



VIEWPOINT

Quarterly Newsletter



Making Excellence the Standard: SDACTE Keynote Mike Oster

By: Travis Santistevan

Contact Travis at: President@sdacteonline.org

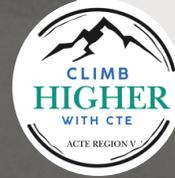
We're excited to announce that Brigadier General (Ret.) Mike Oster will be our keynote speaker at this year's SDACTE event! A dynamic leader, motivational speaker, and bestselling author, Mike brings more than three decades of experience inspiring individuals and teams to live with purpose and make excellence their standard.

Born and raised on a small farm in eastern South Dakota, Mike's foundation in hard work, leadership, and integrity began at a young age. His diverse career spans service in the South Dakota Army National Guard with multiple deployments, leadership roles in public service and business, and over 25 years as a professional speaker and trainer. He retired in 2022 after 36 years of military service, achieving the rank of Brigadier General.

Mike's keynote presentations blend engaging storytelling with actionable strategies for personal and professional growth. His signature theme, "Make Excellence Your Average," challenges audiences to cultivate a positive mindset, embrace resilience, and unlock their highest potential—skills that align closely with the values and goals of Career and Technical Education. Attendees can expect an energizing session filled with practical insights and motivation to elevate their leadership, teamwork, and personal effectiveness. We're honored to feature Mike Oster and look forward to the inspiration he will bring to our community.

ACTE Region V
Conference
April 8th - 11th
Salt Lake City, UT

Follow the link below to
Register:
[Register HERE](#)



Check It
Out!



Direct Live Links Inside this Viewpoint Newsletter

*Throughout this newsletter you will see blue bolded & underlined text. These links will direct you to important websites & opportunities available for our members!



CTE Rookie Teacher of the Year

By: Karen Roudabush

✉ Contact Karen at: PresidentElect@sdateonline.org

Every one of us probably vividly remembers our first year teaching. That year was likely filled with asking hundreds of questions, keeping one day ahead with lesson plans, and discovering all the things about teaching you could not possibly have been taught during any teacher preparation program. CTE teachers often face additional challenges of balancing CTSOs and other responsibilities outside of their teaching assignments. Along with all of those challenges you faced that year, you likely made new connections and learned a great deal about yourself.

We want our rookie teachers to not just survive, but to THRIVE! SDACTE Rookie of the Year is a program to recognize these new teachers. The SDACTE BOD plans to recognize an outstanding Rookie of the Year with a gift. Please consider nominating any NEW CTE teacher for this honor. Teachers who are in their first year of teaching and/or are new to teaching in CTE for the 2025-2026 school year are eligible to be nominated. Please consider nominating the new teachers in our profession!

Rookie of the Year

Nomination Form



Region V: Climb Higher with CTE: New Tours and Keynotes Announced!

By: Bobbie Jo Donovan



In Utah, we don't shy away from the climb — we embrace it. As CTE educators, you are the trailblazers. Like scaling a new peak, your journey involves risk and growth, helping students climb higher toward success in the real world. Utah ACTE is thrilled to welcome you to the 2026 ACTE Region V Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Beyond our breakout sessions, we are excited to announce our premier lineup of speakers and exclusive industry tours!

Inspiring Keynote Speakers: Hear from leaders who have mastered the "climb" in both business and the classroom:

- Rhonda Bromley: VP of Public Relations at Crumbl Cookies
- Chad Warnick: The 2023 Utah Teacher of the Year

Experience Utah's innovation firsthand with our curated conference tours:

- Salt Lake City Airport and the Delta Training Facility.
- Welfare Square and the LDS Conference Center.
- Davis Catalyst Center and Associated Foods processing plant.
- Utah National Guard.

Conference Logistics

Dates: April 8–11

Location: Little America Hotel, 500 Main St., Salt Lake City, UT

Lodging: \$199 + tax/night

Registration: \$450 (Member) | \$500 (Non-Member) | Note: Rates increase after Feb. 15!

REGISTER TODAY!

Don't miss this opportunity to network with fellow innovators and find the inspiration you need to help your students reach their summit.

