EAB

Meeting the Career Readiness Imperative

Best Practices for Scaling Career Awareness and Exposure

Study in Brief

This report profiles cost-effective strategies that progressive institutions are deploying to integrate opportunities for all students to explore and prepare for careers within an academic environment

3 Ways to Use This Research

- Educate the board and executive cabinet on the need for district-wide career education
- Introduce school leaders to strategic initiatives on integrating career and academic development
- Familiarize school personnel with implementation processes

The K-12 Career Education Imperative

Districts Best Positioned to Set Students Up for Career Success

A Growing Need to Provide Career Development Opportunities for All Students

- **Most students do not receive the career development support they need to be successful in the labor market.** As the world of work becomes more complex, the majority (67%) of 25- to 34-year olds across all education attainment levels face difficulty entering the job market because they lack a degree or certification that allows them to secure a living wage job. These students could have benefited from career education, exploration, and guidance starting in K-12.
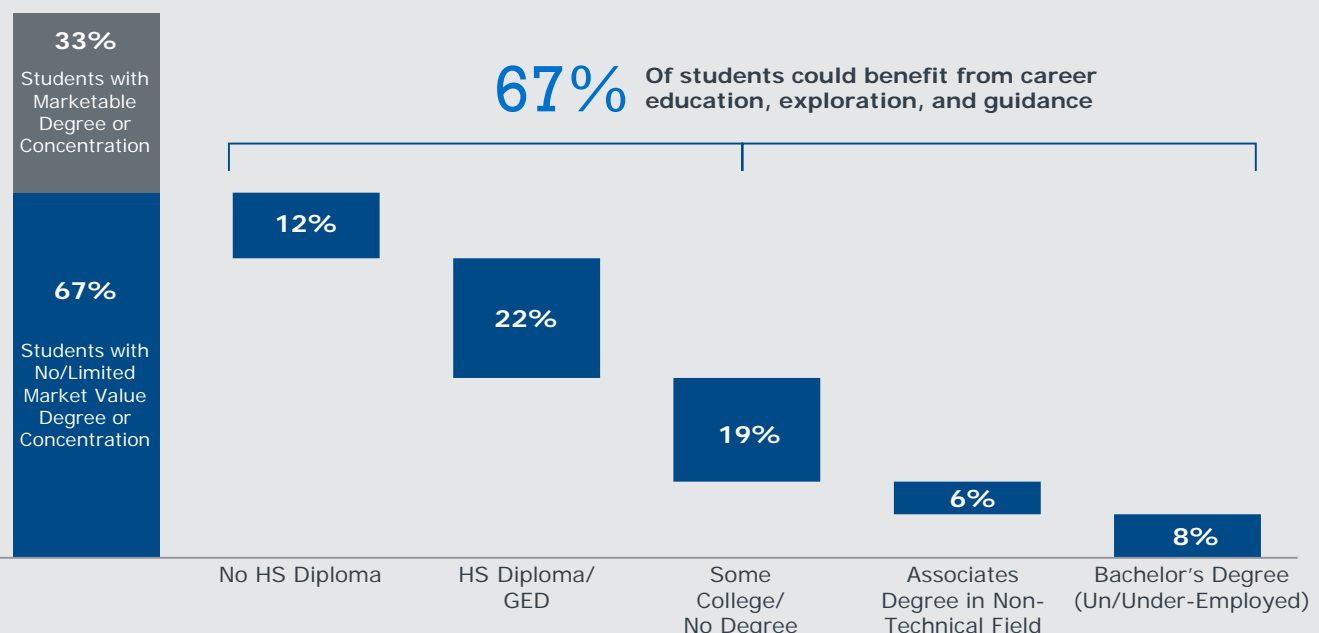
- **In reality, a large share of students make uninformed decisions about their next steps.** Correcting these mistakes at a later date is costly in terms of time and money. More than half of all high school graduates believe their school did not support them in exploring and identifying which postsecondary steps and careers would align with their interests and capabilities. Consequently, only 36% of high school graduates make postsecondary industry-specific decisions that align with their strengths and interests.

- **Additionally, students who are unaware of how their learning relates to future careers face greater risk of becoming disengaged from their learning and eventually dropping out of school.** Most (81%) of high school dropouts reported that "seeing the connection between school and getting a job would have kept them in school."

