



Principal Playbook

Unlocking Career Success



This playbook provides ways in which Principals and their teams can blur the lines between high school, post-secondary education, and the workforce. Principals play a significant role to Raise the Bar for student success by developing an *education-to-workforce system* focusing on Unlocking Career Success within their schools.

Step 1

Create the Foundation

Step 2

Build Staff Capacity

Step 3

Create Conducive Environments

Step 4

Strengthen Partnerships

Create the foundation for career-connected learning

Principals often serve as an instructional leader, building manager, and implementation coach to mobilize school system staff and external partners. Many schools have created policies and learning conditions that link educators, employers, community-based organizations, and others as equal partners in student success. When creating the foundation for career-connected learning, consider how to:



Create a shared vision that brings together students and families, community and employer partners, academic and technical educators, school counselors, and other personnel to ensure that every student can realize their full potential and has options to pursue higher levels of education and employment upon graduation.



Build strategic partnerships to expand the four keys to Unlocking Career Success, which can include partnerships with community & technical colleges to expand dual or concurrent enrollment programs in academic and career-focused coursework, eliminate remedial education courses, and expand industry credential programs.



Leverage data to improve partnerships and research-driven practices, which can include student and family voice and input from school and community stakeholders to create common goals and shared language that anchors school-based services and operational routines to improve student success and postsecondary transition.

Tools to create the foundation for career-connected learning:

Create a Shared Vision

In Colorado, Canon City High School's mission focuses on student career exploration. In Washington, Lakewood High School's vision is to have all students gain the skills necessary to contribute to a global community.

Review Research-Based Models

The Linked Learning Model is a proven approach that combines rigorous academics with career and technical education as demonstrated in California with the Oakland Health Pathways Project. The P-TECH Getting Started Roadmap combines high school with the first two years of college, and is connected with a specific industry.

Share Data & Info on CTE

Research clearly establishes the value of career-connected learning. Dispel common misconceptions about CTE to students, parents, and staff to appropriately set the stage for career-connected learning. Principals can do this through multiple types of media, like infographics as was done in Georgia, or by utilizing webinars from national partners like Next Steps Webinars to answer questions about career pathways, training, and apprenticeships.



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Build staff and school capacity

Principals play a unique role within the local education agency and are essential to scale career-connected education systems. Principals often lead and champion the school's strategic plan, lead and support school-based teams to manage operational and instructional goals, serve as a liaison to community partners, and coach key staff who are responsible for implementation. When building the capacity of the school, consider how to:



Create a school strategic plan that prioritizes career-connected learning and builds the capacity of school-based leadership teams and staff to reimagine high school through the expansion of the four keys to Unlocking Career Success and intentional partnerships with community and employer partners.



Bring together a cross-cutting management team that consists of school administrators, grade level staff in academic and technical subject areas, school counselors, community and employer partners, and students and families to ensure that open dialogue and partnerships are the foundation for the success of the school.



Create supports for educators and counselors through mentorship and coaching models, professional learning communities, and opportunities to build relationships with postsecondary, community, and employer partners, which can help to drive the four keys to Unlocking Career Success and connect in-school and out-of-school learning.

Strategies to build the capacity of personnel:

Support Professional Learning

Create opportunities for staff to engage in professional learning, connect with business and industry, as well as meet with school counselors and other school-based personnel to expand student supports.

Create Opportunities for Collaboration

Give teachers intentional opportunities to collaborate and lead. In Arizona, Westwood High School's teachers and students are distributed across academy teams and each team is given collaborative planning time to provide more flexible support to address student needs. Additionally, create opportunities for staff to support operational routines including budget construction, student course scheduling, and other operations.



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Create conducive learning environments for career pathways

High schools are incubators of talent, building the capacity of young people to enter the world and find success. Principals can help to ensure that classroom instruction and real-world learning connect. Extended and summer learning models, on-the-job training, and secondary-to-postsecondary partnerships can help to accelerate opportunities for youth. When creating learning environments that are conducive to career pathways, consider how to:



Support students secondary to postsecondary transition, which can include helping to facilitate partnerships between schools, community & technical colleges, and local workforce development boards to drive the four keys to Unlocking Career Success and coordinate in-school and out-of-school-time youth programs and services.



Leverage community partners, including community-based organizations, non-profits, local philanthropic groups, and others to support school implementation, build and scale relationships with the community and with employers, and better connect students to wrap-around services, transition supports, and out-of-school learning opportunities.



Elevate employer engagement to ensure that career-connected learning programs in schools reflect and respond to employer needs, partner with industry groups or associations to help recruit employers to support apprenticeship and work-based learning programs, and create opportunities for employers to partner with educators and students.

Ways to create conducive learning environments for career pathways:

Scale Work-Based Learning

In Virginia, CodeRVA's guaranteed internship model provides every student with a paid work-based learning experience while in high school in a high-wage, high demand field.

Create Tools for Students and Families

In Illinois, Mundelein High School's Pathways Handbook is a student and family facing handbook explaining what pathways are, why they matter, and a range of other necessary information. Course catalogues, pathways mapping tools, career inventories can help create conducive environments.

Conduct an Asset Map

Conduct school and community asset mapping exercises to better understand the community's existing resources that can be deployed to support career-connected learning.



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Build and strengthen partnerships

Youth career pathway programs require coordination across local education agencies and partnerships with employers and community facing organizations. Several schools have partnered with intermediary organizations, and developed public and private partnerships, and/or cross-agency teams to support youth career pathways. When cultivating partnerships, consider how to:



Engage the local workforce development board to leverage and embed services offered through in-school and out-of-school youth programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) within school-based services, as well as ways in which the school and staff can support the implementation of these programs.



Support intermediary organizations to build the capacity of the school and staff to engage employers and community-based organizations, to scale work-based learning opportunities, create or expand youth apprenticeship programs, and to support student career navigation and coaching.



Support school partnerships as feeder patterns, school types and configurations vary widely, as do the availability of certain types of career-connected programs and funding models, to ensure that every student has access to high-quality career-connected learning and that the transition from middle to high school and beyond is successful.

Opportunities to cultivate partnerships:

Partner with Business and Industry

Bring industry into the school. In New York, the Brooklyn STEAM Center provides a partnerships opportunity guide and recording for employers to more easily engage with the school.

Expand Community Partnerships

Send students into the community via externships, internships, or other work-based learning opportunities like Butler Tech's 5th Day experience in Ohio in which students can take advantage of coordinated, exploratory work-based learning opportunities with added flexibility in the school week.

Engage Neighboring Schools

Connect with other administrators, particularly feeder middle schools and neighboring high schools to strengthen relationships and share best practices, like the Ches-terfield County Public Schools partnership in Virginia, in which administrators have created a districtwide program of study guide showing pathways from elementary through high school.



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