

# Community Structures: Profiles and Insights



**FORD  
NEXT GENERATION  
LEARNING**   
*Community Connected Learning*

# COMMUNITY STRUCTURES: PROFILES AND INSIGHTS

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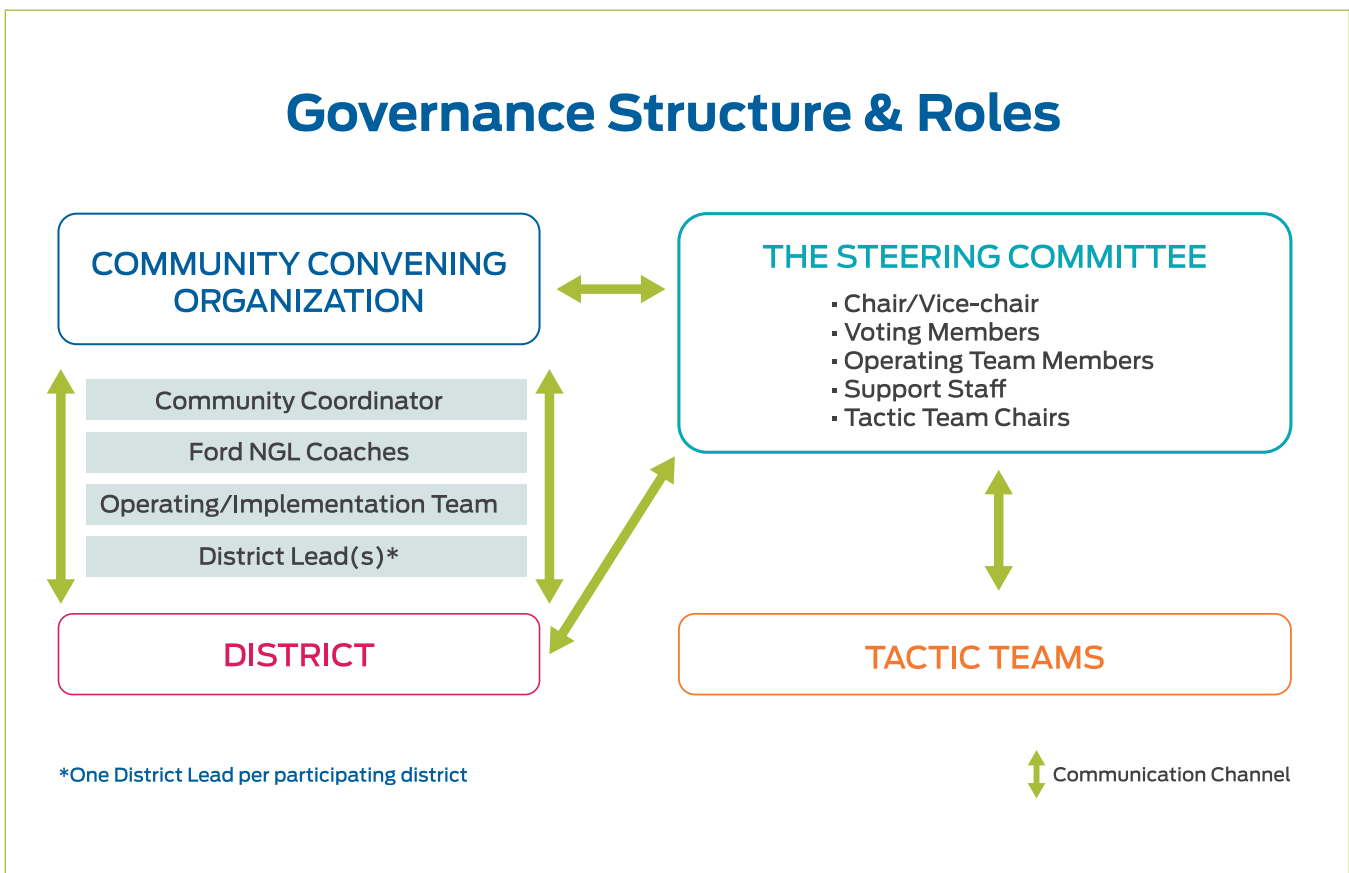
# COMMUNITY STRUCTURES: PROFILES AND INSIGHTS REPORT

## Introduction

We frequently hear from community representatives that one of the greatest benefits of being part of the Ford Next Generation Learning (Ford NGL) Network is the support and insights gained from other communities. Prompted by ongoing requests for examples and specific information about community structures and roles, we initiated a series of reports to provide profiles and personal perspectives. For this report we conducted interviews with representatives from seven communities. Their responses are provided in a condensed form that we hope you find informative, easy to follow, and helpful to you as you plan and navigate your community transformation.

This report is the second in the series. Some of the communities covered in this report were also featured in the prior report and others are participating for the first time. We chose communities in various stages of their transformation in hopes of providing an array of structure variations, community conditions, and educational challenges. You may also find it useful to review the earlier report which can be accessed at <https://fordnglu.com/resources/>.

While Ford NGL offers descriptions and diagrams of what community structures may look like and the elements and functions they should include, we recognize that every community is going to customize their structure based on their situation and variables. There are, however, commonalities among our communities that other member communities with similar characteristics, opportunities, and challenges can learn from.



## AKRON, OHIO



### Community Profile

Akron Public Schools (APS), located in Northeastern Ohio, enrolls more than 21,000 students, and employs 4,400 teaching and non-teaching professionals. The district, one of the state's largest and most diverse, covers 62 square miles in a city of 198,000 residents. APS is located less than 40 miles south of Cleveland and 20 miles north of Canton. It is the fifth largest district in Ohio. The district consists of 47 schools (community learning centers) including 10 high schools, 9 middle schools, 28 elementary schools, and 12 preschool programs at various buildings and elementary schools.

Schools are known as community learning centers (CLCs), because they are co-owned by the city and the school district and serve the entire community with a variety of activities. All but a handful of its schools have been rebuilt in the last 15-20 years as part of an \$800 million, taxpayer-supported effort to bring modern, tech-ready, energy-efficient new school buildings to Akron and its student body in pre-kindergarten through grade 12.

APS has a stated goal to be the number one urban school system in America. Based on Ohio Department of Education statistics, APS is always at or near the top of performers among the eight largest urban districts in Ohio. APS high school students earned 9,713 college credits in 2021 and invested 14,373 hours in job shadowing or internships. Students earned 1,440 industry certifications last year, a stunning jump of 1,500% from the year before. Attendance rates are between 90 and 95% in nearly every elementary, middle, and high school. The attendance rate is 99% in the district's Akron Early College High School and STEM schools.

Partnerships with virtually every non-profit organization in Akron have enriched student education by working their expertise in the arts, history, zoology, business and more directly into the curriculum with their oversight. A special collaboration with GAR Foundation allows elementary schools unprecedented access to treasured resources for their learning experiences.

The College & Career Academies of Akron is a robust, town-grown effort that marries the needs of students with those of the local business community (more than 300 partners) and a broader job market. The program, developed with support from Ford Next Generation Learning (Ford NGL), worked with ConxusNEO and Ford to track regional economic data to identify skills in high demand. This allows students to study through a career lens, applying basic and advanced learning to in-demand fields of their choice.

### APS and Ford NGL

In 2010, the then superintendent of APS, Dr. David James, first learned about the Ford Next Generation Learning model by reading about the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS). Knowing that Akron Public Schools students already benefited from Career Technical Education (CTE), where students participate in hands-on training and gain real-world experience through job shadowing and internships, Dr. James sought to learn more about how the college and career academy (CCA) model would equip all students with the necessary skills to achieve their dreams.



APS has a stated goal to be the number one urban school system in America.

In 2011, Dr. James invited a group of Akron business leaders and city officials to discuss the district's goals, the CCA model, and how it might benefit students and elevate the community. He then flew to Nashville with 20 community leaders to visit the Academies of Nashville. Everyone was impressed and interested, but Dr. James decided to first develop key instructional structures including professional learning communities, data analytics systems, and Instructional improvement professional development days before embarking in the master planning process.

In 2015, a network of manufacturers supported by ConxusNEO partnered with Akron Public Schools to increase enrollment in machining CTE programs at two Akron high schools. The programs generated graduates who were qualified for entry level positions, a critical component of the talent pipeline for the advanced manufacturing industry in the community. What followed was a period of months during which the manufacturers sponsored field trips to their facilities for new teachers, counselors, and students. Manufacturing representatives also went into the schools for classroom and career day engagement. This all took place about the time David James was talking to North High School about becoming the pilot school for CCAA, taking APS leadership and teacher teams to visit Nashville, and working with APS and community leadership to observe and benchmark the Nashville school transformation.

In June of 2016, a steering committee of 40 business leaders convened to develop the overview of College & Career Academies of Akron with representatives from Ford NGL. Between November 2016 and March 2017, over 100 business leaders, teachers, parents, and students joined the effort by guiding the content of the master plan in one of 16 tactical areas. Given its mission and the successful partnership already in place with Akron Public Schools, ConxusNEO was asked to serve as the convening organization for College & Career Academies of Akron. In its role as the convening organization, ConxusNEO co-chaired and co-staffed the steering committee with the district, helped recruit businesses to participate, supported the work of tactical team chairpersons, helped staff tactical teams, and co-authored the master plan with the district. The master plan was submitted to Ford NGL, and in May 2017, APS was designated a Ford NGL community. United Way of Summit County was announced as the liaison to build relationships between APS and business partners. In the fall of 2017, College & Career Academies of Akron (CCAA) launched a pilot program at North High School. By 2018-19, APS had launched freshman academies at all high schools and by 2019-20 wall-to-wall academies.

In 2021, Christine Fowler Mack was named superintendent of Akron Public Schools. Born and raised in Akron and educated in Akron Public Schools (APS). She is an experienced school district leader whose first classroom experience in 1989-95 was in the APS system as a teacher. From that first teaching position 32 years ago, Christine Fowler Mack has demonstrated and continues her dedication to raising student achievement and graduation rates and to increased community and parent engagement.

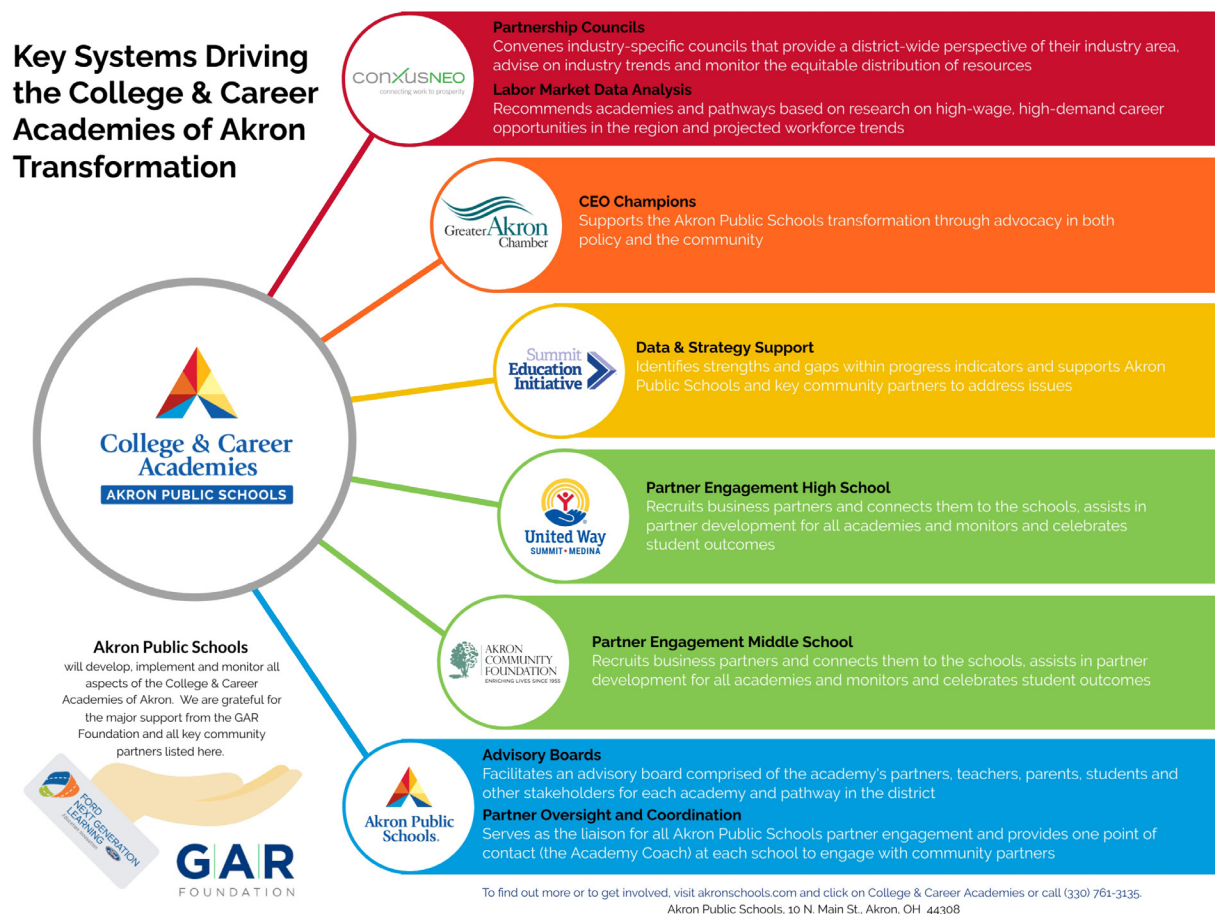


The programs generated graduates who were qualified for entry level positions, a critical component of the talent pipeline for the advanced manufacturing industry in the community.

## Forum Participants

- Angie Berresford, Associate Vice President, Fund Development, United Way of Summit County
- Rachel Tecca, Director, College & Career Academies of Akron, Akron Public Schools
- Beth Winter, Coordinator, Partner Engagement, Akron Public Schools

## Community Structure



## News, Views, and Observations

According to Beth Winter, Coordinator of Partner Engagement for Akron Public Schools, Dr. James first learned about the Academies of Nashville in 2010 from reading a magazine article and watching a video online. From the spring of 2011 when the first pilot academy began in APS, a total of 16 additional academies were launched over a five-year period.”

Over the past four years, the College and Career Academies of Akron have continued to deepen their practices, especially at the high school level. In 2022 they graduated the first class with a full, four-year college and career experience. Rachel Tecca, Director of the College and Career Academies said, “I think we really started on a strong foot with some solid structures around business engagement from our academy advisory boards to our industry sector partnerships through our steering committee. I think the convening organization and our partnership with United Way have been foundational to that entire structure and system not only being built but implemented.

We currently have over 360 partners at the high school level with opportunities for unique partnerships – whether it’s a pathway partnership, a named integrated partner, a sister university partner – we have the kind of systems and structures designed to engage our community at a deep level.”

