



A Comprehensive Approach to Career Exploration

3 Career Exploration Initiatives to Incorporate in K-12 for Future Success



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Introduction

World of Careers/Skills

Economies worldwide are facing a widening talent gap, with an estimated 85 million unfilled jobs by 2030 if left unchecked.¹ That talent shortage could result in about \$8.5 trillion in unrealized annual revenues. As previous generations retire, the younger workers who fill those position vacancies will likely not have the training or career experience to fill many of the high-demand jobs.

To drive America's talent pipeline forward, K-12 education needs to prioritize career readiness for all students. The challenge for the education sector is to address employer demand for skilled individuals who can retain, sustain, and grow regional economies.

Building a sufficient talent pipeline begins with a career exploration and planning framework that engages students as young as five years old. Future planning support continues to develop and evolve with the student as they progress through high school and postsecondary pathways including college, military, and career. A growing body of research demonstrates the importance of providing career-connected learning experiences for younger learners to develop a positive self-concept of their occupational prospects.² Encouraging elementary students to explore career paths helps them broaden their understanding of the opportunities that exist for them as they progress through their academic journey. Introducing career-oriented learning, such as themed curricular units and field trips, helps students begin to understand the relationship between school and career.

What and Why Career Exploration?

Education should foster an environment that facilitates student development and preparation for employment and career mobility. This begins with students understanding their strengths, interests, and aptitudes, and tying these results to potential career pathways that are compatible with their talent and with the demands of the job market. Students who understand their strengths can better envision what they want their future to look like. Education can further support setting career goals, identifying courses within a career pathway, and focusing on work-based learning (WBL) activities to help develop career identity and aspirations.

Designed to place the student at the center, Unified Classroom® Naviance has the capabilities to support career exploration efforts for educators, students, families, and districts. Each student benefits from a unique, personalized plan around which all stakeholders can align. Naviance is committed to making a real impact on student outcomes by ensuring each student is fully supported on their unique journey.





The Growing Value of Career Development in K-12

Students who are able to identify their life interests and career aspirations are more likely to connect their current academics to their future aspirations. These students are more likely to graduate from high school, earn more money, and be more involved in their community.³

Schools can help to create a career-going culture by providing students with the tools necessary to understand career pathways and clusters. They can also engage students in conversations surrounding the structure and value of purposeful, interest-based, and aptitudes-based careers.

According to Norman Gysbers, one of the foremost scholars on school and career counseling, a career-ready student is one who has the skills to think strategically about who they are and how they can build toward a meaningful and purposeful career.⁴ Career-ready students need to be able to understand their own strengths, interests, and aptitudes and connect them to a career that will allow them to lead a fulfilled, successful life.

Career knowledge is built on the work that students develop by participating in hands-on learning and social and emotional exploration. These experiences, however, cannot be siloed in a single department in a school district to be effective. Cross-department collaboration is key to further career exploration initiatives. Educators play a critical role in developing best practices to help students explore possible careers and learn about potential career options. Making these initiatives scalable and available to all students will maximize their impact. The next section provides three steps to a more comprehensive approach to career exploration.

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NORMAN GYSBERS



Three-Step Approach

Step 1

Start Career Exploration in Elementary

Career exploration in the early years of their academic journey helps students broaden their understanding of the opportunities that exist for them. According to Gallup, student engagement in school peaks in 5th grade and declines through middle and high school.⁵



8 in 10 elementary students are engaged in school



By middle school, **6 in 10** students are engaged



By high school, only **4 in 10** students qualify as engaged.¹

Engaging younger learners with career-connected learning during peak years can set them up for future success while also diminishing equity and access gaps. Studies prove that by the time students are eight years old, they've already formed attitudes and perceptions about career paths available to them based on gender, socioeconomic status, and parental expectations, among other influences. As a result, elementary students—from all genders and socioeconomic groups—start closing doors and limiting their options without ever fully exploring their interests, strengths, and potential support networks.



