations (603 CMR 4.00) require sending districts to maintain a districtwide Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy that documents how middle school students in the district are made aware of, and gain exposure to, career technical education (CTE) schools and programs available to them in their district, regional, agricultural, and other public high schools. Sending districts must submit this Policy to DESE by December 1, 2025, and as amended. Sending districts must also submit an annual attestation that the Policy has been implemented in the sending district. Sending districts must make their Policy available on the district website and provide written copies to students and parents upon request. This policy was last updated on December 1, 2025.

Lowell Public Schools has implemented most components of this policy for many years. We plan a comprehensive phase-in of this new policy, primarily the MyCap component, over the next four years as follows:

- 2025-26 planning for implementation and staff/teacher training
- 2026-27 phase in grade 8
- 2027-28 phase in grades 7 and 8
- 2028-29 phase in grades 6, 7, and 8

Policy

As a comprehensive high school and sending district, the Lowell Public Schools Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy will:

1. Ensure that our middle schools collaborate with CTE schools and programs in the district, regional, agricultural, and other public high schools, looking to inform students about opportunities available to them.
2. Ensure that all middle school students are provided an opportunity to tour, during regular middle school hours, with the transportation costs to be assumed by the school hosting the tours; and
3. Ensure that the exploration and awareness of secondary school options, including career technical education schools and programs, is connected to each student's secondary and postsecondary academic and career planning through the My Career and Academic Plan (MyCAP) tool.

Statement of Goals

The Lowell Public Schools is committed to empowering all middle school students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to make informed decisions about their future

academic and career paths. Our goals for career exploration and career-connected learning during the middle school years are as follows:

- Awareness: Expose students to a broad range of career options and pathways to help them understand the evolving world of work and the value of lifelong learning.
- Exploration: Provide diverse opportunities for students to investigate their interests, strengths, and values through interactive activities, classroom lessons, and exposure to a variety of industries and occupations.
- Skill Development: Foster essential 21st-century skills, such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and adaptability, that are critical for success in both academic and workplace settings.
- Real-World Connections: Connect classroom learning to real-world applications by incorporating project-based learning.
- Equity and Access: Ensure that all students, regardless of background or ability, have equitable access to career exploration resources and experiences that broaden their horizons and support their aspirations.
- Decision-Making Skills: Guide students in developing self-awareness and informed decision-making abilities to help them choose appropriate high school programs and begin mapping out future educational and career goals.

Through these goals, the district aims to inspire curiosity, build confidence, and lay the foundation for lifelong career development beginning in middle school.

High School Pathway Options Available to Students

We will notify 8th-grade families by October 15th of each year that the following high school pathway options are available to rising grade 9 students:

Lowell High School offers Career Technical Education (C74), Career Connections (N74), and Early College pathways. For additional information, select these links: [Lowell High School Website](#), [LHS Early College](#), and [LHS Pathways](#).

Lowell is a member municipality of the Greater Lowell Regional Technical High School district, which offers a wide variety of Career Technical Education pathway programs to Lowell students through an application and admission process. For additional information, select this link: [Greater Lowell Technical High School](#).

Lowell students may also access Career Technical Education pathway programs that are not offered at either Lowell High School or Greater Lowell Regional Technical High School through the state's non-resident tuition application and admission process. For additional information, select this link: [How to Enroll in CTE Programs](#).

Exploration of these pathway opportunities will be connected to each student's secondary and post-secondary academic and career planning through the MyCAP tool.

Middle School Career Exploration

The process of exploring and becoming aware of secondary school options, including Career and Technical Education (CTE/C74) schools and programs, plays a crucial role in shaping a student's academic and career trajectory. Through the district's implementation of MyCAP (My Career and Academic Plan), students are guided to make informed decisions about their educational and professional futures by considering a variety of pathways and opportunities available to them.

Secondary school options encompass traditional high schools, specialized CTE schools, and other educational pathways. CTE schools and programs, in particular, offer students hands-on learning experiences and industry-recognized credentials that align with specific career fields. The exploration of these options allows students to understand the breadth of educational choices and the potential career outcomes associated with each.

MyCAP is a district-wide initiative for grades 6–12 that helps students develop personalized academic and career plans. Through MyCAP, students engage in structured activities and counseling sessions that encourage them to reflect on their interests, strengths, and long-term goals. This process includes:

- Researching secondary school options, including CTE programs;
- Assessing how different schools and programs align with their academic and career aspirations, and
- Identifying postsecondary opportunities, such as college majors, apprenticeships, and direct-to-career pathways.