“The practices within the high schools also continue to evolve and improve through the partnership with the Ford Next Generation Learning Community, as well as the Nashville Hub. As we really think about that strand of transforming teaching and learning, we continue to build the capacity of our staff to really think about an inquiry-based model of instruction, like using our business partners to deepen that learning and really make authentic opportunities for students.”

Teaching through that career lens has also evolved over the last four years. According to Rachel, “I think we keep getting better each year at transforming the student experience. From a structural point of view, our academies, our master schedule moved to an AB block. Our academies have common planning time where they can support the learners within our academy, engage businesses, and really think about those experiences that kids need to be ready for the next phase of life.”

“In addition, we started a master planning process for our middle schools and have a master plan addendum that is designed to build a longer runway for our kids with community exploration, service learning, and a kind of self-discovery as the part of that middle school piece. The last piece is the master planning process with the elementary. We really want it to be the first pre-K through 12th grade to college and career academy model. We’ve partnered with Ford NGL again to look at what that master plan looks like. Our tactical plans are well designed and tight. We intend to bring it all to fruition and plan to have approval and designation sometime this year.” Beth added, “We have always said this would be a K to 12 transformation, and we are fulfilling that promise.”

One of the strengths Akron exemplifies is how all the different structures are put together for a specific purpose, yet they’re not siloed. They integrate in places where there might be overlap. The Akron community is intentional about you getting rid of overlap for the sake of efficiency and effectiveness. Rachel believes that is due in great part to the level and frequency of engagement. She explained, “I think one thing that’s fundamental to that point is that we have that weekly business engagement meeting every Monday that discusses all the partnerships. Every single Monday, we have a representative from the United Way, we have a representative from ConexusNEO, we have our partner engagement coordinator, and we have our middle school partner liaison. We meet every single week. I think that structure allows for cohesion. It’s an opportunity to check in and make sure we’re not overlapping and to share our best practices. Really, what we did in middle school was replicate the structure we built for high school, because that’s what worked well for us. We were also able to partner with the Akron Community Foundation to help support that partner liaison at the middle school.”

Originally ConexusNEO served as the community convening organization. It co-chaired and co-staffed the original steering committee with the district, helped recruit businesses, supported the work of tactical teams, and co-authored the Ford NGL community-connected master plan with the district. As the transformation went along, Akron saw the need and wasn’t afraid to change the structure. “That is a change that evolved over time,” said Rachel. “We have the kind of key strategic partners that are always working on college and career academies.



We really want it to be the first pre-K through 12th grade to college and career academy model.

**Rachel Tecca**

Director of the College and Career Academies



Robust communication and collaboration allow the major players doing this work to constantly figure out what's best. I think through those regular meetings, they realize that the strength of ConexNeo was more around those industry sector partnerships, because they were already hosting those types of meetings. At the same time, United Way was at the table saying they felt they could be the convening organization because of the connections they had and the work they do. It's through the leadership and communication among all the major players that are strategic that roles are defined and refined. These are the kind of community leaders that are not worrying so much about who's getting a credit, but about making sure that the work is moving forward."

"The decision to make United Way the convener was based in part on United Way's bold goals regarding education within Akron public schools – to make sure 90% of the students graduate within four years, that 60% are college or career ready, and that 60% of our youth are employed or involved in an extracurricular activity. Obviously, that aligns with what APS is trying to accomplish in the college and career academy model," said Angie Berresford, Associate Vice President, Fund Development, United Way of Summit & Medina Counties. "ConexNEO was really looking at industry sectors whereas United Way and myself have those personal one-to-one business connections. We work with so many of the larger corporations that are huge partners of ours in so many ways, so we have those relationships already. It just made sense that we were more on the granular level when it comes to the business engagement piece of it."

It's amazing how the Akron business community and community organizations are so connected. In some ways, one might expect them to be competing, but they're not. Instead, they are collaborating, and they are cooperating for the good of the community. After all this time, the original partners are still there, and, in fact, the number of partners is growing. So, what is the "secret sauce?" What allows such connectedness and what fuels the momentum and the energy to continue so many years in? Rachel Tecca agreed that there is indeed something special about the community. "I think part of it is just the blessing of living in a community that puts kids at the center of the work. I can't tell you how fortunate we are, that's true. Even when we started to move into the middle school space and think about nonprofits, they have responded extraordinarily well, just like high school. Since January, we've been recruiting and connecting nonprofit partners to middle school. We already have 75 signed middle school partners. I also think we've built the structure to support that work."

"Selecting and coaching and moving academy coaches at both the middle school and high school level is an investment that is vital. You really can't do this work without high school coaches and middle school coaches who are top-notch professionals. They understand education, and they're responsive. I think that leadership as the partner engagement coordinator is fundamental too. They have very clear direction, are very well supported, and the expectations are high. I think structurally, it's about making sure you have those academy coaches at the building. I don't know how you would do it otherwise. Having the kind of leadership that makes sure every detail and every expectation is met. Those are two of the structures that I think make or break the whole system."



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When it comes to partnerships,” said Angie, “I think now we’ve realized it’s not so much about the numbers. It’s more about the quality of the engagement that we’re getting from those partners. So, I don’t see those numbers growing that much nor do we necessarily want them to grow. What’s more important is for instructional learning and working with the partners to take place on a deeper level. Having that curriculum creation come to life in the workplace is key to getting both sides of the equation on the same page. Businesses have one goal in mind, and our educational system has another. How do we bring those together and work more purposefully and more strategically with those engagements?”

“We have three kinds of partnerships here at Akron Public Schools,” said Beth. “The first is our pathway partners and they sign on to a commitment of doing two activities within the calendar year. Whether it is guest speaking, internships, job shadows, or whatever it may be, it’s only two engagements per year. These partnerships range anywhere from a one person company to a Goodyear. It doesn’t matter the size of the company. Then we have named academy partners and those are year long agreements that are reviewed and renewed annually. Right now, we

have an average of five pathway partners per pathway. The third group of partners are named academy partners. Named academy partners commit to providing 2000 hours of time and talent over three years. That includes 1000 hours the first year and 500 hours in each of year two and year three. They work very closely with the academy coach to plan out the year.”

“There are also sister partnerships which are with universities and colleges,” noted Angie. “Much like a named partnership, but it plays to the strengths of the post-secondary institution. For example, they are a sister partner with a whole building, not just the academy. They help write the curriculum with the teachers, especially the cross-curriculum piece, doing thematic learning. They work with them on FAFSA nights, scholarship searches, exposure to campus life to meet students, professors, and see the campus. Some are service-based universities and their students actually mentor high school students, offer group chats and the like. Their work is extremely valuable, especially with first-generation college bound students.”

Beth pointed out, “Critical, of course, to the success of all of our partnerships is the academy coach and their role. We have an academy coach at each of our high schools and just last year, we hired an academy coach for each of our middle schools as well. Their primary responsibility is partner engagement, making sure there is a list of guaranteed experiences at each grade level, planning and executing each of those guaranteed experiences, and developing an extensive list of other engagement opportunities. They work with the partners to brainstorm and implement new ideas. They also facilitate the relationship between the partner and the teacher, and that can be challenging as some teachers are early adopters, some like to wait and see, and others are set in their ways and adamantly opposed.”

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**Angie Berresford**

Associate Vice President, Fund Development,  
United Way of Summit County

“The other thing coaches are responsible for are the academy advisory boards. Those advisory board meetings have changed a bit over the years, but now we have three a year and combined academy meetings with them. Doing so has saved time and shares information consistently and concurrently to more people. The academy advisory board is incredibly important and it has helped assure all the members understand their roles. In the meetings we have not only the partners but teachers and counselors as well as parents and students to help advise on the topics of the day.”

Beth continued, “As far as general oversight, the steering committee is the group that provides that function for the academy model across the entire district. It includes named partners, sister partners, some pathway partners, representatives from our middle and elementary schools and their partners, as well as various administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, and students. The steering committee meets three times a year. Two of those meetings

are an hour and a half in length and the other is a half day or full-day retreat. In my role I play the lead in terms of invitations, agenda, and logistics and coordinate that work with the director of college and career academies, the assistant superintendent, and the superintendent. There is a short introduction to set the stage then most of each meeting is spent in break-out groups with an APS facilitator that focus on a specific issue, problem, or question. Attendees are actually working, and in the member meeting evaluations, I hear repeatedly that they appreciate that they are spending the time developing solutions and providing their expertise. In the evaluation we also ask what they want to see on the next agenda.”

“The other thing that I think we do well as a community is adjust and pivot, especially since the pandemic,” said Rachel. “We have a lot of organizations that are not signed partners, but they want access to our kids, because they need employees. As a team in our Monday morning meeting, we discussed how that might work. How do we take care of our partners who are giving their time and talent and make sure that they have a process if they need entry level employees? On the other hand, what’s the system for those companies that don’t really want to get involved but want our help finding new employees? We build a system for that as well.”

“We’ve partnered with our jobs and family services. They are hosting a career fair for our graduating seniors, but anyone that contacts me about just wanting to get in front of Akron public school students, I’m telling them to go to the career fair. After senior interview day at which our partners can hire our students, we are also taking busloads of kids to the career fair. We are not only trying to be cohesive and communicative, but we’re also pivoting and building structures to meet the demands of the day. I don’t know if that’s the secret sauce or not, but I do think success is dependent on constant collaboration, communication, and adjusting to the needs of the community.”

So, what is the biggest challenge facing the College & Career Academies of Akron today? “I think that the biggest challenge that I can speak to today is trying to figure out the strand around business, community, and family engagement at the elementary level,” said Rachel. “We’ve built this infrastructure to support for-profit companies at the high school level, and then we’ve determined that most of the work at the middle school level is going to be around nonprofits. Now we must figure out what elementary business engagement looks like. We do have the



The academy advisory board is incredibly important and it has helped assure all the members understand their roles.

**Beth Winter**

Coordinator of Partner Engagement,  
Akron Public Schools

essential experiences which are foundational, and they require community partners to be able to provide those. To me, those are fantastic, but we also need to think about the career exposure, the college exposure, and the opportunities to solve authentic problems right through an inquiry-based learning kind of model. What is the business engagement structure that we can sustain at the elementary level that doesn't pull too much from some of our other existing partnerships? As I see it, long-term, that's probably the biggest challenge for us as we embark on our groundbreaking pre-K through 12th grade transformation."

"What we really want our young people to be able to do is have a clear vision of what they want for their future. We want them to use the educational system to help them get where they choose to go. Through an elementary lens, it's about building all those professional skills to be successful, not just academically, but in life. It's about exploring interests, the community, and possibilities down the road. In the middle school piece, students should get exposed to everything in the community and learn how to give back, to think outside themselves, and to make an impact on the community. Having those experiences in hand, the high school student is getting exposure to careers and how college and post-secondary opportunities can help get them where they choose to go. Everything is on a really long runway, so students are ready to make the most of academies when they hit 10th grade. We want students to be the drivers of their future and their educational experience."

## Reflections and Suggestions

- Work together to truly define roles and responsibilities. When everyone understands their role and the roles of others, communication (regular and frequent meetings) will be improved and a process that is functional and mutually supportive will follow.
- Think about the true goal of education. It requires a fundamental mind shift that our leaders must wrap their brains around. The goal is not just to graduate students, but to prepare them to do whatever it is they choose to do after high school. Have we given students opportunities to explore their interests, their passions, and their careers? Have we aligned the educational experience to help get them to where they want to go?
- Business needs to understand it's a long game. This is not a quick hit proposition. You can no longer sit back as an HR person, post a job, and have all these resumes flying in. It's not happening. As a company, what are you going to do to invest in your talent pipeline now that will allow you to be a sustainable organization 10 to 20 years from now?
- Look at what assets are in your community. There are people who really want to make a difference. You may not be lucky enough to have a United Way, but there are other organizations that care and can fulfill a needed role.
- Make connections, build relationships, and then turn people loose. Connectivity and communication will cultivate creativity. It's about sharing ideas and possible solutions first and not who gets the credit.
- Education can no longer be something done to kids. Instead, education needs to be something kids use to get them where they choose to go.
- When it comes to partnerships, make sure students are seeing and working with people that look like them.
- It is important to listen to the coaches when it comes to finding the best fit for new partners. Coaches know their teachers and students and they know what they need.

## BELTON, MISSOURI



### Community Profile

Belton, Missouri is four miles from the Missouri-Kansas border and located in northwest Cass County. The city occupies an area a little over 14 square miles with a population just shy of 24,000. Belton School District #124 (BSD) serves approximately 4500 students with one high school, one STEAM academy, one middle, one upper-elementary, three elementary, one early-childhood, and one educational center. The mission of Belton School District is to inspire and empower all students to reach individual potential by providing learning experiences that challenge and engage within a safe, supportive environment designed to prepare students to thrive and excel.

### Belton and Ford NGL

Belton completed Ford NGL Roadmap Phase 1 and Phase 2 visits in 2017. They then gathered a group of more than 60 community partners to discuss community transformation, learn about Ford NGL and the academy model, and secure members for the Phase 3 work group, operating board, and steering committee. Belton is a tight knit community, and in true Belton spirit, all attendees committed to returning for the Phase 3 session and pledged to perform the tasks necessary to complete the master plan and prepare for implementation.

In October 2019, Belton was designated as a Ford Next Generation Learning Community. As part of the qualification process, Belton High School developed a five-year master plan to ensure that all high school students learn in career academies and that the structures and processes were in place to engage local and regional employers and civic leaders to support and sustain the Belton Academies.

Belton High School freshmen participate in the Freshman Academy. A critical component of the Freshman Academy is the Freshman Seminar course which focuses on helping the student make a successful transition to high school. It provides an opportunity for each student to explore individual interests, skills, and aptitude in preparation for selecting a College/Career Academy and Pathway. Once students make their selection, they are enrolled in courses that allow them to learn academics through the lens of a potential career within Business & Technology, Human Services, and Science & Industry. They are given the opportunity to participate in authentic work-based learning opportunities, job shadows, and other career exploration activities with regional employers. Students work closely with professionals in their field of interest, adding relevance to their studies and connecting classroom knowledge to success in the workplace.