Celebrating CTE Month: Why CTE Matters

By: Andrew Jensen

Contact Andy at: PastPresident@sdacteonline.org



I learned something my very first year in my Agriculture classroom in Fort Pierre: Career and Technical Education is not an “extra”; it is essential.

Eleven years ago, I stepped into that classroom unsure of exactly what I was doing, but it didn’t take long to see how much CTE mattered. Students needed hands-on learning, real-world connections, and a safe place to try, fail, and grow. For many, CTE wasn’t an add-on to their education, it was where learning finally made sense.

That realization was personal. Just a few years earlier, my own CTE teachers in Wakonda had taught me how to sew, how to draft projects, and how to balance a checkbook. Those lessons weren’t just content; they were life skills. Twenty years later, I still rely on them, and they continue to shape how I teach.

To celebrate Career and Technical Education Month, I asked CTE teachers, administrators, and supporters two simple questions: Why CTE? and Why do you stay? Their answers shared a common message.

Educators spoke about the impact on students, schools, and communities that CTE has. They described watching students discover passions and find their niche through hands-on learning. Others shared how meaningful it is to provide opportunities they didn’t have themselves, giving students more options and a clearer understanding of what is possible after high school.

Some of the most powerful responses came through student stories: students who found a passion for creating art through welding, students who communicated their love of agriculture through newspapers and magazines, and students who became more involved in family operations and hometowns after competing in challenges and contests. These experiences don’t just teach skills, they build confidence. Confidence to pursue further education. Confidence to choose a career they love. Confidence to excel. Confidence to be themselves.

At its core, CTE provides students the foundation to explore real-life careers within the safety of our school spaces. These spaces allow students to develop skills, make mistakes, and grow, before the stakes are high. CTE is diverse by design, blending creativity, technical skill, and problem-solving in ways that connect learning directly to real life.

And most importantly, CTE is for all students. It serves those heading directly into the workforce, those pursuing technical training, the military, and those continuing on to post-secondary opportunities. CTE meets students where they are and helps them become confident, capable, and career-ready.

As we celebrate Career and Technical Education Month, this is our reminder that CTE is not an “extra”, it is essential. It strengthens our workforce, supports our communities, and prepares the next generation for success.

CTE changes lives. CTE is for all. And that is why it matters.



Check Out CTE Month Resources Here

Member Benefits

Merch, Swag, & Promos!

It is CTE Month and we want you to have access to all the good stuff! Check out the links below. Order for yourself, your district, or your CTE program. Hey, you can even order for your industry partners! They can continue to support CTE by showing off our merch, swag, and promos!

[CTE Month Items](#)



[CTE Month Logo Download](#)



[SDACTE Shop](#)



[CTE Zoom & Pwpt Backgrounds](#)



[Shop ACTE Centennial](#)



Call for Presenters

By: Amber Rost

Contact Amber at: amber.rost@state.sd.us



The South Dakota Association for Career and Technical Education and the South Dakota Department of Education are excited to announce that speaker proposals are now being accepted for the 2026 South Dakota CTE Conference!

If you are interested in presenting at the CTE conference, click "Submit A Proposal" or use the following link: <https://forms.gle/KuWMkxDnT92ahM3L7> to submit your session proposal.



CTSO Center Updates

By: Katie Paulson

CTSO State Officer Teams to Visit the Capitol

We are excited to share an important update from our state's political hub. CTSO State Officer Teams, alongside State Directors, will be visiting lawmakers at the South Dakota Capitol to advocate for the critical role Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) and Career and Technical Education (CTE) play in our state's education system. This visit provides a valuable opportunity for student leaders to share their experiences, highlight the impact of CTSOs, and reinforce the importance of continued legislative support for these programs that prepare South Dakota's future workforce.

State Championships on the Horizon

As we move into the Spring semester, the busy season of CTSO State Championships is quickly approaching. With State Conferences just around the corner, we encourage educators to remind students to fully engage in every aspect of the experience. From collaborating with peers and attending breakout sessions to networking and skill development, these conferences offer meaningful learning opportunities beyond competition. Most importantly, challenge students to strive for personal excellence—both in their preparation and throughout the conference experience. Together, let's inspire them to grow as leaders, professionals, and competitors as they reach new heights.



