Early College & Career Initiatives during a Pandemic

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Early Learning

Early college and career awareness should begin early on in the pipeline, as early as third grade. At PREP-KC, an education non-profit in Kansas City, we believe that postsecondary success begins with exposure to college options and career paths during a time when students are most eager to learn about the world around them. Especially for students of color and have low-income backgrounds, who face the most equity gaps. PREP-KC partners with six urban school districts and five charter schools that primarily have these student demographics and largest equity gaps. We seek to ensure that every student has access to resources and opportunities to pursue their pathway after high school graduation.

Before COVID-19, we organized offsite experiences for students to learn about local companies and colleges. For example, we organized college campus visits for 4th and 5th grade students. We strategized with our college partners on best ways to help elementary students understand the purpose of college and how to have an engaging campus visit. We organized workplace visits with local industry partners. We work with our industry partners to plan a fun and educational agenda for the visit, in addition to prepping our teachers and students for the visit to ensure it is meaningful. We do not see these experiences as “one time” experiences, but rather experiences that are incorporated into the classroom curriculum. Our students, who may not have the resources to travel outside of their schools or homes, can see what a workplace or college is like and learn more about different career paths. Sometimes bus transportation can be a challenge for our schools, so we organize in-school career events to ensure that students are able to connect with professionals and learn how to network. We want students to be exposed to high-paying careers and talk with professionals that they can identify with. Ultimately, we want students to realize that school is relevant to their futures at an early age.

Now with the pandemic, we are supporting our schools with live virtual college and career opportunities. This really gives students an opportunity for a “brain break” and connection to the outside world. Thankfully, the relationships we have with college and career partners were utilized to offer engaging virtual campus visits and workplace visits. During the pandemic, it is critical that students still have these conversations knowing that COVID-19 is causing gaps in learning. We are thankful for our community for coming together to support these conversations and engage with students. Our students are rich with potential and diverse perspectives if given the opportunity.

Please visit <http://www.prepkc.org> to learn more about PREP-KC and how we are supporting students during this time.