



# Helping Students Navigate Pathways to Adult Success Toolkit

## **RECOMMENDATION 2: EXPOSURE & EXPERIENCES**

Young people enter high school with widely varying levels of clarity regarding their future goals and what they need to do to attain them. Encouraging them to dream and then mesh dreams with reality is an important responsibility of the adults in their lives.

### **EXPOSURE AND EXPERIENCES TO RAISE EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS**

Young people enter high school with widely varying levels of clarity regarding their future goals and what they need to do to attain them. Encouraging them to dream and then mesh dreams with reality is an important responsibility of the adults in their lives. Students need experiences and opportunities that will help them keep their options open, make wise postsecondary plans, and embark and persist on individual paths to adult success. Here is a checklist of ways schools and their partners can help young people and their families broaden career and educational aspirations.

- Organize field trips or day trips to local businesses, agencies, museums, zoos, parks, nature centers, and other community resources, with engaging presenters and age-appropriate choice of locations and formats. Design such trips to help students envision career possibilities in their community, as well as 30, 60, and 100 miles away. Also, bring the outside world in through career days, speakers, or hands-on experiences in STEM, art, and “maker spaces.”
- Work with local businesses and employers to offer career-focused learning experiences: job shadows can begin in middle school; by high school, add internships, work-based learning, and volunteer experiences.
- Design age-appropriate college experiences to expose students to the big picture and concrete “to-do’s.” Build on the foundation of course preparation by having college representatives address students in middle or early high school, as well as in later years of high school.



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- Organize trips to nearby college campuses, beginning in late elementary school, and definitely by middle school. Most students ultimately attend college within 50 miles of home, so knowing regional options is essential. In the upper grades, expose students to more distant campuses, including more selective colleges that generally offer students greater support towards graduation. One rural high school principal required all students to participate in six college visits before graduation, including an overnight trip to a flagship university. Potential college athletes are fully aware of multiple campus opportunities and outcomes; the same should occur in academic and technical contexts.
- Consider the crossover of content offered in college and career exposures.
- Beginning in upper elementary grades, start the discussion by asking, “How does a job differ from a career?” Trips should help students consider the differences between college/ workplace and home.
- By late middle school and early high school, help students and parents learn about types of colleges (community/technical; open-access four-year; and selective); various credentials and degrees offered; and how for-profit and not-for-profit institutions compare. College and workplace representatives can help.
- Help upper-grade students and parents develop understanding of the varying returns on investment from degrees and credentials, as well as variations by focus area. (Two-year associate degrees in engineering offer substantially higher earnings than many bachelor’s degrees in the humanities.) Explore these using accessible language, in student- and parent-friendly settings.
- Make options such as dual high school/college enrollment clear for students and families, especially whether credits gained are transferable to institutions other than those in which they were earned, and/or count towards college majors, certificates, and professional credentials.
- Help students and parents learn about options and requirements for transfer from two-year colleges to four-year institutions. Many states guarantee transfer when certain conditions are satisfied; these conditions must be clear in advance, so students can plan and take courses appropriately in two-year institutions.



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- Organize more complex college visits for juniors and seniors to learn about different housing options, fees, transportation, and other lifestyle and cost logistics, which vary by college type (e.g., most community colleges are not residential).

### **EXPOSURE & EXPERIENCES**

Postsecondary exposure refers to programs that help students make decisions, set goals, and succeed after high school by exposing them to postsecondary educational opportunities as well as career options and possibilities. [Read More](#)