

Creating a Career Development Program for Implementation in Minneapolis Public High  
Schools

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Humphrey School of Public Affairs  
May 2016



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May 3, 2016

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of our partnership with AchieveMpls was to develop an evidence-based career development program for students who do not want or need a four-year degree in order to pursue the career of their choice. A program such as this is necessary in order to produce middle-skill workers in Minnesota and address the shortcomings of the College for All movement. AchieveMpls was best-suited to provide this service because of their expertise in education, and motivated donor who is skeptical of the College for All approach. In order to develop this program, we answered the following central research questions: 1) What best practices are emerging around the country in providing career advising, career exposure, internships, and other assistance to students in high school, especially those not likely to pursue a four-year degree; 2) What communities have shown particular success in building career pathways through a partnership between K-12, postsecondary institutions, and employers; 3) What institutional barriers exist at a district, state, or federal level that might impact stronger career advising strategies in our schools; and 4) What models for service delivery show the most promise?

Answering these questions required three phases of research: 1) a survey of career development programs; 2) a literature review on career development for high school students; and 3) synthesizing recommendations from the research conducted in the aforementioned phases. Our findings suggest that AchieveMpls combine aspects of individual and workforce development programs in order to empower students while highlighting career opportunities available after high school graduation. In doing so, AchieveMpls will increase awareness of the

post-secondary options that do not include a four-year degree while strengthening their own career development program.

## INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT SETTING

AchieveMpls has long been part of the College For All movement, encouraging and equipping all students, especially those who are part of groups with historically lower levels of college degrees, to earn a four-year degree. Although the equity aspects of College For All are still imperative, some are raising questions about the assumption that everyone needs to attend and graduate from college (Carey, 2011). Many students have attended college and ended up with large amounts of debt and no diploma, often putting them in a worse position than if they had never enrolled in college (Boesel, et al. 1999). Others have completed a degree and found a job that did not require that credential, which has left them feeling like they “wasted” their time and money (Osterman, 2008). Furthermore, recent research has shown that “middle-skill” jobs (those that do not require a Bachelor’s Degree but do require a credential beyond a high-school diploma) will continue to exist and will often pay as well as some jobs reserved for college graduates (Pathways to Prosperity, 2011). According to a 2014 report from the National Skills Coalition, 49 percent of job openings in Minnesota between 2010 and 2020 will be middle-skill (“Minnesota’s Forgotten Middle,” 2014). More importantly, that same report finds that while there are more high-skill workers in Minnesota than there are high-skill jobs, there are fewer middle-skill workers than there are middle-skill jobs in Minnesota (“Minnesota’s Forgotten Middle,” 2014).

The Harvard Graduate School of Education published a landmark report in 2011 entitled “Pathways to Prosperity.” In it, the authors discuss a multitude of reasons why the United States’ current system of education has failed an inordinate amount of students. Interestingly, perhaps the most consequential finding is that College For All has not necessarily been a failure, in spite

of negative indicators like unemployment, particularly among youth. Instead, the report found that College For All requires a shift in thinking; it should not mean that all students necessarily require a Bachelor's degree to be successful, but rather than other paths to success are equally viable (Symonds et al, 2011). According to the report, 66% of current jobs do not require a B.A. level of education (Symonds et al, 2011). Only approximately a third of current jobs in the economy require a B.A. or higher, even in an age in which demand for highly-skilled jobs is on the rise. Furthermore, there is little doubt that the United States faces a severe worker shortage from a retiring generation, with some predicting a shortfall of as many as five million workers by the year 2020 (Bidwell, 2013).

Complicating the transition from College For All to alternative models even further is the high amount of support among education-based organizations in Minnesota for the current approach. At a micro level, several influential organizations in Minnesota believe that providing all students with the opportunity to earn a four-year degree will significantly help close the achievement gap. For example, College Possible seeks to encourage and guide young adults, particularly those from low-income families, through the college admission process and during their collegiate studies (About, 2016). Breakthrough Twin Cities has a similar theory of change, believing strongly in promoting and aiding students for traditional college success (Mission, 2016). Similarly, Governor Dayton's most recent budget proposal primarily addresses tuition costs of higher education, without any specific money proposed for career training or vocational schools (Investing, 2015).

Given concerns with the College For All approach, the growing demand for middle-skill workers, and the current lack of middle-skill workers, one of AchieveMpls' donors approached

the organization with a proposal to fund a program that encourages more high-school students to consider post-secondary options other than four-year college. The donor believes a change is needed in the the culture of high schools where emphasis is placed on four-year college attendance, and the needs of students who do not seek such a post-secondary education are largely unmet.