**SOUTH DAKOTA
CTE CONFERENCE
JULY 26-28, 2026 - BROOKINGS**

The South Dakota Association for Career and Technical Education and the South Dakota Department of Education are now accepting speaker proposals for the CTE Summer Conference to be held July 26-28, 2026.

- We are looking for presenters to share topics and resources that:
- Support CTE programs and educators in South Dakota
 - Showcase innovative and engaging tools/resources for the CTE classroom
 - Highlight best practices for connecting classrooms to communities
 - Engage learners in career-connected learning opportunities
 - Help schools prepare the next generation of South Dakota's workforce

Proposal Deadline: January 29th, 2026

[Submit A Proposal](#)

Questions? Contact Amber.Rost@state.sd.us, 605-220-3381



Student Scholarship Applications

By: Alex Topal

✉ Contact Alex at: scholarships@sdacteonline.org



The SDACTE Scholarship Application will open on January 5, 2026, and all application materials must be submitted by April 1, 2026.

The application consists of five small essays and one letter of recommendation. Please note that the letter of recommendation must be submitted by a certified CTE instructor. In previous years, applications have been disqualified due to letters submitted by individuals who did not meet this requirement. We want to be very clear so that all applicants remain eligible for consideration.

Application Link: <https://forms.gle/CSw6oknDSvFQxSYp6>

If you or your students have any questions regarding the scholarship application or requirements, please feel free to reach out to me or any member of the Scholarship Committee. We are happy to assist and help answer questions.

- Committee Chair: Alex Toupal (scholarships@sdacteonline.org)
- Administration Division Rep: Shane Thill (shane.thill@k12.sd.us)
- AFNR Division Rep: Mollie Andrews (mollie.andrews@k12.sd.us)
- FCS Division Rep: Abby Page (abby.page@k12.sd.us)
- T&I, Tech Ed Division Rep: Christian Swenson (christian.swenson@k12.sd.us)
- Business, IT, and Marketing Division Rep: Jessie Yttreiness (jessie.yttreiness@k12.sd.us)
- Health Division Rep: Lisa Fuccello (lisa.fuccello@k12.sd.us)

As a side note, the Scholarship Committee is also exploring ways to increase the scholarship fund besides just the annual Chase the Ace fundraiser. During last year's Summer Conference, the idea of hosting a food truck, coffee truck, or similar vendor was suggested during our committee meeting as a potential fundraising opportunity. If anyone has experience, contacts, or ideas on how to make this possible, please reach out—I would greatly appreciate the assistance.

SDACTE Awards

By: Bev Rieck

✉ Contact Bev at: awards@sdacteonline.org



Do you know a fellow SDACTE member who is deserving of recognition for the work they do in their area? If so, now is your time to put your thoughts into action! I know that each division of SDACTE may handle the selection a bit differently, but the division awards chair will be the contact person for you. Those division chairs who may be contacted regarding your division's choice of winners to advance to state competition include: Administration--Adam Shaw, Ag--Joshua Johnson, BMIT--Kristi Dancsisin, Family and Consumer Sciences--Carrie Kafka, Health Science--Clayton Gropper, and T&I/ Tech Ed--Laureen Mehlert.

For the Excellence Awards the seven categories SDACTE members are eligible for include: Administrator of the Year, Carl Perkins Community Service Award, Counseling and Career Development Professional, Lifetime Achievement Award, New Teacher of the Year, Teacher of the Year, Postsecondary Professional of the Year, Teacher Educator of the Year, and Teacher of the Year. The winner in each category for the Excellence Awards will advance to Region V competition.

Non-members are eligible for their support of CTE in two award categories. They are the South Dakota Award of Merit and the South Dakota Friend of Career and Technical Education Award.

More information on the specifics for each category can be found on our SDACTE website at sdacteonline.org/awards.

Once those winners are determined, I would highly recommend that the individual who is up for the award be the person filling out the application. Only that person can really address all the questions and experiences to adequately complete the application. The deadline for those applications is July 1. Winners will be announced during the state conference on July 26-28, 2026.