Elementary students' perceptions of their career opportunities are being shaped by powerful factors such as:



Poverty

Studies show that students who come from communities with lower socioeconomic backgrounds begin to believe in elementary school that some jobs are not available to them. Additionally, if students believe that college is not financially feasible for their families, they may "give up" in school because they don't understand that additional career pathways and options exist.



Gender

Research shows that gender-role stereotyping of jobs begins between the ages of six to eight.⁶ Early on, boys and girls begin to define the "appropriateness" of jobs by gender, and children are prone to "shut off" their own interests based on conventional gender norms unless otherwise exposed to wider possibilities.



Family Expectations and Social Norms

Family expectations and involvement have a significant impact on students' expectations of themselves and their educational outcomes, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Students can be adversely affected by family expectations, often adjusting their own expectations for themselves based on the level of support and standards the child perceives. This is true for all students, even ones from high-income families. Research shows that too much parental involvement for students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds can cause those students to feel that only certain educational and career options are acceptable for them.⁷

Emerging Trends in Elementary College and Career Awareness

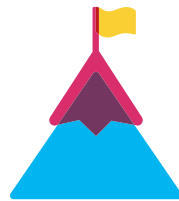
According to a recent study from Hanover Research, superintendents and principals report that it's important for elementary students to make college and career connections at an early age, and that educators recognize that college and career readiness programs are effective.⁸ For those administrators who have expressed concerns about over-emphasizing one pathway, it's important that solutions emphasize the widest possible range of postsecondary options available to students.

Defining the Right Approach to Elementary Career Awareness

To keep students' minds open, there is a growing sense of urgency to deliver a consistent, standards-aligned curriculum that:



Fosters hopefulness
in students about
their futures



Builds the mindset
and skills to
face adversity



Reinforces the importance of
students' personal interests and
values in guiding their decisions
today and in the future

To achieve these goals, educators should seek engaging, high-impact ways to help K-5 students connect their interests to a wide variety of career paths, make a direct link between success in school and goal achievement, and provide tools to overcome obstacles students are likely to confront.

One of the most fundamental obligations of any society is to prepare its adolescents and young adults to lead productive and prosperous lives as adults. This means preparing all young people with a solid foundation of literacy, numeracy, and thinking skills for responsible citizenship, career development, and lifelong learning.⁹



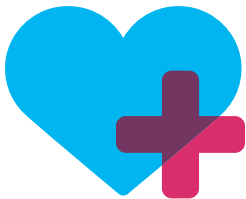
Step 2

Encourage Career Pathway Planning and Exploration Resources

Research shows that a focus on career readiness paired with instruction on interpersonal skills is important for students to experience throughout middle and high school. Students need to be able to explore careers that align with their strengths and interests.

A thorough understanding of the characteristics of various careers and the training necessary enables students to build their pathway to a meaningful career. Students who can identify their life interests and career aspirations are more likely to connect their current academics to their future aspirations. These students are more likely to graduate from high school, earn more money, and be more involved in their community.¹⁰

Offering a wide variety of career pathways allows students to explore careers that align with their aspirations and goals. Listed below are ways to incorporate and support career exploration and pathway planning:



Start with Strengths and Interests

Begin early by helping students understand how their strengths align with careers of interest or potential careers a student may not yet even know about. For example, Naviance provides several self-discovery assessments from AchieveWorks Intelligences® and Clifton StrengthsExplorer so students can gain deeper insight about themselves, including:

- How they process information
- How they solve problems
- How they work through creative processes
- How they behave in real-life scenarios



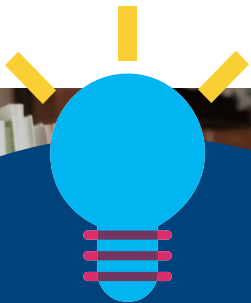
Connect Career Instruction and Postsecondary Data

Allow students to explore the training needed for their identified careers of interest, whether it be an industry certificate, technical degree, college degree, or advanced degree. In some cases, professional certificates can be earned while students are still in high school.