AchieveMpls partners very closely with the Minneapolis Public School District and has College and Career Readiness Centers in every Minneapolis public high school. While these centers are exceptionally skilled in advising high-school students about how to get accepted to college, they have far less expertise in post-high-school career paths other than those that include four-year colleges. According to AchieveMpls leaders, many of the Centers' staff members feel under-prepared to help students that do not want to apply to college.

It is within this context -- the shortcomings of College For All, the need for middle-skill workers in Minnesota, the existence of a motivated donor who is skeptical of the culture that College For All creates, and Achieve's current expertise -- that our team approached our research into what constitutes a successful career development program. The central research questions guiding our project were as follows: 1)What are best practices emerging around the country in providing career advising, career exposure, internships, and other assistance to students in high school, especially those not likely to pursue a four-year degree?; 2) What communities have shown particular success in building career pathways through a partnership between K-12, postsecondary institutions, and employers?; 3) What institutional barriers exist at a district, state, or federal level that might impact stronger career advising strategies in our schools; and 4) What models for service delivery show the most promise?

After briefly summarizing our methodology for addressing these questions, we focus in the following sections on two philosophies of career advising programs, identify specific program components and national exemplars and discuss sustainable funding opportunities. The next section presents our recommendations for the kind of program AchieveMpls should develop, and a concluding section summarizes the major points from this report.

## METHODOLOGY

The focus of this project on successful practices and partnerships for a high school career development program was set through several in-person meetings with AchieveMpls staff. The project was then divided into three phases. Phase I was a survey of career development programs. Phase II was a literature review of academic and foundational research on career development for high school students. Phase III focused on synthesizing recommendations from the research gathered in phases I and II.

Phase I had two parts. In the first part, our team collected information about various career development programs across the country. We looked at lists of successful programs published by the U.S. Department of Education and programs cited in “Pathways to Prosperity,” a landmark paper that discusses the failure of the current education system in preparing youth for adulthood. We also searched for programs using internet search engines. Per request of the client, we did not limit our search to a particular structure or geographic area.

In the second part, we conducted a literature review of research in high school career counseling. We focused our search on studies that provided evidence of success for particular



programmatic or management practices. These studies informed our analysis of the program information we collected.

In Phase II, we analyzed the information we had collected through a program design lens, which was guided by the client's goals and context. Each program we had identified was coded depending on its relationship to several categories. These categories included: organizational structure (was the program offered through a government agency, a nonprofit, or a for-profit entity?), population served, activities offered, and information about the program's mission, goals, values, and outcomes. At the same time, we coded the academic literature with for a variety of themes: models, partnerships, successful program activities, successful management structures, and institutional barriers to successful programs. After the coding was completed, we used the codes to identify patterns and trends within each data stream and across the streams.

Finally, in phase III, we synthesized our analysis into some recommendations for the client. These recommendations are rooted in AchieveMpls' context: their organizational history, their mission, their partnerships, and the demographics of Minneapolis. They take the academic literature as a starting point, but also take into account the practices that are actually used by career development programs "on the ground," as a proxy for implementability.

## TWO APPROACHES TO CAREER ADVISING PROGRAMS

There is significant variation among career development programs in terms of sponsoring organization, activities offered, and populations served. In our preliminary attempt to make sense of this variety, we focused on activities that comprise typical career development programs. A broad survey of career development programs from around the country yielded

eight activity types: Career Advising, Career Exploration, Hard Skills Training, Soft Skills Training, Internships, Mentoring, Resume Workshops and Interview Training, and Student Professional Organizations. After the team's further analysis, a pattern emerged in the way that these activities were combined within different programs, creating clusters of program components. Hard skills training, internships, workplace mentoring, professional organizations, and advising for the job search form one cluster. Soft skills training, school- or community-based mentoring, career exploration, internships, and advising for personal satisfaction make up the other cluster.

Sorting career development programs based on the activity cluster with which they were more closely aligned indicated a relationship between the activities programs offer and the mission, goals, and values of the organizations that sponsor and/or operate these programs. For example, programs that focus on career exploration and personal advising are more likely to identify planning, decision-making, and participants' personal fulfillment as program outcomes, such as the Comprehensive Career Guidance Program offered across 15 Michigan School Districts, the Career Days program offered by Mentoring USA, and the program activities offered through Reef House After School Teen Centers, part of the Future Foundation in Atlanta, GA (Harkin, 2003; "Career Readiness", 2014; "Program Details", 2013). Meanwhile, programs that focus on hard skills and navigating the job search are more likely to identify job preparedness and financial stability as program outcomes, such as the National Academies Foundation and Project Lead the Way (Symonds et al., 2011).

