



Utah State Board of Education

CAREER DAY GUIDE:

WITH FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN MIND

A UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
GUIDE

August 2023

INTRODUCTION

This short guide centers on how to meaningfully engage family and community in the planning of your career day event. Career day events that center family and community offer one of the best methods for connecting students to a broad spectrum of opportunities and role models. Incorporating family and community into the event enables students to relate to the presentations, reflect on their goals, identify community role models, and build connections between home, community, and school.

CAREER DAY GUIDE

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Generally, career days are about awareness. The outcome is for students to walk away from the event with at least one career option that they would be interested in pursuing. The goal is to help our students learn and understand what careers are available while providing the platform for them to see these careers as real opportunities.

But career day events are also crucial for building strong communities. To understand what makes communities strong, it is important to look beyond the individual level of a student's impact on society post-high school graduation and to examine the broad impact that their local, state, national, and at times, even global community has had on their life trajectory. For rural communities that experience job loss when a large factory closes, the ripple effects of families losing that connection to financial stability impacts schools that lose funding when those families leave for areas with more job opportunities, which then, in turn, impacts the capacity of hiring full-time teachers or offering enrichment programs, and the opportunity for students to connect with a wider range of people from their community. Limitations on the amount of income, and minimum wage, a person makes also have been shown to have negative effects on an individual's physical and mental health including the opportunity to engage in fulfilling careers and instead are tasked with completing duties. As some studies have shown that higher minimum wages correlate with lower rates of child neglect, underage alcohol consumption, and lower rates of teen births (Bullinger, L.R. as cited in *Poverty, by*

America), it can be argued that promoting careers early on in a student's life through community engagement builds stronger communities through the strategic involvement of student's protective factors.

For our students, it is important that they know that they have many options to pursue their interests and that there is no one path that is pre-determined as the "right" choice. Career days expand the potential options for students beyond the assumed paths. For example, when students express interest in working with animals the assumed career path is to become a veterinarian. However, this one path is not the only career available for students with an interest in working with animals. Nor is it necessarily the right fit based on the student's goals, skills, and inclinations. By providing diverse examples of potential career paths from representatives of their community, students gain a broader understanding of what is available to them. Whether it be a student who finds that they would like to explore the world of automobiles as a mechanic, a field that is currently reporting staffing shortages, or a student whose plans include a four-year university, career days that engage family and community serve as an influential method to help guide students' futures.

Incorporating families and communities in career day events give students a real insight into how to achieve their long-term goals. Insight from people like them who have already done it! When students can learn from others who share their lived experiences, a career becomes more than a dream. It expands the future they can imagine for themselves. It turns the career into a tangible goal they can work towards and gives them a broader sense of how they can turn their interests into a full life.

WHY INCORPORATE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY INTO CAREER DAY

Career Day event coordination typically involves inviting community partners or organizations to present to students about their organization, role, and daily duties. However, students might not relate to or connect with representatives from community partners and organizations, as these members might not share students' values and experiences. So, while it is important to include community organizations and partners, **incorporating** the community means inviting all community members—not just the outer layer. It means tapping into the already

existing internal relationships by inviting representatives from families and student alumni.

These community members can potentially be even more impactful as students will either be able to recognize them or already have a close relationship with them. Also, because these members already share a community connection with students, it's likely they also share similar lived experiences, which helps to create a meaningful and relevant presentation.

When planning career day events, as with all events, it is important that we are planning these events intentionally. To plan an event intentionally requires us to think about the goal or objective of this event and to focus on how we can ensure that the *why* of this event is embedded into the various components that are part of the planning process. Intentionally planning career day events means keeping our students in mind. This helps us to think about how the presentations and participants will reach specific students, for instance, the student who is struggling with long-term planning. It enables us to identify models that speak to students' concerns and values to make something like college and careers realistic and obtainable.

EXAMPLES OF CAREER DAYS THAT ENGAGE COMMUNITY

A rural school district in [Wayne County](#), NY, provides an excellent example of a career day that engages the whole community. Realizing that the challenges facing students, both now and in the future, were beyond the ability of the district alone to fix, they convened with community partners, nonprofits, parents, etc. The goal of this group was to identify and address the issues and obstacles preventing students and their families from thriving. As part of this larger endeavor, they now host a yearly, county-wide career carnival with a maximum budget of \$5,000. This carnival, through community collaboration, leveraging of shared resources, and working towards a shared goal, offers all students a way to find someone in their community that they can connect with, learn from, and identify as a role model. Because this carnival has a collective impact on the entire community, the operation costs are shared, and the county hosts the carnival on its fairgrounds ensuring that it remains accessible to all. Since the carnival's debut, it has become

an event that all students know to expect and look forward to when they are in 8th grade.

A similar example from a Utah community is the [Davis School District Special Education & 504 Transition to Adulthood Fair](#). While this fair focuses on helping students with disabilities, it is a good model for planning large-scale events that engage the entire community. This fair offers examples of the kinds of topics that should be incorporated into every presentation. It's a good illustration of how to make sure your presenters speak to the concerns and issues facing your intended audience, and how to connect to a range of interests and needs.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR INCORPORATING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Intentionality and collaboration are the two key ingredients for planning a career day centered on family and community engagement.

