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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE // September 24, 2026

Muscogee County School District CTAE Department Awarded National Catalyze Challenge Grant to Advance Innovation in Career-Connected Learning

Part of a nearly \$4 million investment from Catalyze to help organizations put ideas into practice and connect young people to real-world experiences that build skills and confidence for the future.

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COLUMBUS, GA — The Muscogee County School District (MCSD) Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) Department has received a \$300,000 grant as part of a national effort to expand access to high-quality career-connected learning for young people. The MCSD is one of 14 organizations nationwide selected for this round of funding.

The MCSD CTAE Department was selected through a competitive process that began with more than 500 applications from across the country. In April 2026, it was one of 31 organizations selected by Catalyze to receive \$10,000 and three months of technical assistance from national experts to refine and strengthen its idea. MCSD's model stood out for its innovative approach to career exploration for young adolescents, a key priority for this round of the Catalyze Challenge.

The MCSD will design a middle school where every class connects to careers. Rather than treating career exploration as an elective, the district is transforming one middle school into a fully career-infused learning environment where English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies are taught through hands-on projects co-designed with local employers.

The school will cover the same Georgia Department of Education curriculum standards as a traditional middle school. What sets this model apart is its instructional approach and architecture: a whole-school redesign rather than a program add-on, and a documented employer ecosystem in which industry partners contribute real-world

project scenarios and evaluate student work, rather than simply appearing as guest speakers.

Built from the outset to be replicated, the model will be backed by a research partnership, while MCSD's selection as one of 10 districts in the Georgia Department of Education's inaugural Innovative School Models cohort creates a direct path to share what works across the state.

"This grant will help us to build a school where every student sees how what they learn in class connects to real careers here in Columbus, discovers what they are good at and what motivates them, and leaves eighth grade with three years of evidence about where they are headed," *stated* Dr. Victoria Thomas, Senior Director CTAE, MCSD

In addition to the funding, the MCSD and fellow Grantees will continue to receive technical assistance to implement, test and strengthen their approaches while generating lessons that can inform the broader career-connected learning field. The MCSD also joins the Catalyze Community of Practice, a learning community made up of more than 100 organizations.

"We're excited to support this cohort as they grow impactful employer partnerships and build strong organizational infrastructure to turn the spark of innovation into transformational change for young people. We look forward to seeing these ideas come to life through meaningful career-connected learning experiences that reflect where the world of work is headed," *stated*, Dr. Michelle Cheang, Director, Catalyze

Learn more about the Catalyze Challenge and most recent round of funding at <https://www.catalyzechallenge.org/round-five-grant-funding>.

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About Muscogee County School District

The Muscogee County School District is committed to providing an education that inspires and equips students to reach their full potential and become productive citizens in a global society. Focusing on excellence, equity, and innovation, the district serves a diverse student population, fostering academic success, personal growth, and community engagement.

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