So, depending upon how your division handles the process, if you would like to recommend a worthy individual in your division, please contact your division chair. We have so many CTE members who deserve to be recognized for their efforts!



Southeast Technical College Highlight
By: Dr. Sara Vande Kamp

In December, Southeast Technical College (STC) announced a transformational \$2 million gift from Wells Fargo to create a new Homebuilding Lab, expanding hands-on learning for students in construction and skilled trades. This investment strengthens industry partnerships and supports workforce development by giving students real-world, project-based experiences aligned with industry needs. It's an exciting time at STC!

Building on this momentum, we are now promoting two upcoming Career Academy opportunities for high school students:

Construction Career Academy Students gain hands-on experience in construction fundamentals while earning college credit and working alongside industry professionals. This academy provides early exposure to high-demand careers in construction and the skilled trades. Apply now; the application deadline is February 26, 2026.

Horticulture Career Academy Open to high school students age 16 and older, this academy offers three college credits, high school credit, and paid work experience in horticulture or sports turf management. Students participate in classroom instruction, labs, and on-the-job training with local industry sponsors.

We are proud that these opportunities reflect Southeast Tech's commitment to innovative partnerships and meaningful career pathways that support students, schools, and employers across South Dakota.



Connecting Students, Skills, and Careers at Mitchell Tech
By: Annika Russell-Manke

The 2nd Semester is in full swing at Mitchell Technical College! We started the semester with an impressive 93% retention rate from Fall 2025 to Spring 2026 which is a testament to the quality education and supportive environment at Mitchell Tech.

The first Exploration Day of the semester was on January 21, giving prospective students hands-on experience with our programs. The same day, the Build Dakota Industry Connection Fair, brought potential employers and students together to find the right fit for the program.

With tax season upon us, our accounting students are ready to help community members with their tax returns through the VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) program. They are open on Tuesday's through tax season.

We have a couple campus expansion projects that continue to progress smoothly, with both the Underground Utilities Construction project and the METC Amphitheater on schedule. These additions will enhance learning opportunities and campus life for years to come.

We are holding a Career Fair on February 26, where students can connect with potential employers and find employment after graduation. Meanwhile, SkillsUSA is gearing up for the on-campus competitions April 9-10, where students across the state will showcase the technical skills and professional excellence. We look forward to having everyone on campus!



Construction





Scan the QR codes to Learn More!



Horticulture



Big Things Are Happening at Western Dakota Technical College By: Fawn Wilde

Let's start by sharing how thrilled the WDTC community is to have its new president on board! Dr. Kendra Ericson brings a strong understanding of and passion for career and technical education, believing in its power to transform lives and communities. She previously served as President of Iowa ACTE and is also a 2019 recipient of the ACTE Region III Iowa Merit Leadership Award, which recognizes outstanding contributions to the promotion, development, and direction of career and technical education; an honor that speaks volumes about her impact and dedication. Her leadership reflects a deep commitment to growing CTE opportunities not only at WDTC, but across the western South Dakota region.

In a moment worth celebrating, WDTC proudly swept all five 2025 American Technical Education Association (ATEA) awards! ATEA is dedicated to excellence in technical education, professional development, and workforce development, serving as a driving force behind high-quality training for today's and tomorrow's workforce. Congratulations to the winners!

- Outstanding Technical Program – Registered Nursing (RN)
- Program Innovation – Gary Gregson, College Dining Services Coordinator
- Outstanding Technical Faculty – Christina Zweber, MSN, RN, Practical Nursing Offsite Coordinator/Instructor
- Outstanding Technical Student (tie) – Dawson Johnson, Medical Laboratory Technician program (May 2025 graduate)
- Silver Star of Excellence Award – Black Hills Information Security (business partnership award, nominated by WDTC)

WDTC continues to break down barriers to education by expanding flexible learning options. The Health Information Management – Coding Specialty is now offered entirely online, allowing the college to accept more distance learners. This expansion creates greater access to high-demand healthcare careers while meeting learners where they are. Learn more here: <https://www.wdt.edu/degree-programs/health-information-management/>

Looking ahead, WDTC is excited to host its All Programs Camp for juniors and seniors on March 19 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. with registration opening soon.

