



Student and Family Playbook

Unlocking Career Success



This playbook provides ways in which students and their families can blur the lines between high school, postsecondary education, and the workforce. Students are the most important stakeholders to Raise the Bar for student success and can play an active role in shaping the *education-to-workforce* system to focus on Unlocking Career Success.

Step 1

Focus
on Goal Setting

Step 2

Unlock
Career Success

Step 3

Prepare for Life
After School

Focus on goal setting

High school is an opportune time for young people to try different types of programs and leadership opportunities that help foster their sense of identity, develop skills and interests, and take steps to form and pursue their education and career goals. Students and their families can work to establish these goals and take concrete steps to accomplish them throughout high school. When focusing on goal setting, consider how to:



Develop an education and career plan that provides opportunities to set realistic and timebound goals, with at least annual milestones, allows for reflection and iteration of these goals throughout high school, incorporates course of study options, supports students in attaining good jobs, and creates opportunities to discuss these goals with family, friends, different peer groups, and other key mentors.



Get a head start on your future by participating in career pathways and early college programs that are offered in high school, which include career and technical education (CTE), early college programs, youth apprenticeship programs, or similar programs that support the development of academic, technical, and leadership skills.



Participate in youth career development and leadership activities which can occur in-school, after-school, and over the summer months and include things like career and technical student organizations (CTSOs), programs offered through youth.gov, summer youth employment programs, extracurricular activities, volunteer opportunities, and other youth focused programs.

Tools to focus on goal setting:

Enlist Support and Input

Talk with a school counselor, CTE Director, teacher, or coach to understand different postsecondary and career options, and develop a plan while in high school to help accomplish goals related to education and future careers.

Explore external resources like Colorado's Individual Career and Academic Plan, a comprehensive resource to support individualized student planning.

Work with counselors, teachers, and family members to document interests, activities, and goals—many states require that students complete a plan designed to help young people define their education and career goals and take steps to pursue them.



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Tools to focus on goal setting (continued):

Identify Your Personal and Professional Strengths

Take steps to *identify personal interests and strengths*, which can help inform careers and types of postsecondary education programs that may be of interest. Activities such as the American School Counselor Association's [Career Conversation Starters](#) can help students identify personal strengths and professional interests.

Explore skill-to-career matching websites that help students and their families to look at and evaluate different postsecondary and career options, which can include free assessments such as the [ASVAB Career Exploration Program](#) that can help students identify potential careers based on their unique skills. [MyNextMove.Org](#) will match skills to a variety of careers that utilize and develop personal skills into professional practice by offering tools to search careers, browse careers by industries, and discover interests. Resources such as [My Colorado Journey](#) enable users to find and explore careers in Colorado and map out the steps to achieve their goals while taking into account job outlook, expected earnings, and the required training.

Ask your teachers and counselors about opportunities to meet with industry professionals through webinars, informational and mock interviews, workplace tours, or job shadowing. Many schools leverage virtual platforms to connect students to mentors and industry professionals, or can host events independently, like [The Pittsburgh Technology Council](#) which hosts an annual STEM summit to showcase the diverse array of STEM related careers for students, parents, and educators with company tours as a highlight, or [UpSkill Houston](#), an employer-led initiative that hosts conversations with employers and the education community and provides resources and [videos](#) to showcase good careers that don't require a four-year college degree.

Consider Career Pathway Options in High School

Research the benefits of career and technical education to see if it would be a good fit. The U.S. Department of Education's [CTE Data Story](#) provides information on the overall benefits and national landscape. A student's local high school or district may offer an overview of what high school career pathways are, why they matter, and what they involve such as [Mundelein High School's Pathways Handbook \(IL\)](#).

Consider the best possible career pathway to meet student interest. [Advance CTE's Student Interest Survey for Career Clusters®](#) can help narrow down careers of interest. Resources such as [My Colorado Journey](#) enables users to find and explore careers in Colorado and map out the steps to achieve their goals while taking into account job outlook, expected earnings and the required training. Many states have similar dashboards and tools that teachers can leverage, including [Indiana's Hoosiers by the Numbers](#), which breaks out labor market information by county and topic.