Connect Learning to Life

Align pathways with career-focused classes. Students often question the "why" behind the specific classes they need to take in high school. Having pre-built pathways allows students to easily identify the "why" behind academics, learning, and life.



Work-Based Internships

Work-based learning opportunities, such as internships and job shadowing, help students experience career-connected learning, enabling them to see how what they're learning in the classroom translates into a career.



Get Creative When Providing Experiential Career Learning

Make the process fun for students to explore career options. Involve the community by asking families and their networks to share resources and information. Even if done virtually, companies and professionals are often happy to share their expertise with students. Other ways to get creative include:

- Inviting guest speakers to visit classes and/or meet with students who have expressed interest in their professional field
- Hosting career fairs and encouraging students to network with local businesses
- Connecting with local organizations and businesses to support internships and/or volunteer work
- Building curricular units that involve project-based learning around student-identified careers of interest
- Visiting local companies and shadowing various professionals at each site



Step 3

Expand Work-Based Learning (WBL)

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are 10.7 million unfilled jobs in the United States as of the end of September 2022. Many employers across the country report that there is a skills gap for middle-skilled jobs, with an insufficient number of applicants having the qualifications, training, or education needed to fill those roles. Developing a combination of technical, academic, and employable skills is the best way to prepare students for fast-growing and high-earning jobs.¹¹

A 2020 report by Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce, "Workplace Basics: The Competencies Employers Want," revealed the five most in-demand competencies across the labor market. These competencies may be better developed through WBL than in-classroom learning alone.

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Sales and customer service
- Leadership
- Problem-solving and complex thinking



WBL supports a continuum of knowledge and hands-on skill development experiences, from career exposure and engagement to real-life work and career experiences. WBL should be diversified for students as early as the fourth grade. A sample timeline is included below:

	Career Awareness (Grades 4-8)	Career Preparation (Grades 9-12)	Career Launch (High School + Postsecondary)
Purpose	Exploration for All Students in Grades 4-8	Connecting In-School High School Learning with WBL	Meaningful On-the-Job Experience and Aligned Classroom Learning
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest speakers in the classroom • Worksite tours, job shadowing, and information interviews • Career presentations and connections to classroom learning • Career day and career fairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career mentorships • Career-related dual enrollment • Youth internship • Project-based learning with employers • Summer employment • Pre-apprenticeship career pathways aligned to curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered apprenticeships • College internship programs • Youth registered apprenticeships • Career training programs
Outcome	Early exposure to high-growth and/or high-wage career pathways	Academic credit, career connections, and/or industry certifications	Postsecondary credential, paid work experience, career connections

When planned and implemented thoughtfully, WBL delivers compelling, integrated experiences for students to gain early exposure to career pathways, promoting relevant skills development. When provided equitably in a community, WBL also creates a strong, critical bridge to economic self-sufficiency.

Students of all backgrounds can get a head start on postsecondary programs, including opportunities to earn college credits and industry certifications before graduation. Early engagement with WBL can fuel the future economy and help reduce the talent shortage in the future of America's workforce.

Keys to Effective Internal (Cross-Departmental) Collaboration

Coordination between staff members focused on college and career readiness (e.g., school counseling and CTE/Career Technical Education)

- Collaborate to arrive at shared definitions of WBL opportunities, processes, and measures (e.g., credit earning options and requirements)
- Team up to maximize partnership opportunities and resources

Coordination between CCLR staff and teachers

Create communication materials, such as flyers and emails, to make it easy for teachers to promote WBL opportunities. Educators could use the school's learning management system (LMS) to create a page listing courses that offer WBL, so all students have access to that information. Additionally, promote the availability and benefits of WBL opportunities to students during course selection and showcase WBL as a central element in a program of studies.

Coordination with transition counselors supporting students with disabilities

Special education departments often already have partnerships and programs in place to provide WBL as part of school-to-work transition plans for students. Drawing on the expertise of these departments and inviting opportunities for collaboration could provide opportunities for additional experiences for more students.