Each activity cluster is reflective of a different understanding of the nature of successful adulthood, the purpose of K-12 education, and the shortcomings of the College for All

movement. These relationships will be described in more detail in later sections; in brief, depending on a program's activities and the philosophies it expresses either directly, through mission statements and program objectives, or indirectly, through the outcomes its leaders choose to measure or the narratives they present in their annual reports or program descriptions, that program can be categorized as taking one of two approaches: the Personal Development Approach or the Workforce Development Approach (Appendix A and B).

The distinction between a personal development v. workforce development approach is important for more than just facilitating academic analysis. The consistency within the field regarding the relationship between a program's philosophy and the selection of activities that that program offers suggests that certain activities are understood by practitioners to be more successful at preparing students for particular conceptions of adulthood than others. This suggests further that, when an opportunity arises for an organization to design a career development program, it is important for the organization to consider its career development philosophy. Considering what the needs of youth transitioning to adulthood are and which of those needs are being met in the current environment will allow the organization to select activities that have the optimal chances of success within their particular context in both the short- and the long-term.

Below we more fully describe each approach, specific program components, and ways that each can develop sustainable resources. For example, irrespective of their underlying philosophy, career development programs for high school students bridge the divide between the economic development policy field and the education policy field. As such, it is important to consider the interconnected web of organizations that exist in a career development program's

context. Regardless of whether a program takes a Personal Development Approach or a Workforce Development Approach, career development programs influence, resource, and are influenced and resourced by organizations in the private sector and in the public education sphere, including schools, businesses, economic agencies, public education agencies, and nonprofits with various missions. While the philosophy of a given program will almost certainly have an effect on which organizations that program chooses to form partnerships with, a successful program will recognize its position in both policy fields so as to maximize both its influence and its available resources.

### **Personal Development Approach**

One approach to career development programs is the Personal Development Approach. Programs that take this approach share a common philosophy around the purpose of K-12 education and the deficits present in the current system for preparing students for post-secondary life. Specifically, these programs espouse a belief that the goal of public education should be to prepare students to be successful adults in all areas of their life: in work, in the civic sphere, and in the social sphere. Successful adults are those individuals who have a thorough understanding of their own identity—their strengths, weaknesses, values, and needs—and are able to make the best choices for themselves based on their identity and their circumstances (Creed, 2007; Stringer et al., 2012; Symonds et al., 2011; “Career Guidance and Counseling Programs”, 2014; Whiston, 2010). Based on this understanding of school and of adulthood, the failings of the College for All model are characterized as discounting students’ individuality and functionally limiting their choices for post-secondary life to the four-year college path. According to

Pathways for Prosperity, the College for All approach pushed students into programs that are poor fits, either emotionally, intellectually, or financially, and from which it is extremely difficult to recover (Symonds et al., 2011). Further, it limits the opportunities young people have to develop the skills necessary for self-efficacy—the cornerstone of successful adulthood—during the optimal developmental period (Bandura, 1999; Super, 1990).

To address these issues, career programs that take a Personal Development approach seek to maximize all students' time in high school, whether college-bound or not, to develop an understanding of self and a thorough awareness of skills and resources for making the best post-secondary decisions for themselves as individuals. Our analysis of programs that express a Personal Development philosophy suggests that they generally offer one or more of the following activities:

- Skills training in leadership, teamwork, communication, or financial literacy;
- Career exploration opportunities, such as tours of businesses and panels of guest speakers;
- Mentoring relationships that emphasize social and emotional development;
- Advising sessions that help students identify their interests, strengths, needs, weaknesses, opportunities, etc.;
- Internships that are focused more on letting students “try something out” rather than providing entry-level experience in a field

*Exemplar Programs.* Two exemplary Personal Development career programs are with the Van Buren Independent School District and Mentoring USA. These programs were identified on the basis of three criteria. First, they operate on large scale, universally accessible to students within their geographic service area. Second, they offer multiple complementary activities and they offer these activities over time. This system, rather than one that offers one service or one-time program participation, provides stronger and more lasting outcomes (Creed

et al., 2007; Whiston, 2010). Finally, both these programs have made strategic use of partnerships in order to implement their programs.

Van Buren Intermediate School District in Lawrence, MI offers the Comprehensive Career Guidance Program to all public high school students in 15 school districts, emphasizing “self-awareness, option awareness, decision-making, planning, and placement.” Students complete a number of guided and self-directed career exploration activities, culminating in an Employability Development Plan, which articulates the link between student interests and potential careers, and outlines the steps students should take to achieve their career goals. The geographic breadth of the program, as well as the comprehensive nature of the program offerings is made possible by partnerships among school districts, employers, college admissions representatives, and community members (Harkin, 2003).