Identify what career pathways are available at your local high school and explore other available options. While many high schools offer CTE and Early College programs, every school is unique. Some communities require students to apply to participate in career and technical focused high schools or "career academies." If the program you are interested in is not available locally, you may be able to apply for the opportunity to attend another school or district or participate in a program through distance or out-of-school time learning. For example, Massachusetts provides an [overview of CTE](#), explaining the different types of statewide programs and how to enroll.



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Unlock Career Success

[Unlocking Career Success](#) is an initiative that is designed to reimagine how high schools prepare all students to thrive in their future careers and focuses on dual enrollment, work-based learning, workforce credentials, and career navigation. When put together, these experiences help young people to explore postsecondary education and the world of work, develop transferable skills, and seek support as needed. During a student's high school experience, consider how to:



Participate in work-based learning experiences which can include a variety of activities from job shadowing to mock interviews, to paid learning experiences that occur in the workplace—collectively these experiences build awareness about how to access a job, build a professional network, and develop work experiences that are part of a resume.



Earn a workforce credential or a similar articulation of skill and experience that is high value, which means the industry credential can help to apply for postsecondary education and a job and may support advanced standing in postsecondary education and/or increased wages in a job because of the level of skill and experience demonstrated.



Pursue dual enrollment (also known as concurrent enrollment), in both academic and technical subject areas to get a head start on college-level coursework while still in high school, to eliminate remedial education, and ensure that all awarded credit is transferable to a degree.

Tools for Unlocking Career Success:

Participate in Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment means taking courses that allow high school students to earn both high school and college credits, which are transferable to the institutions of higher education.

Ask teachers and school counselors about the benefits of dual enrollment, what courses are available, how to get enrolled, what costs and financial supports might exist, and other information necessary to enroll in college-level coursework while still in high school.

Dual enrollment can help students earn postsecondary credits at low or no cost and has a proven track record to support [high rates of success in college](#), through both virtual and on-site college classes. To learn more about the benefits of dual enrollment, particularly for underrepresented students, see the [Community College Research Center Research Brief](#).

In several career and early college high school models, students can earn an Associate degree by the time they graduate high school. Look at [Early College High School](#) to review characteristics of early college programs and [P-Tech](#) to help to evaluate the types of programs that are offered in your area.

[Advanced Placement®](#) offered by the College Board and [International Baccalaureate®](#) are classes that provide access to college-level content while in high school and can often, but not always, result in awarded credit at colleges and universities based on a student's score on the end-of-year exam(s).



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Tools for Unlocking Career Success (continued):

Take Part in Work-Based Learning (WBL)

WBL is often paid, on-the-job learning that supports the development of a specific set of skills, and may include related classroom instruction, allowing students to “earn-and-learn.”

Identify paid internships in the community or those that may exist virtually by talking to teachers and school counselors, family and friends, contacting local workforce boards or area chambers of commerce, and exploring online job boards.

Start by developing an online resume and a second traditional resume that can be saved and shared as a PDF. Before reaching out to employers, consider making social media profiles private and be sure to double-check social media content for anything that may not put you in the best light.

Registered Apprenticeship is the premier work-based learning experience that students can pursue while in high school and after. It offers paid, on-the-job training, with guaranteed wage progression, related training, and instruction, culminates in an industry-recognized credential and national certificate of completion, and provides valuable career mentorship and partnership with an employer.

Many schools are working to create youth apprenticeship programs that start in high school, like in North Carolina where the Apprenticeship NC program offers high school students opportunities to earn credit for secondary career and technical education coursework, college credits, and on-the-job training with a registered apprenticeship sponsor. After graduation, students complete their apprenticeship along with their Associate degree, all of which is paid for by the employer.

My Next Move is a great resource to support career exploration and includes tools to help search for careers and industries as well as explore interests. Additionally, Career OneStop includes supports to find a career, support the completion of high school, guidance on creating a resume, applying for postsecondary education and training, and searching for a job.

YouthRules provides resources on young workers rights and includes information for youth, parents, educators, and employers on topics like where youth can work, what hours youth can work, and best practices related to youth employment. Additional resources can be found on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s Safe Work for Young Workers, which includes information on youth rights to work, employer responsibilities, and occupational safety.

Showcase Your Skills through Workforce Credentials

Workforce credentials should hold value both in the labor market and in higher levels of education and can provide a leg up in both.