Engagement means striving to plan events based on student, family, and community input or feedback. Ask what it is that they need, would like to learn more about, and how they would like to have this information provided.

Intentionality means having a clear vision and understanding of why you are engaging in a practice. Make sure that students, families, and community members are thought about in the initial planning stage and throughout the process rather than as an afterthought. While families should be invited to events, events should be planned based on their input and feedback regarding interests, needs, and availability. The career day itself should have a mission based on shared goals and outcomes that are generated from not just the school but the larger community.

Collaboration means sharing the resources, skills, costs, and vision of what you want out of your practice. Engage students, families, and the community as thought partners and problem solvers. Through effective family and community engagement, we are able to shift away from engaging in practices because they are normative or expected and move towards shared responsibility, ownership, and accountability.

Below you will find some questions and components of creating a career day that fully engages families and communities for you to consider as you begin to plan a career day event.

REPRESENTATION

Making sure that those presenting are representative of your student's interest, life experiences and future needs will help to ensure that these presentations are meaningful to them. When saying that career day events should involve **representation**, we include representation of those with similar backgrounds and those who will face similar obstacles as they enter higher education or the workforce.

Know your audience! Think about your specific student group and work with those who have a relationship with that student group to identify what their interests are. Remember, it is not about what we want for our students, but about the future they want for themselves. Once you know what interests would be most meaningful to your students, identify those in your community that can speak to those interests. Is there a community partner that can speak to those in the group that enjoy dance or is there a family member who can present to students what working in the music industry is like? Our students can have grandiose dreams of driving for Nascar, and while we might not know any race car drivers there are other ways in which connecting that student to the field is possible.

The bulleted questions below speak directly to the representation of the school community. Rather than bringing in external and unknown members of the community, connecting students to role models whom they have a connection with can create a mental schema legitimizing careers as a real option for them. When students can visualize members of their own community as police officers, lawyers, business owners, artists, or educators they expand their worldview. Alumni offer the additional possibility of modeling that higher education, trade school, or careers can be achieved by students at that specific school by proving it has been done. Facilitating access to social, navigational, and cultural capital provides students with career experiences that are meaningful, accessible, engaging, and insightful.

Introducing students to models that share similar experiences to their own or look like them in nontraditional careers can help students expand their interest or

cement for them that their interests are obtainable careers. Transitions are important, and transitions into adulthood can require explicit examples for students to be able to reference.

If inviting alumni, provide them with talking points regarding what it was like to navigate higher education especially if they were the first in their family to do so. Also consider including talking points for students to learn life skills from presenters about managing school and work, expectations from their family, and for special education students it is important that students gain awareness about life after graduation.

The Utah Parent Center has created a resource for parents, the [Transition from School to Adult Life resource book](#), that you can reference. While this is geared towards parents, it does provide some areas that you can utilize as guidance for talking points. Specifically, encourage career day presenters to highlight self-advocacy. That is, making sure that presenters can explain how students can make sure their accommodations are met if they pursue higher education or what their rights are in the workplace.

Here are some questions on **representation** to consider:

- What careers or postsecondary education paths are represented within our school community?
- Are there school alumni that can present to our students?
- Are we including presenters that can serve as role models for students with disabilities?
- Are we including community members that share the physical characteristics of our students?
- Are we including community members that share similar lived experiences of our students?

PLANNING

Including families and community organizations should be part of the initial phase of planning a career day event or week.

Create a plan! Make sure that planning your event includes input from families and community partners. If you already have a family and community engagement (FACE) team, they can help you identify participation barriers and identify ways to

help remove or lessen them. This team can also help you create a plan to inform, persuade, and remind families and community members of this event and why their participation is of importance to students. The [Career and Technical Education Recruitment Guide](#) , pages 6-7, helps to highlight nontraditional careers. This resource can help guide you on how to recruit a variety of speakers from different careers in addition to talking points that you can proactively think about as barriers for students who would like to learn more about these careers. You can also use these as touch points to prepare for their presentation. Make sure to have a quick run through prior to their presentation to ensure that their talking points are in alignment with your LEAs (Local Education Agencies) goals.

When inviting new partners, ensure that these partners are working in alignment with your goals and that they are also an organization that the community itself utilizes, values, and trust. You are most likely to have a higher positive impact and rate of acceptance if you are inviting partners that already have a connection with the community. Working with partners who have access to resources such as event space or other items that will elevate this event is also something that should be considered.

When selecting your partners and space, consider accessibility to the space regarding transportation and, whether the space will be accessible to those with mobility supports like wheelchairs in addition to other supports such as interpreters or translators. It is also important that presenters and presentations themselves are visually and audibly accessible to all students, families, and community members.

The [Career and Technical Education Recruitment Guide](#), pages 19-31, has some additional points to consider including some activities during the event that you can have students engage in to make the event more interactive rather than lecture only.

Make sure that event invitations and ongoing communication is sent to families and community partners in multiple ways which should include email, text, phone calls, social media, newsletters, electronic app messages (e.g., Class Dojo, Remind), and that your greeter at the event is someone that families recognize. Front office staff, for example, have been identified as the person and tool which families most commonly identify as setting the tone for their relationship with their schools.