- **Districts are well-positioned to propel students towards career success** due to their access to all students, regardless of their eventual educational attainment levels. The good news is that districts can provide all students with ongoing career development support without sacrificing academics or requiring additional resources. This study will outline best practices to achieve that goal.

Large Share of Students Across Education Attainment Levels Face Difficulty Entering the Labor Market

EAB Analysis of U.S. Census Data on 25- to 34-year Olds' Education and Employment Outcomes

33%
Students with Marketable Degree or Concentration

67%
Students with No/Limited Market Value Degree or Concentration

67% Of students could benefit from career education, exploration, and guidance

No HS Diploma	HS Diploma/ GED	Some College/ No Degree	Associates Degree in Non-Technical Field	Bachelor's Degree (Un/Under-Employed)
12%	22%	19%	6%	8%

Supporting Students' Career Exploration Journey

Where Should Districts Focus Their Efforts?

Four Major Barriers to Integrated Career Awareness and Exposure

Limited View of Career Options and Pathways

Students develop their career aspirations as early as late elementary to middle school, but their career interests are usually confined to a limited menu of options based on what they observe in their immediate surroundings (e.g. who they know and who looks like them). As a result, students across all socioeconomic classes risk developing career goals that reinforce historic social patterns and expectations, regardless of their individual capabilities and interests.

Testing Career Fit and Interests Occurs Infrequently or Too Late

The best way for students to refine their career aspirations early on is by gaining industry-based work experience. In reality, students have few opportunities to do this in high school. Schools either have a limited supply of industry-based work experience opportunities (e.g work based learning or project based learning) or students' crowded schedules prevent them from participating. As a result, alarmingly low numbers of high school students have the chance to test their career fit and interest before making postsecondary decisions.

Postsecondary Decisions Based on Minimal and Superficial Advice

High school students today are asked to make high-stakes decisions from an overwhelming and growing number of postsecondary options. Districts' reliance on overburdened school counselors is insufficient for providing students with the support they need to make informed choices. Not only do counselors have limited time, but many also lack training in providing career advice across a broad range of industries. As a result, 62% of students rate their counselors "fair" or "poor" in helping them explore and plan for careers.

Insufficient Professional Skills and Experiences

Employers often complain that students lack the professional etiquette and skills required to be successful in the workplace. In fact, nearly half of employers attribute their entry-level vacancies to the lack of professional characteristics among incoming candidates. Unfortunately, students have few opportunities to hone these skills before transitioning to work. Most students (74% of 18- to-24 year olds) claimed their schools failed to prepare them for the professional world.

Integrating Career Development Into Existing Structures

The challenge to prepare all students for careers within current systems is evident. *How can schools support all students in discovering their personal career goals and plans without compromising academics and requiring additional resources?* This study outlines practical ways districts can reengineer existing structures and resources to boost career outcomes for all students, while enhancing academic success. The key is to integrate academic and career development into a continuous, coordinated strategy that relies on academic enrichment (including experiential learning and reflection activities) and in-school services (e.g. counseling and advising).

Our Research Study Roadmap

16 Best Practices for Scaling Career Awareness and Exposure

This study is based on a series of interviews with more than 100 K-12 leaders representing school districts nationwide. Following these interviews, our final study profiled 16 best practices that districts can deploy to integrate career education within their current system across the following four sections.

1
Cultivate Early and Broad Career Awareness

1. Worlds of Work Middle School Expo
2. Pathways Essentials
3. Pathways Teacher Development Lessons
4. Structured Career Reflection

2
Lower Access Barriers to Career Experiences

5. Community-Sourced Project Based Learning
6. General Education Externships
7. Virtual Work-Based Learning

3
Offer Personalized and Frequent Career Decision Support

8. Career-Based Scheduling
9. Industry-Based Advisory Cohorts
10. Employer Mentorships

4
Formally Aid Workplace Transitions

11. Employer-Led Workplace Skills Intensives
12. Ethnographic Career Research
13. Curriculum-Wide Transferable Skills Call Outs
14. School-Wide Elevator Pitches
15. Career Interests Capstone Presentation
16. Student Workplace Performance Awards

Looking for Frontier Practice

— **"** —

How can we equip all students with comprehensive career education?

