

SHAPING THE PATH TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



A few years ago, I approached local education professionals and business leaders about what the YMCA could do to help our youth thrive and our community sustain growth. It boiled down to our job market, and I learned that students needed to actually see people at work to get inspired about a career versus simply hearing it in a classroom.

In response, the Y launched the College and Career Readiness program. This nine-week program is designed to feature prepared lessons, coupled with field trips to local businesses, and a college tour so students can see and learn first-hand about careers. The program was supported by local businesses who welcomed tours of their facility, knowing that students may work at their business one day.

One example was learning how plastics are made. Using the Path Finder's curriculum kit, students mixed chemicals and actually made plastic in the classroom and then later toured Berry Global to see various operations, from meeting a front line operator to shaking the hand of a Vice-President. Students witnessed the production of a single cup as well as the packaging of hundreds of thousands of cups and even met the single most important employee, the Safety Coordinator. The pilot program was an immediate success and has grown to serve 5 schools and 150+ students a year, partnering with 10+ businesses, the latest being Atlas World Group.



Creating a sustainable future through a career path after high school also means students and families need to learn how to plan for the expenses related to college or pursuing a trade. We piloted another phase to the program at Caze Elementary in which students who completed the program also attended a graduation that included a financial literacy workshop presented in partnership with CollegeChoice529. Families learned from professionals about the benefits of post-secondary education and how to start planning now. To help them get started, the Y opened a CollegeChoice529 account for every student in the program, immediately increasing the odds that the child will one day enroll in college. Subsequent deposits were made each time a student earns a new certificate within future phases of the program.

Prior to the program, many students did not have a clear vision or path to their future. Helping students understand their interests and unlock their potential is key to career exploration and future success. Ultimately, they become self-sufficient citizens in our community. The Y is proud to partner with students, families, schools, and local businesses to prepare today's students for tomorrow's careers and ensure that there is a clear path for every student.



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