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EDUCATION

# 5 College and Career Readiness Strategies

Preparing students for life beyond graduation presents a unique set of challenges for districts. The evolving landscape of higher education, the job market, and the skills required for success demand that schools provide more than just academic knowledge. Districts must balance teaching core subjects while also equipping students with the tools to navigate their career paths and college opportunities. As a result, students often graduate without fully understanding how to explore career options, manage their time, or build the networks they need to succeed.

These strategies bridge that gap. They teach students about exploring career clusters, building a professional network, and mastering the art of balancing commitments—crucial skills for students preparing for life after high school. These skills help students make informed decisions about their futures and build confidence as they transition into college or the workforce.

**How to use these guides:**

- **District Leaders:** Share these resources with your school teams. Consider ways to introduce and implement college and career readiness initiatives districtwide.

- **School Leaders:** Bring these strategies to PLCs and staff meetings. Share with staff and develop ideas to incorporate these lessons into the classroom.

- **Classroom Teachers and Support Staff:** Try these activities in class, small group, or individual settings to support students' college and career readiness.

## About Panorama Playbook:


Screenshot
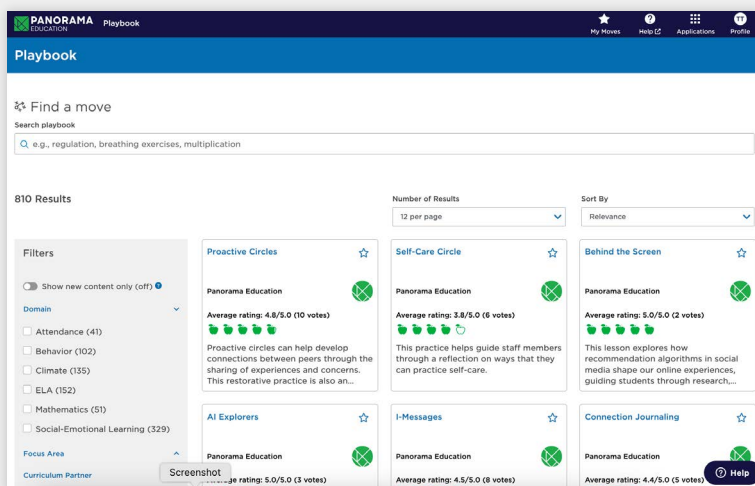
We've selected the interventions in this toolkit from Playbook, Panorama's library of research-backed and evidence-based strategies for K-12 educators. Our districts and school partners have full access to nearly 900 strategies, instructional resources, and MTSS interventions across life skills, academics, attendance, and behavior.

In addition to facilitation guides like those in this toolkit, Playbook users get in-depth implementation tips and differentiation ideas. Panorama works with many evidence-based support programs to extend free access to their interventions, lesson plans, and activities to our partner districts and schools.

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**Focus Area:** College and Career Readiness
**MTSS Tier(s):** Tier 1 • **Developmental Stage:** High School

## About This Strategy:

This lesson enables students to explore various career clusters and devise a personal Program of Study that aligns with their interests and future aspirations.

## Instructions:

**Introduction to Career Clusters:**
- Start by explaining what career clusters are, emphasizing how they group careers that share common skills, interests, and abilities. Use the analogy of a library organizing books into genres to help students understand how careers are grouped into clusters.
- Think of career clusters like the sections of a bookstore. Each section, whether science fiction, mystery, or history, groups books by their similarities. Similarly, career clusters group jobs by what they have in common, helping you navigate the vast world of careers to find ones that truly fit your passions and skills. Today, we'll explore these 'sections' of careers and start sketching an educational roadmap leading to your future dream job.

**Exploration and Discussion:**
- Facilitate a discussion where students reflect on their interests and how these might correlate with different career clusters.
- Guide them to consider how their current hobbies or subjects they enjoy could translate into career paths.

**Mapping Out a Program of Study:**
- Engage students in a brainstorming activity to outline what their ideal high school and post-secondary education might look like if tailored to a specific career cluster.
- Students should think about what subjects they need to focus on and what extracurricular activities might support their career goals.