### Forum Participants

- Chase Nagen, Academies Design Grant Project Coordinator, Belton School District
- Stacey Yurkovich, Director of Academies, Belton School District (retired June 2022)



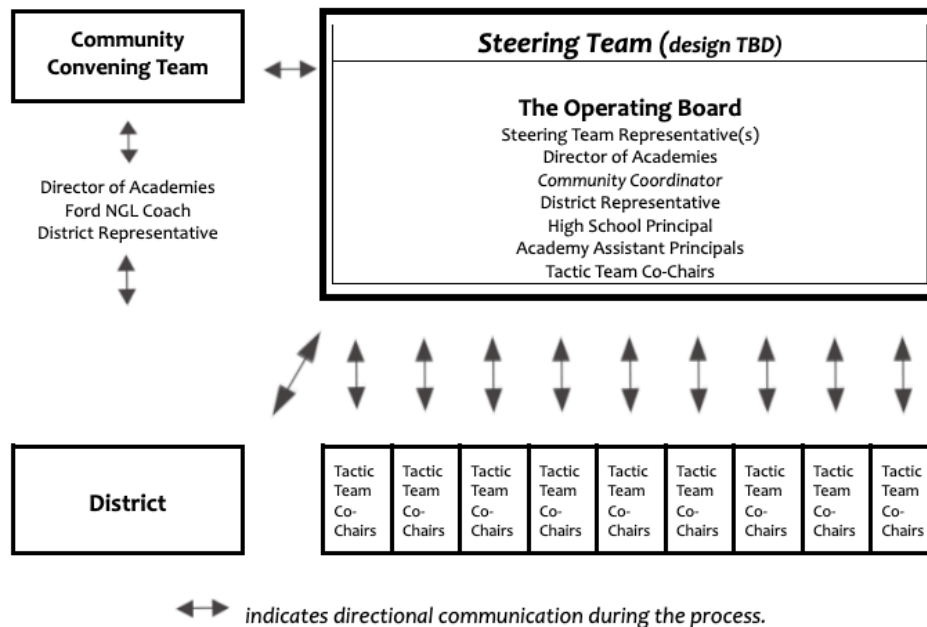
## Community Structure

### ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

#### Academies of Belton Structure



#### COMMUNITY STRUCTURES, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



## News, Views, and Observations

Belton is a smaller school district relative to many Ford NGL Communities. Stacey Yurkovich, the Director of Academies for Belton School District, noted, “One of the things about a smaller community I think is true (not only in the work we’re doing with academies but also just in our day-to-day) is the focus and desire to compete with larger neighboring districts. We just have fewer people to do the work. Job titles responsibilities within academies and in our districts are broader in scope than those in larger districts in the Kansas City Metro area. That’s something any small community, especially those close to larger school districts, experience. It’s a reality that impacts our transformation and the way we approach things. We have also benefited from the support from Ford NGL and most recently from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and the real-world learning initiative which created some funding and networking opportunities.”

“The working relationship with Ford NGL started before I came to Belton. I believe Dr. Underwood attended a conference and heard a speaker whose school district is a Ford NGL Community. At that time, the Belton community was looking for something to engage their students at a higher level. They were looking for something different,

because the demographics and the community had changed significantly over the prior 10 years or so, due in large part to the closing of a military base. That is when conversations started within district leadership. Some of the key community leaders were identified, and the superintendent and groups of people visited communities like Pinellas in Florida and Coachella in California. At the same time, there was a plan to move from a three-year high school configuration to a four year by adding onto the building at the current high school. There was conversation that perhaps it would be a great opportunity to make that academy model transition at the same time as the new construction.

“It was the fall of 2017 when the community and the school district had made the commitment to partner with Ford NGL. I was hired initially that summer as a High School Assistant Principal/Director of Academies. It’s a vivid memory for me, because it was September. I had just started in the summer. I knew from what I’d read online and from what people had shared with me, there was to be a meeting here in Belton with our coaches, Ford NGL representatives, some district leadership, the middle school principal, and instructional coaches. For me, that is when things really started to pull together. I was formulating a clear vision for the future and an understanding of the framework. Soon after that, I was part of a group that had been put together to visit Nashville.”

“Fortunately, I came from a district that had interdisciplinary teaming and had worked with that for a good part of my career. We had an academy model that touched about 25% of our students. I had been a part of the development of that, and it functioned at four high schools in that community. Because of that experience, I had some knowledge as to how to move things forward, but it was the fall of 2017 when we really started to do the work. It was November when we started the master planning. We had a series of meetings and planning sessions with a large group of people throughout the year, and really dug into the framework. Our chamber and our educational foundation had committed to be convening organizations.”

“The principal at the high school had started in Belton a year before I did. He came from the same community that I had, so we shared much of the same background. Throughout discussions and planning, we slowed down some of the process, so we would be better prepared for implementation. During those initial couple of years, with the two of us in the building, we were very strategic and intentional in laying a solid foundation with our staff and with the community as we engaged with the master planning process.”

“I really believe in the power of the Ford NGL Network and the opportunities it affords to connect with other communities. I also see a value for those in leadership and for those who are just starting in the work to see it firsthand. We’ve taken multiple teams to Nashville to see what that work looks like after a number of years. As I interacted with and visited other communities, I could see that those identified as convening organizations here in Belton, just didn’t have the same capacity of resources and staff that other communities did. Our Belton Education Foundation has one full-time executive director and an assistant. Our chamber has one full-time executive director and a part-time assistant. The capacity and breadth of contacts for businesses and partnerships just wasn’t there.”



I really believe in the power of the Ford NGL Network and the opportunities it affords to connect with other communities.

**Stacey Yurkovich**  
Director of Academies,  
Belton School District

“We knew Romeo, Michigan was a similar community and about a year ahead of us, so we talked with them about their convening organization. It was the Macomb County Economic Development Services Group, so I reached out to the Cass County Economic Development Council. The executive director was very supportive, but I discovered he was the only staff person on the council. That’s when we had the idea to combine all these resources and create a convening team to perform the convening function. It includes a variety of components that contribute to the academies: chamber of commerce, educational foundation, city economic development, and county economic development. It’s what we’ve been doing now for about two years.

“The pandemic, of course, influenced the work and forced us to make some adjustments. Now we are going through another iteration because the Cass County Corporation for Economic Development is in a state of flux. Currently, we are re-evaluating who we might add to this convening team that would be supportive and provide some of that county-wide support. Our world is one of change and transition. The convening organization is part of our organizational structure, but it is one of the things that we don’t have fully defined.”

“Bringing together multiple organizations to function as the convening organization might seem like a difficult thing to do, but in addition to their positive attitude and willingness to participate, we had another advantage. The players already knew and had worked with each other. There wasn’t that period of getting acquainted, plus they each bring different strengths to the table. That is advantageous for a team of people. To be honest though, there has been some confusion as to what exactly it is they’re supposed to do. We have worked together, and they have been very supportive, but they’ve needed some guidance as to what specific things they can do to help. In time, we expect they will take more of an initiative to make more suggestions about what they can do and what might be good for the academies. There will be more growth in that area, especially as Chase, the Academies Design Grant Project Coordinator, and I get to know everyone’s strengths.”

“There has also been conversation with the superintendent and board of education about the steering committee. I think that might be an area again, that should have a variety of individuals who could work with the convening team, strengthen that organizational structure, and keep things moving. This steering committee, in my opinion, should be broader than just built-in individuals dictated by the size of the community. Cass County and our proximity to the greater Kansas City area provides a lot of opportunities for connections with and for our kids. We need to tap into those resources.”

“It has been challenging at this stage of our development, as our reality has been strongly influenced by the pandemic. It limited our ability as far as safety, to be engaged with businesses and our students outside of our building. Like so many other school districts, we were doing both in-person and virtual at the same time. At certain points of the school year in 2020-2021, we had less than half of our students in person. That influence affected communication with our convening team as it too was usually virtual or in emails. As we reflect and as we move forward again, we need to identify the skills and the



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**Stacey Yurkovich**  
Director of Academies,  
Belton School District



strengths members have. We need to help them feel like they're contributing and gain a better understanding of how they fit in. We also need to add some individuals, with perhaps a different emphasis, to the steering committee. If we accomplish those things as we move forward, growth and achievement will come. The 2021-2022 school year provided many more opportunities, and we look forward to 2022-2023 when things will be closer to "normal."

The value and role of a convening organization hits home when a commitment is made to offering work-based, experiential learning – when you are trying to make that connection with the business and outside community for all students, not just those in tech ed. To have that kind of reach for that number of students requires a significant team. Finding and establishing that kind of organization, especially in a smaller community, can be a real challenge. Chase

Nagen described his experience in Belton this way. "I was fortunate enough to have been in sales and business development for over two decades locally in the Kansas City metropolitan area. I was able to bring a lot of partners with me along with that experience of networking. I was comfortable getting out there and having those partnership conversations. A city like Belton is technically a suburb but far enough away to be autonomous socioeconomically. It has a predominance of skilled labor, manufacturing, and fast-food restaurants, and unfortunately that doesn't cover the spectrum of an academies model. So, looking further up into the city and other suburbs was something that we had to do. In addition to that, taking advantage of some online opportunities through third-party programs and looking for ways to be creative was a necessity, because we have students who want to be things like paleontologists or marine biologists or work with autonomous vehicles. We connected with a marine biologist on LinkedIn and one of my best friends happened to be the president of an autonomous vehicle company. Sometimes you just have to push the envelope and do things like bringing them in via zoom or having them record a video."

"In terms of maintaining structure, Stacey has done a great job. For example, there are these events that are interspersed throughout each year of the high school experience. Stacey has been very strategic and intentional. We have a kickoff meeting before every single event. We map it out who's going to take care of what, how we're going to accomplish it, and what the tasks and deadlines are. You have a framework established and built in before we even start having conversations about something we want to do."

"Because of the size of the community, Stacey and Chase take on broader duties and multiple roles. There is the role of a director of academies and there is the role of an academy coach. We see the typical role of an academy coach having to really support teaching teams, to be able to understand how they can utilize the community better, as well as being that liaison, that networker and that bridge to the community. Sometimes it's difficult to find that person that can appreciate and function well on both sides of that equation. The piece that is unique about Belton is how Chase and Stacey leverage their relationship in an effective way to support both ends of the work."

According to Stacey, "Critical in this relationship and in the success of the academies is the fact that Chase came from a different world than we as educators are living in. He has that business mentality approach. Just this morning, we were having a conversation about an event coming up, and I was able to get his thoughts on it from a business perspective. I tell people all the time, I've been going to school every day since I was five years old. That's a long time, but that's my world and my lens. I do think I've grown with the academies and certainly learned



A city like Belton is technically a suburb but far enough away to be autonomous socioeconomically.

**Chase Nagen**

Academies Design Grant Project Coordinator,  
Belton School District

from Chase, but he brings a ton of experience to the table from the business world. Another example comes from the time we were closed for months because of the pandemic. Chase was intentional about continuing to reach out to our business contacts. He sent out a weekly email, because nobody was having meetings or getting together for coffee. Chase knew to do those things because of his business background.”

“I think for us to work together in this capacity (with essentially the two of us doing the director of academies, the academy coach, the business partner, community liaison, and many of the tasks and events that an organization like PENCIL takes care of for the Nashville academies) is quite a undertaking. Fortunately, Chase and I are able to make it work due to the high level of trust and respect between us. Those two pieces are critical. We plan, we think it through, and we always debrief. Whether it’s Chase and I, or a team of teachers with us, that process is standard. That way, the next time we do something similar, we can adjust. We get input from our business round tables, and we get feedback from the teachers who were sitting in the room. Did the business representatives relate well to the kids? Did they stay on topic? Would that businessperson be better in another role? Would it be better if they just came in and participated at a career fair rather than participating in a business round table? It’s that complimentary balance of my experience in education and Chase’s experience in business that has strengthened our academies and allowed us to move forward.”

The Ford NGL Framework and Model is a solid foundation and is wholeheartedly supported by our communities, but if it’s not customized to make it work for you, then Ford NGL and the community being served is not as effective as we can be. Sometimes there is a temptation to wait for all things to be perfect, but sometimes the reality of a situation is imperfect and requires us to plan carefully and move forward responsibly. Stacey reflected on Belton’s experience and what she has told some of the newer communities that have reached out, “Part of the message that I share with them is you can never spend too much time upfront preparing and communicating and sharing information with staff. In our case, there was some conversation about starting implementation while future students were still in another building. Instead, we slowed it down, so that we could align the implementation with when the freshmen were in the high school with us. That actually gave us more time to spend with our staff. It wasn’t a focus of selling it to them. We were just intentional about identifying the leaders in our building who were supportive and who believed in the mission. We strengthened those relationships and their knowledge, because they are the ones out in the halls every day with other staff.”

“They’re the ones who have had those instructional relationships with people, and teachers respect those individuals. When they hear it from their peers, it also distributes the leadership. It’s not just about the director and the principal having this dream and this vision, especially since both of us were new to the community. The truth is, we didn’t spend a lot of time trying to sell people on the idea. If people didn’t feel like it was for them, we understood that. And, prior to implementation, we had an individual conversation with every staff member. Part of it was getting to know them better. Part of it was hearing their questions. Part of it was asking them where they saw themselves fitting into the academies. Some said, ‘I don’t really think this is for me.’



We were just intentional about identifying the leaders in our building who were supportive and who believed in the mission.

**Stacey Yurkovich**  
Director of Academies,  
Belton School District

We understood and respected that and said, ‘Let us help you find a place where you’ll be happy.’ To some that may sound harsh, but the work is too important. It’s a belief and a true transformation we are working toward. It’s not just a program that will be in place for a couple of years. Not enough can be said about taking the time to do that. The other thing prior to implementing – every staff member we hired, every system we looked at, every decision we made was through the lens of the Academies of Belton. Even though we weren’t implementing yet, that’s the time when you’re building the foundation for things to be put into place later. Make sure the movement is strategic and the vision for the district and the schools is well defined and communicated.”

As far as his role in the Academies of Belton, Chase shared what he felt was important for him and for others filling similar roles in other communities. Said Chase, “The person that fills this job needs to come from the business world. If I had been asked this question three years ago, I wouldn’t have known exactly how to answer. Now that we’re part of the community’s Real-World Learning initiative and I’ve gotten to know several of my counterparts around the area, I’ve seen there are very few teachers or former teachers in this position who have done well. It’s not that they aren’t dedicated or working hard, it’s just that most do not have the significant experience in the business world required. For communities starting out and putting the structure together, get someone from business involved in your academy’s programs. Connection with the business is everything, and not only for those direct events happening tomorrow or next week, but also for those conversations that you are inevitably going to have in the future. You must be a person that is going to live that connection mindset with the ability to relate to and tap into the interests and mindset of employers. I make it a point to be prepared, strategic, and intentional before every single phone call I make or email I send. I make sure they know we are thankful for them. I share our idea and what we have in place to execute it, before asking them to consider being part of it. The last thing we want to do is make our partners feel that we are a burden and are asking them to do a chore for us.”

