

# Chehalis School District

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THE CORNERSTONE PROJECT

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# Introduction

The Chehalis School District (CSD) is embarking upon the next strategic phase of the Student Achievement Initiative (SAI). *College and Career Readiness* has been a cornerstone of district work for more than a decade. During this time there have been continuous research efforts embedded into the initiative in order to make strategic decisions regarding best practices toward district goals. This research has shown that efforts around college and career readiness rely heavily upon a holistic approach to student support, beginning early in life and continuing throughout post-secondary completion. This pathway emulates *Promise Programs*, which offer students a variety of resources to help them achieve their goals into and through post-secondary completion. The executive director of the *Say Yes to Education*, Buffalo chapter shared, “This is re-imagining public education...this is not the traditional 9-to-3 school day focused on academics with some art and music and physical education mixed into it” (Frahm, 2016, p. 13). Frahm continued by highlighting the complexities and nuances of envisioning comprehensive support as students develop into contributing community members with a purpose and plan for their futures. This, he noted, is the responsibility of public education.

In a 2022 report on the state of career readiness in the United States, the author wrote, “A Career Ready Nation is one in which young adults contribute to the economic competitiveness of their communities by navigating into high-demand occupations that align with their skills and interests. A Career Ready Nation offers integrated systems of support and services from K-12 and higher education, workforce development, and community-based organizations that enable youth and young adults to develop the proactivity, resiliency, and adaptability skills necessary to thrive in adulthood” (Solberg, 2022).

Building a system of support from early education through postsecondary achievement requires intentional planning and staffing, incorporating a variety of voices and perspectives. To accomplish their long-term strategic plan, the CSD is committed to creating and hiring positions to lead the work into the next decade. The district proposes hiring an *Early Learning Coordinator* to continue the commitment and strategic vision of the SAI. Based on empirical evidence from national and global research, the responsibilities of this role would include leading efforts to develop and implement a holistic and comprehensive approach to postsecondary success at the preschool and early elementary levels. Coordinating early learning efforts throughout the district will improve outcomes for students, a foundational component for postsecondary success.

Another critical component of school success is the relationship between the school district and families. The school district proposes hiring a *K-8 Family Engagement Coordinator*, whose role would include collaborating with elementary and middle school families to act as a conduit for communication and relationship building. Family engagement is imperative to early intervention

and awareness and lays the foundation for postsecondary success at the secondary level. The family engagement coordinator will be instrumental in removing barriers for families that have been traditionally marginalized in PK-12 education, thereby increasing equitable outcomes for students. The district recently received a \$1.05M Regional Challenge Grant from the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to support this position and work.

This work will include a dual-generation strategy designed to help parents also attain postsecondary degrees and credentials. The district amended narrative for the WSAC Regional Challenge Grant stated:

One of the most important factors in a student's success, through K-12 and beyond, is parental or family empowerment and support. By using a dual-generational approach we will focus on the needs of the student and the family. Researchers have found that a parent or caregiver's education, economic state, and overall health has an impact on a child's development. But also, a child's education and development have a positive effect on families.<sup>1</sup> Dual-generation approaches do this by "intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together".<sup>2</sup> We believe in focusing on the whole family to create a legacy of educational success and economic prosperity that passes from one generation to the next. In Chehalis, we are well positioned to provide direct links to Centralia College and support family members in pursuing or completing degrees, certifications and credentials.

Finally, in addition to family engagement and communication, *Community Engagement and Communication* are also critical components of a postsecondary career-ready system. Creating equitable outcomes for students involves engaging all stakeholders. The greater community has a vested interest in positive outcomes for students, as their successes strengthen the community as a whole. Sharing messages about postsecondary support and options throughout the community reinforce the work being undertaken by the SAI.

The Chehalis School District wants secondary students to be successful as they select their career development *pathway*. The SAI Cornerstone Project is focused specifically on building this support early, leading toward a postsecondary pathway, as students progress through their education to gainful employment.

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<sup>1</sup> National Association of Secondary School Principals. "Poverty and Its Impacts on Students' Education." NASSP.org. <https://www.nassp.org/poverty-and-its-impact-on-students-education/>

<sup>2</sup> Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center. "Two-Generation Approach." Urban.org. <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/metropolitan-housing-and-communities-policy-center/projects/host-initiative-action/designing-housing-platform-services/two-generation-approach>

This report will introduce research supporting the proposed positions, highlight the work the CSD has already been engaged in to support College and Career Readiness, and suggest strategies to implement a comprehensive career development system rooted in empirical research and focused on a PK-8, community-based, holistic approach to postsecondary success.

## Literature and Research Review

### Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Early understanding of the educational system is critical to student success throughout their entire learning pathway. This understanding is often shaped by socio-economic factors, family culture and connection to the system, and access to resources. Additionally, “the expectations teachers, counselors, administrators, family members, and college admissions officials have of students are integral to the earliest decisions youth make about college, and the options they see for themselves.” (Knight, M. G., & Marciano, J. E. 2015). These beliefs about college-going often shape how students and their families navigate school, from their first pre-school class through their choices in credit-bearing high school courses.