Members asked the Forum to find promising, replicable approaches to address two problems: how to increase career exposure and exploration for students and how to support students in career planning and preparation

The four practices outlined in this brief provide a sample of some of our most promising findings. In addition to describing the steps and details necessary to execute these practices, we have included sample tools/templates to ease the implementation process for school leaders.

Featured Institutions

Whitewater Unified School District

Whitewater, WI

Greenwood School District

Greenwood, AR

Cross County School District

Cherry Valley, AR

Blue Valley School District

Overland Park, KA

What the Best Are Doing

The critical elements for supporting all students' career development include broadening and cultivating career awareness early on, increasing access to career experiences, providing personalized and frequent decision support, and expanding opportunities for students to hone and communicate their professional skills.

Cultivating Early and Broad Career Awareness

Structured Career Reflection
Integrate Career Reflection into Existing Structures to Clarify Career Knowledge and Goals

To cultivate ongoing career and self awareness in high school, Whitewater Unified School District integrates career reflection time into existing homeroom periods. During this time, students participate in self-directed, grade-specific career reflection activities. These activities aim to cultivate students' self-navigation skills and promote personalized career discovery.

Lower Access Barriers to Career Experiences

Virtual Work-Based Learning
Leverage Digital Tools and Staff Networks to Enable Online Work-Based Learning

Despite Cross County Public School's remote location and limited access to nearby employers, the district provides work-based learning opportunities for all juniors through its virtual work-based learning program. The district leverages the professional network of staff to source employers and work-based learning projects.

Offer Personalized and Frequent Career Decision Support

Industry-Based Advisory Cohorts
Utilize Advisory Periods to Promote Deeper Industry Knowledge and Planning

Greenwood School District reengineered its advisory cohorts so that students' interest in a particular industry are matched with teachers who have a familiarity or affinity for the same industry. During advisory periods, students engage in activities that help them explore and evaluate their career interests. Teachers also receive industry-specific resources and ongoing counselor support to improve their industry knowledge and the quality of their advice.

Formally Aid Workplace Transitions

School-Wide Elevator Pitches
Prompt Students to Constantly Hone their "Career Pitch"

Blue Valley School District requires all high school students to develop a career-oriented elevator pitch that communicates their experiences and career goals. School staff across the district and adult guest visitors are encouraged to ask students to recite their elevator pitches at any time between class periods.

Structured Career Reflection

Career Reflection Clarifies Student Goals and Career Knowledge

Practice in Brief

Whitewater Unified School District dedicates one homeroom period a week for students to engage in ongoing, self-directed career learning. All homeroom teachers receive grade-specific career prompts activities designed to allow students to deepen their career knowledge, refine career goals, and engage in thoughtful career planning.

Implementation Steps

Elevate Underutilized Homeroom Time

- Insert career reflection into a twenty minute homeroom period one day each week

- Ensure continuity of students and teachers in the same homeroom to foster a community of ongoing support

Assemble a Volunteer-Based Task Force to Develop Career Activities

- Recruit a leadership task force of teachers, administrators, counselors, and parents to collaborate on developing grade-specific career reflection prompts and activities that are designed to develop students' independent learning skills

- The leadership task force meets monthly to either create or update career activities starting in the summer months

Ease Implementation for Homeroom Teachers

- Task force representatives introduce and disseminate grade-specific career activities and prompts to homeroom teachers at the start of the school year. Career activities and prompts are designed to be student-directed, which reduces the need for significant teacher training

Benefits to Institution

» 55 hours spent on structured and personalized career reflection

» 92% of students felt confident in identifying careers that align with their strengths and interests

» 97% of students felt confident in their ability to be successful in their chosen career path

» Decreased high school dropout rates

> "
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> Students tell us they like the reflection activities. Students have the time to create a future that they want [...] They are able to connect how their time in high school relates to their futures.
>
> Pamela Sonmor-Wintz
> Coordinator of Counseling Services
> *Whitewater Unified School District*

Whitewater Homeroom Career Learning Program

Key Program Components

Grade-specific career prompts help students develop and refine their career goals

Self-directed research activities hones students' ability to independently search and identify pertinent career information (e.g. "What are the education and skill requirements for a specific entry-level position?")