Mentoring USA offers Career Days to any student who is registered as a participant in one of Mentoring USA’s chapters across the country. Career Days offers job-shadowing experiences for youth and their mentors that combine career exploration with surveys on values, skills, and interests. The program “reinforces the importance of academic success and making good choices” and supports youth to create a roadmap for their future career goals. This program is made possible through several employer partners and local community organizations (“Career Readiness”, 2014).

Specific tools are also available for Personal Development-oriented programs. For example, the Career Path Binder program and the *My Career Narrative* tool are used in multiple schools around the country. The Career Path Binder program uses guided and self-directed research to allow students with Autism and Asperger syndrome to explore different careers that

interest them as well as identify the various social, affective, and sensory requirements of those careers and how the student might adapt to these requirements. Students who participate in the Career Path Binder project demonstrated increased self-advocacy and self-determination (Hurlbutt and Handler, 2013). *My Career Narrative* is an identity exploration tool that facilitates examination of values and past experiences to identify themes that can be applied to the selection of different career paths. This tool recognizes the importance of identity and the fit between a career path and identity, helping students “to understand [their] self core” in order to get excited about careers (Lopienski, 2016).

*Program Delivery Options:* A career development program that takes a Personal Development Approach would benefit from partnerships with schools, nonprofits, and businesses. A nonprofit-school partnership, like the one AchieveMpls has with the Minneapolis Public School district where they provide all postsecondary counseling exclusively to MPS students, benefits the school district by providing the counseling that administrators value, but lack the knowledge to implement (College Board, 2012), while providing the nonprofit with space for programming and ready access to program participants. An alliance with a large school district could also place the nonprofit in a position of influence within the field of career development in the relevant state.

For an organization like AchieveMpls, which seeks not only to prepare students to be successful after high school, but also to “change the culture” around the postsecondary experiences that are valued, this is important because it strengthens the organization’s ability to direct the “[policy] conversation [about college and career readiness].” AchieveMpls sees itself as a “leader in the field [of college and career readiness],” but as an organization that is not

actively engaged in lobbying efforts at the state level, being a strategic partner with the largest school district in the state offers a means to influence the goals and values of that school district. This influence spreads to other organizations who are active in policy within the education policy field and who can act on the goals and values of AchieveMpls, and amplified by MPS, by setting and lobbying for policies that reflect those goals and values.

A nonprofit program or school program would also benefit from sharing responsibility for program services and credit for program outcomes with additional youth development-focused nonprofits (rather than workforce development-focused nonprofits, to allow for better mission alignment) and businesses. One very significant benefit could be increased staffing capacity, either through funding or through sharing of human resources. This is critical because the highly individualized nature of the Personal Development approach causes programs to have significant human resource needs. For example, in terms of individual advising, the American School Counselors Association recommends a caseload of no more than 250 students per trained counselor (Baron 2014). In order to serve all the students in a large urban high school (1000-2000 students), a program would need 4-8 career counselors. Depending on the other activities that the program offers, it may also need mentors, trainers, and internship supervisors. This quantity of human resources is beyond the capacity of most organizations; however, the cross-sector nature of career development, bridging education, community development, and economic development, lends itself incredibly well to partnerships that can address these staffing needs. Nonprofits may offer access to volunteers or staff through joint program grants, and may benefit from increased access to funding. For-profits may also offer volunteers or grants to support staffing in exchange for boosting their image as a socially



responsible business or in exchange for some influence over the program according to their needs as businesses, such as what internships are offered (Sawchuck, 2013) or which soft skills are emphasized (Symmonds et al. 2011).

*Funding Opportunities.* Under Title IV of the Every Student Succeeds Act, formula funding is provided to school districts specifically to expand school counseling (“Legislative Affairs”, 2016). Personal Development Approach programs also lend themselves well to federal 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center grants. The decision-making skills that the Personal Development Approach prioritizes fit within the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program’s stated objective to provide enrichment activities that complement academic programming (“21st Century Community Learning Centers”, 2014). These grants are available through state departments of education to schools and nonprofits. Other smaller grants may be available to nonprofits from foundations that similarly value identity exploration and the development of self-efficacy among youth. Finally, contracts may be available from school districts to provide career-counseling services. If businesses can be convinced of the benefits of the personal development approach, they may provide some supports, such as those described above. However, businesses are more likely to support programs with a Workforce Development Approach because that approach is more closely aligned with their needs and values.

*Policy Implications.* The policy implications of the Personal Development approach to career development go beyond partnerships and funding relationships. On the one hand, the success of this approach is threatened by an interpretation of the failure of the College for All approach not as resulting from a fundamental flaw in the assumption that a four-year degree is the right choice for everyone (Symmonds et al., 2011). Rather, College for All is seen as failing to

promote awareness of and enthusiasm for the four-year college track and application process.