**Group Activity - Role Play:**
- In small groups, have students role-play advising sessions where they help each other refine their Programs of Study based on their discussed interests and goals. This activity will encourage peer feedback and collaborative thinking.

**Reflection and Wrap-up:**
- Conclude the lesson with a reflection activity where students share how their envisioned Program of Study might help them achieve their career goals and how they might start taking steps towards this plan in their current educational journey.

**Focus Area:** College and Career Readiness, Communication
**MTSS Tier(s):** Tier 1 • **Developmental Stage:** High School

## About This Strategy:
This lesson introduces high school students to networking and informational interviews as tools for exploring various career paths and building professional relationships.

## Instructions:

**Explaining Key Concepts (10 minutes)**
- *Networking:* Discuss how networking is the act of engaging with professionals to exchange information, seek advice, and create relationships beneficial for career development.

**Informational Interviews:** Explain that informational interviews are meetings where you learn about the day-to-day roles of professionals in fields of interest. They differ from job interviews because the goal is to gather information, not to secure a job offer.

**Discussion: How to Conduct an Informational Interview (15 minutes)**
- *Finding Professionals:* Briefly discuss how to identify professionals in various fields, suggesting tools like LinkedIn, company websites, or community networks.
- *Crafting Questions:* Share examples of open-ended questions that can help glean detailed insights, such as, "What does a typical day look like in your role?" or "What do you find most rewarding about your career?"
- *Professional Etiquette:* Highlight the importance of being respectful, punctual, and prepared with specific questions during the informational interview.

**Role-Play Activity (15 minutes)**
- Have students pair up to practice conducting a mock informational interview. One student plays the role of a professional in a career field of interest, and the other is the interviewer.
  - Emphasize the importance of listening carefully and showing genuine interest in the responses.
  - Encourage students to ask follow-up questions based on the interviewee's answers to demonstrate engagement and deeper understanding.

**Wrap-Up and Reflection (5 minutes)**
- Ask students to share one new thing they learned from their partner about a career path.
- Conclude by reinforcing how networking and informational interviews can provide valuable insights and aid in making informed career decisions.

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**Focus Area:** College and Career Readiness, Communication
**MTSS Tier(s):** Tier 1 • **Developmental Stage:** High School

## About This Strategy:

This interactive and insightful activity helps students understand the importance of professional references in the job application process.

## Preparation:

- *Materials Needed:* Paper, writing utensils, access to the internet for researching examples of professional references (if available).
- *Suggested Pre-Activity:* Share examples of good and bad professional references from various sources to contextualize the importance of choosing appropriate references.

## Instructions:

**(1) Introduction to Professional Networking (5 minutes):**
- Introduce the concept of professional references, using the analogy of a social network: Think of professional references like your social network's VIP list—people who can vouch for you, much like friends who endorse your character.

**(2) Understanding Professional References (10 minutes):**
- Discuss online review sites like Yelp. Draw parallels between these reviews and professional references, highlighting how both influence perceptions.
- Guide students to identify various categories (music, food, sports, fashion, or technology) and write a positive and a negative referral for a product or service in their chosen category. Emphasize the importance of detailed, honest reviews.

**(3) Building Your Professional Reference List (10 minutes):**
- Discuss the criteria for choosing professional references, emphasizing the need for professionalism, work ethic, and interpersonal communication skills.
- Have students list potential references, including a brief description of their relationship and the length of time they've known each reference.

**(4) Role Play and Discussion (5 minutes):**
- Conduct a role-play activity where students practice asking someone to be a professional reference, emphasizing communication skills and professionalism.

# 4. Career Vision Board

**Focus Area:** College and Career Readiness, Communication
**MTSS Tier(s):** Tier 1 • **Developmental Stage:** High School

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## About This Strategy:
This creative and interactive activity encourages students to visualize and map out their future career and educational goals.

## Preparation:
- *Materials Needed:* Magazines, scissors, glue sticks, poster boards, markers, and access to a printer and the internet for students who wish to print images or text from online sources.
- Click here to access the Vision Board template worksheet (Google Doc | PDF).