Personal career journals (online or paper-based) allow students to track relevant information and archive their thought process regarding careers

Final 12th grade career presentations foster students' ability to articulate strengths, interests, and post-secondary plans

Grade-Specific Career Learning Themes
Representative Career Activities

9th — Self-Awareness?
- *What am I good at?*
- *What do I enjoy doing?*
- *What subjects or activities excite me?*

10th — Broad Career Awareness
- *What careers are related to the subjects I most enjoy?*
- *Which of these careers are projected to grow in the next decade?*

11th — Defined Career Interests
- *Which careers are most aligned with my strengths and interests?*
- *What's most important to me when choosing a career?*

12th — Postsecondary Preparation
- *What do I need to do after high school to accomplish my career goals?*
- *Which education programs could help me achieve my goals?*

Career Presentation Components

1 Academic and Elective Courses
Present eight artifacts from academic courses and six from career-related courses

2 Volunteer and Extracurricular Activities
Present three items that showcase interests, strengths, and talents

3 Post-Secondary Plans
Explain immediate postsecondary plans, whether job-related or college-bound

4 Career Goals
Describe long-term career goals and current plan to achieve them

5 Financial Plan
Present expected wages for entry-level jobs in career field of interest along with anticipated personal expenses and savings

Virtual Work-Based Learning

Leverage Digital Tools and Staff Networks to Expand Work-Based Learning Opportunities

Practice in Brief

Cross County Public Schools has built a virtual work-based learning network that connects students with employer volunteers representing industries across the country. Volunteers are sourced by teacher networks, and students and volunteers are matched based on shared industry interest. Employers provide students with industry-specific business challenges and guides students in completing each task. Students connect with employers virtually to receive coaching and feedback on their work performance.

Implementation Steps

Identify Student Career Interests

- Students complete an online career survey (e.g. Naviance)
- Administrators create a list of in-demand industries based on student interest surveys

Assemble the Network of Employer Contacts

- All school staff members submit at least five professional contacts from their network (e.g. friends, family members, and previous employers), prioritizing contacts from in-demand industries

Secure Employer Commitment

- Staff members email their personal contacts asking employers if they would be interested in volunteering to mentor students on career-specific projects
- One administrator (e.g the Vice Principal) is cc-ed on all correspondence to manage employer follow up and vet work-based learning projects

Master the Match

- Students are paired with employers based on their career interests
- Employers outline a work-based learning project plan for school approval by completing an internship plan template
- Students and employers correspond through email and skype throughout the project
- Employers evaluate student performance against student goals

Benefits to Institution

» 75% of students clarified their career interests

» 50+ employers partnered with students through mentorships

» 17 states were represented by professional mentors

> 66

> This kind of exploration helps students self-advocate, communicate with professionals, and broaden their scope of knowledge. And the best part of this initiative is that students experience the authenticity of being an actual intern.
>
> Matthew Swenson
> Assistant Principal & Director of College and Career Access
> *Cross County Public Schools*

Internship Plan Template Example
To be filled out by the Mentor

Big Idea	Sally is going to do a diagnostic report on a deceased patient who died of an undetermined skin condition in 2010. Sally is going to learn as much about dermatology as possible and then create a diagnostic report about what Jane Doe may have died of.

Lesson-Oriented Tasks: Each project component leads to a specific learning outcome

Representative of the Job: Projects resemble job-specific activities or problem sets

Stage of the Experience	What is the Intern Learning?	What is the Intern Producing?	Time Frame for this Stage
Early Phase	*All about dermatology. In order to produce a comprehensive report, she's going to have to have a background in the science and in different diseases.*	*She's reading my book plus studying 100 medical terminology vocabulary words. We'll talk through both of those things on the following chat.*	*All February*
Middle Phase	*How to diagnose a patient. On a video-chat, we're going to discuss how I go about diagnosing a patient– how I process the symptoms, what is important to remember and what isn't, and how to express diagnoses in a succinct manner.*	*Sally has to come back having studied 25 skin diseases. I've asked her to research the 25 most common diseases, write out their causes, symptoms, and remedies.*	*First half of March*
Late Phase	*I will introduce Sally to the Jane Doe case. Jane Doe died of an unknown disease before we could get to her. She'll use critical thinking to try to answer this problem.*	*Sally is going to study the case, perform research, perform consultations, and then participate in a diagnostic meeting with a med student and me where we'll push each other on what could've killed Jane Doe.*	*Second half of March*
Final Project	*How to think through a problem; how to diagnose a patient; how to save a life*	*Sally is going to give a presentation displaying what she feels to be the top three potential diseases which killed Jane Doe.*	*All of April*