The programs offered at WDTC represent some of the fastest-growing industries and these free career exploration camps give students the chance to experience them firsthand. Through engaging and informational activities, students can explore programs, discover what speaks to them, and begin charting a path toward something bigger and brighter.

From leadership to innovation to student success, WDTC is proud to continue advancing CTE in western South Dakota, and the momentum is just getting started!

For questions, reach out to WDTC's SDACTE liaison, Fawn Wilde, at Fawn.Wilde@wdt.edu.

Congratulations Award Winners!

By: Bev Rieck

✉ Contact Bev at: awards@sdacteonline.org



Good luck to the following SDACTE Award winners from the 2025 SDACTE conference as they work and submit their respective Excellence Award application for consideration for Region V competition! They are working on this now before their March 1 deadline.

- Administrator of the Year—Breanne Lynch
- Carl Perkins Community Service—Charlene Weber
- Counseling & Career Development Professional—Renaë Oines
- Lifetime Achievement—Suzanne Skinner
- New Teacher of the Year—Tanner Peterson
- Postsecondary Professional—Dr. Sara Vande Kamp
- Teacher Educator—Nicole Graves
- Teacher of the Year—Andrew Jensen



Building the Future: Engineering Vision & Innovation in Motion

By: Katrina Kruse

Contact Katrina at: TradesIndustryDivision@sdacteonline.org

February is Career and Technical Education (CTE) Month, a time to celebrate the hands-on learning that fuels our economy and empowers our students. As the President of the T&I Division for SDACTE, I am constantly inspired by the grit, innovation, and skill I see across our South Dakota classrooms and shops.

Our division represents the backbone of the workforce. From automotive technology and construction trades to precision machining and welding, T&I educators are doing more than just teaching "skills"—we are bridging the gap between classroom theory and real-world application. We are preparing the next generation of builders, fixers, and creators who will keep our state moving forward.

Innovation in the Shop

This year has been one of incredible growth. We've seen a surge in industry partnerships and a renewed focus on emerging technologies. Whether you are integrating advanced robotics into your curriculum or refining traditional woodworking techniques, your commitment to excellence is what makes South Dakota CTE stand out on a national level.

CTE Month is the perfect time to open your doors. I encourage you to share your students' successes with your local communities, school boards, and industry partners. Let them see the sparks flying and the projects taking shape!

Call for Presenters: Share Your Expertise!

As we look forward to the SDACTE Summer Conference, we know that the best professional development comes from the experts in the room—you. We are officially looking for presenters and session ideas for our T&I track. Do you have a unique shop management system? A successful project-based learning unit? Or perhaps a new piece of technology you've mastered? We want to hear about it. Sharing your "tricks of the trade" helps elevate the entire division and ensures our programs remain cutting-edge.

We are specifically looking for sessions on:

- Emerging Tech: EV technology, CNC advancements, or Green Energy.
- Shop Safety & Management: Innovative ways to keep labs organized and safe.
- Recruitment: Strategies for growing your program and engaging non-traditional students.
- Industry Integration: How you've built lasting partnerships with local businesses.

The summer conference is more than just a meeting; it's a chance to step out of the shop, recharge your batteries, and return to your programs with fresh ideas. Beyond the sessions, you can look forward to high-level networking and peer collaboration that is simply unmatched. There is no resource more valuable than a fellow teacher who has "been there, done that."

Thank you for everything you do for your students and for our profession. Your work in the Trades and Industry Division isn't just about jobs—it's about providing students with a path to a high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand career.

Happy CTE Month! I look forward to seeing your presentation proposals and catching up with everyone this summer.