This leads to initiatives that focus primarily on increasing the the four-year college application rates and acceptance rates of high school seniors. This is evident in organizations like College Board, which advocates that classroom teachers cover the college application process in English class and Math class (College Board, 2012) and College Possible, whose programmatic centerpiece is 320 hours of curriculum and coaching on the college application process (About, 2016).

On the other hand, this approach is has a number of opportunities for success. First, the Every Student Succeeds Act includes an open-ended mandate for states to implement standards for career readiness (“Every Student Succeeds Act”, 2015) and includes a block grant program that provides funds for school counseling (“The Every Student Succeeds Act, Explained”, 2016). Additionally, federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants are administered by the Minnesota Department of Education, strengthening the ability of community organizations to offer enrichment activities, including career readiness. Finally, a program that takes the Personal Development approach has the opportunity to contribute to a growing body of evidence that the decision-making skills learned in these programs offer significant benefits in employability and in persistence in the student’s chosen post-secondary path (Gewertz, 2010; Stringer et al., 2012, Symonds et al., 2011). This evidence, along with the value ascribed to these skills through federal funding, can be capitalized on to influence the services supported at the state and district levels. For example, Personal Development programs can and should advocate for state policies that promote a more individualized approach to career counseling, such as instituting mandatory school counseling and caps on student-counselor ratios, neither of which exist in Minnesota

(ASCA, 2016). At the local level, practitioners should approach principals and superintendents to advocate for policies that facilitate a cultural shift away from College for All and toward a multiple-pathways-approach to success, such as expanding current post-secondary preparation services to include decision-making skills rather than just presenting options.

The Personal Development approach challenges the idea that a four-year college is the only path, or even the optimal path, to success in adulthood. Instead, it emphasizes self-knowledge and decision-making, fostering success by helping students figure out how to play to their strengths. Despite ideological barriers and significant resource requirements, Personal Development programs find success through cross-sector partnerships and federal funding. However, the Personal Development approach is only one philosophy of career development. The Workforce Development approach shares some similarities with the Personal Development approach, such as the need for cross-sector partnerships, but is rooted in fundamentally different understandings of public education, adulthood, and the failure of the College for All Movement.

### **Workforce Development Approach**

A workforce development approach to career development programs is focused on helping young people develop career-specific skills in order to prepare them for labor market and economic opportunity. This approach matches learning experiences with labor market needs. There is a growing concern and consensus that the traditional and existing educational system will not prepare an adequate number of workers to meet the labor market demand for middle-skilled workers as they will be exploding in the coming years (Symonds et al., 2011).

Thus, this approach, with its emphasis on vocational education and training, apprenticeship opportunities, and adequate career advising, seeks to prepare students to become productive employees who can meet labor market demand. This approach rests on the underlying assumption that the goal of public education is to create workers for our society.

*Program Delivery Options:* Common components of workforce development programs are internships, work-based mentoring, hard skills training, and advising for the job search. Many internship programs showed positive results in terms of developing the workforce (Symmonds et al., 2011). For instance, the National Academy Foundation (NAF) is a leading organization in developing workforce through its national network of over 500 career academics serving more than 50,000 students in 41 states. NAF partners with businesses to transform the learning environment to include industry specific curricula and work-based learning experiences, including internships. Their programs include a paid internship, typically lasting 6 to 10 weeks. According to their track record, nearly 90 percent of its students graduate from high school, which is 23 percent higher than the overall graduation rate in the schools in which they operate. More than 80 percent go on to college, and 52 percent complete their degrees in four years (Symmonds et al., 2011). A 2009 study by the Urban Institute found that 86 percent of apprenticeship program sponsors would “strongly recommend” the program to others, and 80 percent said it helped them meet their need for skilled, productive workers. Completion rates were high. Another study found that adults who complete apprenticeship programs tend to increase their annual earnings far more than those who just attend community college, yet the U.S. currently spends just a pittance on efforts to support and promote apprenticeships.

Besides career advising and counseling, hard skills training showed significant results. For instance, Project Lead the Way was developed to introduce high school students to engineering. Since it was launched in 12 New York high schools in 1997, the program has expanded to nearly 3,500 high schools in all 50 states, and currently serves more than 300,000 students. The program uses a uniform, rigorous curriculum that is designed as a four-year sequence of courses. Students complete such foundation courses as introduction to engineering design and principles of engineering before moving on to more specialized options as biotechnical engineering and civil engineering and architecture. The program resulted in some 80 percent of those who complete the program say they will study engineering, technology or computer science in college.

