

EXPLORING POST-SECONDARY PATHWAYS EARLY. WE DON'T HAVE TO WAIT.

LIBERTY NORTH HIGH SCHOOL



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Project Brief

As the education community, like nearly every community, has experienced a shakeup in their normal routine of late, a focus has been placed on how schools are preparing students for life after high school. Real world learning has become a focal point of districts across the country. And with the changing landscape of the employment market, schools are struggling to address how to best prepare their students for the next step, whether it be employment, choosing the right college, or any of a host of other options.

In this presentation we discuss ways in which we think schools can begin to address some of those questions. We focus on three areas that help schools begin to implement processes around self awareness and career options, independent study programs, and real world learning.

Career festivals and aptitude tests are a great starting point for kids in high school to get an early start on certain career paths or interests. Kids often face the pressures of having to figure out what they want to do late in high school, and many can feel unprepared going into the next step of their lives. By introducing certain resources such as career fair opportunities and aptitude tests, it can take much of this pressure off students at an earlier age. Career fairs are a great cost effective way for students to connect with adults who work a variety of different jobs in a face to face manner. Not only do career fairs allow students to meet with different adults in a professional setting, there can be certain opportunities for internships and ways to get more involved with certain companies. Another great resource, to help kids get an idea of what career path they want to pursue are aptitude tests, often kids don't get the chance to take certain tests, like aptitudes to learn more about their strengths and weaknesses, and don't see possible jobs they hadn't even considered. Schools can easily provide these types of tests, on their counseling pages or even in classrooms, to allow their students to get an earlier grasp on what they can succeed in.

With our team's goal of providing more early career opportunities for students to be better prepared for their future careers after leaving high school, career fairs and aptitude tests are a great starting point for this purpose and very beneficial. Students often don't get the chance to interact with adults in a professional, yet comfortable environment in high school, and career fairs are the perfect chance for students to be able to expand on life skills and learn about certain careers they wouldn't have thought of. While aptitude tests give kids the perfect chance to learn about certain skills they didn't know they had, and offer

RETHINK YOUTH

CONFERENCE PROJECT BRIEFS

them certain careers they would succeed in. Both of these resources are a great cost effective and beneficial way for students to learn more about certain careers and skills they have to better prepare for college and the work world.

Independent study is a tool used in many schools to provide students with an opportunity to conduct in depth research on a topic of their interest with a teacher who has experience in that subject. Students will typically choose a topic in the field of their interest and spend the year researching in order to create a thesis paper under the guidance of a teacher. The role of the teacher is merely to provide structure, help provide resources, and field questions when needed as the majority of the responsibility for the completion of the project is placed on the student. An independent study program is meant to not only give students a chance to learn more about a subject that interests them and can benefit them in their career later on but also contributes to college-readiness by fine tuning skills such as independence, resourcefulness, time management, etc. One of the greatest aspects of independent study is that it is extremely cost and time effective, with the only financial burden coming from compensation for the teachers and funds for extra resources should they be needed. Thus, independent studies can be implemented in practically every school no matter the financial situation.

With our goal of providing more opportunities for students to be career ready when they leave high school, utilizing independent study for students who already have an idea of the career path they plan to pursue is extremely beneficial for two main reasons. The first reason being that implementing independent studies in lower income schools with limited curriculum can provide students who wish to engage in more specialized subjects an opportunity to do so. The second reason being that it gives students who learn at a faster pace, whether they are at a low, moderate, or high income school, a chance to do research at their own pace without feeling the pressure of having to remain at the same pace as their peers. Of course, in both situations, independent study also better prepares students for college and their career.

The final aspect of educational reform discussed in the presentation was creating more in-house opportunities for students to gain real-world, or hands-on, experience in a given career field. It is essential to have internship and career readiness programs available to students so they can begin to solidify their post-secondary plans, setting themselves up for success, as early as possible. An important aspect of hosting internship programs is the ability for students to feel

RETHINK YOUTH

CONFERENCE PROJECT BRIEFS

as though they contributed to a company, and had an overall positive experience. The way to do this comes through constant self-evaluation of a respective program, taking into account and working alongside the students within them to try and create the most successful and satisfactory experience. Though many of these programs already exist, allowing the students to play more of an active role in their curriculum will almost exclusively reap benefits in terms of their enjoyment of education, motivation, and many other factors.

The goal of our project is to show how simple it can be to implement a career navigation, exploration, and readiness program into the secondary curriculum. In the early years of high school, allowing students to explore the career world and engage in discourse with local professionals will put the idea of career navigation at the forefront of their mind. Once they have done ample investigation into a career of interest, it is simple for them, in their upper classes of high school, to engage in hands-on experience with a respective occupation, be it an independent study or a traditional career internship. By allowing students to explore their practical interests and get them ready for post-secondary life, it will create a positive and engaging environment for students to flourish as individuals and excel as a team

RETHINK YOUTH CONFERENCE PROJECT BRIEFS

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