By systematically exploring these options within the MyCAP framework, students are empowered to make choices that are relevant to both their immediate educational experiences and future career ambitions.

Exploring secondary school options is a key part of a student's academic and career planning. Through MyCAP, students are supported in the following ways:

- Mapping high school coursework that aligns with their postsecondary goals,
- Setting short- and long-term goals based on personal interests and labor market trends,
- Accessing resources and guidance to effectively navigate the transition from secondary to postsecondary education, and
- Developing skills and competencies valued by employers and higher education institutions.

CTE programs, in particular, provide a bridge between secondary education and real-world career opportunities, making them an integral part of the planning process. By including these options in their MyCAP, students ensure that their educational journey is purposeful and tailored to their future ambitions.

The District’s implementation of MyCAP ensures that the exploration and awareness of secondary school options—including CTE schools and programs—is woven into the fabric of academic and career planning. This comprehensive approach empowers students to make informed, strategic decisions about their education and career, preparing them for success in both college and the workforce.

Lowell middle schools will inform students about their secondary school options and collaborate with CTE programs—whether district, regional, agricultural, or other public high schools—that request to share information with students.

Starting in sixth grade, middle school students will receive information about career technical education (CTE) programs and career pathways through MyCAP activities at their schools. Additionally, by October 15 each year, all 8th-grade students and their families will receive an email outlining available high school options.

Middle School CTE Tour Policies

Lowell Public Schools will ensure that all middle school students have the opportunity to visit CTE schools and programs during regular school hours. The host school will cover transportation costs for these tours.

Middle school students will not receive an unexcused absence if the CTE school or program confirms the student’s participation in a tour.

Providing Records to CTE Schools and Programs

Lowell Public Schools will provide receiving CTE school districts with student and family contact information, such as mailing labels, upon request.

Maintenance of Records

Each middle school will be responsible for maintaining documentation of student participation in tours and other elements of this policy implementation, such as MyCAP and CTE access schedules. The IT department will maintain documentation of all information provided to regional and/or non-resident CTE schools.

Appendix: MyCAP Scope and Sequence by Grade Level

MyCAP is a student-centered, multi-year planning process designed to help students identify, plan, and pursue their academic and career goals. The Scope and Sequence refers to the structured progression of MyCAP activities and learning objectives across grade levels, ensuring students build the skills and knowledge necessary for informed decision-making about their futures.

- Grade 6: Introduction to self-awareness, interests, and strengths. Activities include interest inventories, goal setting, and initial career exploration.

- Grade 7: Expansion of career exploration, including research on various pathways, guest speakers, and introduction to local industries. Students begin to connect personal interests to potential career options.
- Grade 8: Deeper exploration of academic and career pathways, including elective choices, high school course planning, and understanding education requirements for various careers. Students create or update individualized MyCAP portfolios.

The Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy is designed to provide all students with equitable access to information and experiences related to a variety of academic and career pathways. The policy emphasizes early exposure, hands-on learning, and informed choice-making to prepare students for high school and beyond.

- Ensures all students participate in structured pathway exploration activities.
- Encourages collaboration with local businesses, community organizations, and high schools.
- Requires integration of pathway exploration into core curriculum and advisory periods.
- Mandates the use of data-driven tools (such as MyCAP portfolios) for tracking student progress and interests.

There are several key areas where the MyCAP Scope and Sequence directly support and enhance the Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy:

1. **Structured Progression:** The MyCAP Scope and Sequence provides a clear, grade-by-grade framework for pathway exploration, ensuring students receive age-appropriate guidance and opportunities every year.
2. **Personalized Planning:** By using MyCAP portfolios, students document their interests, strengths, and goals, which aligns with the policy's focus on individualized pathway exploration and informed decision-making.
3. **Integration with Curriculum:** Both frameworks emphasize embedding career and academic planning into core classes and advisory periods to ensure all students have equitable access to these opportunities.
4. **Data-Driven Support:** MyCAP's tracking tools allow educators to monitor student progress, interests, and engagement, enabling data-informed guidance and support.

The sending district's MyCAP Scope and Sequence and its Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy are deeply interconnected, working together to provide a comprehensive and equitable approach to career and academic planning. By aligning these frameworks, the district ensures students are equipped with the knowledge, experiences, and personalized support they need to make informed choices about their futures.