## Reflections and Suggestions

- Sometimes there is a fear of losing momentum by slowing down, but when you’re making this type of change, taking the time to have the right people in the room allows you to be more intentional and unified in your planning and implementation.
- You can never spend too much time upfront preparing and communicating and sharing information with staff.
- Be very intentional about preparing students when they are going to have interactions with the business community. It’s part of preparing students for the workforce. It’s part of making sure businesspeople don’t feel like they’ve wasted their time, because the students didn’t have questions, didn’t make eye contact, or appeared disinterested.
- Prior to events like business roundtables and career fairs, meet with the businesspeople to welcome and thank them. Inform them about what has been done to prepare the students for them, because the goal is to be respectful of their time and for the experience to be worthwhile for everyone.
- Be creative in establishing business partnerships. You may be able to find an architect in every community, but you are less likely to find a paleontologist or marine biologist. Get creative and find new ways to put them in front of your students.
- Don’t be afraid to think outside the box. When our schools were closed for months because of the pandemic, we didn’t stop. We thought, maybe it looks a little different, but perhaps we can still achieve our goal. Example: This year with our career fair, we arranged experiences our kids could have virtually that couldn’t happen in person. We extended our career fair and had a second day of just virtual career interactions.
- You just never know when opportunities for partnership are going to arise, so always be prepared. Remember, our partners don’t want to be assigned a chore. They want to feel like they’re part of the culture. They want to be on this journey with us. If you are just calling someone to see what they can do for you, you’re off on the wrong foot.

# COACHELLA VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

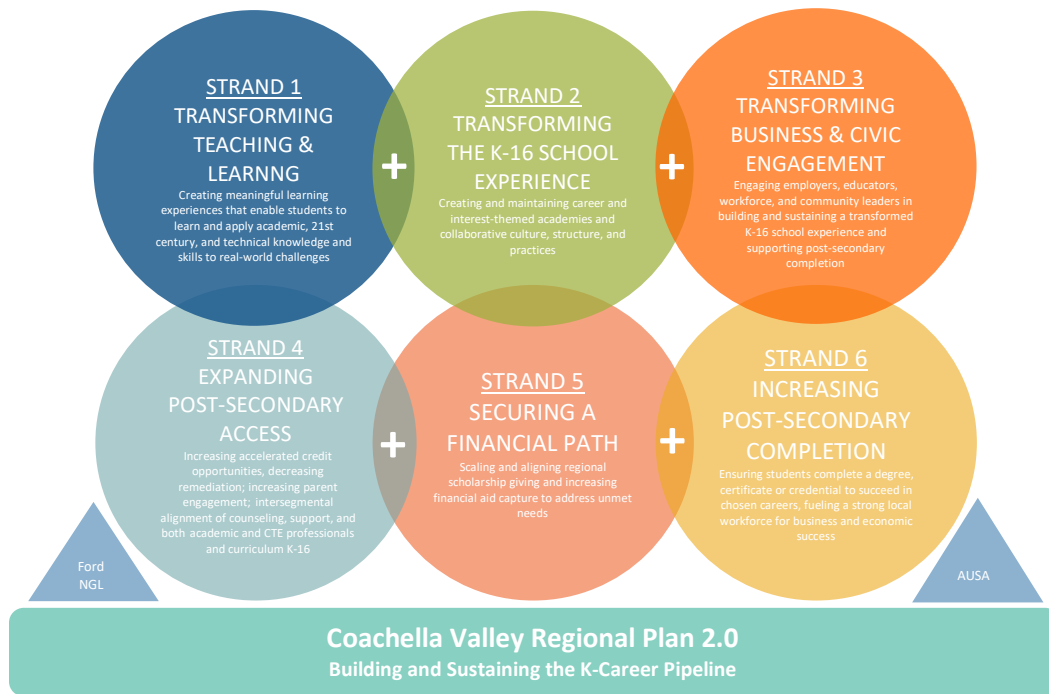


## Community Profile

The Coachella Valley is a desert community in Southern California and is about a two hour drive east of Los Angeles. The valley extends for approximately 45 miles and is about 15 miles wide. The valley contains the resort cities of Palm Springs, Palm Desert, Rancho Mirage, Indio, La Quinta, Indian Wells, Desert Hot Springs, Cathedral City, and Coachella. The region is home to 463,000 permanent residents, and local government associations predict the region will grow to 884,000 by 2035 – that’s a growth rate of 99.4%! There is a large population of seasonal residents in the winter months, which at times may surpass 100,000 with another 3.5 million annual conventioners and tourists. Coachella Valley includes schools in the Palm Springs Unified School District, Desert Sands Unified School District, and Coachella Valley Unified School District.

## Coachella Valley and Ford NGL

Coachella Valley’s relationship with Ford Motor Company Fund dates to the spring of 2006. Today the Coachella Valley brings over 16 years of experience as a regional intermediary, facilitating a multi-district, multi-partner, inter-segmental education and economic workforce development initiative to the Ford NGL Network. Its experience as the neutral convener and its deep experience with Ford NGL Strand 3, serves as a resource to the Ford NGL Network. Innovations specific to Strand 3 include developing, aligning, and sustaining regional business, education and civic partner engagement and outcomes-driven collaboration for K-20 college and career pipeline programs. Coachella Valley completed its first Ford NGL Master Plan in 2012. The plan had four strands – the three Ford NGL Strands plus one for College and Career Success.



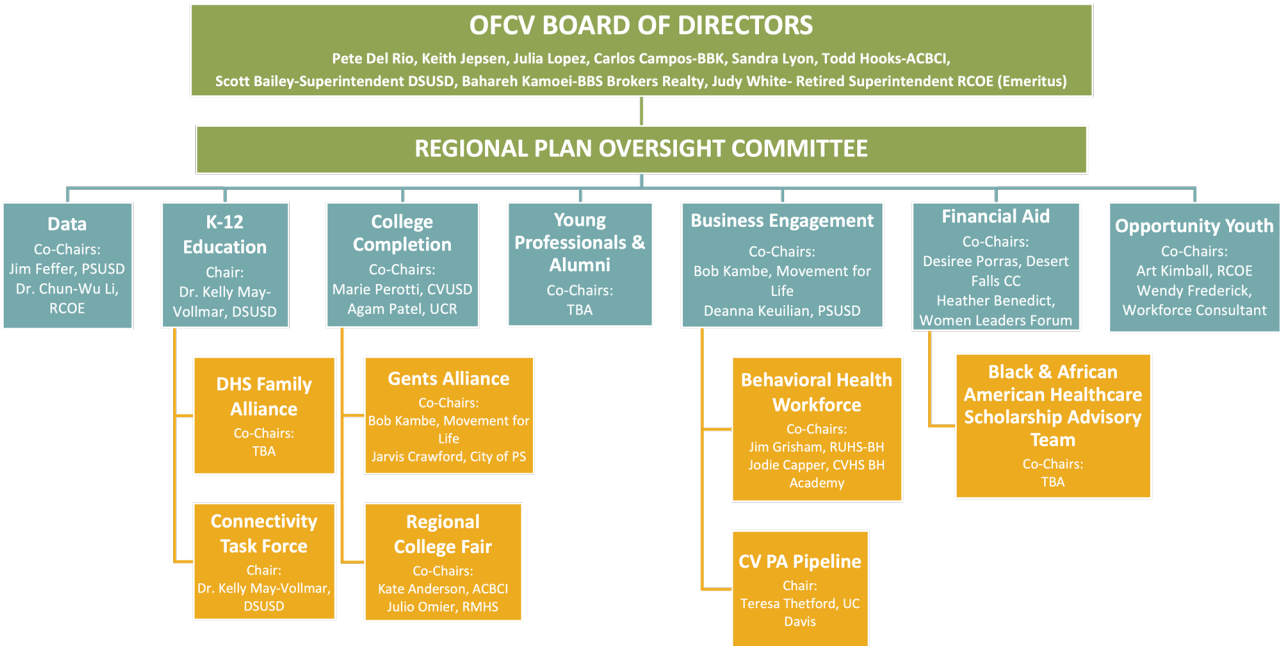
- Top three circles (Strands 1-3, shared with Ford NGL, with slightly edited descriptions. Included in first Regional Plan)
- Bottom three circles (Proposed Strands 4-6, expansion of Strand 4 in first Regional Plan)
- Bottom box demonstrates foundation and purpose of the plan is to build and sustain the K-Career pipeline
- Small triangles on bottom left and right demonstrate that Ford NGL and AUSA are support resources to the Coachella Valley as we design our new Regional Plan (Regional Plan 2.0)

In 2017, there were dramatic and unprecedented changes in the superintendent positions. Realizing the importance of the transformative work, three of the remaining assistant superintendents knew it was vital to quickly engage the new leadership. While such changes can be unsettling, the team seized it as an opportunity by involving the new leadership in an examination and refresh of the master plan. With help from Ford NGL, a design team was created and focused on taking the plan to the next level. The result was a plan based on six strands. The strands include transforming teaching and learning, transforming the K–16 experience, transforming business and civic engagement, expanding post-secondary access, securing a financial path, and increasing post-secondary completion.

### Forum Participants

- Kevin Bibo, Director, College and Career Readiness, Desert Sands Unified School District
- Kim McNulty, Vice President of Regional Success, OneFuture Coachella Valley (Convening Organization)
- Marie Perotti, Director of College and Career Readiness, Coachella Valley Unified School District
- Sheila Thornton, President/CEO OneFuture Coachella Valley (Convening Organization)

### Community Structure



### News, Views, and Observations

Since participating in an earlier report on community structures, Coachella Valley has experienced a number of changes. Primary among those are changes in leadership roles including superintendent changes in all three K-12 districts. According to Marie Perotti, Director of College and Career Readiness at Coachella Valley Unified School District, “Top leadership changes affect the work that we’re doing, because it takes time to onboard someone new to the vision of the valley and build trust. That’s an undertaking sometimes, but I’m happy to report our newest superintendent really embraces CTE. He’s allowed me to expand positions that are needed to support this work. I think the biggest challenge when leadership changes across all three school districts is making sure we all stay on the same page.”

“In Desert Sands, not only am I new to this role, but we also had one superintendent change and are about to have a second,” said Kevin Bibo, Director, College and Career Readiness. Our incoming superintendent is Kelly May-Vollmar, Ed. D. She has served as assistant superintendent of educational and technology services in Desert Sands since 2019. In fact, Dr. May-Vollmar was the one who hired me. In terms of our commitment to CTE, she actually expanded my role. Desert Sands Unified School District (DSUSD) is all in when it comes to our CTE.

Marie emphasized, “We recognize that we can’t just wait for students to get to high school to start this work. We must start preparing them in elementary school. We are starting to collaborate regionally on that. In Coachella Valley USD, we start in elementary school making sure our principals and our teachers at that level understand that it’s not just about academics. It’s really preparing and exposing students to the overall concept of college and career readiness. We are doing this by funding College and Career STEAM labs with support from our county office of education to train teachers. We have always had middle school programs, and we are expanding those. By the time students get to high school, our data shows that students who belong to a (career or interest-themed) program perform better. They’re more successful in their graduation rates, their GPA’s, their AP testing, and their state testing. It’s just really creating that alignment of college and career readiness from PK-12 and beyond, and that is a new change too.”

Marie continued, “Experience with CTE and academies wasn’t necessarily part of the superintendent criteria search or selection. I shared what I was doing and why it needed to get done. I’ve had a solid track record here, so they trust me. I shared a presentation that showed how elementary school students need career exposure and middle school students need career exploration before being fully engaged at the high school level. It’s all about the preparation, right? We’ve had the bridge to our post-secondary partners for high school students, but we discovered we were missing the reach down into elementary school to prepare those students for middle and high school programs. Next year, we’re hiring a communications firm that specializes in nonprofits and education to do all of our marketing. I want to make sure our entire community understands the value of career pathways work and where we’re going. I think that is really what’s going to lift this up and build broad support for our pathways.”

“There was some hesitation in our district, because I was originally hired to help our district go wall-to-wall with academies. Then a new superintendent came aboard, and we determined we aren’t able to go wall-to-wall just yet. We are committed to building capacity so that all students are aligned to programs including CTE, AVID, and Puente. We just added a seventh period to our high school day, because we realized that if students were part of programs like AVID, PUENTE, band, or sports, they couldn’t participate in a career themed pathway, because there just wasn’t enough room in their schedule. So, we are changing the schedule to create more room. Now, students will be able to join a career pathway, even if they also are part of PUENTE, AVID, sports, or band. We have a lot of work to do, because this is a new change. We may find that a block schedule will work better, but right now, we’re just going to get our feet beneath us with a new seven-period day and see how it goes.”



We recognize that we can’t just wait for students to get to high school to start this work.

**Marie Perotti**

Director of College and Career Readiness,  
Coachella Valley Unified School District



“Desert Sands will not be going wall-to-wall, but we have a variety of different programs at the four traditional high schools,” said Keven. “Just about every student is involved in something at some level that helps support them as they go through their high school experience. We’re working hard to start that earlier and earlier. I’ve been working with the middle schools to try to build programs. We’ve got a couple of successful ones that are moving up. Marie and I are both basically working in the same direction. It’s just that the needs of the districts are different. The structures are different. That’s not wrong, but in the different school districts there are different things you must address.”

Kim McNulty, Vice President of Regional Success, OneFuture Coachella Valley described their role and how it relates to the different districts, “The role of OneFuture is to convene the Regional Plan collaborative and support the districts in what they’re working to accomplish. We share a common commitment to the Regional Plan. We’re all striving to get the same outcomes for our students, and we allow each district to advance the plan in the way that best suits their culture and administrative structure. In 2014, we received funding from the James Irvine Foundation to seed Career Technical Education/Linked Learning directors in each K-12 district – those are the positions that Kevin and Marie currently hold. The districts now fund those positions, and they are invaluable to the success of our regional work. Those directors are internal champions who are resident experts about academies and CTE, and they champion the importance of the regional plan and provide support through leadership transitions. I think if there’s one challenge that’s been constant in this region over the past 16 years, it has been navigating leadership transitions – helping new people to come in and understand the value of collaborating around a regional plan with an emphasis on career and college preparedness for all students.”

Kim continued, “In terms of our structures and what has changed over the years, the addition of alignment teams has also been key. When we wrote our first master plan in 2012, we realized we needed a framework to facilitate implementation of the plan, and we found and adopted the Alignment USA structure, which was a game changer. In 2016-2018, we had eight alignment teams and three industry councils. We’ve now honed the work and facilitate 12 alignment teams, two with an industry focus. When we built the structure, we worked backwards from workforce needs. Today, we are leveraging the structures that were in place to convene folks in a more focused way.”



In terms of our structures and what has changed over the years, the addition of alignment teams has also been key.

**Kim McNulty**

Vice President of Regional Success,  
OneFuture Coachella Valley

“I think the big seismic change is what we’re experiencing nationally,” said Sheila Thornton, President/CEO OneFuture Coachella Valley. “We are in a healthcare workforce crisis, and nationally we’re going to have to do something on a massive scale. That said, a community like this can’t wait around for a national plan. We have an aging population and growing population with a fairly fixed number of students in the school districts. You must be really good at pipelines and pipelines all the way from the job and reaching back into the high schools. While we’ve always had all three hospitals on board at some level, now their CEOs are paying big time attention. We’re meeting with them about strategic workforce planning for the Coachella Valley, and we know it’s not just one institution or another that’s going to solve the shortage. A solution requires going across a number of institutions.”