Legislative Session Spotlight: Advocacy, Awareness, and Action for CTE

By: Breanne Lynch

Contact Breanne at: AdminDivision@sdacteonline.org

It is legislative time in South Dakota. May this note serve as a call-to-action for: monitoring, advocacy, and planning. As veteran CTE administrators and leaders are aware, there are many bills each session that may impact CTE programming and funding. It is important to take some time to read and follow the bills directly and indirectly tied to CTE, workbased learning, and apprenticeship. Consider expanding beyond the actual language of the bills and entertain conversations with local leaders in workforce development; perhaps attend a legislative coffee. The Governor and Legislature are signaling continued attention and support for registered apprenticeships and workforce development, with plans to expand structured pathways tied to high-demand careers. CTE programs are the natural on-ramp into those opportunities—what a great time to share your valuable insights. CTE leaders can bring clear stories, outcome data, and employer testimonials, which help lawmakers see CTE not as a budget line item, but as a primary strategy for talent development, workforce, and economic vitality.

Many in our division are actively tracking bills, communicating regularly with superintendents and lobby teams, and building relationships with local legislators. Want to get involved? Reach out to SDACTE’s legislative committee on how your insights can be shared.

Beyond policy we are also busy ensuring programs are ready for registration and planning for the 26-27 school year. Before the demands of next year pile up, be sure to make time in your schedule for our annual CTE Conference in Brookings, July 26th - 28th. With ample division time, please reach out with requests or ideas on how to make the conference and our schedule purposeful. I look forward to hearing your suggestions, email: admindivision@sdacteonline.org

CTE IN ACTION

The Horticulture Program at Southeast Technical College is now receiving plant plugs from Natural Beauty!

Natural Beauty donates plugs each spring in order to help CTE students throughout the state gain valuable hands-on experience in horticulture. These leftover plugs would otherwise be thrown away.

We typically receive plugs on a weekly basis until the end of the semester. The amounts vary from week to week, and it is on a first come first serve basis. Reach out via email or phone (listed below) if you have any interest in receiving plugs.

benjamin.ringling@southeasttech.edu
605-680-0974





Inspiration, Innovation, and Impact

By: **Brigitte Brucklacher**

Contact Brigitte at: FCSdivision@sdacteonline.org

ACTE CareerTech VISION 2025, held in Nashville at the Opryland Resort, was an incredible experience! If you are looking to reignite your professional passion, I highly recommend attending the next conference in New Orleans in December 2026. A huge congratulations to SDATFCS member Nikki Melius, FCS teacher from Faulkton, who was a finalist for the prestigious ACTE Carl Perkins Community Service Award. Nikki is an inspiration to her students, her community, and the entire SD FCS family! SDATFCS was well represented in Nashville. In addition to Nikki and myself, we were proud to have Jaymi Langer (Gettysburg), Hillary Terpstra (Alcester-Hudson), Carrie Kafka (Parkston), and Tracy Kern (Harrisburg) in attendance. Beyond the exceptional professional development sessions, we enjoyed unforgettable highlights like the Grand Ole Opry's Country Christmas featuring Lainey Wilson, a dinner cruise on the General Jackson Showboat, and exploring downtown Nashville and The Hermitage.

Mark your calendars and save the date for the 2026 SDACTE Summer Conference! This year, we are heading to SDSU in Brookings from July 26–29, 2026. To make this the best event yet, we are actively seeking your input for:

- FCS Presenters: Do you have an innovative teaching strategy or a successful program model to share? We want to hear from you!
- Industry & Educational Tours: Suggestions for local Brookings tours?
- Trending Topics: What do you need most right now? From integrating AI in the classroom to new culinary techniques or mental health resources for students, let us know what topics will most impact your teaching.

Rooted in CTE: An AFNR Journey of Skills, Leadership, and Opportunity

By: **Sara Colombe**

Contact Sara at: AFNRdivision@sdacteonline.org



Happy CTE Month!! In preparation for this month, I reflected on my high school days. I was very involved in the music department, and others were shocked when I told them I was majoring in Agriculture Education. CTE was a key influence on my education. I took courses in the Business, Family Consumer Sciences, and Agriculture pathways. I was also involved in Business Professionals of America and FFA. I understood the impact of learning technical skills on my career.