The positive impacts of early childhood learning are well documented throughout the literature. In an Educational Researcher article published in 2017, researchers found, “[We] used meta-analysis of 22 high-quality experimental and quasi-experimental studies conducted between 1960 and 2016 to find that on average, participation in ECE leads to statistically significant reductions in special education placement ( $d = 0.33$  SD, 8.1 percentage points) and grade retention ( $d = 0.26$  SD, 8.3 percentage points), and increases in high school graduation rates ( $d = 0.24$  SD, 11.4 percentage points). These results support ECE’s utility for reducing education-related expenditures and promoting child well-being” (p. 216). Other key findings in this research showed that students who participate in ECE programs demonstrate “statistically significant higher rates of high school completion and lower rates of school dropout by age 20, juvenile arrests for violent and nonviolent offenses are decreased, and are marked by lower rates of grade retention and special education placement by age 18 years.” (Reynolds et.al, 2001)

In a similar study on ECE, researchers identified several key components of early learning that helped to create foundational knowledge of the attitudes and behaviors necessary for learning in elementary and secondary environments. This research explored the perceptions of early learners and their caregivers, and found that the more information that caregivers received about the opportunities available to their children, the more likely they were to seek out resources throughout their child’s educational career (Beason, Molloy, Fehlberg et al., 2022; Traga Philippakos, Ross & Summers, 2022)

The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced that the academic skills of children are aided or impeded by their social emotional development. A key goal of early childhood education is building the social skills of students and providing a foundation for future learning. While the research

remains ongoing regarding the impacts of the pandemic, it is clear that those students who had strong social skills prior to the pandemic were more successful in making the transition back to the classroom. The research clearly supports the notion that PK programs with a focus on pre-academic learning skills and social skills produce the best results for students. Making a shift to early childhood learning focused on social skills could pave a smoother pathway forward for students entering kindergarten and beyond (Zimmerman, 2022).

Districts can further improve equitable outcomes for students and leverage their limited resources more effectively through the hiring of an ECE coordinator. The ECE coordinator role is intended to focus on the importance of early education as part of the college and career readiness pathway. The ECE coordinator helps to ensure high quality programming that emphasizes a true integration of college and career ready mindsets and learning, confirm that the program will not be lost in the scope of the PK-12 continuum, and can reinforce that the highest quality programming is produced and sustained over time. The data is clear that, “Developing an ECE system that is effective, efficient, and equitable... illustrates how to use empirical evaluation data to facilitate and validate the building of such a system. Implications are high for improving ECE systems and ultimately child outcomes.” (Xingyuan, et al. 2022) When added to a district's strategic plan, budgeted for, and prioritized, a comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program, facilitated by an experienced educational leader, is a key component to success for students as a foundation towards high school and beyond.

### Family Engagement and Community Communication

In addition to the roles of early childhood coordinator, a family engagement specialist would provide another pillar of support for the Chehalis Cornerstone Project. In defining family engagement, researchers suggest that family members are “both authors and agents in school settings. Families are authoring such space through activation of multiple forms of capital (human, social, and material) and they are positioning themselves as agents within these spaces (Kiyama & Harper, 2018). This is a progressive, strengths-based approach to the family-school partnership. The word engagement is critical, as it assumes that families are involved and interested in the school-lives of their children, to the extent that they are capable. One 2016 study concluded that, “families are the most important predictors for children’s optimal social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development and general wellbeing (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine NASEM).

To develop authentic family connections that lead to engagement, it is critical to understand and support the various ways families of different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds engage in their child’s schooling. In a recent article on engagement and equity, the authors shared that “a growing body of research suggests that traditional family engagement in schools fails to incorporate multilingual and immigrant communities in meaningful and empowering ways. This contributes to ongoing marginalization based on race, ethnicity, class, language, and immigrant status.” (Dorner et al., 2019). Additionally, families with fewer economic or socio-cultural

resources often miss opportunities to partner with schools during the traditional school day, making meaningful relationships more difficult to build and sustain (Iruka, Cabrera & Paez, 2022). In a 2019 study on building family agency for participation in education the authors shared, “Families should play more transformative roles in equitable collaborations aimed at systemic change goals focused on relationship and capacity-building strategies that attend to the broader sociopolitical contexts of systemic change efforts” (Ishimaru, Lott, Torres, & O’Reilly-Diaz, 2019). The authors continued by discussing the critical need to shift the traditional school-family paradigm from one that attempts to “fix” family engagement to fit into the school system, instead moving to opportunities to “build collective capacity and power” (p.2).

This shift to authentic engagement begins early in a student’s academic career and relies on a commitment from school stakeholders to learn about the motivations and needs of their families (Marshall, 2016). At the core of that motivation is trust, which may be difficult to build without an understanding of the assets and challenges families bring to the relationship. As mutual trust builds between schools and families, however, so will the extent of the commitment to the partnership (Halgunseth, 2009). To begin to build trust, schools must create opportunities to interact with families. Frequent and high-quality interactions between teachers and families result in fortifying that trust, increasing social capital for students (Baker et al., 2016). Beecher and Van Pay (2021) proposed that the most effective strategies to increase family interactions are through face-to-face discussions with families at a familiar location, or in public spaces that offer options for pre/post activities, such as libraries and community centers. Zucker et al. (2020) noted the importance of leveraging educators who have a relationship with families and using approaches, including remote coaching, to ensure that all families can participate. These strategies can begin to dismantle barriers that limit engagement (Iruka, Cabrera & Paez, 2022).

Research on school-family partnerships is not new. Decades of studies have shown that incorporating school, family, and community voice in decision-making can play a vital role in increasing student achievement, closing academic gaps, contributing to better attendance, improving high school completion rates, supporting higher standardized test scores, and encouraging college attendance (Best 2012; Cunningham 2002; Gordon & Louis 2009; Hantgan & Vincent 2009). What has changed, however, is an awareness of the importance of adopting an equity stance to build family partnerships that move into the engagement space. This shift is integral in helping students to progress through their academic careers from preschool through post-secondary education.

In addition to family engagement, building meaningful partnerships with community members and organizations is critical to student success. Community engagement results in more challenging, responsive, and supportive learning environments (Sanders & Harvey, 2012). A mutually beneficial relationship is formed as schools and community organizations work together to identify resources and create opportunities, giving the community members involved a greater investment in the future of their community. In addition, the community itself serves as

an extended sphere of learning for students, as learning is a social activity (Bandura, 1961). Sanders (2001) identified ten major categories of community partners: business/corporations, universities and educational institutions, government and military agencies, health care organizations, faith organizations, national service and volunteer organizations, senior citizen organizations, cultural and recreational institutions, community-based organizations, and individuals in the community. Collaboration with the community can facilitate improvements to schools, provide family support, and encourage community development (Sanders & Harvey 2012).

