

Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, December, 2021

Preparing students for success in whatever path they choose after graduation is one of our top priorities within the Plainville Community Schools. As part of this work, we are combining career education with our academic instruction so students are more aware of the connections between academic coursework and future job responsibilities and expectations. In order to improve student engagement, it is critical to provide students with a feeling of relevance in their coursework. Exposing students to aspects of careers, including what high school and postsecondary coursework can best prepare them for that career, will allow our students to better connect their educational experiences to real world application. This, in turn, allows students to select coursework and experiences that best match their motivations, aspirations and aptitudes.

When most think about career education, we tend to think about middle and high school courses such as drafting, woodworking, cooking, auto mechanics and other hands-on experiences. But those experiences are often viewed separately from content-specific courses such as English, Algebra, Biology and U.S. History, to name a few. Our goal in Plainville is to make more explicit connections between career-focused courses and content area coursework so students will develop skills and knowledge that will help them succeed in the area or areas of interest they want to pursue after graduation. To achieve this goal, we are working to establish college and career pathways for students. The foundation of this focus will begin in elementary school, and progress throughout a student's educational continuum in Plainville, building upon each successive experience. The college and career

pathways work will begin with more general exposure to various careers and work skills in elementary school, build toward exploration of colleges and careers aligned to student interest in middle school, and expand to direct experiences such as college visits and job shadowing at the high school level.

Along this continuum of learning, student portfolios will be developed that will assist school staff with providing opportunities that align with each student's college and career goals. Students will be able to collect and upload various experiences that will help build their digital college and career profiles and resumes. Ultimately, this portfolio will allow us to better meet each student's unique needs and interests by aligning their skills and interests with their learning experiences, creating a more connected and engaging learning environment for them. This alignment of coursework and experiences to college and career interests has the potential to afford students the following opportunities: college-level course completion through our numerous college and university partnerships, accrual of micro-credentials and certifications as they master specific skills and concepts, internships and field work experiences through our numerous community business partners, and in some cases becoming fast-tracked into a post-secondary certification program.

As the job market continues to change and becomes less predictable, we in turn need to adapt as a school system in order to prepare our students for the jobs and careers of tomorrow. We realize students won't always have a firm grasp on what they want to do for the rest of their lives before they graduate, but the more we can do to embed the necessary postsecondary skills and experiences that match their interests, the better prepared those students will be. Beginning in elementary

school, our goal is to ignite each student's passion by keying in on where their interests lie, and matching the academic and career experiences that align with those interests. Through the development and implementation of college and career pathways, we will strive to best prepare all our students for success in life beyond the Plainville Community Schools.