Here are some ideas to celebrate CTE month:

- Share your CTE story with your classes
- Plan CTE educators dress up days
- Partner with other CTSOs for celebration events
- Showcase your CTE programs at a sporting event

Vision Stipend Recipients



CTE IN ACTION



Proud moment for South Dakota ACTE! Faulkton's own Nikki Melius is representing Region V on the national stage as a finalist for the Carl Perkins Community Service Award.

Membership Benefits By: Nikki Melius

Attending the ACTE VISION 2025 conference in Nashville truly hit all the right notes for me. Thanks to the generous \$500 SDACTE stipend, I had the opportunity to join more than 5,000 educators in Music City to explore the latest innovations and ideas shaping Career and Technical Education. From the impressive and beautifully decorated Gaylord Opryland Resort to meaningful, in-depth professional development sessions, and even an unforgettable night at the Grand Ole' Opry, I came home inspired. The experience left me with renewed appreciation for the important work we do in our South Dakota school districts and the lasting impact we have on our CTE students.

One of the most rewarding parts of the week was serving as the Region V representative for the Carl Perkins Community Service Award. It was an honor to represent my community, the state of South Dakota, and the members/states of Region V as we celebrated the powerful role community engagement and service play in strengthening our CTE programs.

Many of the breakout sessions I chose to attend focused on AI in the classroom and how those skills directly transfer to the workplace. My biggest takeaway was learning practical ways to use AI to enhance student creativity while also streamlining the administrative tasks that often compete for instructional time. One message came through loud and clear: AI is no longer a "future" skill; it is a current workforce expectation. By intentionally integrating these tools now, we can better prepare our students to stay competitive and confident in an increasingly AI-driven economy.

The trade show was an impressive glimpse into all that CTE has to offer. I spent time browsing for new resources and innovative technologies designed to better connect education with industry. One highlight was touring a food truck and visiting with students from a high school in the Nashville area about their roles both in the classroom and in running a classroom-based business. The real-world connections were evident and the students were top-notch!

As we move into February and celebrate CTE Month, I challenge you to showcase what students in your CTE programs are doing in and for your local community. The VISION conference reinforced that when community service and technological innovation come together, they create a powerful environment for student success.

Thank you again to SDACTE for the support and the opportunity to represent our state on a national stage!





CTE, Collaboration and a Touch of Tennessee
By: Hillary Terpstra

I recently had the opportunity to attend the National ACTE Vision Conference in Nashville, held at the Gaylord Opryland Hotel and Convention Center, and it was truly a memorable experience. From the moment I arrived, I was surrounded by passionate Career and Technical Education and Family and Consumer Sciences educators from across the country who were eager to learn, share and grow together.

One of the biggest highlights was participating in a roundtable session led by Tisha Richmond focused on Gamified Strategies to Engage and Elevate CTE Learning. The interactive discussion sparked creativity and reinforced the importance of engagement, innovation and student-centered learning. I also attended several other impactful sessions including NATFCS Best Practices Networking, FCS Kickin' Up Success Roundtables and Magical Learning in CTE: Engaging Strategies for Student Success. Each session provided practical strategies, fresh ideas and inspiration that I am excited to bring back into the classroom.

Beyond the conference sessions, I was able to attend the leadership breakfast where we celebrated the accomplishments of our South Dakota association (SDACTE) and others across the nation. It was a powerful reminder of the strength of our profession and the incredible work happening every day that truly sets this organization apart.

Of course, no trip to Nashville would be complete without experiencing some of the city's iconic attractions. I had the chance to attend a show at the legendary Grand Ole Opry, enjoy a dinner and show aboard the General Jackson Showboat, visit the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum and explore all that Nashville has to offer. From live music and great food to unforgettable sights and sounds, Music City did not disappoint.

Overall, the conference was the perfect blend of professional learning, meaningful connections, celebration and a little Nashville fun. I returned home re-energized, inspired and excited to bring new ideas and a bit of Music City magic back to the classroom. If you have the chance to attend VISION 2026 in New Orleans - take it!



Trading Wrenches for a Conference: Revitalized by Vision
By: Taylor Burkett

My name is Taylor Burkett, and I am the Automotive Teacher at Harrisburg High School in South Dakota. I decided to leave the industry and start the auto program in Harrisburg six years ago. We are busting at the seams.