How students articulate and present their skills and experiences is particularly important for young people who choose to enter the workforce immediately after high school or those who choose to work and pursue postsecondary education simultaneously. A workforce credential can assist students in communicating their skills and can help youth to be more competitive for a job.

Career and technical education (CTE) programs are often a starting place for students to pursue a workforce credential and many CTE programs require students to complete a workforce credential as part of the program.

Understanding which workforce credentials hold value is important—to learn more about the role of credentials in high school, check out this Fordham Institute Report.



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Tools for Unlocking Career Success (continued):

Career Advising and Navigation

Every young person should leave high school with clear career goals and the knowledge and resources needed to pursue them. Getting there requires the help and support of adults.

Navigating postsecondary education and the evolving labor market can be extremely complicated. As such, it is important for young people to leave high school with clear education and career goals, and the knowledge and skills needed to pursue them. Career counseling and navigation supports have traditionally been provided by school counselors and educators.



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Prepare for life after high school

Students have multiple options beyond high school to pursue higher levels of education, enter the workforce, or do both concurrently. However, these choices are not always communicated to students or their families. And while education and a good job are explicitly linked, the type of credential or degree that holds value is most reflective of the occupation and industry that young people want to pursue. When preparing for life after high school, consider how to:



Explore two- and four-year options like community and technical colleges and four-year institutions, and take actions to apply, like researching colleges and programs, completing the ACT or SAT, completing the FAFSA®, looking into financial student aid estimator, researching college promise programs, completing the Common App, and applying for scholarships.



Explore earn-and-learn options, like registered apprenticeship, military or other national service, and youth programs, and take actions to apply, like researching and finding a registered apprenticeship, looking for industry credential or youth program through a local workforce board or American Job Center, looking into military requirements, or looking into other youth programs like Job Corps, YouthBuild, and AmeriCorps.



Act as your own advocate by talking with school counselors, educators, family and friends, and other key mentors to create a postsecondary and career plan, know what postsecondary and career options are available, take steps to apply to these options, and to ensure that the appropriate supports and transition services are available along the way.

Tools for preparing for life after high school:

Explore Your Postsecondary Options

College is one of several options that students have beyond high school. Explore different types of earn-and-learning models like registered apprenticeship, industry credentials, military or other national service, and youth programs.

As an AmeriCorp member, students can choose the service opportunity that aligns with their passions, as an example in AmeriCorps NCCC you will travel the country, all expenses paid, addressing climate change, disaster relief, and more, while earning money for college.

YouthBuild primarily serves young people who lack a high school diploma reclaim their education, gain job skills, and become leaders in their communities. They provide financial resources through community-based, pre-apprenticeship programs that provides job training and educational opportunities —and includes a network of hundreds of YouthBuild programs in the United States and around the globe.

Job Corps is the nation's largest free, residential career training and education program for low-income young adults ages 16 through 24, and provides education and training as well as wrap-around supports and job placement services in more than 100 training areas, 10 in-demand industries, across more than 120 campuses nationwide.



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Tools for preparing for life after high school (continued):

Explore Your Postsecondary Options (continued)

[Reentry Employment Opportunities](#) is a grant programs offering direct services and training for justice-involved youth, young adults, and formerly incarcerated adults.

There are different pathways into the military including military academies, [Reserve Officer Training Corps](#), or enlisting in active-duty service, which could later [help pay for college, offer you experience in industry partnerships](#), or provide advanced degrees while teaching you valuable technical skills. For more information on each branch of the military, see the related military [requirements](#).

Working with [local workforce development boards](#) and [American Job Centers](#) can help to identify additional programs for youth including [in-school and out-of-school youth programs](#) which can help youth to connect to industry credential programs, transition services, and other supports to help young people continue their education and pursue employment beyond high school.

Registered apprenticeship is an industry-driven, high-quality career pathway where employers can develop and prepare their future workforce, and individuals can obtain paid work experience, receive progressive wage increases, classroom instruction, and a portable, nationally recognized credential. To learn more about registered apprenticeship see [here](#), to find a registered apprenticeship in the community see [here](#).

Get Support to Access Postsecondary Education

Pursuing the right postsecondary educational opportunity can require some mentorship, guidance, and support. To help students be successful in finding their unique postsecondary pathway, consider the following:

Consider joining family organizations, such as a [Parent Teacher Association \(PTA\)](#) to become more active in P-12 activities. Connect with high school counselors, CTE teachers or supervisors, and other school-based staff to see what internship opportunities exist by grade level.