## Instructions:
**(1) Introduction to Career Vision Boards (10 minutes)**
- Briefly introduce the concept of a vision board, emphasizing its use as a tool for goal setting and inspiration.
- Show examples of vision boards focusing on careers and education.
- Educator Script: "Today, we're going to create our own Career Vision Boards. These boards are like a map of your dreams and goals. They will help you visualize where you want to go in your career and the steps needed to get there."

**(2) Brainstorming Session (10 minutes)**
- Guide students to brainstorm about their career interests, skills they want to develop, educational goals, and sources of inspiration.
- Encourage them to write down their ideas in the 'Career Vision Board Template.'
- Educator Script: "Let's start by brainstorming. Think about your dream, the skills you need to excel in it, and how you plan to get there. Don't limit your imagination!"

**(3) Creating the Vision Boards (20 minutes)**
- Distribute the vision board worksheet to students. Instruct them to reflect on each section and fill out the table with their thoughts and plans.
- Students can use the materials provided to create their vision boards, incorporating images, words, and drawings. They can include sections from the template on their boards.
- Educator Script: "Now, let's bring your vision to life on your boards. Use the pictures, words, and your creativity to make a board that inspires you."

**(4) Gallery Walk and Sharing (15 minutes)**
- Organize a gallery walk where students display their boards and walk around to view their peers' work.
- Encourage students to discuss their boards and the aspirations depicted.
- Educator Script: "Let's showcase our vision boards. Walk around, observe, and discuss. What inspired you? What did you learn about your peers' aspirations?"

**(5) Reflection and Goal-Setting (10 minutes)**
- Students reflect on their vision boards and set at least one short-term and one long-term goal. Encourage them to share their goals with the class or in small groups.
- Educator Script: "Reflect on your vision board. What are one short-term and one long-term goal you can set for yourself? Let's share these goals and support each other in achieving them."

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**Focus Area:** College and Career Readiness, Self-Management
**MTSS Tier(s):** Tier 1, Tier 2 • **Developmental Stage:** Middle School, High School

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## About This Strategy:
As children get older, they encounter increasingly complex academic, social, athletic, and familial demands on their time, which can be difficult to navigate. This strategy helps students learn how to prioritize and balance their commitments.

## Preparation:
- Queue this TEDTalk
- Download and distribute copies of the Time Management Activity for Students

## Instructions:
**(1) Begin by introducing the lesson to students.**
- Say: "Today, we will reflect upon how we spend the time available to us. We will identify some strategies to maximize time for things that are important for us to be caring, gratified, and engaged individuals."

**(2) Ask students to complete the time management worksheet individually. As they reflect on and record how they use their time, students should consider the following:**
- How do you spend each hour of the day? How would you like to spend a typical day? Why/how are these answers different? How do you spend your hours overall during the week? How would you like to spend a typical week? Why/how are these answers different?
- What are your top three priorities on a day-to-day basis? What should they be?
- How much time do you spend "giving back" to others (including your family, school, or community)? Do you think you spend too much time caring for others? Do you feel like you spend the right amount of time? If you don't feel like you spend enough time caring for others, how might you spend more time?
- When/how do you practice self-care? Is this enough time? Too little? Too much?
- If you could do anything with your time, what would it be?

**(3) Students will watch a TEDTalk by Laura Vanderkam titled, "How to Gain Control of Your Free Time." While watching the video, encourage the class to take note of strategies they hear Laura Vanderkam list:**
- Write a family holiday letter to identify your top priorities
- Make a three-category priority list and include it in your weekly planner before you include other tasks and appointments
- Keep a time diary
- Maximize "in-between" moments by putting down your phone and instead doing what matters most to you

**(4) Ask these reflection questions after the video:**
- What can you do to plan your time so that it reflects your most important priorities, and so you feel good about the way you spend it?
- What might be difficult in doing so?
- Who can support you in managing your time well?

