

# Real-World Career Learning Experiences Prepare Students for the Future

A Conversation With Superintendents on Their Approaches to Career Readiness



There are currently **6.5 million unfilled jobs in the U.S. right now** with an insufficient number of applicants having the qualifications, training, or education needed to fill those roles.

Real-world career learning experiences, like **work-based learning**, are key for preparing the next generation of the workforce and closing the skills gap.

As students uncover their strengths and interests and begin aligning those to career interests, work-based learning gives students an opportunity to **connect learning to life**, preparing them for future success in the workforce.

## District Leaders Share Their Approaches to Career Readiness

In a recent discussion with superintendents from across the country, seven district leaders shared their unique approaches to supporting multiple career pathways and the importance of developing community and business partnerships to help students succeed after high school.

Below are some key insights from the conversation. [Download the full white paper](#) to hear more from all the superintendents!



## How Do You Approach Career Planning in Your District?

*We look at career planning as being important from K through 12. We start exposing students to career paths by having guest speakers beginning in elementary school. We have a transition program in fifth grade, where our students visit a career location and spend time with local leaders to help decide on what they want to pursue and narrow down their career interests. In the seventh and eighth grades we use Naviance to do a complete career skills inventory to help students develop a four-year plan. At the high school level, we have developed a great relationship with our chamber of commerce, so students can learn from local business leaders.*

**Joris M. Ray**, Superintendent, Shelby County Schools (TN)



## How Do You Connect College Planning With Career Planning?

*It is so important to increase students' awareness about what college and career learning is, and what their future could hold. Too many students think that they'll do one or two things in life, but as we tell our juniors and seniors, 40% of all college students change their major in the first year. So, the question is, whichever path you take in life, how are you preparing yourself now to continue to gain knowledge?*

**Merv Daugherty**, Superintendent, Chesterfield County Public Schools (VA)

*We have been working to build work apprenticeships in our area. We also have seven colleges within our district's 80-mile radius, so we're trying to incorporate them into our business partnerships and build connections with them. It is so important to weave together career readiness with college readiness.*

**Ian Saltzman**, Superintendent, Everett Public Schools, Everett (WA)



## How Do You Rely on Local Business and Industry to Support Work-Based Learning Experiences?

*We're very blessed to have an extremely engaged local business community and chamber of commerce, and an organization called Chattanooga 2.0 that spearheads our work. We launched Future Ready Institutes, which are career academy schools within schools, and we have over 19 of them in our high schools at this point.*

**Bryan Johnson**, Superintendent, Hamilton County Schools, Chattanooga (TN)

*One unique partnership we have developed is with our local trade unions, which are providing paid internships. Students in our carpentry program, for example, work towards a certificate while in high school and when they graduate, are first in line for apprenticeships.*

**Chad E. Geston**, Superintendent, Phoenix Union High School District, Phoenix (AZ)



## How Do You Market Your Programs?

*We have a Business and Education Alliance here in Wichita, which has local business leaders and educators meet regularly to discuss internships, mentorships and career exploration opportunities. We have advisory committees for each of our 26 pathways that include representatives from companies and businesses interested in or related to that subject area, and we rely on them for marketing and outreach to help build our internship and mentorship programs.*

**Alicia Thompson**, Superintendent, Wichita Public Schools (KS)



## How Do You Fund Your Programs?

*We rely on Perkins Act dollars, as well as state and local funding and our chamber of commerce for financial support. Also, the corporations we partner with agree to come to the table with funding. Our mayor runs a CTE summer work apprenticeship for our students, so the city pays the salary of students in that program.*

**Diana L. Greene**, Superintendent, Duval County Public Schools, Jacksonville (FL)



## Three Key Takeaways



### Start with strengths and interests

Begin by helping students to understand their strengths and interests and how those align to careers of interest.

### Connect instruction to experiences

Allow students to connect career instruction to real-world career experiences through internships, guest speakers, or job shadows.

### Build community partnerships

Get the community involved. Local companies want to share their expertise to help ensure the next generation is prepared for the workforce.

To read the full interview with all the superintendents, download the white paper, [Developing New and Innovative Approaches to Support Career Readiness](#).