How Naviance Can Help

Naviance for Elementary

Naviance for Elementary is a blended learning solution that reinforces the range of options students can follow and the practical pathways to achieve their goals. The experience includes K-5 curriculum lessons aligned to ASCA and CASEL national standards. Naviance has long empowered schools and districts to support the college, career, and life readiness of middle and high school students. With Naviance for Elementary, educators have more resources to help younger learners explore options for future success.

Leverage "Up the Ladder"

- In this gamified experience, students can explore career options based on their interests, take age-appropriate assessments, and experience a variety of exciting careers while climbing "up the ladder" from intern to employee to manager

Build Resumes & Take Notes

- Students can automatically build resumes as they continue exploring careers, including job descriptions, skills, and education requirements

Earn Badges

- Counselors and teachers can reward younger learners with positive feedback and encouragement as they explore future career options and pathways



Naviance has been essential to the development of our school and community-based career pathways. The enhanced career features have made Naviance an even more powerful tool in helping students to create their 4-year plans in Naviance. The plans of study and career pathways features allow students to create plans that are tailored to individual student needs and goals.

DAVID ELLEFSON | High School Counselor, Hutchinson High School, MN

Naviance Pathway Exploration

Self-Discovery

With Unified Classroom® Naviance, students can begin understanding "Who I am" by engaging with powerful self-discovery assessments. Naviance partners with industry leaders like Gallup, CareerKey, and AchieveWorks to provide students with eight self-discovery assessments. Each assessment generates potential careers and pathways aligned to a student's individual results.

Career Search

Students can identify specific occupations that match their interests from more than 1,000 career profiles, including career descriptions, academic preparation requirements, and videos (with many offered in Spanish).

- Find best-fit careers
- Explore local and national wages
- Create a plan to reach career goals

RoadTrip Nation

Naviance is the only CCLR provider with a partnership with RoadTrip Nation (RTN), which empowers students to find their own path. RTN encourages students to listen to their own inner voice to understand what drives them. RTN includes an interview archive featuring over 10,000+ career videos of leaders including Soledad

O'Brien, Michael Dell, Craig Newmark (Craigslist), and Howard Schultz (CEO of Starbucks), discussing hardships, obstacles, failures, and successes.

WBL Opportunities in Naviance

Naviance enables schools and districts to provide access to WBL opportunities for students. School and district staff have visibility into the career paths students are interested in, allowing them to provide the tailored activities and support needed to help students achieve their postsecondary goals. Districts can publish WBL opportunities district-wide or for specific schools.