“It’s probably going to mean adding other kinds of training programs to address the crisis and even thinking differently about how you use a workforce. I would say now more than ever, all the infrastructure that’s been built,



the interconnection between the districts is strong, and the model we follow. Those who stepped in early and modeled what it looks like to adopt those students within the academies, they've benefited early. Now, that's informing those who maybe didn't step in as aggressively, but really need it. We've got work to do, but it's knocking at our door now in a different way than ever before. What we have built over the years is a foundational piece that's allowing us to have these conversations and game out solutions."

'We're now working with our hospitals to build a million dollar healthcare workforce fund, like the scholarship component. Forty percent of the scholarship funds we award go to healthcare students. As you go down that road, you ask, 'What is at the top of the pipeline?' It's students who are finishing their degrees, and maybe they are going into health sciences. How do we pick off those and get them into our workforce? But then, we're asking the bigger question – what's at the beginning of that pipeline? Are students ready when they come out of high school to become an EKG tech or a Monitor Tech? Is there anything we can do to increase the number of those who are ready and really scale it when they're coming out of high school? Yes, there is. Our three districts do all of this deep work with pathways, and their teams are interconnected. Now, seven of the 35 pathways across our three districts are health academies."



The infrastructure is an incredible asset. It's about how Coachella Valley interconnects and how it has continuity from the workforce side.

The infrastructure is an incredible asset. It's about how Coachella Valley interconnects and how it has continuity from the workforce side. It's not just one-off business support. Kim continued, "The structures within the districts have matured and expanded. It began with career tech-ed coordinators and now each district has a Director of College and Career Readiness, and they are adding other staff to those teams. Kevin's district established assistant principals in charge of CTE at each high school to support the academies and pathways. Marie's district has CTE Assistant Principals at each high school and two Teachers On Special Assignment (TOSAs) supporting all schools. Palm Springs Unified has Work-Based Learning Coordinators at each high school to support the academies. All of them are connected, not only through their districts, but also through our Regional Plan Oversight Structure and Alignment Team Network. In addition, College of the Desert, our community college, started a K-14 Consortium where they're deeply connecting their faculty, administration, and programs to the K-12 principals and the career tech-ed folks. Now we are seeing an increase in dual and concurrent enrollment. OneFuture participates on the K-14 Consortium and College of the Desert participates on our Alignment Teams, all of which drives ongoing conversation."

Marie Perotti described examples of how the structure and connectedness has impacted how students are taught and are supported. "Coachella Valley Unified is way out in the east end of the valley, and we're really rural. We have different types of students and families who need different types of support, and the opportunities for work-based learning aren't as accessible. So last year, we worked with OneFuture to explore distance learning, and we realized we could do what are called Micro Internships through Zoom. Much of this was done because of COVID, but it gave us the idea of using this option all the time. Even after COVID, what's wrong with connecting through Zoom for work-based learning? Students can work on projects, meet up with business partners once a week, go over those projects, and then do a final share and report out. It just gave us a different way of looking at and thinking about things. That's probably an option that is going to stay with us forever. Work-based learning does not mean that the student always has to physically be at another location. We can do much of that learning experience over Zoom."

Marie continued, “The other thing that I want to highlight is that our data shows that our young men are falling behind the young ladies in their academic achievement. We now have what’s called the Gent’s Alliance. It was something we first saw in practice at the college level. Gent’s Alliance is an initiative put together by OneFuture to support students who graduated and who had been given scholarships to make sure that they saw their post-secondary experience through. We saw the value in that. Now we brought it to the high school level. From eighth grade up until 12th grade, we’re uplifting Gent’s Alliance to make sure that our young men are supported and connected. For example, just the other day Gent’s Alliance was able to get local companies to donate suits for the boys. I just happened to be on campus at the time when these young men were trying on their suits. They were flying, and they all stood a little taller. They all had just a little bigger smile on their face, as they prepared for an event that was happening on the upcoming weekend. That’s just an example of one of the little nuances that help us uplift the messaging of what college and career readiness looks like and how we support our students.”

Kim McNulty elaborated further, “Back in the day, we started out with three industry councils and were really focused on pathways in those sectors. Now our regional plan includes broader resources that support students in pathways and throughout the schools. The Gent’s Alliance is focused on helping connect young men to the tech-ed pathways and broadly to college and career supports. That connectedness and that focus impacts all kids. When we saw the disparity in achievement between our young men and women, we started at high school. The Gent’s Alliance team worked to pilot a club program where the district’s high schools coordinate their staff team to have the kids meet as a club. That alignment team then supports the clubs by providing mentors and hosting special events. That foundation is allowing us to go further and amplify our efforts, because some of the critical work, structure, and process you needed to do at the beginning is firmly in place. Now the mindset is not only about how we sustain that, but also about how to do even more.”

As the readers of this report look at Coachella Valley’s Regional plan structure, they are likely wondering how some of the support elements and structures for young men came about. Sheila Thornton shared it had its roots in their regional plan retreat in either 2019 or 20. She recalled, “At that time we decided we would have some of the young men who are scholarship recipients speak at our regional retreat. We were finding that they had different issues, so wanted to hear more about their needs and be more responsive. When they spoke, they talked about their youth, their circumstances, and what was difficult for them in terms of college. They spoke about how this network back in the community helped them.”

“That’s when I think the whole regional plan collaborative realized this is not just unique to college students. This reaches all the way back into the K-12. Let’s focus attention on building it backwards now. That’s how the high school focus happened. We created an alignment team out of it. It wasn’t like it was a OneFuture program initially, but it’s more about how beautiful the alignment teams and the regional planning collaborative came together and made it a priority in our structure.”



We now have what’s called the Gent’s Alliance. It was something we first saw in practice at the college level.

**Marie Perotti**

Director of College and Career Readiness,  
Coachella Valley Unified School District

Kevin Bibo added, “If you go back about 10 years ago, I was a teacher at a high school about an hour west of here in the Inland Empire. I went to a conference for CTE teachers. I was frustrated at the time, because in my school district, I was responsible for the only CTE program there. I was teaching a program that qualified for CTE funding, and I was being asked to put together an advisory panel and to collaborate with a local college and to do all these other things for which I had no help or guidance. What I had was somebody from the district who said that I must complete this application and do all these other things.”

“At this conference, I see this opportunity to attend the session that is being hosted by these folks from the desert. I’ve never heard of or seen these folks, but I’m going to go. I’m sitting in this breakout session, and I listened to Sheila and Kim talk about all these things and ideas and how they do things in the desert. I’m excited about what I hear and want to bring those good things back to my school district. When I get home, I try, but when I look around, there’s no structure, no opportunity, no community.

Not too long after, I interviewed for a job at one of the high schools out in Coachella Valley. In my interview I said that if I was hired, the first thing I was going to do is reach out to Sheila Thornton and Kim McNulty, and we’re going to get rolling. They were like, oh yeah, we know those guys. And I’m like, yeah, I figured. I mean, they’re doing great work. Shortly thereafter, that’s exactly what I did, and the results speak for themselves. It’s not because of what I did, but because of what OneFuture has done. The structures and the opportunities that it creates takes things from a very myopic view of what’s possible for students and moves it to a very broad, very large idea. And it gets even better because of the facilitation of this group and the commitment of these school districts. Teachers in each one of these programs can not only collaborate within the district, but they can also be facilitated by and make connections with other school districts. They have opportunities to share what they have going on and what best practices are. And, how that leads also to our collaboration with our local community college has been huge. The structure that OneFuture provides for us to collaborate around CTE and other enhancements to education, like the Gent’s Alliance, is amazing!”



Teachers in each one of these programs can not only collaborate within the district, but they can also be facilitated by and make connections with other school districts.

**Kevin Bibo**

Director, College and Career Readiness,  
Desert Sands Unified School District

Structures change and evolve over time and do so for a variety of reasons. That was true in Coachella Valley, and it is worthwhile reviewing that development. Sheila recalled, “We realized from work done by the California Workforce Development Board and California Career Pathways and Education Committee (CPEC) that we had a huge issue with low intellectual capital in the region. We knew that our region would not be able to attract companies or keep companies if we didn’t have more college bound students, prepared for the jobs we had here. They recommended we start dealing with that issue by establishing three industry councils and working together.”

“It was the first wide platform for us to start thinking about the problem and working on solutions. From that evolved structure, and the health council took off. After a year, the council had ten objectives and a funder came to the table and provided a grant. That was phenomenal, and we were gaining all kinds of traction, but it was complex and demanding. We needed a real plan. I think that’s why we morphed to alignment teams. It was a nimbler structure iterating one strategy, and then moving it forward as teams. It was more flexible, so, for example, you could

shut a team down for a bit, and you could push on another issue. With that kind of adaptability, we can allow it to emerge. It's not so Robert's rules — it's networking and working human beings together in teams. It's like a good company working together on new priorities. The industry council is like the broad team. Now, we still bring the healthcare industry together, but we're really articulating it through the alignment teams and strategies."

Kim added, "In the early days, we started with the industry councils, because the concept was, we could help the region if we could build seamless pathways K to career. It was natural to think, okay, we need to start with the sectors. At the time (around 2005) there weren't many career academies in the valley. There were a lot of CTE pathways, but they weren't coordinated. Those industry councils gave us the platform to ask, 'What do you think about this? Are these working?' They were working, and naturally we wanted to do more. We wanted to target the work in those sectors that the region was looking to grow. The foundation was built, and we wanted to broaden its reach and hone it."

"It is not like the healthcare industry council wasn't great. We were connecting employers and educators, but we had this network of career academies, and we were having a real challenge with the behavioral health workforce. How could we take what we were doing and hone it further? Instead of starting something new, we just morphed what we were doing and dialed it in a little more. We're still connecting the same partners, so that solid relationship piece is there. We're just focusing the conversation on a specific area. We need a structure to do that, and for us, it's the alignment structure. That tactical planning process is so key. Things may not align perfectly with certain pages in the regional plan, but the work absolutely aligns with those overarching big goals that we've set. It's all about advancing what we're trying to do to assure student success. The strong foundation allows you to grow it where you want it to grow, despite leadership changes and transitions. That's why nurturing those professional relationships is so vital as it allows you to reach out or text each other and say, 'Hey, what about this?' It's that interconnection that helps us keep it together. In fact, regional plan 2.0 happened because all three local superintendents and the county superintendent were changing out. Recognizing the need for sustainability, one assistant superintendent said, 'We need to act, because what we have going is too important to lose.' We got together, worked with Ford NGL, and took action to refresh the regional plan."

When we talk with Ford NGL Communities about the strands of transforming education, we talk a lot about strand one and transforming teaching and learning. Project-based learning and the relevance of teaching through the lens get a lot of interest and attention. We also talk significantly about strand three where the focus is on creating, developing, and sustaining business partnerships. The strand that's not really sexy is the one in the middle. That's that structural piece — the culture, the mindset, the structures, and systems and processes. Yet, in this forum, much of the discussion and reflection centered on structure and process. From what is being talked about, it seems that it is in that second strand where much of the magic happens to make our work scalable and sustainable over time. What are some of the other structural pieces that might be specific to Coachella Valley that are important to share?

"Well, sometimes you are a singleton, and sometimes you don't have a lot of support. Other times, even when support is there, you still have people with a very fixed mindset," said Marie. She continued, "There's two things that I'd like to uplift. Number one is something I say all the time. District lines don't divide. We have three school



We wanted to target the work in those sectors that the region was looking to grow.

**Kim McNulty**

Vice President of Regional Success,  
OneFuture Coachella Valley

districts, but the children in this valley belong to all of us. We are stronger together, and we support each other. If Kevin's doing something fantastic, I am going to start something similar. I'm going to go to Kevin, and he is going to share very freely with me. Often, districts are off on their own and don't share best practices, but not so in our region. Our structures and OneFuture drive us to share our best practices and collaborate more."

"The second thing is that sometimes it just takes time, because folks can be wed to a mindset and approach they have used for a long time. Like all of us, change isn't always comfortable. For example, initially our counselors didn't like the idea of a regional college and career fair, because they had been conducting their own district fair for years. They were so upset. For a while we ended up having both. It took some time and some convincing, but now our counselors are on board with the regional college and career fair. They now see the value of collaborating and leveraging resources for the greatest benefit to all the children. Even if we represent different districts, we should all be working in the same direction."

While we are talking about strands and structure, Kim offered to touch on the strands Coachella Valley added. She recalled, "By the time we got around to writing our regional plan, we had already launched an initiative around scholarships and had coordinated a regional scholarship program. It was core to who we are and how we proceed. That is why, when we did our first regional plan it just made sense to add a fourth strand and Ford NGL was fully supportive. When it came time to refresh in 2017, we had learned a lot. It's not just about access to college. It's not just about preparing them to be successful in getting them there. It's about supporting them to and through college. It's also about what a financial plan and path looks like, and how do we support them into employment? That's when we added strands five and six. We also changed our definition of strand two to address K-16. The strand structure is very helpful when trying to think through something thoroughly. We added the additional strands, because it's germane to what we do. When you're thinking about helping students succeed in college and career and life. It's all interconnected, so we see it as K to career."

Kim summed it up this way, "I think when all is said and done, I'd encourage others to 'be ish.' Let me explain. Ford NGL found us when they were looking for strong community collaboration models, and we found Ford when we were looking for a strong project- and inquiry-based curriculum resource. We had our Industry Council model and they had Ford PAS, and we were able to become thought partners and explore how these pieces fit together. Neither of us said, 'We have the best way, do it our way.' Rather, we learned from each other. The work we've done here has helped others explore the Ford NGL way, and the things that other Ford NGL communities have done have informed us, like Alignment in Nashville. The AUSA framework is now the way we implement our Ford NGL inspired Regional Plan. We've also benefited from resources that our funders have brought to us, like the Irvine Foundation and Linked Learning. The California Department of Education funded a strong Career Partnership Academy (CPA) model, and now our districts are designing their own district funded academies using CPA ideas. That's why I say, there's not just one perfect way to do things or one perfect plan. Find those pieces that work well, align them with what your community is trying to do, allow for differentiated approaches and then implement. Allow the ideas to mix and grow. Our way of proceeding is unique and different, because we integrate the best of a lot of different resource supports. That approach has formed a solid foundation that we're continuing to build upon. So, don't be afraid to be a little bit of this and a little bit of that – allow yourself to 'be ish.'"



Our structures and OneFuture drive us to share our best practices and collaborate more.