In the field of education, there is empirical research on collaboration between colleges and the private sector (Siegel, 2008), partnerships between universities and school districts (Paletta, Candal, & Vidoni, 2009), and collaboration between school districts and community organizations (Tilhou, Rose, Eckhoff, & Glasgow, 2018). Siegel (2008) studied an interorganizational model of collaboration designed to support underrepresented students through the LEAD (Leadership Education and Development) program. Founded in 1979 by executives from Johnson & Johnson, the LEAD program was a response to the perceived lack of minority representation in business. Through sustained partnerships between universities and businesses, students were offered financial, educational, and social supports to prepare them for the workforce. The structure of the collaboration was supported through work at the college and business level, with representatives from all partnering organizations. Siegel's (2008) question was, "How do social institutions collectively organize to prepare underrepresented students for access to-and success in- postsecondary education and beyond" (p. 197).

In Oklahoma City, partnerships between the teachers' union, the school system, families, and community leaders, including business leaders and higher education administrators, supported students in areas with high Hispanic populations. These conversations were unique in that they addressed the real-time needs of families, including immigration rights, college entrance requirements, and language barriers. These collaborations resulted in the hiring of more bilingual staff members, professional development for teachers, course offerings in Spanish and English that focus on college and career preparation, and the expansion of volunteer opportunities for students at-risk of dropping out.

In another example, a community in Columbus, Ohio formed a task force in response to their struggling school system with a 52% graduation rate. This task force, composed of stakeholders ranging from educators to businesspeople to community members, suggested transforming the school into a STEM and 21<sup>st</sup> Century school with more college level courses, resulting in community funding and, eventually, a more attractive school option for the community.

Several additional studies in the field of education have addressed the need to support whole child development into and through public education by adopting a collaborative approach (Amey, Eddy, & Ozaki, 2007; Swanson et al., 2016; Vandal, 2013). These initiatives are often



called Promise Programs, and address social, emotional, and academic learning from birth through post-secondary achievement (Miller-Adams & Fiore, 2013). Almost all of these programs include some component of interorganizational partnership, cooperation, or collaboration. Michelle Miller-Adams, a researcher with the Upjohn Institute, defined Promise Programs, or communities, as those “that seek to transform themselves by making a long-term investment in education through place-based scholarships” (Miller-Adams, personal communication, June 2016; Upjohn Institute, 2015).

Results from over 80 Promise Programs across the nation have demonstrated positive results in varying degrees (Swanson et al., 2016), with the most successful programs being the ones that consider a “whole child” approach, including support services, mentor programs, and community participation embedded as critical components, and starting as early as prenatal care (Brown, personal communication, June 2016).

Investing in a district employee responsible for building and maintaining these community connections provides the opportunity for these positive relationships to support the SAI’s desired outcomes. These partnerships can be structured in several ways. Some can be system-wide while others may be more focused, specific partnerships. What is most critical is that these connections involve the voice of many, incorporating underrepresented groups of students and families, and conceived with the vision and mission of the SAI in mind. These connections can have a positive impact on closing the achievement gaps, as the community members who are from those lower-performing groups will have a greater insight on how better to connect those students with academic importance in their community.

### [College and Career Readiness](#)

College Readiness and Career Readiness are intertwined. Although chronologically college (in the pursuit of a postsecondary degree or credential) is likely to precede a person’s career, research shows that it is best to begin with developing career interests and then determining the postsecondary options that are best suited to meet the individual’s interests. Ed Hidalgo, Chief Innovation and Engagement Officer for the Cajon Valley Union School District stated, “In the early years, you have to double down on interest, exploration, strengths, and values. When you look at research, interests have the highest correlation to career, success, performance, and income of any of the personality measures” (2022).

Many efforts, both nationally and locally, are underway to raise awareness related to college in high school and middle schools (Gates, Washington Round Table, SAI). College readiness gained momentum and popularity approximately two decades ago. At that time the ACT (2005b) defined college readiness as “...the level of preparation a student needs to be ready to enroll and succeed – without remediation – in a credit-bearing course at a two-year or four-year institution, trade school, or technical school. Increasingly, however, college readiness also means workplace

readiness” (Achieve 2013). Hidalgo (2022) stated, “You know, it's really intuitive to focus on college-career readiness at the high school. We’ve always done that. But that is too late!” (2022).

While difficult to operationally define, academic scholars and researchers agree on many of the components that combine to create a “college and career ready” student, including academic knowledge, cognitive and behavioral skills, and noncognitive factors, including motivation, persistence, and self-efficacy (Conley, 2007; Conley & French, 2014). Additionally, Vandal (2013) argued that what was needed was a change from “traditional structures and methods” (p. 4) in assessing college readiness to a more collaborative, inclusive operational definition. Conley (2007) suggested that any comprehensive definition of college and career readiness should be robust and address the fundamental differences between high school competence and college preparedness. Conley cited the significant academic and social differences placed upon high school and college students, including the level of autonomy, amount of work, and lack of immediate access to the level of support available in high school classrooms.

College awareness, college eligibility, and college preparation are three elements that comprise college readiness. These three elements are essential requirements throughout a student’s educational programming. College Readiness, particularly around awareness and preparation, are at least as important at the elementary level as they are the secondary level.

**COLLEGE READINESS** = College Awareness + College Eligibility + College Preparation

While the focus on secondary education is important, the development of early childhood support is critical. Several studies have focused on the economic impact of higher education. Policy makers, educational leaders, and organizations including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The Lumina Foundation have been actively engaging in discussions about how to increase postsecondary success, and create more equitable opportunities for an increasingly diverse population. Additionally, all community stakeholders have recognized that as the needs of the workforce change, so must our system of higher education. In a 2013 report from the Lumina Foundation, researchers wrote, “Perhaps the clearest evidence about the need to increase higher education attainment comes from the fact that employers cannot find people with the skills they need to fill all of their current job openings, much less those that will be created in the future.” (p.3). They continued, “The essential skills for success in today’s economy are critical thinking skills-abstract reasoning, problem solving, communication, and teamwork. These are precisely the skills that are needed to build strong communities and societies wherever one lives.” (p.4). It is a foregone conclusion; we need students to start well to finish well.

