

# The changing landscape of college and career readiness



## Q&A with Amy Reitz, Senior Vice President of Product, Hobsons

**As schools and districts focus on the whole student and getting them prepared for college, career, and life, there is an evolving focus on career readiness. What does the landscape for career readiness in K12 look like today?**

With an increased emphasis on the importance of aligning all types of pathways to drive career outcomes for students, schools and districts are required to expose students to a broader range of post-high school opportunities besides college. While many students choose college after high school, it's not the only path worth considering. So, schools and districts now must ensure that students have the chance to explore all of their options. Additionally, concerns about higher education affordability are making pathway exploration alternatives more desirable for students.

We know that every student will take their own unique path to a career that is the best fit for them. Whatever path students take after high school—whether enrolling in a trade school, community college, or four-year institution; entering the workforce; enlisting in the military; or a combination of these—the end goal is to pursue a fulfilling and meaningful career. Ensuring that all students are career-ready when they leave high school means providing career exploration and career learning opportunities as early as middle school and throughout the high school years.

In the 2020 Naviance Student Survey, 66% of students stated they were on the path leading from high school to a four-year college and then to a career. The other sizable 34% had different plans: 12% said they would attend a community or technical college before transferring to a four-year institution; 8% planned to attend a community or technical college before entering the workforce; and 5% planned to pursue their career

through a combination of the military and college. The remaining 9% said they weren't sure.<sup>1</sup> Career readiness education and training are vital in supporting students, no matter which pathway they choose.

These same students were asked to identify the primary obstacles standing in the way of their first-choice pathway. The top responses were academic scores and finances, which is not surprising. Coming in third place was the fear of making the wrong career and/or pathway choice. There is a need to provide students with career education throughout their schooling so they can make well informed decisions about their futures and be confident in the path they have chosen.

### How and why should we expand our definition of college and career readiness?

Traditionally, college and career readiness in K-12 has focused on academic skills, career knowledge, and college knowledge. Students have prepared for tests, explored careers, conducted college and scholarship research, and ultimately, applied to college. While all of these steps are vital to students' future success, they are not enough.

The goal of building career knowledge is to develop career readiness by the time students graduate from high school. No matter what postsecondary path students choose, guiding them through the process of self-discovery will expand their horizons of career possibilities and help them make well-informed decisions. Giving them opportunities to explore career clusters, understand the meaning and structure of various jobs, and conduct multiple career searches will help them build a solid understanding of the training necessary to reach future goals. From there, career goal-setting

<sup>1</sup>Naviance Student Survey, 2020

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and specific career-fit conversations can lead to further career knowledge.

As students progress through their schooling, providing access to more career learning opportunities—such as work-based learning—can build on this foundational career knowledge. Work-based learning opportunities will help students connect how what they are learning in school today will directly impact their futures

### Why are more states requiring or providing funding for work-based learning opportunities in K-12?

There are 6.5 million unfilled jobs in the U.S. right now.<sup>2</sup> 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.

Many states have recognized that work-based learning is key for preparing the next generation of the workforce and closing the skills gap. Work-based learning requirements are expanding and gaining support, with 35 states requiring and/or funding work-based learning experiences for K-12 students.<sup>3</sup>

This presents a great opportunity for schools and districts to connect learning to life. As students uncover their strengths and interests in school and begin aligning these to career interests, work-based learning provides real-world career learning experiences that will best prepare them for success in the workforce. Additionally, research shows that a blend of techni-

cal, academic, and employability skills best prepare students for fast-growing and high-earning jobs in the future.<sup>4</sup>

### Is there demand from students for more career learning opportunities? If so, what types of career learning opportunities are students looking for?

Students definitely are seeking more opportunities to explore and experience careers while in school. Many schools and districts are looking for ways to expose students to more career exploration and real-world career learning opportunities, like work-based learning, to meet their students' needs.

We asked students about their perceptions of the career learning opportunities available to them through their school. Over half of the students (55%) stated that there were too few opportunities offered in their school. Just 41% of students thought they had adequate offerings, while 4% of students stated they had more than enough. When we asked students what opportunities they wanted more access to, they overwhelmingly expressed interest in more hands-on experiences like internships, job shadows, and career field trips.<sup>5</sup>

There is still work to be done across the country to meet students' needs. The good news is that many schools and districts employ passionate educators working diligently to ensure that all students graduate high school ready to be successful in their futures. At Naviance, we continue to innovate and partner with over 13,000 schools and districts to fulfill this goal.

<sup>2</sup>US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020

<sup>3</sup>National Skills Coalition, 2017

<sup>4</sup>Orrell, 2018

<sup>5</sup>Naviance Student Survey, 2020