**Kim McNulty**

Vice President of Regional Success,  
OneFuture Coachella Valley

## Reflections and Suggestions

- Identify those individuals with a positive mindset and bring them together. You're always going to have people on your team who don't want to be part of this and that's ok. Move forward realizing you can't change everybody's mindset. Often, those people will join down the road once the work takes hold.
- The best advice is to really believe it can be done. Embrace it. In the beginning it's going to be some challenging work, but over time that work becomes easier. Sometimes, it's going to feel like a big, heavy lift, and it's going to feel overwhelming, but that's okay. It should feel like a heavy lift, because it's not uncommon for worthwhile change to be overwhelming. Once you embrace it, go with it. Identify those people who are the leaders who are going to drive the bus and keep them on board. Make them happy and encourage them to stay.
- When I worked as a teacher in a school district where there was no structure, it felt very limiting. With the structure like we have here in Coachella Valley, it feels like we collectively have the right focus for our students. We are truly preparing them for their future careers.
- If we're really going to be serious about preparing kids to put food on the table, buy a house, buy a car, and all those things that they want to do, it's got to be about preparing for a career. It's hard to do that as just one school site or one small school district. In the Coachella Valley, we have pulled together our resources – our human resources, our intellectual resources, our community resources – and focused on how to address the needs in our area collectively.
- There is not one perfect process or plan. Find those pieces that work well and align them with what your community is trying to do. Embrace them, and allow them to mix and grow. We have created a fabric that is unique and different. It weaves in the best of different resource supports from partners like Ford NGL, AUSA, Linked Learning and others. This has helped us put in place a solid foundation that we're building upon.
- Keep the main thing the main thing, but make sure you identify the main thing. It's not about who is right or who is wrong. It's about our youth having every opportunity to create their future and our community's future – workforce quality, college and career success, and assured economic mobility.
- Consider dropping the phrase, "We're already doing that." If you want to say it, make sure you seriously analyze why things haven't changed. If we are already "doing it" then why are we getting the same results? When you do this difficult work (tactical planning, bringing everyone on board, using the facilitation structure and processes) and when you begin to see the positive results, it's like creating a really, really great family in a way that's so much more powerful than going it alone.
- There are so many positive, common-sense things that can and should be done, but never happen because of time or other limitations. All can be achieved if we just reach out, interconnect, and reimagine our structures.



There is not one perfect process or plan. Find those pieces that work well and align them with what your community is trying to do.



## LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY



### Community Profile

Louisville, Kentucky is the largest city in the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the 29th most-populous city in the United States. Louisville is the historical seat and, since 2003, the nominal seat of Jefferson County, on the Indiana border. Since 2003 after a city-county merger, Louisville’s borders have been the same as those of Jefferson County. The official name of this consolidated city-county government is the Louisville/Jefferson County Metro Government or Louisville Metro, but the term “Jefferson County” continues to be used. The city’s total consolidated population is approximately 780,000.

Jefferson County Public School District (JCPS) is the 30th largest school district in the United States and largest school district in Kentucky. It serves over 95,000 students who collectively speak 139 languages at 165 schools with 6,890 teachers. There are 15 high schools, each housing two to three academies and serving over 27,000 students.

### Louisville and Ford NGL

Jefferson County Public Schools completed its first master plan and became a Ford NGL Designated Community in March 2014. JCPS began phasing in their high schools during the 2017-2018 school year with a mission to evolve public high school education by equipping students with the skills and 21st-century know-how needed to thrive in an ever-changing global economy. Initially, 11 of their 16 high schools opted to transform. Currently, there are 15 high schools participating.

### Forum Participants

- Dr. Joseph Ellison, Assistant Superintendent of High Schools, Jefferson County Public Schools
- Michael Gritton, Executive Director, KentuckianaWorks
- Kim Morales, Executive Administrator of High Schools - Academies of Louisville Schools, Jefferson County Public Schools
- Dr. Marty Pollio, Superintendent, Jefferson County Public Schools
- Kristin Wingfeld, Specialist School Business Partnerships, Jefferson County Public Schools





## Community Structure



### Key Systems Driving Transformation



#### Develops, implements, and monitors all aspects of the Academies, including:

**School-Level Implementation of Academy Model**  
Provides direction and support for all aspects of school-level implementation of the Academy Model including strategic direction, training, and oversight.

**School-Level Advisory Boards**  
Supports an advisory board for each Academy and pathway in the District comprised of the Academy's partners, teachers, parents and students and other stakeholders

**Business Partner Staffing and Management**  
Recruits and onboards business partners and connects them to the schools, assists in partner development for all academies and monitors and celebrates partner outcomes; provides one point of contact (the Academy coach) at each school to engage with business partners

**Data Management and Evaluation**  
Identifies strengths and gaps within progress indicators at the school-level and for the Academies overall

#### Designated as the convening body and provides staff leadership and support for:

**Guiding Team and Executive Committee**  
Primary advocates; mobilizes the community and cultivates deep, community-wide ownership; Provides strategic advice and oversight; sets goals for community engagement.

**Industry Collaboratives**  
Convenes industry-specific councils that advise career pathways and industry certifications; shares industry trends and workforce needs; and serves as a conduit for new Academy partners

**Labor Market Data Analysis**  
Recommends pathways based on high-wage, high-demand career opportunities in the region and projected workforce trends

**Business Partner Engagement and Onboarding**  
Recruits business partners and connects them to the schools, assists in partner development and celebrates partner outcomes

**SummerWorks**  
Connects junior and senior students to summer internship opportunities and provides softs skills training

**KentuckianaEARNs.com**  
Platform that connects young people ages 16-21 to WBL opportunities and career information

#### Provides leadership in all areas of the Academies and staff support for:

**Business Partner Engagement and Onboarding**  
Recruits business partners and connects them to the schools, assists in partner development for all academies and monitors and celebrates partner outcomes

**Business Partner Recruitment for SummerWorks**  
Identifies and recruits business partners who offer summer internships

#### Supported by:



## News, Views, and Observations

KentuckianaWorks stepped up to be the convening organization for Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS). Kristin Wingfeld, Specialist School Business Partnerships, Jefferson County Public Schools described their role, “Their main role is around convening the guiding team, which meets every other month and focuses on work that is happening across all 15 of the Academy of Louisville schools. We also have a work group that meets every other week that involves leadership from KentuckianaWorks, Greater Louisville Inc. (The Metro Chamber of Commerce), and JCPS regarding the daily and week-to-week work that must happen and brings the right topics to our guiding team.”

Michael Gritton, Executive Director of KentuckianaWorks stated, “We have built up a lot of professional and personal trust over the years by just making sure we’re in the room with each other and trying to solve problems together. We took very seriously what we saw in Nashville and what the chamber did there, where they set a small number of yearly goals, tried to track and pay attention to those goals throughout the guiding team meetings. When we convened people in the summer, our first agenda item was clarifying the goals. We asked the group to discuss and determine what was going to be done over the next year. The cadence and rhythm of that process has been thrown off a little because of the pandemic, obviously, but we’ve been trying to continue that same approach.”

Kristen added, “Michael’s leadership and Michael’s board’s leadership at KentuckianaWorks adopted (five or so years ago and reaffirmed in their recent strategic plan) that alignment from secondary into post-secondary into the workforce is a priority of their board. That is how he ensures that the work of Academies of Louisville is aligned with the work of KentuckianaWorks in terms of staffing and support. Michael supports a director of special projects focused on the academies that works to support the guiding team amongst other things she is assigned to do.”

When asked about the district, Dr. Marty Pollio, Superintendent, Jefferson County Public Schools offered this perspective. “I think what we did as far as expansion took us a few swings and misses to get it right. A big part of that was, we’re not mandating this for schools, but, as a district, if we’re going to fund it and support it and provide the personnel and the facilities, then you’re going to have to sign on to this model. We do have an interesting, school-based decision making (SBDM) structure here in Kentucky that makes it more different where the site-based council has control. I think that was a huge difference maker. Other schools started seeing and saying, ‘Wait a minute. Like, we want all of that stuff. We want this – these engaging programs.’ That’s when we started getting people to sign on. We said that we need this done with fidelity, not the fake way that it can be done.”

“As far as the community structures to support us, I’ll say it’s kind of two-fold with this. The smaller, but as important, is the accountability. Having to stand in front of that guiding team on a regular basis. We’ve got a few very strong-willed guiding team members who are very involved in outcomes and very involved in how we’re doing. They are pushing hard, which is why they’re great. They’re critical partners – critical friends that we need. Knowing that we’re going to stand in front of them at least quarterly and give an update that includes accountability makes a difference. Numbers hold our feet to the fire, so we know we’ve got to do this.”

“Through this process, we’ve had two leadership changes at the high school on top of changes in high school superintendent and assistant superintendents. So, there was this feeling that when someone leaves or retires and we bring in someone else who did not create this, how are we going to keep doing it? I think that’s the biggest threat to all this work is sustainability through leadership change. With that guiding team, there really wasn’t an option. Like, we’re not going to bring in someone else who has a different focus after all this work. And so, Dr. Ellison, Assistant Superintendent of High Schools, knows one of the main questions I had for him was how are you going to make the Academies of Louisville better than it is now, not just sustain what we have? So that was huge.”

Marty continued, “I think the second part was with the community structures that we have with KentuckianaWorks and the guiding team. We could build the structures in the school, but there is no way we could have, by ourselves, established engaged business partners for 14 different high schools and multitude of pathways in each school. We are up to 190 partners. That is something that we could not do on our own in any way whatsoever. Having the guiding team and some very strong-willed and dedicated people who can go out and say with influence, ‘You need to get involved in this right now and be a part of this’ is monumental. All of that has led to a real sustainable model that continues to grow. We have one more high school to get, and I think we’ll get them soon. Then we’ll have all of our high schools in the network and covered in this model.”

Kim Morales was once a principal and is now the Executive Administrator of High Schools in Jefferson County. She thinks that given the structures in place, that the principals raised their hands and said they would commit in order to benefit their students and the community. She said, “It wasn’t a top-down mandate either. Therefore, the schools changed a lot and funding for those schools changed. Outside of that, much is the same, because we still



We’ve got a few very strong-willed guiding team members who are very involved in outcomes and very involved in how we’re doing.

**Dr. Marty Pollio**

Superintendent,  
Jefferson County Public Schools

have a lot of schools that are not academy schools. Principals have navigated through the status quo while trying to build the academies. I think that our next challenge (or phase of growth) is really working with our current structures that support the traditional school model. In terms of 9th through 12th grade counselors, everybody needs to have a grade level (or everybody has a part of the alphabet) to move into that teaming mode and work with our teaching and learning division.”

“For example, consider our in-school instruction (ISI), our special ed division, our language learners, and our multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) folks. What does that look like in the school? We must really make sure that our schools continue to move forward in the academy structures, in addition to other valued initiatives or goals that they have. How do we assure that principals are consistently trained and evaluated in relation to their academy model implementation goals? We must really work with principals on goals to strengthen their academy work, provide the support that they need to do it, and then hold them accountable. Having access to the academy, coaches that have a dotted line to the district office and meet with us regularly to keep us informed and the communication flowing. While each school is very different, we’re able to support and promote our district goals at each school through those coaches.”

“What I would add is that our focus now has been on systematizing the work, so that it’s not just 15 schools doing what they do, but instead, it’s very clear, very consistent, very systematized. Even our support is systematized. The way we engage with other departments in our district is a part of the system. We firmly believe if we have solid pieces in the system and the system itself is solid, then our outcomes are going to follow. We’ve got to make sure everyone understands,” said Dr. Joseph Ellison, Assistant Superintendent of High Schools. “It’s about everyone understanding what’s expected, so there’s a sense of continuity and predictability, and there is sustainability through leadership change. It also gives us the ability to expand and support that expansion. The other thing I will say is we are really working hard to deepen interdisciplinary work and trying to get outside of math, English, science, social studies in silos and our career technical education in silos. We are really working with our Career Tech Ed instructional leads and with our Teaching and Learning department that supports our math, English, science, social studies work to come together and begin to integrate that work. We want to make sure the work that students do in the classroom is interwoven – it’s interconnected, it’s authentic, and it’s more meaningful and engaging for them. We know we’ll see impacts in core content from that. We’ll also see greater impacts in our Career Tech Ed work too if we make sure that the interdisciplinary work is happening.”

We asked Michael Gritton if he could, for the benefit of those communities starting out on this journey, to share his thoughts on how the convening role played by KentuckianaWorks developed over time. He recalled, “Thinking back, what I remember is we had started to work with Ford NGL and others, and we had a plan that was very, very deep,” said Michael. “In fact, it was so deep we didn’t get much done because of it. Then, when we took the trip to Nashville and saw what was happening there, I walked out and told my colleagues that Nashville was not just beating us, they’re kicking our ass. That’s what it felt like. It’s not like we weren’t working hard. We had tried the five-



I think that our next challenge (or phase of growth) is really working with our current structures that support the traditional school model.

**Kim Morales**

Executive Administrator of High Schools,  
Jefferson County Public Schools

star rating system, and I had been involved in that. Everyone was truly trying, but it just wasn't working. You saw McGavock High School in Nashville, and you're like, oh, this is how that could work."

"My board at that time had already identified alignment issues as the single biggest problem that they wanted to try to tackle. Workforce boards run career centers, we get funding to do things, but the mayor, Greg Fisher, has challenged us to try to be the workforce intermediary for the community, identify problems, and solve them. What employers were saying at those board meetings back then was that these kids were coming out of high school, and they didn't know anything about what our business is about. There's got to be a better way. So, because my board was interested in that, we got involved from the beginning."

"Coming out of the great recession, a lot of chambers were facing some difficult circumstances. In contrast, at KentuckianaWorks we had strong leadership at the top of the board. We had a woman named Rena Sharpe who was a manufacturing executive. We had Tom Quick from GE Appliances who was their HR leader and a real visionary. We had Tony Georges from UPS, their HR leader. We had this guy named Jim Lancaster who is also a visionary around all this work who had gotten involved at the community college level. We had a woman named Jackie Beard from Norton Healthcare. Some of our major employers were interested. They were on the board and wanted to lean into this work."

"The board wanted to lean into this work. We volunteered to play the facilitation role. I think we organized the very first strategic planning session. I ultimately was able to raise some money from the largest foundation in Kentucky to the James Graham Brown Foundation to try to support the staffing required. That director of special projects, who basically spends almost all of her time on the academies, is funded primarily out of outside grant money."

"We were tracking and paying attention to them at each of the guiding team meetings. There's transparency with Marty and his leadership team about data both good and bad. The vibrations we were giving out were intended to communicate that we were a partner and not trying to be a critic. Tell us what your problems are. Let's see if we can try to solve them together. The chamber has also been a very effective partner in helping to recruit business partners. They've been great at that. They have a broader reach than we do, and that's most beneficial. Fortunately, a couple of those people that I named earlier were visionary leaders. For some of the first couple of years, not only were we doing guiding team meetings, but we also had a small executive committee of the guiding team that was getting together in between those every-other month meetings. We had people really rolling up their sleeves, trying to figure out how to help Marty as a new superintendent. The role of the guiding team is much bigger than being about one person. We try to be encouraging and do what we can to support new leadership, because there are big challenges as people retire or leave. We struggle to find people with the same broad shoulders, with the same community view, with the same knowledge base. So that's an ongoing challenge."