In a similar report, *A Projection of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018*, researchers from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce shared that, as a nation, “our ability to match education alternatives with career options is woefully underdeveloped” (2010, p.1). They continued to present a compelling argument for the alignment of education

with trends in the workforce, noting, “Good pay and benefits, then, are linked to the sequence of postsecondary educational attainment, achievement, workplace training, and the use of technology on the job” (p.2). In this 2010 report, researchers projected opportunities for job openings in specific fields through 2018 for different levels of postsecondary education, finding that 26% of the job openings for engineers and technicians, 25% for healthcare practitioners and technical occupations, 21% for healthcare support occupations, and 21% for installation, maintenance and repair occupations could be filled with holders of associate degrees nationwide. The authors concluded their article by writing,

Obtaining a good job-one capable of providing a family-sustaining wage-has become the ultimate standard for educational adequacy. The mass postsecondary educational system has arrived, leaving academics to debate over “college for all.” Experts might contest whether everyone needs some college education-but the labor market clearly has linked middle-class employability to postsecondary education and training.” (p.110).

Across the country, educators and policy makers are attempting to strengthen career pathways by improving programming and increasing the rigor of coursework. Lowry and Thomas-Anderson (2017) cited President Obama’s Community College to Career Fund as one opportunity to “[make] substantial headway in promoting industry partnerships to foster career readiness and job creation for trained workers.” As a result, there are expanding opportunities for students to learn in the workplace through internships, apprenticeships, and job shadowing. These shifts highlight the current national focus on equitable access to education and promote the understanding that the needs of communities are connected to the educational initiatives and priorities of school districts. These ideas can be seen in new federal legislation: the fifth reauthorization of the federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Professional Education Act (Perkins V), which went into effect on July 1, 2019. Perkins V emphasizes workplace-based learning, postsecondary training, industry credentials, access for students from special populations, and programs that prepare students for careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). (CRPE), 2019, p. 1). This essentially means elementary and secondary education is becoming more rigorous. Students now need to be at an academic level in kindergarten that was traditionally reserved for 1<sup>st</sup> grade, requiring school support for academics and socialization to start earlier.

In a 2017 report from the Gates Foundation, researchers surveyed over 1000 students eligible for the College Bound Scholarship program, a last dollar scholarship offered to students in Washington State who meet specific requirements based on family income. Approximately 20% of student respondents acknowledged that while they did want to go to college, they were not sure when or how they would make it happen. The students also shared that it would be helpful to start talking about college earlier, to have a mandatory class with a college preparation focus, and to have more help with the application process (BERC 2017).

## **College and Career Readiness in CSD**

For the CSD to be truly “College and Career Ready,” district leaders, faculty, students, families, and community members must collaborate and coordinate on programs and systems that support the education pathway from early learning through postsecondary selection and completion. Hidalgo (2022) calls this “... from K to Gray.” The CSD has been focusing on systemic support for college and career readiness for more than 10 years and has developed relationships and partnerships with dozens of leaders around the country. Thus far, this collaborative work has involved a strong partnership among the Chehalis School District, Chehalis Foundation, and Centralia College, in addition to other local organizations and businesses. Through these connections, CSD leaders and partners have studied and implemented current best practices at programmatic and systemic levels. This multi-phase approach has helped this work to sustain and evolve over time.

Phase 1 began with a comprehensive needs assessment, where district leaders gathered data and research focused on improving outcomes for students in the community in real time. The work of the past 10 years has emphasized the needs of secondary students, as high school graduation and college going rates were lagging below state averages and impacting the economic viability of the community. During this phase, the district set a goal of 60% of all WFW High School graduates receiving a living wage credential within eight years of high school graduation.

Through each phase of this work, SAI partners have strategically considered their best path forward, leveraging the resources available, and innovating for progress. While Phase 1 involved an exploration of needs, identifying best practices, and setting goals for success, Phase 2 incorporated the implementation and evaluation of many programs designed to improve college and career readiness district wide. These programs were also intended to alter the postsecondary trajectory of as many students as possible. These efforts were data-driven and incorporated the wisdom of national programs already engaged in similar work.

### [CSD CCR Programs and Systems \(Phase 2\)](#)

Over the past 10 years, the SAI has helped to establish and sustain several programs to support a college and career-ready school district. These programs incorporate opportunities for students and their families to gain information, access, and awareness of what it means to be college and career ready. Most of these programs were initiated at the secondary level, with middle and high school students and staff receiving the attention and focus, although some efforts were made to introduce concepts at the elementary level as well.

At the elementary level, career and college readiness efforts have included:

- College of the week facts during announcements and newscasts
- Career and College interviews of teachers and Watchdog Dads
- Assemblies highlighting local businesses and career opportunities

- College campus visits for all second and third grade students

At the secondary level, these programs included:

- The creation of the Career and College Readiness Committee (CCRC)
- NAVIANCE College Advisory Program delivered in a daily block of time with specialized curriculum
- Community Mentor Program for High School Seniors
- FAFSA support and Financial Aid Parent and Student Workshops
- Financial Literacy development using NAVIANCE
- College Cheat Sheet for navigating college enrollment process
- Collaborative College Application Sessions
- Summer Counseling Support
- Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID)
- High School and Beyond Plan – This plan is a graduation requirement initially written in grade eight.
- Enhancements to create a more robust high school CTE program
- Greater and more equitable access to Advanced Placement courses, College in the High School courses, and Running Start
- A focus on completing Algebra by 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- A CSD Alumni program
- Powerful Teaching and Learning
- Instructional Leadership Team development and training

At the college level, career and college readiness efforts have included:

- Positions at Centralia College dedicated to supporting CSD students in their preparedness, application, and initial enrollment in college.
- Incentives at the high school and college level to engage in academic courses
- Internal Data Management system monitored by reengagement specialist

In addition to a number of programs implemented to increase college and career readiness district-wide, SAI leaders also promoted the development of systems to support college and career readiness, with the intention of standardizing and automating the work involved, helping with sustainability over time. The SAI leadership made a commitment to meeting annually to discuss the progress of the initiative and make strategic decisions for how to move forward. This steady and consistent collaborative practice has driven the vision and mission of the work. The systems implemented included changes to the college registration process at Centralia College, the development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), dedicated CCR staffing at the middle and high school levels, and a consistent and collaborative partnership with Centralia College.