**(5) Students will discuss the benefits and challenges of using each strategy in small groups. They will work together to identify three strategies they will use to align their time with their priorities. Ask students to share strategies they've identified with the class during their individual or group work.**

**(6) Ask students to create a time log for their coming week. At the end of the week, compare the actual time log with the Time Management Activity they completed at the beginning of this lesson. Identify similarities and differences between the actual log and their estimates. Have a discussion focused on the following questions:**
- What caused the differences between the time you anticipated/estimated spending on each activity and the time you actually spent on each activity?
- How does it make you feel when you don't do what you set out to do? Are there times when it feels ok? Times when you feel badly? What makes the difference?
- How can you strategize to make better use of your time? How can you strategize to ensure you take care of others and yourself? How does good time management impact our ability to help others and ourselves?
- What aspects of how you currently spend your time are you most proud of? Least proud of? How much time do you currently spend taking care of yourself? Others? Is this the "right" amount of time?

# About Panorama Education

Founded in 2012, Panorama Education is at the forefront of edtech, offering cutting-edge software to help schools and districts understand and address the needs of students, families, and staff. 15 million students in 25,000 schools across 2,000 districts rely on Panorama for a holistic view of academics, attendance, behavior, graduation pathways, and life skills. With these insights, you'll drive strategic progress and boost learning outcomes by ensuring the right supports reach the right students at the right time.
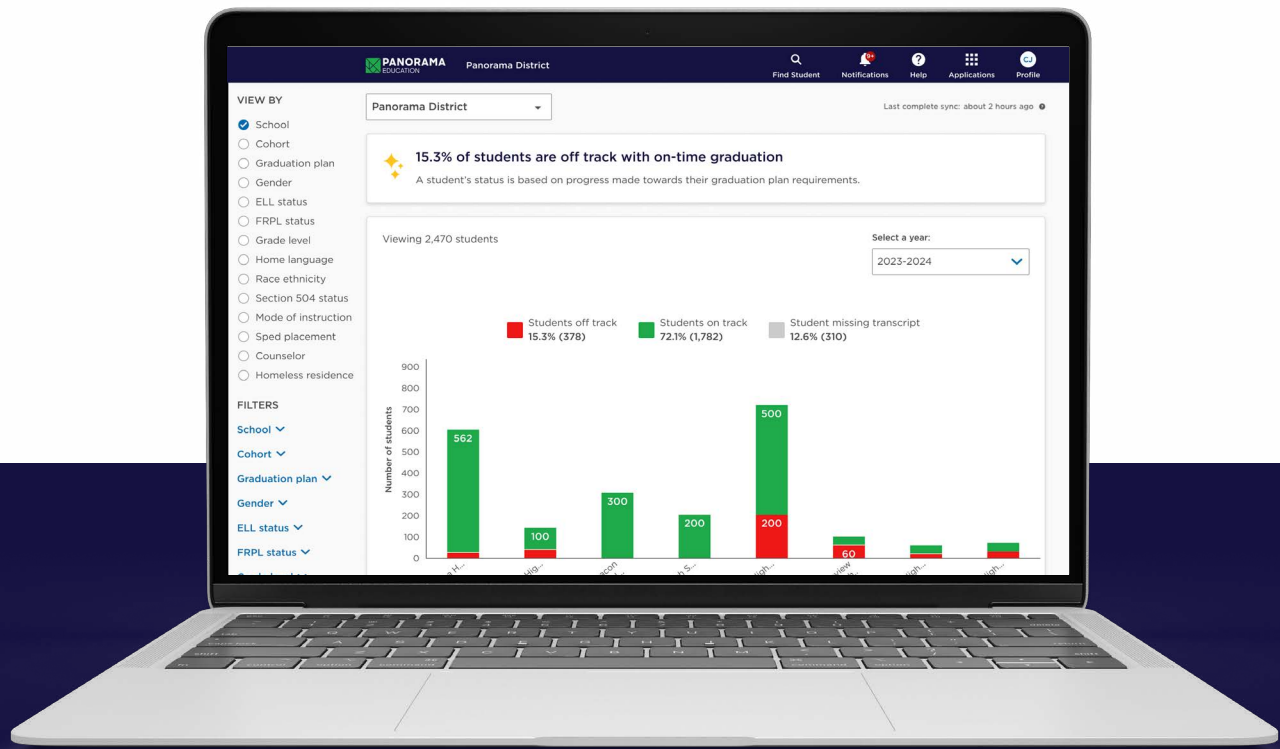


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