No matter what role we play in this transformation, sustainability is key. Once you recruit and begin working with partners, how do you build and sustain that relationship? "In our case we have a team that meets weekly," said Kristin. "It includes a representative of KentuckianaWorks, two folks from the chamber, and me.



The chamber has also been a very effective partner in helping to recruit business partners. They've been great at that.

**Michael Gritton**

Executive Director, KentuckianaWorks

We mostly focus on the business engagement piece, how we are doing it, and what needs to be done next to deepen and strengthen the partnerships. For example, we're getting ready to launch a huge recruitment initiative, so we met with our schools and identified the industries in which they need partners. The team at our chamber is thinking through their contacts. For example, we know we need five more partners to work with our business pathways. They're identifying 10 partners that might want to work with our business pathways. They will do the initial reach out and then transfer that relationship over to me and others on the team to connect them to schools in a robust way."

"I think most Ford NGL communities struggle a bit with defining that academy coach position. What exactly are we expecting, what are the criteria, and what is their certification level? The academy coach, of course, is the key to making the business partnerships actually work at the school. Regular convenings have a train and deploy model where I meet with them every other week to talk about business partnerships and leverage some of those opportunities. We talk about how they're tracking them and how they're deepening them at the school level. I'll talk about two partnerships that I think exemplify what we're really trying to go for."

"One is the partnership between GE and Doss High School. GE Appliances is heavily involved at Doss high school, making a quarter of a million-dollar investment and putting in a mock manufacturing line. What I love about that partnership goes way back to its beginning. The most fascinating presentation I ever saw was the GE Appliances lead from their side, took their core values and Doss High School took their core values, and they overlaid it on a PowerPoint to show the alignment. GE Appliances put their entire leadership team in a van and took them out to Doss High School. There was a meeting between the Doss High School leadership and the GE leadership. I think that sets the stage for the type of partnership you want to have, and the deep level is really exciting to see."

"The other favorite partnership that I love to talk about is a partnership between a small company called WireCrafters that partners with one of our welding programs. Literally, every other week, the operations manager at WireCrafters recruits five of his top welders and takes them over to Pleasure Ridge High School (PRP). They just hang out in the welding lab for a half day, mentoring kids, and talking to them about welding and about what work is like. After they hang out at PRP for a couple hours, the operations manager takes the welders out to lunch. He talks about how that type of opportunity for his employees has really made a difference in the morale and the culture and climate at his organization, for two reasons. They get to inspire the next generation, and they get time alone with their manager to share their thoughts and perspective."

"Currently at WireCrafters, nine of their 51 welders are PRP high school graduates. I think that's an exciting kind of connection. Just last week, I was on a panel with their operations manager, and I brought up the question of equity, wondering if he'd have an answer to it. And he immediately offered a suggestion. He said that the welding teacher at PRP pointed out that the demographics of the program didn't reflect the demographics of the school, and the teacher wanted to improve that. The partner immediately said, I have a very diverse workforce. I will bring in people that look like your students across PRP. Let's work on recruiting to ensure that the welding program at PRP reflects the school. I think GE and Wire Crafters are just two examples that have come out of the community structures and have really been cultivated by the partnerships that we have formed and sustained over time."



The academy coach, of course, is the key to making the business partnerships actually work at the school.

**Kristin Wingfeld**

Specialist School Business Partnerships,  
Jefferson County Public Schools

Kim Morales added, “We celebrate business partnership signings like an event. Tomorrow I’m going to Seneca High School where they are signing Frost, Brown, Todd Attorneys. They’re signing a law partner, and so that’s exciting. We’ll have banners up, and we’ll have JCPD media there. It will be a big event, and that is so important. We ask our academy coaches every other time we meet with them to update us on celebrations with business partners that are making a difference for kids. There’s an expectation that something is happening all the time with your business partners. We are celebrating those things at a district level. We report those out to our chief of schools to keep him informed. We let our academy coaches know that the district is interested in these business partnerships. They are important, we want to know about them, and we want great things to be happening.”

Kim noted that, “Kristin works with each academy coach and with Greater Louisville Inc. In meetings this year specifically, she sat down with them and asked about their pathways. Who are your partners? Are you looking for any gaps when it comes to equity? Are you identifying needs that are not being met or weren’t aware of or that just require better support? Each principal identified a partnership goal and how to deepen their partnership work based on what we defined as a healthy partner. They have a year to work on those goals with their academy coach and with their teachers. We want to have the ongoing presence of what we call transactional partners – the guest speakers, the field trips, the lunch and learns, and we also want an increase in our transformational partners who are doing the kinds of things that Wire Crafters and GEA (General Electric Appliance) are doing for our schools.”

## Reflections and Suggestions

- Achieving goals and objectives is far more than data indicating compliance. It’s about ensuring authenticity and effective implementation. Saying you have 100% of students in a career academy is insufficient. We must make sure each student is in and experiencing a true pathway, and that means having leaders in the schools often, so they can see and speak to implementation. If we’re not seeing the desired outcomes, that means we’re struggling with our systems and the work is not deep.
- Transformation is not one of those things you can implement in a year. When you don’t see the immediate results, you don’t go looking for the next shiny new toy. You must commit to multiple years of implementation in which you apply a continuous improvement mindset. It’s a step-by-step, make it a better and better process.
- When you are thinking about who in the world is going to be your convening organization, think about the missions of the organizations in your community. Is there a basis for a mutually beneficial relationship? Find the organization(s) with which you can align with instead of trying to force a square peg into a round hole.
- Investing in the career-academy model can be an expensive proposition when committing to do it the right way. Having the community and business partners who are going to work with you is a powerful resource. Business partners willing to advocate with the school board and the public for that kind of investment is a big deal, especially when they show a willingness to make some of their own investments of time, money, and people.
- It is critically important to have good partners, but it is also essential to have trust – trust and transparency among the convening group, the business partners, the district, and the schools.
- The second time we got a plan, we had a three-page plan. With that we’ve kicked ass and taken names. That’s my coaching for you all when you’re working with other communities. Sometimes what’s asked for was too much in too much detail. What’s really needed is a very short, very crisp idea, and then execution. For us, once that happened, we spent more of our time on execution and less on planning.



## NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



### Community Profile

Nashville, Tennessee is the capital of Tennessee. It is centrally located and the second largest city in the state. The region is home to nearly 2 million people with nearly 700,000 living within Davidson County. Although known as Music City, Nashville has several key industries outside of entertainment and music including healthcare, advanced manufacturing, corporate operations, supply chain management, and government. In fact, the top employers in Nashville are not related to the music industry, but are in healthcare and government.

Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) is the most diverse district in Tennessee and one of the largest in the nation serving over 80,000 students at 159 schools with 11,030 staff and nearly 5,000 classroom teachers. The Academies of Nashville is one of the best college and career prep programs in the nation because of the effort to transform high schools in Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) that started more than 15 years ago. Today, the Academies of Nashville has 35 wall-to-wall academies in the district's 12 zoned high schools. Being part of the Ford NGL Network provides essential ongoing support, resources, and professional development vital to continuing the Academies of Nashville, MNPS.

### Nashville and Ford NGL

The partnership between Nashville and Ford NGL reaches back many years. It started in the late 1990s with Nashville serving as an early demonstration and training site for the Ford Partnership for Advanced Studies (Ford PAS) Curriculum. Through this work, Nashville was able to demonstrate the impact of meaningful, sustained school-business partnerships. Those experiences and relationships formed a strong foundation for the successful implementation of the academy model. Implementation began in 2006 supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Small Learning Communities Program.

In the early years of Nashville's academy model implementation, the Ford NGL Network provided much needed support. In 2011, Ford Motor Company Fund supported the development of Nashville's second five-year master plan to continue implementation of the academy model and plan for its sustainability. Also in 2011, the Nashville Hub was launched (housed at Alignment Nashville) to provide opportunities for communities to visit Nashville and learn about the Academies of Nashville. The Nashville Hub provides consultation and professional development for other communities as they explore and implement the academy model. In 2013, Nashville was designated as a Ford Next Generation Learning Hub.

### Forum Participants

- Jennifer Bell, Director, Academies of Nashville, Metro Nashville Public Schools
- Melissa Jagers, President & CEO, Alignment Nashville/Nashville Hub
- Bob Kucher, Chief Partnerships and Programs Officer, PENCIL



# Academies of Nashville Community Structure



## News, Views, and Observations

The structure within Nashville has remained quite stable over time. Perhaps that is because when those structures were built out over ten years ago, they were designed for sustainability. According to Jennifer Bell, Director, Academies of Nashville, Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS), “When we’re thinking about having to pivot, whether that be through a pandemic, in response to changing student needs, or in the face of other demands or shifts – sustainability is really that key piece. Having those structures in place and designed for sustainability has proven its point. For example, even during a pandemic, our academy teams still met. They still offered interventions and experiential learning. They might have looked different, but everyone was engaged including our partners. Even as we came back to school from the pandemic, we learned from the experience and continue to offer virtual job shadowing and are able through video to provide and connect with employers where they are.”

“Those are key pieces as we look at students and internships still working through the summer,” added Melissa Jagers, President & CEO of Alignment Nashville. “Even in those remote environments, our structure of teaming has remained the same with an academy, with a counselor in place with a team of teachers. I think that’s why when we built these structures years ago, we have proven that they were designed in such a way as to be sustainable given any shifts, changes, or pandemics that could occur.”

Bob Kucher, Chief Partnerships and Programs Officer, PENCIL observed, “To Melissa’s point, the structure has remained the same. To Jen’s point, the way in which engagements have happened looked a little different over the past couple of years. One of the structures I think that we’ll talk about is the sustainability of partner relationships and the ability to be flexible and pivot the way engagements happen. I think we all witnessed our partners being flexible and being creative and bringing new ways to engage with students.”

A big challenge Ford NGL and its communities had to confront and work on from the beginning of the transformation process was redefining the school/business partnership. Traditionally, that relationship had been very transactional. You introduced a new business partner to the high school principal and the question was about what the

partner could provide. Usually that principal would say something like we need picnic tables for our courtyard or a new scoreboard for the athletic fields. In some ways, changing that mindset was scary for some principals, because it really changed what a partnership looked like. In the traditional partnership the transactional payoff could be immediate where in a true partnership it requires mutual engagement and cooperation, sustained over time.

“I think that is why, when we did encounter something like the pandemic, it demonstrated how our partnership relationships were at much a deeper level,” said Jennifer Bell. “The principals didn’t have to ask the partners. The partners had such a deep understanding of the students and the needs of the schools that they were able to say, ‘Here’s what we can do to help.’ That demonstrates the fundamental shift that takes place in a relationship when you go from transactional to transformational. PENCIL and MNPS work hard on nurturing and maintaining that shift. Because the transactional experience with the business community is still so common in traditional education, someone new to our district might even ask why MNPS schools aren’t allowed to ask business partners for money. That’s not it at all. It’s just that transactional requests are no longer the primary focus or basis of the partnership relationship.”

Bob added, “From my point of view, I’m grateful in the sense that PENCIL has been around for 40 years serving MNPS. The organization has learned a few lessons along the way including how to put together a partnership continuum which sustains relationships over time. That model is not only about making sure we are the best matchmaker possible. It’s much more than that. We want to change the culture of companies, and we want to impact students. We want to make sure that these relationships endure over time. It’s important to recognize that relationships are not necessarily just between two people. More than that, they are between two entities. How do we weave that relationship together? We do that by being very strategic in the way we communicate on a regular basis, and in how we apply routine patterns of engagement that not only benefit teachers and students, but also the employees from partner companies.

Both parties must benefit, and their lives must integrate. They must come together regularly where the mutual benefits are seen on an ongoing basis. I feel like the model we apply and move forward here in Nashville as a collective speaks to our ability to create those long-term relationships.”

“When you make that significant shift to a true partnership, what really comes into focus is scalability,” said Jennifer. “For example, this year, we really took a deep dive into work-based learning career practicum. As the name of the course suggests, students are both learning and earning. When you look at not only the impact it has for the students, but also how it supports our partners (especially during this period known as the ‘great resignation’), it demonstrates how you can work creatively to achieve more with existing structures and resources. With just one kickoff event, we’ve already had 220 positions for which our employers offered to employ students. It took powerful partnerships to make that happen. There has been such a positive influence from PENCIL and the Nashville Chamber, bringing partners together through Alignment. That is the kind of impact transformed partnerships can achieve and how our structures and relationships can provide even more opportunity for students.”



When you make that significant shift to a true partnership, what really comes into focus is scalability.

**Jennifer Bell**

Director, Academies of Nashville,  
Metro Nashville Public Schools

Bob added, “Earlier we talked about asking for picnic tables for the courtyard as an example of a transactional relationship. Well, those conversations still pop up from time to time, but what we really need to talk about is sharing time and talent. Trust me, the picnic table will show up, but let’s think about something that is bigger, broader, more impactful. These are things that we are still educating others about, not only on the school side of the fence but also on the business community side. A powerful partnership is far more than getting a picnic table. It’s about what we do at the picnic table. It’s about what we put on the picnic table. We’ve all seen how partnerships have grown within the city of Nashville, and it’s really all about the business community sharing their expertise and their time.”

Structure, its interconnectivity, and the establishment of mutually beneficial relationships have certainly been key to Nashville’s success, but there are also other considerations if you want to foster sustainability. Jennifer explained, “I need to emphasize the importance of professional development. Just as we have mobility with students we have mobility with teachers, staff, district leaders, team leaders, and business partners. In fact, we have and will continue to see mobility throughout the structure. That is why we must continue to train, and we can’t look at it through the lens of training every five years or more. Why not? I’ll give you an example. A CTE teacher, on average, stays in the position for three years. Clearly you can’t wait five years to train. You must continually provide professional development, not only for your teachers, but for your administrators and your district leaders. Trainings can’t be limited to just highly effective teams either. You have to look at team leaders and at business partnerships. You certainly need to onboard new partners effectively. It’s vital to look at everything from teaching through the lens all the way up through the interdisciplinary team. Another piece to sustainability is the buy-in of your superintendent. We’ve been through a few superintendents over the last several years, and that buy-in is a critical piece. A third piece to sustainability is communication. Whether it’s within our advisory boards at the school level, partnership councils, or anywhere throughout the community – continued communication helps us focus on our ‘glows’ and our ‘grows.’ What are our priorities and how can we continue to improve the work that we’re doing?”

“Jennifer, I couldn’t agree more about the importance of communication,” said Bob. “From PENCIL’s perspective as a third-party intermediary working these relationships, our partnership managers have a very specific cadence of how they reach out to and communicate with business partners. We are literally tracking every communication that goes out, whether that is about an engagement plan or a variety of other opportunities. Documentation is a piece of the puzzle that I feel strongly about and a priority I share with my team all the time. For example, say we have a company that agreed to partner in 2006. Having a clearing house of information allows us to deliver a report to our partner that says that on April 25, 2006, your company came onboard and connected with such and such academy. You had 10 employees involved, and they did these engagements. We’ve tracked every hour, we have all related communications, and we can generate a huge, detailed report. When you can provide that kind of documentation, it impacts sustainability. Why? Because it allows us to showcase the investment and progress a company and its employees have made. When you can document and detail the investment, there is not a lot of room for the company and the partnership to turn around. There is room, however, to grow. There is room to



We’ve all seen how partnerships have grown within the city of Nashville, and it’s really all about the business community sharing their expertise and their time.