While Phase 2 persists, district and community leaders recognize the need for a third phase of the SAI, which leverages the programs and partnerships already in place. This third phase brings the SAI full circle, refocusing efforts on early education and whole-child development. As students in secondary programs have been served well over the past 10 years, the research confirms that building up that foundation early in a student's academic career will provide a more equitable starting point for all, ultimately improving long-term outcomes.

### **Moving Forward: The next steps of the SAI (Phase 3)**

For any system to be successful, it is necessary to consider and revisit the purpose, vision, goals, and constituents. Answering *who is being served, why do they need support, and what do we hope to achieve with this support* are critical questions for any collaborative effort trying to make change. For SAI leaders, their clear vision has led them to the need for a comprehensive career ready culture. This vision is strongly rooted in local, state, and national research. In Phase 3 of this initiative, SAI leaders know and understand the importance of going back to the foundation, building up the capacity of the community from as early as possible in a child's educational journey. This *Comprehensive Career Ready Culture* is the culmination of 10 years of efforts and partnership. And while career is the end goal, SAI leaders remain committed to helping the students and families in the Chehalis community understand that there are many different pathways to success. Therefore, college readiness should be driven by career interests.

There are several communities across the country focusing on efforts to build equitable and inclusive career ready cultures. As discussed, Promise Programs offer a wide variety of examples. These initiatives are built through collaborations similar to the SAI, taking local and regional assets and needs into consideration as they develop comprehensive programs and systems. Over 10 years ago, Janis Brown, one of the founders of the Kalamazoo Promise, shared that providing comprehensive support to families early on in a child's life was a critical component of postsecondary completion and career success. She proposed prenatal education programs, parenting classes, and opportunities for families and caregivers to be part of decision making throughout their child's academic career.

The Campaign for Free College Tuition offers a list of benefits to communities that engage in promise programs, including the high economic return, the academic and social gains to students and their families, and the improved performance throughout the k-12 years. Results from over 80 Promise Programs across the country demonstrated positive results in varying degrees, with the most successful programs being the ones that consider a "whole child" approach, with early intervention, comprehensive education and support services, mentor programs, and community participation embedded as critical components. (CFCT, 2016).

In Cajon Valley, CA, district and community leaders have been emphasizing the importance of early awareness and interest in career as a focus for their elementary students. Through the implementation of the World of Work (WoW) curriculum, students in kindergarten through high school focus on their futures through a series of lessons designed to expose them to a variety of



career pathways. According to the developer of the RIASEC model, John Holland, “The choice of a vocation is an expression of personality.” By using the RIASEC model (Figure 1) to determine employment personalities, the WoW curriculum not only gives every child a chance to learn about many careers, but also helps every child determine which career fits their personality, strengths, skills, and values. The WoW curriculum combines technology platforms with real-world experiences. While they are still learning to read, students hear what it’s like to work as a baker, a doctor, a policewoman, and many other diverse careers.

|        |  Realistic |  Investigative |  Artistic |  Social |  Enterprising |  Conventional |
|--------|---|---|--|---|--|--|
| Kinder | Police Officer  | Doctor  | Artist   | Elementary School Teacher   | Baker  | Farmer   |
| First  | Firefighter   | Civil Engineer  | Technical Writer   | Registered Nurse  | Florist  | Mail Carrier   |
| Second | Carpenter   | Veterinarian  | Musician   | Fitness Trainer   | Chef   | Software Developer   |
| Third  | Forester  | Zoologist   | Comic Book Writer  | Customer Service Representative   | Real Estate Agent  | Computer Programmer  |
| Fourth | Yoga Instructor   | Geographer  | Marketing Manager  | Park Naturalist   | Entrepreneur   | Paralegal  |

Figure 1

Ed Hidalgo shared, “Together, we are advancing a common language of interests, to help students know themselves, know their options and make more informed choices. The importance of making connections between students’ interests and their college and career decisions cannot be overstated.” Research affirms that students who fit well with their environment in terms of interest are more likely to be successful in college; including earning higher grades, persisting in one’s major, and graduating on time (Allen & Robbins, 2008; Allen & Robbins, 2010; Feldman, Smart, & Ethington, 1999; Nye, Su, Rounds, & Drasgow, 2012; Smart, Feldman, & Ethington, 2006). Hidalgo continued by noting, “Overall, implementing WoW has created a culture where career-related learning, developing students’ self-awareness, and building on student’s interests is fundamental to the process of learning.”

In a 2019 white paper titled Career Readiness for All (2019), experts from the Coalition for Career Development proposed seven overarching principles as part of a solutions framework for increasing career readiness. The authors shared, “The Solutions Framework amounts to a roadmap for transforming the culture of education. We would be moving from a system that has been too content to fully serve the needs of only a fraction of students, to one far more prepared

and dedicated to fulfilling the American promise of equal opportunity for all.” (p.31) The seven principles include:

1. Engage employers as full partners
2. Promote equity to promote upward mobility
3. Collaboration is critical
4. Start early
5. Increase investments
6. Foster flexibility and innovation
7. Develop definitions

Opportunities for the SAI to continue into Phase 3 are highlighted using these seven principals to organize and to guide recommendations.