*Exemplar Programs.* There are numerous exemplary programs in the country, which the U.S. Department of Education has designated as successful and signature programs. The Career Connections program in Florida successfully implemented a career mentoring and apprenticeship program that increased students' hard skills and enthusiasm for course work, while increasing business involvement. The program used Career Connection's Planning System, which provides array of choices in educational programming that meet individual needs and engage students in career development process. The system was adopted by 10 high schools and 2 middle schools in Florida. Participants of the program take a Career Research class where they begin to develop their *Passport*, a portfolio constructed during high school that contains all of their high-school career development activities. Successful programs include extensive collaborative efforts between the schools and the community and incorporate parents as active participants in schools.

Career Planning and Employment Services in Illinois was very successful in assisting students in making the transition to further education or the workplace. The Parkland College's Career Planning and Employment Service office collaborates with the faculty, administration, graduates, the local university, and business and industry to help students progress. It provides students, as well as people in the community, with a broad range of services including counseling, advising, testing, job placement, and other support programs designed to enhance educational experiences and supply employment assistance. The office also collects critical data on student placements, salaries, program placements, and a variety of other information used regularly for program improvement and for guiding current and prospective students. Many human resource representatives of local business and industry list their job openings with CPES exclusively. Activities, services and resources were individual assistance in defining job-search strategies; on-campus interviews; videotaped mock interviews; informational booklets; announcements in job bulletin boards; on-campus employment; career planning seminars; counseling; assessment of interests, abilities, and values; self-directed computer searches; and classroom presentations. A recent innovation is the computerized job-management system including student, employer, and job databases, with job-matching capabilities that benefit employers and students/graduates.

*Funding Opportunities.* Funding sources for workforce development-focused career development programs vary depending on the programs and its partnerships. Most internship, apprenticeship, hard skills training or even mentoring programs can be funded through sponsoring companies that will eventually hire the trained graduates of the programs. In addition, many state and federal labor and workforce development agencies offer grants for career

development programs that create direct pathways from high-school training programs to postsecondary careers.

*Policy Implications.* There are many policy implications to consider when creating a workforce development career development program. First of all, there should be better advocacy for non-college post-secondary education paths, as there is great economic opportunity and labor demand for middle-skilled workers. Furthermore, vocational education and training should be promoted and financially supported for students who are not on four-year college track.

Secondly, K-12 education might need a policy shift on how and what to educate the children. In other words, K-12 education ought to be focused not only on providing general knowledge, but also on enabling students to unfold their skills and talents through combining classroom and workplace learning from early grades. This way, work-linked learning will be made widely available as early as the high school level, and adapted to accommodate the abilities of each age. Young students could begin with workplace tours, attending job fairs, and participating in projects designed to expose them to the kind of challenges workers face in fields like engineering. Older students enrolled in a career-focused program of study could work with career mentors and take part in internships. The more students know about themselves and the world of work, the more likely they will be able to make satisfying decisions about their future. School counselors at the middle level are in a unique position to offer students a variety of career awareness experiences (Hogan, 1995).

Additionally, there are several noteworthy organizations in Minnesota that Achieve should seek to partner with to increase the chances of creating a change in the culture of

education in the state. The Citizens League has a history in Minnesota of framing problems, recommending solutions, and lobbying for implementation. In a final report to the Lumina Foundation, the Citizens League surveyed a wide variety of individuals in the education field, and found widespread support for increased advising, mentoring, and readiness (defined as both career and college) (Alexander et al, 2014). Additionally, the individuals surveyed broadly agreed that there needs to be a renewed focus on each student, rather than treating each child the same. The Citizens League's history of success should allow Achieve to greatly increase its capacity and ability to induce change. In addition, both the Minnesota Association for Career and Technical Administrators (MACTA) and the Minnesota Association for Career and Technical Educators (MnACTE) are potential partners for Achieve in their endeavor to shift the mindset among Minnesotans in the realm of post-secondary education.

The Workforce Development approach, like the Personal Development approach, rejects the idea that a four-year degree is the only or best path to successful adulthood, although the Workforce Development approach has a narrower definition of "successful adulthood." This approach to career development emphasizes industry-specific training in order to prepare students to be economically successful adults. Through robust partnerships with local business, organizations can maximize students' time in high school to prepare them for the workforce.

In our exploration of these two approaches to career development, we have presented them as opposing viewpoints. However, this is not necessarily the case. It is useful for a program to identify the approach it is most closely aligned with in order to articulate its beliefs about adulthood and K-12 education as a foundation for determining program outcomes and, working backwards, program activities. In practice, though, an organization may identify a



composite philosophy as one that most closely aligns with their values and beliefs.