Student Evaluation Template Example
To be filled out by the Mentor

Aspiration	*Sally's aspirations are to 1) Be the first in her family to graduate from college and 2) Run a successful medical practice*

Outlined Employer Support: Employers are encouraged to outline how they will support students' development in their growth area(s)

Relevant to Student's Aspiration: All evaluation feedback is based on the skills and characteristics relevant to students' career goals.

Strengths	What	Why	Progress
Strength 1	*Planning*	*She's so on top of things! I am so impressed that she read through my entire biography on my website and she always has such great questions that are well prepared.*	*She's just an awesome planner, and I hope that she maintains that trait.*
Strength 2	*Respect for Adults*	*Always saying "yes ma'am" and "no thank you".. Super polite!*	*This is really going to help her advocate for herself later in life. Professors and professionals will respect that she is delightful in her disposition.*
Growth Area(s)	*Confidence*	*I noticed– and Sally agrees– that she is very nervous when working with professionals. Her nervousness comes off as under-confidence.*	*1) For the final presentation, I am going to make sure she's extremely prepared for it so that she feels confident delivering it. The more she knows, the more confident she should be.* *2) We're having conversations and I am giving her feedback about ways that she can present herself in a more confident manner.*

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Industry-Based Advisory Cohorts

Elevate Advisory Periods to Promote Deeper Industry Knowledge and Planning

Practice in Brief

To provide students with industry-specific career planning, Greenwood Public Schools utilizes advisory cohorts as opportunities for students who share similar career interests to explore and plan for a specific industry. While most districts sort students into advisory cohorts at random, Greenwood Public Schools organizes their advisory cohorts around industry themes and assign them to teachers who are familiar with the industry or have an affinity for it. During advisory period, students engage in a series of activities that helps them identify the education, experience, and skills needed for specific industries and careers.

Implementation Steps

Organize Advisory Cohorts Around Industry Themes

- Students take an online career assessment, and teachers submit their industry interests via school surveys

- Teachers and students are assigned advisory cohorts based on similar interests

- Advisory cohorts meet for 30 minutes three times each week

- Students remain in the same advisory cohort throughout high school. However, they have the option to change advisory cohorts if their interests change

Provide Industry-Specific Resources and Ongoing Teacher Support

- Counselors train teachers in advising skills during teacher in-days

- Teachers collaborate to develop and exchange career exploration lessons, which are applicable to any industry during professional development days

- Counselors disseminate the most up-to-date industry state and federal data to teachers so that they can provide accurate industry information and guidance

- Advisory teachers participate in at least one industry externship to improve their ability to advise students on preparing for careers related to that field

Benefits to Institution

» Increased opportunities for students to explore and plan for careers

» Larger cadre of career advisors available to individually support students in planning for their next steps

> "
>
> We used to assign our advisors based on where they fell in the alphabet. But we realized that when it came to careers, many of our teachers come from other fields besides education. We realized we were ignoring sources of industry knowledge. Our kids are now thinking about their careers long before they are walking across the stage.
>
> Cody Chatman, Principal
> *Greenwood Public Schools*

Sample Teacher Survey

EAB Recommended Survey for Sourcing Industry Advisors

Name:_____

Subject(s) You Currently Teach:_____

1. Do you have prior work experience in an industry other than education?

❑ Yes (Proceed to questions 2 and 4 to complete the survey)

❑ No (Proceed to questions 3 and 4 to complete the survey)

2. If You Answered "Yes" → Please indicate all industries in which you have previously worked (Select all that apply)

❑ Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources

❑ Architecture & Construction

❑ Business Management and Administration

❑ Finance & Accounting

❑ Government & Public Administration

❑ Health Sciences

❑ Hospitality & Tourism

❑ Information Technology

❑ Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security

❑ Manufacturing

❑ Marketing & Communications

❑ Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

❑ Social Services

❑ Transportation, Distribution & Logistics

❑ Other: _____

3. If You Answered "No" → Please indicate which of the following industries interest you the most? (Select Up to Three Industries)

❑ Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources

❑ Architecture & Construction

❑ Business Management and Administration

❑ Finance & Accounting

❑ Government & Public Administration

❑ Health Sciences

❑ Hospitality & Tourism

❑ Information Technology

❑ Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security

❑ Manufacturing

❑ Marketing & Communications

❑ Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

❑ Social Services

❑ Transportation, Distribution & Logistics

❑ Other (Please specify): _____

4. Please indicate the top three industries from the above list for which you would be most interested in serving as a student advisor?