1. Engage Employers as Full Partners in Career Development: The Coalition suggests that what is needed is a fundamental shift in how companies, as well as industry associations and organizations, view their role in career development. Their future will depend on how well today’s young adults understand the career pathways their industry offers, and to what extent those young adults have meaningful chances to learn about these opportunities and acquire essential skills through internships, apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning. The authors suggest that businesses must make the effort to inform children and young adults through career fairs, job shadowing and mentoring; create meaningful opportunities for work-based learning; and ask some of their best employees to contribute time to this worthy endeavor. Career development cannot be confined to education and government, and should be initiated, co-lead and funded by multiple stakeholder groups.

In the CSD, this work has already begun. The Chehalis Foundation has maintained a strong partnership with the school district and Centralia College. Local business members have participated in the high school mentor program, and students have had the opportunity to engage in career fairs and college campus visits. As the district reinvigorates the commitment to college and career awareness and readiness at the early education level, the Early Childhood Coordinator position should be tasked with building partnerships and relationships with local business and industry leaders. Through these mutual partnerships, business should invest in creating a career pipeline for Lewis County. Leveraging these partnerships will be critical as the SAI enters into Phase 3.

2. Promote Equity to Propel Upward Mobility: The economic argument for college readiness is not just a national or state discussion. In the 2013 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan (CEDSP) for Southwest Washington, policy leaders identified the need to “develop a regional approach to workforce training and re-training in order to address the loss of the experienced workforce due to baby boomer retirements



and the need for economic diversification.” County leaders recognized the efforts made by Centralia College to increase their degree programs and tailor them to the specific needs of the county. Additionally, community leaders referenced the need to improve graduation and college attendance rates of students throughout the region. Career development for all youth provides a powerful opportunity to create a more equitable economy and society. This is not simply a matter of social justice; increasingly, it is an economic imperative, as the demographics of the American workforce are changing “beyond recognition.” Research demonstrates that companies that increase gender and racial diversity tend to outperform those that don’t.

3. **Collaboration is Critical:** Providing high-quality career development is a community-wide responsibility. It cannot be solely delegated to school counselors or college career services offices. Rather, there should be a continual effort to broaden the scope of people and organizations invited to participate in this work. This community should grow to include every teacher and school administrator; employees and executives from business and industry; retirees and other adults who can serve as mentors and coaches; parents and guardians; and critically, the young people who are the intended beneficiaries of this effort (Coalition for Career Development, 2019, p.35). Simply put, any initiative needs people as partners in the work in order to be effective and meaningful.

In the CSD, collaboration has been a hallmark of the SAI. Leaders have met regularly to research, propose, implement, and evaluate their work. Their perspective that including people in decision-making was important in creating shared ownership for the initiative was critical. Leaders also talked about the need for everyone to have some “skin in the game,” referencing the importance of having community members support the initiative by contributing resources. An example of this could be seen in the Foundation’s challenge to the community to raise a portion of the funds needed to continue the initiative into 2020. Foundation leaders offered to donate \$1,000,000 if the community would contribute the remaining \$500,000. In response, the community raised over \$700,000.

As the SAI moves into Phase 3, these collaborations should be expanded upon. In addition to local businesses, families and community members would benefit from having a stronger voice in the development of a career ready community. One consideration is a Parent/Caregiver University. An example is the South Dakota Parent Resource Network in Sturgis, South Dakota, which organizes parenting workshops that appeal to parents of children of all ages. “The philosophy of the ‘Parent University’ programs is that parenting is an ongoing learning process.” (Education World, 2006, educationworld.com)

Similarly, the Parent University in the Everett Public School District promotes collaboration with families as critical to student success. Their website elaborates:

Parent University is an on-demand resource created to help parents and guardians become full partners in their child's education. Parent and family engagement in education positively impacts the academic and social success of children. Our goal is to increase collaboration and involvement between schools, families, and the community; to educate, empower and connect families with resources that build parent and student confidence, enhance character development, and promote life skills to increase the likelihood of family success in academic endeavors. Content includes a selection of pre-recorded videos and how-to documents that can be viewed at any time.

The CSD should consider implementing their own version of a Parent/Caregiver University, specific to the interests and needs of their community. This would work well with the dual-generation strategy the district is looking to implement. To begin, SAI leaders could develop and administer a survey asking community members to share their perspectives, interests, and wonderings about career readiness throughout Chehalis. The development of this survey should consider cultural, socio-economic, and generational differences, and will help SAI leaders to understand what families and communities members understand about career development, and what future hopes they have for their children. This qualitative data is the first step in building programming to support parent/caregiver needs and develop curriculum for the university model.

4. **Start Early:** Career development should not be put off until students graduate from high school. Rather, students and their parents/guardians should be exposed to career development—and the core idea that they have access to economic opportunity—beginning in elementary school. Starting early will not provide an immediate economic payoff. But as these students grow up, they should be substantially better prepared to develop and pursue viable personal career plans.

In a paper titled, *A Case for Comprehensive Youth Services*, author Janice Brown detailed the collective learning of experts connected to the Kalamazoo Promise program. In her case study of one of the first promise programs in the nation, Brown highlighted the challenges of community alignment, or “getting community institutions and organizations to embrace common goals and accountabilities for youth success.” She suggested that a support system should “begin as early as birth” and continue until a student is “job ready.” To do this, Brown proposed that communities collect data on all students, creating an individualized development plan (IDP) that tracks students through development, attending to physical, social, emotional, and cognitive characteristics and needs.

In Kalamazoo, these IDPs are implemented and supported through partnerships with non-profit agencies, foundations, government agencies, and educational systems within local communities. Families receive a case worker, or support person, to visit them at home,

develop trusting relationships, and advocate for their child throughout his/her development. During a phone interview with Dr. Brown, she spoke to the critical need for comprehensive supports, sharing that leaders in Kalamazoo were willing to “do whatever needed to be done” to support their students. She wrote, “The ‘web of support’ that underserved students need is complex, difficult, and often underfunded. But systems that have a framework that support the whole child and their many needs are far more beneficial for them.” Michelle Miller-Adams (2009) wrote that in Kalamazoo, as in many communities across the country, “the barriers faced by many of the district’s students extend well beyond the purview of the schools...[as such], support services ranging from nutrition programs to mental health services to mentoring are crucial.” (p.23).