Advocate for students' postsecondary needs and aspirations.

[Prepare for life challenges](#) a student may face through understanding the complexities associated with navigating secondary and postsecondary education and training.

Understand the Costs Associated with Postsecondary Education

Understand the costs of different postsecondary education options and what support students need as they apply to certain programs.

The Department of Education's [College Scorecard](#) can help compare college's fields of study, earnings, costs, admissions, debt, completion results, and more.

Take control of your future by completing the [My Future My Way](#) workbook which explores the crucial steps to understanding how to prepare financially for college, including federal, state, or local resources.

Explore family-specific opportunities such as [Saving Early = Saving Smart!](#) To start saving for college early.

Look for ways to offset the cost of college tuition through Pell grants, work-study

[FSA](#) provides a federal student aid estimator that helps provide an estimate of how much federal student aid a student may be eligible to receive.



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Tools for preparing for life after high school (continued):

Explore Ways to Pay for Postsecondary Education

Review the [Federal Student Aid's Money Management Checklist for College Students](#), and learn the difference between [saving](#) and [borrowing](#) through MyMoney.gov.

Grants: This source of funding is [generally needs based and most do not have to be repaid](#), including [Pell Grants](#), and other [federal student grant programs](#).

Scholarships: These are often pots of money allocated to students based on academic achievements, financial need, extracurricular activities, student demographics, and more that are searchable through websites such as [FastWeb.org](#) and [Scholarship.org](#).

Work-Study Jobs: A [Federal work study](#) program provides part-time jobs to undergraduate and graduate students with financial need and can occur on and off campus. Students can earn minimum wage as they learn with set working hours – this program specifically encourages community service, such as tutoring or serving as a mentor, and work related to the student's course of study.

Loans: Money that you borrow that you have to pay back. Consider who is making the loan and the terms and conditions of the loan. For example, if you receive a federal loan – the U.S. Department of Education is your lender.

Understand the different types of loans that are available including [federal loans & private loans](#) and [direct subsidized and unsubsidized loans](#).

Utilize a [Loan Comparison Calculator](#) to compare up to four different loans at the same time and a [Loan Payment Calculator](#) to estimate future monthly loan payments, including the annual salary to manage them.

Internships: Paid work-based learning opportunities like [internships](#) are a common way for college students to offset college-related expenses, and also increase their personal and professional wealth and knowledge.

Make a Plan and Execute

Once a student and family decide on a postsecondary path, students and families should prepare for the realities of postsecondary education and training programs.

Create a postsecondary or college savings plan utilizing [studentaid.gov](#). Take control of your future by completing the [My Future My Way](#) workbook which explores the crucial steps to understanding how to prepare financially for college, including federal, state, or local resources.

Identify your family's financial need and [how financial aid is calculated](#). Financial need is calculated based on the difference between the [cost of attendance \(COA\)](#) at a school and your Student Aid Index (SAI). While COA varies from school to school, your SAI does not change based on the school you attend. Use the [Federal Student Aid Estimator](#) to find out how much federal student aid you are eligible to receive and don't forget to research costs beyond tuition!

Complete a FAFSA. This will require collecting your family's financial information, determining your dependency status, and choosing which colleges and universities to which you will send your financial information. Go to <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa> to learn more and access additional U.S. Department of Education resources.



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Tools for preparing for life after high school (continued):

Make a Plan and Execute (continued)

Understand how to read a financial aid award letter. Specific to the college you applied to – you will be provided with a student aid package or school offer that will discuss the type of financial aid available to you including the annual total cost of attendance, a list of financial aid options such as gift aid and repayable loans. Calculate the cost of attendance (COA) when considering financial aid packages, and remember the average cost of attendance includes housing (room and board), meal plans, supplies, textbooks, and other expenses.

Explore opportunities to apply for additional financial aid and make key decisions. This can include filing for a financial aid appeal letter, searching for additional scholarships, and private loans, The College Financing Plan is a consumer tool and FAQ document that simplifies financial aid information to help students and families make informed decisions in a streamlined and comparable way. Contact your college's financial aid office and connect with a financial aid counselor, the Department of Labor's free scholarship tool: CareerOneStop, and more!



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