

Community Partnerships & Career Connections

Involving local entrepreneurs, small business owners, Career Technical Education (CTE) programs, and community mentors helps students build authentic connections between classroom learning and the real world.

Partnerships provide opportunities for students to:

- See learning in action
- Interact with real-world problem-solvers and innovators
- Explore future career pathways
- Build confidence communicating with professionals
- Receive authentic feedback and mentorship
- Understand how ideas can positively impact communities

Community involvement also strengthens school-community relationships and increases awareness and support for education initiatives.

Benefits of Community Partnerships

Community involvement helps:

- Increase student engagement and excitement
- Strengthen real-world relevance
- Build career awareness early
- Encourage authentic communication experiences
- Expand mentorship opportunities
- Strengthen school-community relationships
- Increase visibility of education
- Support future-ready skill development

Students often become more motivated when they know their ideas will be shared with authentic audiences beyond the classroom.

Guidance for Bringing in Community Partners

Many educators are interested in involving community members in learning but may feel unsure where to begin or worry that partnerships need to be formal or time-intensive. Community partnerships can start small and still create meaningful learning experiences for students. A classroom visit, short interview, virtual conversation, feedback session, or local business example can help students connect concepts to real people, careers, and community needs. Partners may include small business owners, nonprofit leaders, local government representatives, tradespeople, school alumni, caregivers, or others who solve problems and create value in the community. Educators can begin by identifying one clear purpose for partner involvement, such as sharing a career story, describing a local

challenge, giving feedback on student ideas, or serving as an audience for student presentations.

Best Practices for Community Outreach

Start Small

Begin with:

- Family-owned businesses
- School partners
- Classroom volunteers
- Parent organizations
- Chamber of Commerce contacts
- Local makers or artisans
- Community organizations

Even one guest speaker or showcase visitor can make a difference.

Clearly Explain the Program Purpose

When reaching out to community and industry partners, clearly communicate that the program is designed to help students develop **future-ready skills and mindsets** that can be applied across careers, education, and everyday life. Emphasize areas such as:

- Creativity
- Problem-solving
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Innovation
- Critical thinking
- Confidence-building
- Adaptability
- Initiative
- Decision-making

Clarify that the program provides students with **authentic, hands-on learning experiences** that help them apply these skills to real-world challenges and opportunities. The goal is to prepare students to think critically, work effectively with others, communicate their ideas, and approach challenges with confidence and creativity—not to provide formal instruction in a specific industry or career field.

Messaging for Community & Industry Partners

Key Message: Community partnerships help students connect classroom learning to real-world innovation, leadership, and career opportunities.

Suggested Talking Points:

- Students benefit from authentic learning experiences.
- Community involvement increases student engagement and confidence.
- Partnerships help students explore future pathways and careers.
- Students gain valuable communication and problem-solving experiences.
- Mentorship opportunities strengthen school-community connections.

Provide Specific Ways to Help

Community partners are more likely to participate when expectations are clear and manageable. Examples can include:

- Visit for 20–30 minutes
- Participate in a Q&A session
- Provide prototype feedback
- Attend a showcase
- Share career experiences
- Demonstrate tools or materials
- Mentor a student team

Keep Student Interaction Age-Appropriate

Encourage partners to:

- Use simple language
- Share stories and examples
- Focus on creativity and problem-solving
- Encourage student questions
- Keep presentations interactive and engaging

Students respond best to hands-on, visual, and story-based interactions.

Celebrate & Acknowledge Community Partners

Recognize community involvement through:

- Students thank-you letters
- Showcase recognition
- Social media spotlights
- School newsletters
- Certificates of appreciation

Building positive relationships increases future participation opportunities.



County-Level Partnership Suggestions

Partnership opportunities will vary by district and community, but schools are encouraged to explore relationships with:

- Local small businesses
- Chambers of Commerce
- Economic development organizations
- Libraries
- Community colleges
- CTE centers
- Maker spaces
- Agriculture programs
- Health organizations
- Nonprofit organizations
- Local government agencies
- Parent and alumni networks

Rural communities may also benefit from highlighting:

- Family businesses
- Trades and skilled labor
- Agriculture and farming innovation
- Community problem-solving initiatives
- Local artisans and makers