I always like to learn and grow. When I saw there was a National ACTE conference, I became interested. I talked with my administrators, and they were very supportive. I also saw that there was an SDACTE conference stipend. I applied for it and got it. IT'S ON. LET'S GO! This stipend basically made this trip possible for me. It helped cover transportation and added expenses that I had.

During this conference, I got to meet teachers from all over the nation who are doing some of the most amazing things in their classrooms. I have been to other conferences before that have breakout sessions. These sessions at the Vision Conference were on another level. The speakers they brought in were extreme experts in the topics they were presenting. This was also an amazing opportunity for me to connect with other teachers from our state.

I saw teachers from all over our country winning awards for their achievements. It was extremely encouraging. Knowing that I am part of a bigger movement helps me understand the importance of what I am doing. There was also the biggest expo I have ever seen. I was able to visit vendor booths of equipment that I have and chat with them about things I need. I was also able to visit booths of products or curriculum I had never seen before. It was a great way to connect with programs for students that will get them into the industry. The conference was at the Gaylord Opryland in Nashville. I had been to this facility a long time ago. I knew it was amazing, but it had grown and changed so much. The food was excellent, and it was an absolute pleasure to be there.

If you are thinking about going to the ACTE 2026 Vision Conference, I highly encourage it. Apply for the stipend to help you get there and learn as much as you can. After coming back from the conference, I feel revitalized in my teaching efforts with fresh ideas. Community and understanding of being part of a bigger effort is so needed.

Chris Gardner was the closing speaker, the author of *The Pursuit of Happiness*. What an amazing opportunity to hear him speak. As Mr. Gardner says, "PLAN B SUCKS!"

Get to the 2026 ACTE Vision Conference in New Orleans and learn new things.

CTE IN ACTION



SD ACTE Executive Board Members, Region V Leaders and VISION Stipend Recipients attended the Leadership Breakfast representing the state of South Dakota



Executive Proclamation

State of South Dakota Office of the Governor

Whereas, February 1-28, 2026, has been designated Career and Technical Education (CTE) Month by the National Association for Career and Technical Education; and,

Whereas, CTE offers students the opportunity to gain the academic, technical, and employability skills necessary for true career readiness; and,

Whereas, students in CTE programs participate in authentic, meaningful experiences that improve the quality of their education and increase their engagement and achievement; and,

Whereas, CTE provides students with career exploration opportunities early in their educational experience, which enables them to make informed and beneficial decisions about their academic coursework and pursue established programs of study and career pathways; and,

Whereas, leaders from business and industry nationwide report increasing challenges related to addressing the skills gap and connecting qualified professionals with careers in critical and growing CTE-related fields. These include advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, energy, health care, information technology, and transportation; and,

Whereas, CTE prepares students for these and other fulfilling careers by offering integrated programs of study that link secondary and postsecondary education and lead to the attainment of industry-recognized credentials; and,

Whereas, CTE programs ensure that employers have access to a qualified and thriving workforce, ensuring our nation is a strong and competitive economy;

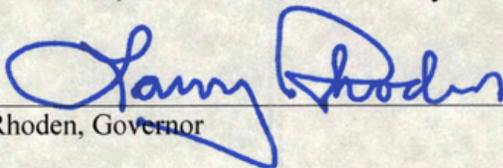
Now, Therefore, I, Larry Rhoden, Governor of the State of South Dakota, do hereby proclaim February 1, 2026, as

CTE Month

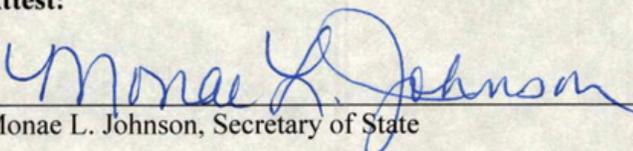
in South Dakota.



In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the Great Seal of the State of South Dakota, in Pierre, the Capital City, this Twentieth Day of January in the Year of Our Lord, Two Thousand and Twenty-Six.


Larry Rhoden, Governor

Attest:


Monae L. Johnson, Secretary of State