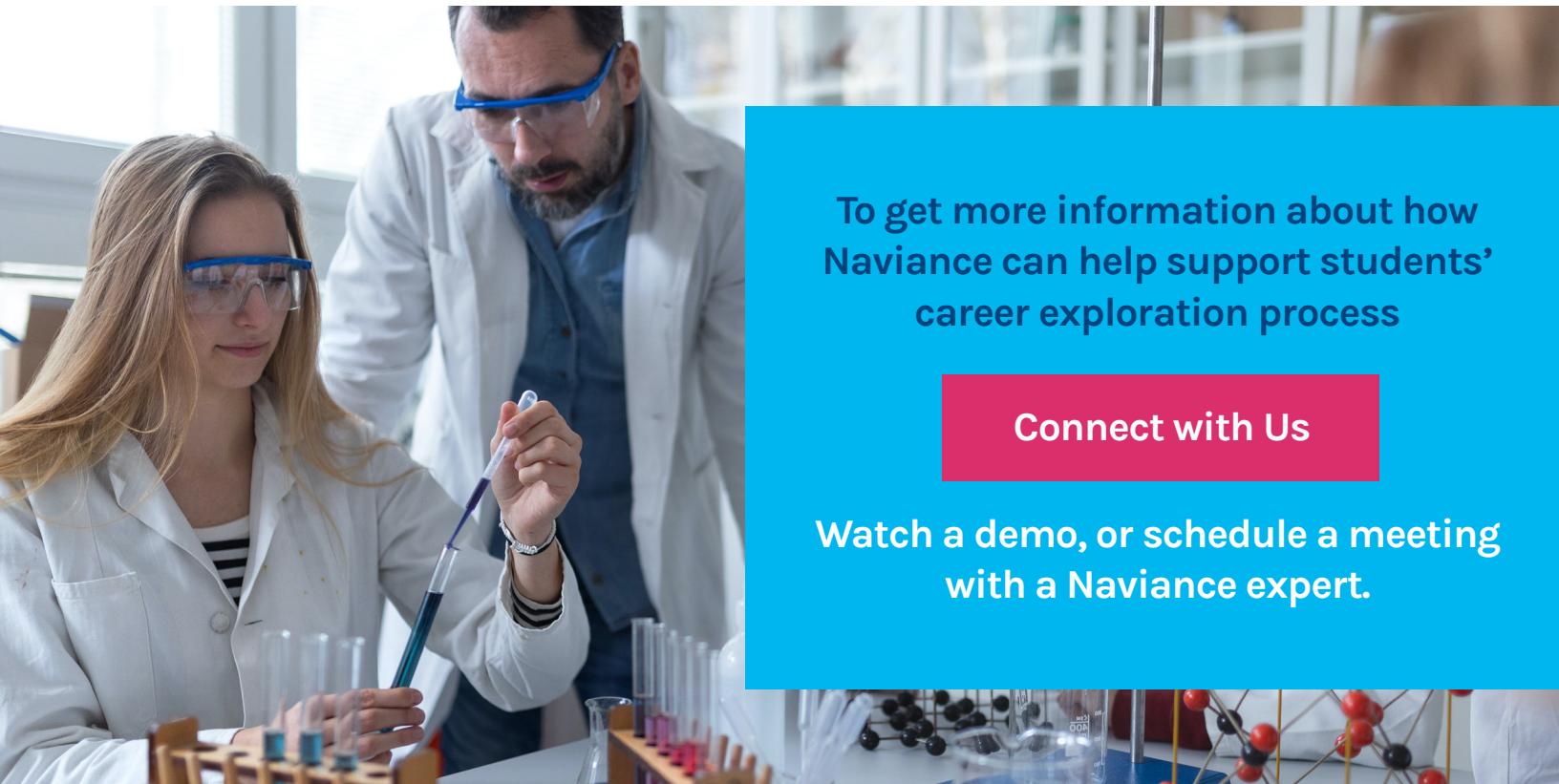
Once staff enter WBL opportunities in Naviance, students can view, act on, and track opportunities they participate in, such as internships, externships, job shadows, career fairs, field trips, and guest speakers. Students will see additional information when they click on an opportunity. For example, in an internship, they will see details about the organization, the application process, if it's paid or unpaid, etc. They will see how opportunities connect to career clusters and pathways so they have a holistic view of how their interests can align with their future careers.

Conclusion

Our goal with Naviance is to enable students to see that there are many paths to the future they envision for themselves and that finding the best-fit path is an opportunity for self-discovery, exploration, and curiosity.

Committed to reducing inequity in postsecondary opportunities, Naviance provides all students—regardless of their personal identifiers—with the tools they need to develop a personalized plan that makes the most sense for them along their path. The most essential elements of these plans include:

- Starting career exploration in elementary school, with age-appropriate activities
- Helping students see all options as viable, regardless of personal, familial, cultural, or communal beliefs about what careers are "expected" or "appropriate"
- Aligning students' personal interests with potential career fields
- Offering experiential WBL opportunities
- Mapping the necessary coursework, degrees, certifications, and/or experiences required for potential career paths
- Supporting the transition from high school to postsecondary life



To get more information about how Naviance can help support students' career exploration process

Connect with Us

Watch a demo, or schedule a meeting with a Naviance expert.

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