



A Union of Professionals

AFT Innovation Fund

# COLLABORATING TO EXPAND CTE OFFERINGS



THE PITTSBURGH FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, LOCAL 400





# COLLABORATING TO EXPAND CTE OFFERINGS

## PROGRAM GOALS

- To more closely align career pathways for high school students with local job opportunities.
- To expand the CTE offerings in the school district with high-quality coursework that leads to a certification at the end of the program, yields college credit and/or articulates with a community college pathway.
- To expand awareness of CTE among the community and business sectors.
- To recruit more students to CTE offerings.

## Summary

As part of the AFT’s Promising Pathways initiative launched in 2015, the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers was awarded an AFT Innovation Fund grant to expand career and technical education opportunities, in collaboration with the Pittsburgh Public Schools, throughout the school system, and to change public awareness about what CTE can mean for students.

With the grant, the PFT and the school district have opened a new Emergency Response Technology academy at Westinghouse High School. The three-year program for students interested in pursuing careers as police officers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians leads to high school certifications and ties into postsecondary education opportunities.

The union and district have also worked together to open a new Multimedia Production and Coding academy at Brashear High School, complete with a curriculum and pathways to certifications, postsecondary education and careers.

The grant focuses on several key things, including a big focus on improving student recruitment into CTE pathways. The PFT and Pittsburgh Public Schools have been experimenting with using CTE teachers as frontline expert recruiters and implementing virtual tours of CTE programs for teachers, students, parents and partners.

To change the public perception of CTE and the opportunities associated with it, the grant included funds for a public awareness campaign, with billboard, radio and print media reaching a wide audience. Building general awareness is also a primary goal of a regular convening, hosted by the union, that includes a number of local organizations and leaders who are committed to expanding CTE in the district.

## Program Leaders

- **NINA ESPOSITO-VISGITIS**  
President, Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers
- **DARCY TYHONAS**  
CTE Innovation Fund grant project manager, Pittsburgh Public Schools
- **ANGELA MIKE**  
CTE executive director, Pittsburgh Public Schools
- **HAROLD GRANT**  
CTE vice president, Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers

## Community, Industry, Postsecondary and District Partners

- Pittsburgh Promise
- Community College of Allegheny County
- Emergency Response Technology program partners
- Pittsburgh Department of Public Safety
- Entertainment Technology Partners
- Steeltown Entertainment Project
- Point Park University

## Program Contacts

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The AFT Innovation Fund was established in 2009 to identify, nurture and bring to scale union- and educator-led innovations in public education. As an initiative of the AFT, the fund’s reach is nationwide. To date, the fund has made more than 45 investments. These investments position the AFT and its affiliates, in collaboration with school districts and the communities in which they work, as leaders and engaged partners in improving outcomes for our members and the people they serve.

“The Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers and Pittsburgh Public Schools have built an outstanding and deep partnership for career and technical education. They have opened exciting and high-demand academies for students interested in careers in public safety and digital media arts that lead to industry certifications while students are still in high school. They are also promoting CTE to students, parents and the community as a strong option to develop the skills needed for good-paying, high-demand jobs. As a testament to their commitment, they have grown their partnership to include a number of local and regional postsecondary institutions to ensure that students and their families are aware of all the opportunities that exist through CTE in Pittsburgh Public Schools and beyond.”

—Randi Weingarten, AFT President

## PFT PRESIDENT'S REFLECTION

Throughout the first two years of the AFT Innovation Fund grant, the Pittsburgh Public Schools and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers have made great strides in increasing awareness of CTE options for students, families, local industry leaders and community organizations. With the support of the AFT Innovation Fund, a wide cross section of students in the district have been exposed to the 15 program options available to them to begin preparing for careers in fields they are passionate about. This early preparation provides high school students with the opportunity to earn college credits, industry certifications, job-readiness skills and hands-on training using state-of-the-art equipment.

Pittsburgh students have been able to learn about CTE programs through a variety of outreach efforts. During our ninth-grade CTE college and career fair, for example, students talked with CTE program teachers, current CTE students and postsecondary institutions that provide training after high school. During the spring of 2016 and 2017, the families of every ninth-grade student in the district received a personal phone call from a CTE teacher or staff member. In June 2017, ninth-grade students were invited to attend a CTE exploratory summer program. During this teacher-led program, ninth-graders learned about six CTE programs through hands-on activities.

In addition to increasing exposure to students and families, the AFT Innovation Fund grant has allowed the PFT and Pittsburgh Public Schools to gather local stakeholders for regular roundtable discussions focused on meeting the needs of students, families, local industry leaders and postsecondary institutions in the Pittsburgh region. These recurring meetings have led to product-based collaboration and cooperation.

While working to increase awareness for all invested parties, we've been able to build meaningful and collaborative partnerships. These vital partnerships allow programs to operate at their fullest potential when providing students with career training. The city of Pittsburgh has donated equipment, resources and professional expertise for the new Emergency Response Technology program. Without this commitment, the program would not have started with such a strong foundation. The same is true for the partnerships formed for the new Multimedia Production and Coding program. The Steeltown Entertainment Project has supported the program by providing teaching artists who work directly with students on developing their media production skills and finding job opportunities.

NINA ESPOSITO-VISGITIS  
PFT President



## OUR MISSION

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

Randi Weingarten  
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