First Choice:_____

Second Choice:_____

Third Choice:_____

School-Wide Student Elevator Pitches

Hardwire School Staff to Prompt Pitch Practice Between Class Periods

Practice in Brief

To hone students' professional communication skills, Blue Valley School District trains all high school students in developing and delivering their career elevator pitches. The district makes use of the time between class periods as an opportunity for students to practice communicating how their courses and extracurricular activities relate to their career goals. This provides students the opportunity to receive feedback from teachers and improve their professional communication skills on an ongoing basis.

Implementation Steps

Integrate Opportunities to Develop Elevator Pitches Into Classroom

- Students complete an online assessment of their career interests

- Students learn the concept of elevators pitches during their English class, and students develop their own 30 second pitch as a class assignment

- When relevant, all teachers convey to students how their class lessons relate to career preparation

Cultivate a School Culture Around Elevator Pitches

- District administrators task all teachers with asking students to deliver their elevator pitches in between class periods. These expectations can be conveyed during staff onboarding processes or staff-in days

- Teachers and school visitors ask students at random to give their pitch in the hallway. Students receive immediate feedback throughout the school year

- Students update their pitches as needed

Benefits to Institution

» Increased percentage of students who reported feeling confident in effectively giving elevator pitches

» Increased percentage of students who felt confident in conversing with business professionals

> *As students improve their elevator pitches over time, they develop a number of important skills and traits—communication, speaking with confidence, versatility. It also provides a forum for them to constantly refine their own career interests.*
>
> Cory Mohn, Executive Director
> *Blue Valley School District*

Sample Elevator Pitch

When I entered CAPS as a junior, I had not given much thought on what life would look like after high school and had certainly not contemplated future career paths. What a difference a year made!

As an outgrowth of my Global Business coursework, I had the good fortune to serve as chairperson of the yearlong Innovation Celebration project, which is a student led fundraising event. My team raised nearly $60K for CAPS and was responsible for all aspects of the event from fundraising, to donor recognition, to day of event logistics. The task seemed daunting at first, but I quickly learned that if I applied the professional skills learned at CAPS, we could accomplish our many goals.

I am now a senior and I split my time between an amazing marketing and business development internship and project work. At CAPS I have done things that I didn't think were possible. I see myself as a leader with professional skills and a network that I will take with me as I enter Texas A&M next year to major in business.

Hope Adams, CAPS – Global Business '16-'17

Key Characteristics of Elevator Pitches

Engaging:
Lead with a high-level summation of an experience or one's goal to engage the audience

Academically Relevant:
Use the pitch to link future plans with coursework

Results-Oriented
Include results or outcomes from activities, including any skills attained through an experience

Goal-Specific:
Communicate education and/or professional goals for after high school

Rule of Thumb

Elevator pitches should be limited to **30 seconds or less**

Sample Teacher Prompts

"I'd like to learn more about you. Tell me about yourself."

"What are you planning to do after high school and why?"

"Tell me about your high school experience and how it relates to your future goals?"

(Pre/Post) Professional Skills Confidence Survey Sample

Disseminate survey to students at the beginning and end of the school year

Directions: Indicate whether you disagree, somewhat agree, agree, or strongly disagree with the statement on the left. Please indicate one answer for each statement.

	Strongly Disagree Score=1	Disagree Score=2	Somewhat Agree Score=3	Agree Score=4	Strongly Agree Score=5
I believe I form a positive first impression through my 30 second elevator speech				✔	
I am good at conducting a 1-on-1 conversation with a business profession and/or mentor					✔
I know and can articulate my personal strengths				✔	
I know and can articulate my career aspirations			✔		
Overall, I feel confident in myself and my ability to be successful in life				✔	
My elevator pitch is a good representation of my strengths, experiences, and current ambitions					✔

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District Leadership Forum

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