Alternatively, and perhaps more realistically, due to the nature of career development practice as one that straddles different policy fields and requires cross-sector collaboration, an organization may need to implement elements of both philosophies in order to obtain necessary stakeholder buy-in. We take this into consideration in the following section, where we present our recommendation to AchieveMpls.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Our team recommends that AchieveMpls choose an approach to their career advising program that combines aspects of both the Personal Development and Workforce Development philosophies. From what our team has learned from AchieveMpls about its capabilities, its current activities and approach, and its donors motivations, we believe that AchieveMpls is best positioned to enact a Personal Development approach. While AchieveMpls has relationships with employers, its expertise is on equipping students to match their interests to their future plans, which is more aligned with the Personal Development approach than with Workforce Development approach. In addition, although the donor is not opposed to working more closely with employers, we have learned from conversations with AchieveMpls leaders that his goal is to shift the culture in high schools to one that promotes the best post-graduation option for every student -- an attitude that aligns better with the Personal Development approach. AchieveMpls and its donor are motivated by the goal of providing options for all Minneapolis students and making sure that their outcomes are positive. When the donor talks about his desire for a culture

shift in Minneapolis high schools, he is referring to the idea that all students should feel capable of and free to choose a post-high-school path that works best for them.

We believe, however, that this approach (and the career development program components it incorporates) is not sufficient for AchieveMpls. The economy in the Twin Cities is strong and diverse; there are many businesses in a variety of industries. Our team recommends that AchieveMpls leverage the Twin Cities business community and incorporate some aspects of the workforce development approach into its program. AchieveMpls leaders have told us that they already have some relationships with Twin Cities employers. We think that Achieve should strengthen and leverage those relationships and cultivate new ones. Specifically, we think that Achieve should identify the industries that have the most need for middle-skill workers and create strong partnerships with companies in those industries. Achieve should then use the partnerships to develop career pipelines for Minneapolis Public Schools students. It should work closely with its private-sector partners to understand what skills they need their employees to have. Then, it should develop programs (skills training, internships, and workplace mentoring would all likely be included) that prepare high-school students for careers in the partners' companies and industries.

While we think there is value in creating a program that allows students to explore themselves and all of the potential options for their future, we are concerned that unless the non-college options are as robust as the college options, students who choose something other than a four-year college will continue to be marginalized and somewhat rare in this context. To prevent this, we think there should be strongly structured links to aspects of the Workforce Development approach included in any implementation of the Personal Development approach.

If there are well-defined career paths and strategies for ensuring that students who choose those paths are well-prepared for success, students can feel confident and actually able to evaluate multiple options: four-year college, a career in Industry A, a career in Industry B, or a career in Industry C. Instead of, as in the case of a purely Personal Development approach, simply understanding students' identities and desires, our recommended blended approach will help students develop their identities while equipping them with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in their chosen career.

In addition to helping students determine which of those options fits them best, AchieveMpls' career development program should ensure that students are prepared to be successful in each of them. Doing so requires a commitment to the personal development approach, as well as well-developed partnerships with local employers. AchieveMpls' current in-school staff members, who are already well-equipped to help students do identity development work, will combine that expertise with resources and programs from employee partners.

Funding for this type of hybrid program will likely be easier to find than for a program that only focuses on personal development. Incorporating a well-defined path toward specific careers will allow AchieveMpls to access resources from businesses who will eventually higher graduates of AchieveMpls' programs. We recommend that when AchieveMpls starts cultivating new employee partnerships, it pay careful attention to the potential financial assistance that these partners could provide, after the existing donor's funding has ceased. The workforce development nature of the program will allow it to be eligible for federal and state labor grants.

AchieveMpls can be an important component of Minnesota's economic development and regional vibrancy, while also maintaining its position as an education nonprofit that seems to improve outcomes for all students. Bridging this gap is not only exciting and beneficial in creating partnerships and accessing resources, it is imperative for the future. Workforce development and education do not exist in isolation, so the more intentional that Achieve can be about creating connections between the two spheres, the better equipped it will be to serve students in the long-term. This hybrid approach attempts to combine both career development approaches, as well as two ideas about the purpose of K-12 education. It seeks to balance the need for students to become well-rounded individuals with the reality that finding a well-paying job is imperative in adulthood. Our team's hope is that by combining some Personal Development activities with well-defined career paths, students will graduate from Achieve's program with a sense of self and the ability to be economically self-sufficient.

## CONCLUSION

Given the context in which AchieveMpls and its partners are operating, our team has studied and analyzed the exceedingly complex policy environment of education in Minnesota. As the state of education in the United States continues to be meticulously evaluated, recent challenges to the College For All approach highlight a desire for a shift in thinking. Created to ensure that all children have the same opportunities in the realm of education, the initiative has led to some negative, largely unforeseen consequences, such as an overabundance of young adults with bachelor's degrees when most jobs still do not require a B.A. or higher (Symonds et al, 2011). Furthermore, the state of the labor force in Minnesota demonstrates that nearly half of

jobs in the current decade will be for “middle-skill” workers, of which there is currently a dearth (“Minnesota’s”, 2014). These factors, in combination with the skills and competencies of AchieveMpls and the urging of a motivated donor, led us to assess and ultimately provide recommendations for a successful career development program in Minneapolis.