During this third phase of the SAI, leaders and collaborative partners should consider all of the ways early education can be linked to career awareness and interest. One potential opportunity is incorporating a rubric similar to the RIASIC model used by Cajon Valley. Ed Hidalgo shared, “From research we understand that Dr. John Holland’s RIASEC theory is the most researched of all vocational typologies and used by the U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration to help job seekers match interests to jobs.” There is a body of research that points to “interest fit” predicting employment outcomes, such as job success, income, and job performance. (Nye, Su, Rounds & Drasgow, 2012, 2017; Spokane, Meir, & Catalano, 2000; Van Iddekinge, Roth, Putka, & Lanivich, 2011). The RIASEC framework, therefore, is a powerful tool to help students make connections between who they are and who they want to become.

In addition to early awareness, the CSD should consider how to utilize the new Early Childhood Coordinator position to truly focus efforts on career readiness at the pre-k level throughout the district.

5. Increase Investments of Money and Time: Funding for all key elements of the SAI is critical in considering college and career development as part of the district’s core mission. This includes strategic staffing, technology, counselors, coaches and research and evaluation efforts. If the vision is to elevate career development to a central role in education, it simply requires more substantial resources. In addition to money, this effort will also require more time in schools and on college campuses.

The CSD has already made a significant commitment to dedicating resources to the SAI over the past 10 years. SAI leaders have funded research efforts, hired strategic positions, paid for professional development, made improvements to the STEM wing and CTE departments, and supported the numerous programs and initiatives cited earlier in this report. Moving forward, staffing focused on Early Childhood Education and Community Connection will be important, in order to create a system that is effective, efficient, and sustainable over time.

6. Foster Flexibility and Innovation: Because career development is still adapting to the needs of the modern, global economy, we must encourage innovation and flexibility in designing systems. Encouraging innovation will help speed the emergence of more effective solutions for diverse communities. In the CSD, school leaders have been investigating ways to create innovative and responsive programs, particularly through their STEM and CTE offerings. By aligning practices to the offerings at local colleges, and with the industry needs in Lewis County, the CSD is working towards the creation of a comprehensive employment pipeline. With Phase 3 of the SAI, leaders are looking at ways to begin this employment pipeline earlier, incorporating innovation and creativity earlier in the education pathway. By encouraging young students to begin thinking creatively about their futures, exploring career options, and developing their own interests, the CSD will be a leader in this work.
7. Develop definitions and employ better data to drive quality practices: While most educators now embrace the value of “industry recognized credentials,” there remains a lack of consensus on what constitutes a quality certification or program. Terms such as internships, apprenticeships, and job shadowing often are used interchangeably, yet involve a wide range of experiences for students. There is also a need for generating and improving the data critical to evaluating the impact of career development.

SAI leaders have worked diligently over the past 10 years to clearly define the key terms of the initiative with all stakeholders. As a component of their collaborative process, leaders meet to discuss research and evaluation efforts, and develop key performance indicators and recommendations using common language focused on their consistent vision and mission. This consistency has been a critical component of the longevity and sustainability of the work and has allowed for turnover and growth across the district. This research-based practice has allowed leadership to shift without losing forward momentum.

## Summary and Recommendations

There is a wealth of research on the benefits of incorporating CCR early and often into a child's educational pathway. When children and families are exposed to career possibilities, they can make more informed decisions that impact the trajectory of their child's future. In many ways, being informed about possible careers may drive the desire for, and interest in, college. For Chehalis, a rural community in Lewis County, the economic argument for CCR is clear. There are several opportunities for local students that require degrees, certifications, and endorsements. CSD has made the commitment to research, develop, and implement programs that support this vision. During Phase 1 of the SAI, CSD and community leaders devoted time and resources to understanding the needs of the community. They partnered with The Chehalis Foundation, The BERG Group, and Centralia College to initiate and communicate their vision for becoming a college and career-ready district and planned for the implementation of programs with a focus on supporting all secondary students in the community.

Phase 2 of the SAI involved the development and implementation of college and career ready programs and systems. Throughout this phase, school district and community leaders collaborated on the use of resources, taking time to reflect and evaluate on each component of the initiative. During this phase there were several successes, with local and statewide organizations recognizing and seeking feedback from SAI leaders. Although initiative leaders acknowledged that college and career readiness is a holistic, comprehensive process involving multiple stakeholder groups and sustained over time, they chose to focus Phase 2 primarily on secondary student success. This decision was thoughtfully considered based on real-time needs and concerns. As the initiative has progressed, however, graduation rates have improved, more students are going to some form of postsecondary education or workforce training, and postsecondary completion rates continue to climb.

With their continued commitment to research and development, and the successes of the past 10 years as a solid foundation, SAI leaders are now focusing on Phase 3, which brings the whole-child approach to career interest, college readiness, and career readiness full circle. Throughout this report, evidence of the value of career interest, college readiness, and career development from P-20 has been highlighted. Programmatically, engaging in *Career Interest* from PK-8, *College Readiness* from 6-12, and *Career Development* for postsecondary success from 9-20, allows all students to begin understanding their strengths, interests, and values.

Using the seven principles of the Coalition for Career Development's Solutions Framework as a guide, we have prepared several recommendations rooted in empirical evidence and national best practices. These recommendations are intended to guide the development of Phase 3 of the SAI and are focused on incorporating career interest and college readiness into early childhood education.

**Engage employers as full partners in career development:** As the district reinvigorates the commitment to college and career awareness and readiness at the early education level, the Early Childhood Coordinator position should be tasked with building partnerships and relationships with local business and industry leaders. Through these mutual partnerships, businesses should invest in creating a career pipeline for Lewis County. Using a model similar to that being implemented in Cajon Valley, CA, students should be exposed to a variety of careers, with community and local business members participating in learning opportunities during the school day. The RIASEC (Holland) Model is one example of a tool that can support this purpose.