Here are some questions on **planning** to consider:

- How are you considering student interests in planning which fields will present? What are students expressing an interest in hearing about?
- What careers or postsecondary education paths are represented within our school community?
- What schedule will best allow families to attend?
- Can we compensate families for their contribution to the career day agenda (e.g., gift cards, vouchers, gift bags, etc.)?
- Are there school alumni that can present to our students?
- What community organizations do our students and families utilize?
- What career pathways are most meaningful or interesting to our students?

ACCESS

Make sure that information is shared in a variety of ways, especially with keeping language and visual, processing, or hearing disabilities in mind. Access also includes planning an event around the availability of families and community members so that they can be active participants in the career day event.

Plan with access in mind! Building connections with families and incorporating them into the culture of the school is essential to building a positive school culture, improving positive relationships with families, and increasing buy-in and awareness of families for the way in which they impact student life and academic outcomes.

Incorporating families into the LEA community means that accessibility must be considered. Accessibility is about affording the opportunities to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services to all persons in the community. You should consider accessibility not only in terms of what persons with disabilities will need to access career day, but families and community members from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Family and community access to materials and events, for example, might depend on linguistic ability and the ways in which materials might be translated. In this case, family events might be offered in the dominant language of attendees even, and perhaps especially, if the language is not English.

Language accessibility should be embedded into all events, and Career Day is no exception. Ensure that language accessibility is thought through in the planning stages. Options to consider include securing interpreters or interpretation devices

and walking families and students through applications that support language accessibility.

Accessibility also means ensuring that families' schedules and availability are considered. By asking families when they can attend an event, you increase parent participation by ensuring the timeframe is realistic. Additionally, accessibility means not planning events or adding tasks that compete with a family's basic needs. To meet these needs and incentivize participation, offering the family compensation, whether it be a gift card or food at the event, might be appropriate. However, it is important that in offering such compensation we ensure we are helping to remove a barrier to participation, and not adding another hurdle the family must clear in order to attend.

By considering what community organizations students and families use, we are connecting academic and private spaces through the shift of students and families from consumers to providers.

Here are some questions on **access** to consider:

- What schedule will best allow families to be able to attend?
- Can we compensate families for their contribution to the career day agenda?
- What community organizations do our students and families utilize?
- Will the event be hosted in the LEA's community (families and students) dominant language?
- Will presenters be able to access translation services to present to students and to attend as a participant?

STUDENT LED PERSONALIZED COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING (PCBL)

It is not the job of the LEA to dictate the "right" or "wrong" life pathway for a student. Rather, an LEA should be helping students and families explore postsecondary options comprehensively. The LEA is responsible for spotlighting the assorted options students may have access to. By considering students' interests, the student's increased awareness of possible career pathways can help to function as a tool to strengthen protective factors for positive life outcomes.

Incorporating Student Led Personalized Competency Based Learning (PCBL) into the career day event ensures that the presentations, speakers, and other events are meaningful and relevant to students' interests.

Here are some questions on **PCBL** to consider:

- What career pathways are most meaningful or interesting to our students?
- What does long-term planning look like for our students? Families?

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout the process, it is important to consider all students and how presentations might impact them or what information they might need as they think about their futures. For example, how might a presentation by a K9 Unit impact students who have experienced the use of canines as military tools? Think about the impact presentations will have on students, like immigrants and refugees, who have very different life experiences than some of their other classmates. Ask yourself, will each presentation account for the lived experience of students in the room?

By thinking ahead about these kinds of needs and providing a guide for your presenters based on those needs, you will help prevent a behavioral response from students with various lived experiences and ensure a meaningful experience for all.

REFLECTION

Review and adjust! At the end of each presentation cycle, you can consider doing a pulse-check with your students to assess if they found the presentations meaningful, engaging, and informative. You can also leverage school surveys to assess the impact or identify goals. Pulse checks are quick check-ins done with families through exit tickets, thumbs up or down assessments, and other tools which we typically find in our classrooms.

Additionally, consider students on IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) after career day events and identify changes that can be made to the IEP that correlate with the information provided at career day presentations.

REFERENCES

Davis School District. (n.d.). *Special Education and 504 Transition to Adulthood Fair*.

Retrieved from: <https://www.davis.k12.ut.us/departments/special-education/transition/free-annual-transition-fair>

Desmond, M. (2023). *Poverty, By America*. New York: Crown Publishing.

Utah Parent Center. (July 2019). *Transition from School to Adult Life: A Parent Resource*

Book. Retrieved from: <https://utahparentcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Transition-Parent-Handbook-Final-07.2019.pdf>

Utah State Board of Education. (n.d.). *Career and Technical Education Recruitment*

Guide. Retrieved from: <https://www.schools.utah.gov/file/f6c817b7-4fa9-41d2-9ead-24aa748d4ac1>

Wayne County Partnership for Strengthening Families. (n.d.) *8th Grade Career*

Carnival. Retrieved from <https://www.waynepartnership.org/8th-grade-career-carnival>