There are two major approaches to career development programs: those that focus on the individual, and those that target workforce development. Our recommendation is for AchieveMpls to leverage aspects of both types of approaches to implement a program that is most effective. Students should feel empowered to discover their own sense of self and direction, through use of personal development models. At the same time, AchieveMpls should work to build pathways and pipelines between its school partners and its business partners, as well as develop new connections. In doing so, students will be able to develop and identify their passions, while also generating self-efficacy. Through its business partners, AchieveMpls will establish and highlight destinations for students following high school graduation. By demonstrating positive outcomes and developing self-efficacy among students, our recommended program gives AchieveMpls the best chance to enhance awareness of options other than four year degrees, encourage students to pursue those options, and strengthen their career development program overall.

In addition to program implementation recommendations, we have explored some of the ways in which AchieveMpls might influence common wisdom about postsecondary preparedness on a broader cultural level. We believe that, for AchieveMpls to have the greatest chance at shifting the status quo, it must engage with policymakers at the state level. During the current session of the Minnesota Legislature, there are a variety of legislators that have shown a

willingness to bolster vocational training and career readiness in particular. The bipartisan group of sponsors for HF 939 drafted a bill that strengthens state support for career education and job skills training (HF 939, 2016).

Additionally, HF 2890, which expands opportunities for innovation by allowing school districts to work together to develop inventive ways of educating students, has bipartisan support (HF 2890). By collaborating with new partners, such as The Citizens League, AchieveMpls can expand its organizational capacity to influence policy. The aforementioned bills are just a couple contemporary examples to demonstrate the legitimate possibilities for change that exist in the state of Minnesota.

Changing the narrative in the exceedingly complex policy field of post-secondary education will undoubtedly be difficult. Powerful stakeholders, such as Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (MnSCU) will likely oppose a broad change if the focus is mostly on career readiness training. It will be imperative for Achieve and its partners to craft their message in a way that does not alienate MnSCU. A policy change that aims to improve community college access and career readiness should aid in bringing them onboard. President Obama's recent proposal in 2015 to offer tuition reimbursement for responsible community college students (White House, 2015), offers an excellent starting point for this policy proposal. Additionally, AchieveMpls must be prepared to devise a message that reassures skeptical stakeholders of the merits of this approach. Specifically, they must address concerns regarding the potential limiting of vulnerable groups. Ultimately, in order to enact change, AchieveMpls and its partners must satisfy all influential stakeholders according to each's definition of success if it wants to meaningfully shift the discourse in the state of Minnesota.

College For All, referring the necessity of a four-year college degree in order for every student to be successful, has become deeply entrenched in the national psyche, despite its failure to meet the needs of all students or to meet the changing needs of America's workforce. AchieveMpls is well placed to address this failure, both in terms of their partnerships and in terms of the funding opportunities they can access in this moment. By implementing a career development program that both empowers students to make identity-informed decisions and validates alternative career pathways as respectable and economically viable, AchieveMpls can combat the failings of the College For All model, eliminating both "the forgotten half" (Symonds et al., 2011) and the gap between supply and demand of labor in Minnesota. Furthermore, by engaging with other stakeholders in the education and economic development policy fields, AchieveMpls could become the leader of an exciting cultural shift: one that does believe in a "one-size-fits-all" approach, but rather recognizes and values the variety of paths towards successful adulthood and empowers students to pursue the path that is right for them.

*Note: AchieveMpls withdrew from the project in March 2016. This report represents our effort to address this project's original research questions.*

## APPENDIX

### Appendix A: Personal Development Approach

Programs combine the key components in different ways, depending on the motivating philosophy of the program.

#### COMPONENTS OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS



- Common among programs started by businesses, community colleges, public labor or economic development agencies, and schools and nonprofits with an “education as tool for economic success” mentality
- Goal is to use time in high school to train for a particular career or industry
- Best serves students who have clearly defined goals and/or are product-oriented learners
- Requires highly-engaged employee partners; may require very flexible school partners





## Appendix B: Workforce Development Approach

Programs combine the key components in different ways, depending on the motivating philosophy of the program.

### COMPONENTS OF PERSONAL GROWTH PROGRAMS



- Common among programs started by schools and nonprofits with “education as a tool for personal fulfillment” or “education as a tool for societal participation” mentality
- Goal is to use time in high school to develop an understanding of one’s self and a knowledge of the resources available for making good post-secondary decisions
- Best serves students who are undecided about post-secondary plans or who are process-oriented learners
- Requires highly-trained program staff; may require very partnerships with organizations other than employers

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