**Promote Equity to Propel Upward Mobility:** District leaders recognize the importance of using data to identify student populations who have been underserved throughout the community. Many families in the CSD would benefit from the exploration of available careers throughout the region. To do this, SAI leaders should consider expanding their data collection to include *Street Data*, or data that focuses on the human experience in addition to the numbers. In their text, the authors highlight the importance of the idea that “what is measurable may not always be valuable” (p. 12). One suggestion is to bring families into the system of education more fully, allowing their stories to help guide programming and support. This qualitative data adds depth to the work, and builds stronger partnerships with more nuanced understandings of what students want and need.

**Collaboration is Critical:** One hallmark of the SAI has been collaboration. Throughout the past 10 years, SAI leaders have made a sustained commitment to bringing the unique perspectives of each participating organization to the group. While coordination between the college, the school district, The BERC Group, and the Chehalis Foundation have been consistent, we recommend that the SAI consider additional collaboration partners who might be useful in moving their vision forward. Specifically, leaders might consider any organizations that focus on early childhood development, first generation college families, or pre-natal care and parenting support. By learning from and collaborating with these stakeholder groups, SAI leaders can expand their understanding of community needs, while also building the capacity to develop common language around college and career readiness.

**Start Early:** Research supports the value of introducing college and career vocabulary early in a student’s educational pathway. One consideration is to develop common language around workforce readiness that can be incorporated into lessons to help students to identify their strengths, interests, and values as early as kindergarten. Aligning this language with what students are learning in elementary, secondary, and college would create an even stronger pathway of support. When students know themselves early, they have more time to familiarize themselves with college and career pathways that match their strengths, interests, and values.

Students at Centralia College have the opportunity to engage with the Strong Interest Inventory, developed by Myers-Briggs to assess students’ interests and help them to consider potential careers, their educational path, and the world of work. The CSD has an opportunity to embed this



type of career inventory into the vocabulary and curriculum of their early elementary students, with the hope that this language will carry through into their postsecondary selections. This will likely elevate career awareness across students' pathways and set the stage for college and career readiness at the secondary and postsecondary levels.

**Increase Investments of Money and Time:** Any initiative focused on change requires adequate funding, time, human capital, and growth mindset. The SAI has been well led, funded, and visioned for the past 10 years. As part of this sustained commitment, SAI leaders have continued to build capacity for this initiative to grow. School district leaders have championed the vision work, incorporating the SAI into their professional development for staff, sharing stories with the media, and creating awareness and excitement throughout the community. It is recommended that district leaders continue to keep the SAI as a central focus of professional learning. We suggest leaders reinvigorate teachers by building in time for them to meet in PLCs and departments to discuss progress on the work, successes and challenges, and plans for the future. As early education becomes a more focused component of the SAI, we recommend providing early educators with training on Powerful Teaching and Learning as well as the district's chosen Career Interest Inventory, so they are able to confidently lead students in the college and career awareness work.

In addition to providing time to understand, learn, and implement components of the SAI, we recommend that SAI leaders continue to look for grant money to fund the next phase of the work. For example, many of the recommendations in this report may be possible with a recent grant from the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC). By continuing their process of evaluation and reflection, SAI leaders will be able to use research to identify new opportunities to expand upon their CCR pathway.

**Foster Flexibility and Innovation:** As part of the initial phase of the SAI, staff, students, and community members were surveyed to better understand their perspectives on the future of the CSD. Throughout the past decade SAI leaders have returned to this information to guide their work. We recommend that leaders consider surveying community members, students, and district staff again, to better understand their needs and interests at this phase of the work. Specifically, SAI leaders should continue to explore the community's interest and awareness of connections between early childhood education and college and career success.

Once an updated needs assessment has been conducted, SAI leaders can use the information to begin innovating for future implementation. One consideration is the development of a Parent/Caregiver University, specific to the needs of Chehalis families and students. An example is the Parent University in the Everett Public School District, which is an on-demand resource created to help parents and guardians become full partners in their child's education.

In a 2006 Education World article, Lori Laughlin, the state coordinator for the South Dakota Parent Resource Network, suggested several steps to develop a successful Parent University.

Listen to your stakeholders. Acknowledge that Saturday or evening events might work best for your community.

Offer childcare. That can be a huge barrier to many parents. For Chehalis, this could be an opportunity to engage with Centralia College's early education program, making real world connections for college students considering a career in education or childcare.

Provide a meal. Lori shared, "We have had universities at a school, and the school has cooked the meal for us to serve. We pay for this in a variety of ways, sometimes seeking community donations or charging a small fee."

Market the event in a variety of ways, including radio, the newspaper, and letters sent home with students.

In addition to consideration of a Parent/Caregiver University, it is recommended that the CSD offer events throughout the year that bring people together. Welcoming families into school buildings, walking school schedules, sitting in circle time on classroom carpets, and eating in their child's cafeteria helps families to remember what a school day feels like for their kids. This time also allows families to connect with one another, ask questions about school, and get to know school staff in more genuine ways. In some districts, schools invite food trucks and local restaurants to sell their products, engaging even more community members in the school system.

**Develop definitions and employ additional data to drive quality practices:** Finally, the Coalition for Career Development highlights the need for clear definitions and transparent data to ensure that efforts are guided by the actual needs and interests of all stakeholders involved. The SAI has been data driven and focused on common language for the past decade. This common language has been instrumental in supporting the changes needed to see progress and growth. As Phase 3 begins, SAI leaders should consider operationalizing language related to career development for early learners, so these terms can be reinforced throughout their educational pathway.

In addition to creating common language around career development, it is recommended that SAI leaders continue to expand, refine, and reassess data collection to ensure that what they are measuring adds value to the initiative. In addition to the KPIs that have driven this work for a decade, leaders might benefit from incorporating *Street Data*, as mentioned in a prior recommendation, as well as taking information from an updated community needs assessment to identify new data points.



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