**Bob Kucher**

Chief Partnerships and Programs Officer,  
PENCIL

leverage the investment and build upon the capacity for growth the investment has created.”

PENCIL’s partnership managers work with the business partners to keep the lines of communication open and relationships strong. They also have a structure for working and communicating with the academy coaches. Bob described it this way, “We have 12 academy high schools to support, and each has an academy coach. PENCIL has four partnership managers, so each is responsible for building a solid working relationship with three academy coaches. I think the coaches and our managers work well together, and it’s dependent on having well defined roles that everyone understands and respects. Think about the fact that there are 360 partnerships which need to be sustained in a variety of ways. Add to that the engagements and plethora of ways in which experts can become involved, and it is easy to see why communication and teamwork is essential. Educating the partners, educating the employees of the business, and making sure they know there is a role for each of them within the structure is important too. There are a variety of ways in which employees can get involved and manage that effectively help us create and sustain those relationships.”

“To Bob’s point, we have our monthly academy coach meetings. There is time in every one of those meetings where PENCIL has a dedicated space with the academy coaches,” added Jennifer. She continued, “I call it your ‘pick up your PENCIL’ time. It’s at that time where academy coaches can say things like I need some support, we have pathways where I need some help, I need a new business partner that can do this or that. PENCIL can then utilize resources through the chamber of commerce, through the Nashville business journal, or through Alignment Nashville to start generating a conversation. That leads to onboarding a new business partner and makes sure they are completely aware of what they’re getting into. When partners come through PENCIL to be part of the academy structure, everybody is onboarded in the same way. Everybody comes to an intake meeting. The agenda for the meeting is very structured and keeps the content and discussion focused. The goal is to give everybody an informed and equal footing before they step out into the world of partnership work.”

“In terms of sustainability, from an Alignment perspective, I think the community has as much of the ownership, accountability, and responsibility as the schools do,” said Melissa. “That said, nobody really wants something done to them or imposed on them whether that’s the community or the schools. That’s why I think our role has been one of facilitation and convening. A balance needs to be maintained. That’s sometimes difficult to do, but somebody has got to be paying attention to that aspect as well. We have a group we call the Academies of Nashville A-Team which focuses on that and the tactics of the work. The Academies of Nashville A-Team now serves as a steering committee. It conducts the annual planning retreat and provides ongoing oversight and accountability for both MNPS and community partners as they work to achieve specific goals for the year.”

During this period known as “the great resignation” we are seeing more in the way of key leaders shifting, moving, leaving, and retiring. While many organizations just do their best to live with it and go about their business, it can create some significant problems. The challenge can be even greater to navigate for Ford NGL communities as they seek to sustain gains and go further. “I would be dishonest if I said it was not a challenge,” said Jennifer. “We’ve been most fortunate in that we’ve only had turnover in one academy coach position since pre-pandemic.



There is time in every one of those meetings where PENCIL has a dedicated space with the academy coaches.

**Jennifer Bell**

Director, Academies of Nashville,  
Metro Nashville Public Schools

That’s a huge win when we think about maintaining partnerships and all those who are shifting and transferring to other occupations or other companies, not to mention all those who are furloughed. Conversations about turnover are ones we have continually in the partnership councils. Regarding our PENCIL partnership managers and the academy coaches, it’s what we’ve really had to do. Thankfully Bob and his team takes inventory of where personnel changes and shifts have been made. Going back to that need for documentation, we’ve gone through rosters of all our employers, so our coaches know where to lean in on program managers to reach out and bridge connections. As we go into the summer, one of the things that we’re doing is looking at those new leaders supporting the academies and bringing them together to provide professional development.”

“When I think about what I’ve witnessed in my eight-year tenure at PENCIL, I’m encouraged, because now I see a young generation that feels responsible,” Bob reflected. “I see corporations that say they need to be at the table. They say, ‘We should raise our own. We should help support students and raise our own workforce.’ I see more and more of that from the community as time goes on. I think that’s a shift that I’ve witnessed. I also feel like the documentation Jen mentioned is something our business partners know through our very strategic onboarding process. I think we understand the ebb and flow of relationships. We understand that you may grow and do a lot one year, and the next year you may shrink. For example, we’ve had companies in the hospitality arena that have lost massive amounts of their staff. Their engagements shrunk, and we had to pivot on how they helped and were involved in schools. Now they’re growing back, and we can add more engagements. Just being on the front end of having those personal relationships and that constant communication allows the people in the partnership to say, ‘I can’t do as much as I did last week, but I’m still around.’ I let them know I understand and empathize with their situation. We agree that we have something good going on and continue to grow our relationship and feel how it moves over time.”

## Reflections and Suggestions

- It’s important to have champions at all levels, but transformation often starts and is driven by principals and leaders at the school level. Don’t underestimate the powerful influence school leaders can have on the community.
- When it comes to creating long-term, powerful partnerships, there needs to be someone responsible for the relationship (like an academy coach) in the school and a champion who is responsible for the relationship inside the employer’s organization. Absent those roles filled by champions of the cause, the partnership is likely to fail.
- When we look at the impact and challenges of the pandemic, we surprisingly see there were also a lot of wins. It afforded us an opportunity to look at new ways in which partners can engage, how teams can collaborate, and what innovations can be applied. Consider not only what should be abandoned, but what should be continued and/or further developed.
- A partnership is not so much about getting the picnic table for the courtyard. It’s really about what we accomplish together at the picnic table.
- When a community starts this work, it is important to have leaders who are on board, but it is also important to guard against one entity “owning” it. Ownership by a single individual or entity can jeopardize the work when changes occur over time. It’s why structures like CEO champions and steering committees are vital to sustainability.
- Recognize the necessity to continue professional development. Training can never be allowed to be a one and done proposition.
- Invest in people. Invest in community partners that need to see and hear what academies are all about. Make sure people from across the community understand at a very granular level what academies look like, what it takes to create and sustain one, and how academies can benefit students and the entire community.

## RACINE, WISCONSIN



### Community Profile

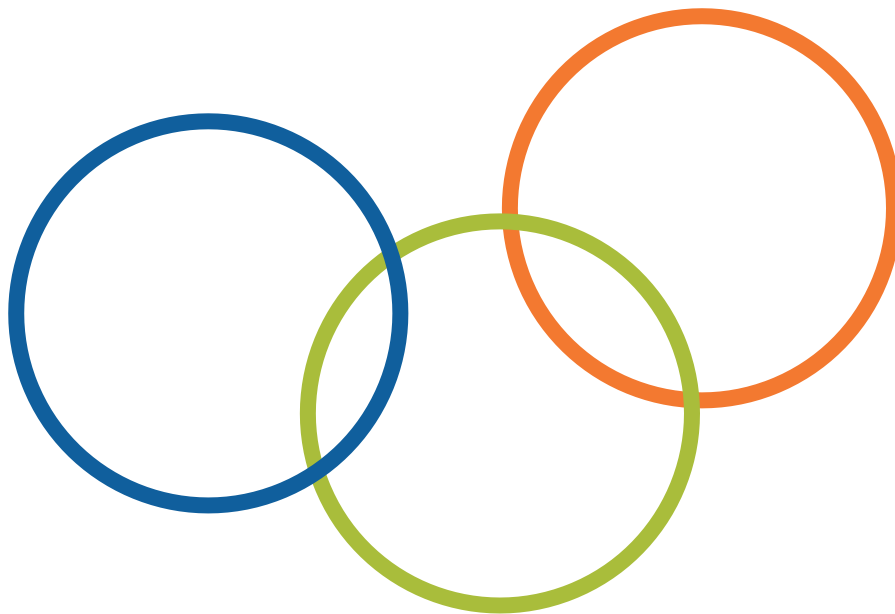
Located in southeastern Wisconsin, Racine Unified School District (RUSD) is the fifth largest school district in the state, serving more than 16,000 students. It serves seven cities/villages in an area of approximately 100 square miles. In RUSD, culturally diverse schools prepare students to thrive in a global community. The district boasts highly qualified educators who are committed to ensuring all students graduate career/college-ready. RUSD offers many options including 3- and 4-year-old programs, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Montessori, dual language, virtual learning, award-winning fine arts, after-school programs, the Academies of Racine and more.

### Racine and Ford NGL

In the Fall of 2016, Racine Unified School District (RUSD) launched the Academies of Racine at three comprehensive high schools – Case, Horlick, and Park. The Academies of Racine are designed to assure students are prepared for college and careers within the regional workforce. All freshmen are part of the Freshman Academy, which includes partaking in the Freshman Seminar course, exploring careers at the annual SEE Your Future Expo, visiting three local colleges, and engaging in two events, known as the Commitment to Graduate Ceremony and the Declaration Ceremony. After Freshman Academy, the students select their academy and pathway of choice for more in depth learning experiences, featuring guest speakers, coordinated site visits, job shadows, internships or Youth Apprenticeships, and project-based learning to connect their classroom learning to the real world. Professional skills and transferable skills are also strengthened along the journey to graduating career and/or college ready.

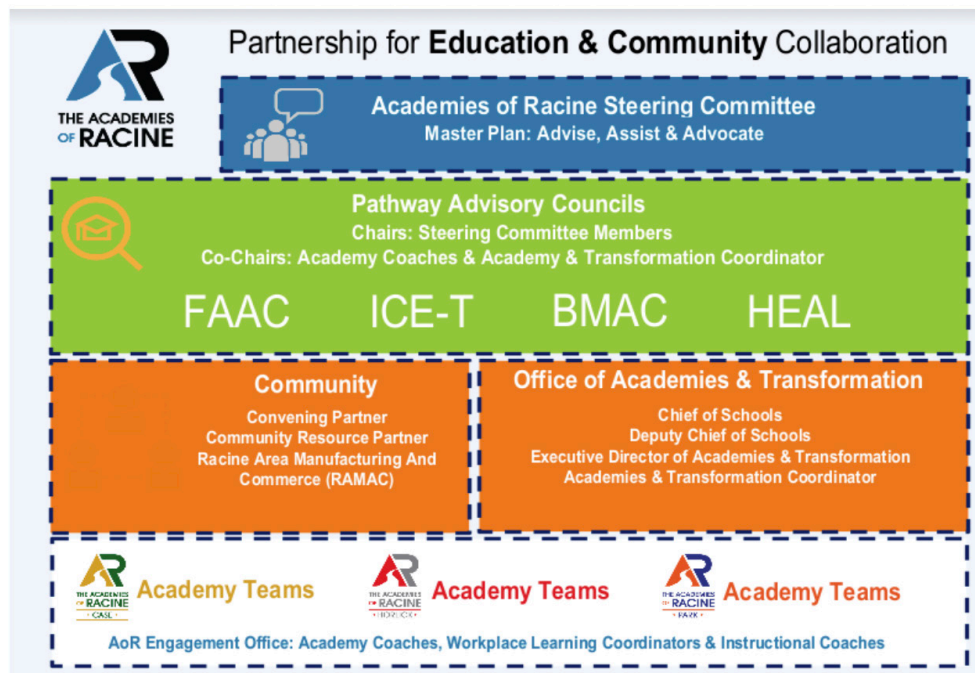
### Forum Participants

- Alexander DeBaker, Executive Director of Academies & Transformation
- Martin Weishoff, Engineering Manager at Modine Manufacturing Company (previous steering committee chair)





## Community Structure



## News, Views, and Observations

Participating in this discussion are Alexander DeBaker, the Executive Director of Academies and Transformation for Racine and Martin Weishoff, Engineering Manager at Modine Manufacturing Company. Alex once taught manufacturing and engineering and was the manufacturing pathway teacher when the Academies of Racine were first launched. He has been on both sides of this from being a teacher to now being an administrator. He was also a workplace learning coordinator and helped arrange youth apprenticeships. Martin, in addition to his work at Modine Manufacturing, served as a member of the Academies of Racine steering committee from 2018 to 2021. He stepped down from the steering committee to make way for a new voice then continued his service to the community by joining a career-pathway advisory committee. As for the steering committee itself, Martin sees it as a bridge. As Martin put it, “I think there’s a great connection of the entire community. It’s not just RUSD folks working on their own. I think that it has been important to bring together the community members so they can hear the school’s perspective, to understand what it’s looking for from the community, and what the community needs as well. I think that there is that bridge. I am glad to be a part of it and get the word out about the Academies of Racine as much as I can. As part of the committee, it was great to hear and understand the changes that were being made. As we developed the committee and our working relationships, we could better appreciate the goals, the metrics, and what the academies were trying to achieve.”

Alex shared his thoughts on the steering committee and its role. “Obviously the steering committee was a huge part in launching the academy back in 2015 and 2016. They helped support the crafting of the master plan. Back then, we filled up huge ballrooms and would just start brainstorming on what this academy model looks like and the outcomes that we were looking for. Now we’re transitioning into this period of sustainability. Now that we’ve launched, it’s a lot more streamlined. What we ask of our steering committee is to keep us accountable and informed about what is important to the community. What do they want to see? What do they want to know?”

What are some of the data points that they need to monitor? Then, not only are they supposed to hold us accountable, if we do have issues in certain areas, what are some solutions? It takes a village to raise these kids and provide the learning and career opportunities they rightly deserve, and that's for sure in an urban setting. We can't do it on our own. That's where the steering committee really comes into play because it is solution minded. As we run into road bumps and barriers, the big role is that accountability piece, but also master plan writing. And what do we want to see? What's the future look like, and where do we need to go? And that's really their major function. Right now, we're working on master plan 3.0, so we will be into our third version coming up this summer. That is exciting, and it looks a lot different, because it is more about sustainability. So, now we're here, how can we improve? That's where we really lean on the steering committee for that guidance."

Steering committees are composed a bit differently in each Ford NGL community. Martin described the makeup when he served on the Academies of Racine Steering Committee as a large and diverse group. Alex elaborated, "The steering committee has representatives from the business community, non-profits, post-secondary institutions, the district, and our school board. We also try to keep the ratio at 50% RUSD and 50% community members. It's something that we'd actually like to evolve to where it's 75% of various team members and 25% RUSD. As far as representation, it's close to including all the career pathways."

Over the years, there have been changes in the convening organization. Originally it was Higher Expectations of Racine County and over time that role transitioned to Gateway Technical College. Alex thinks Gateway is a great fit for the academies. "We partner with them on a lot of different credit opportunities and different experiences for students. They are great partners as far as bringing our kids out and offering those post-secondary tours just to expose them to different opportunities. Even our teachers need to get out and see what technical schools have to offer just to open their eyes. I say that, because some of them only think in terms of four-year colleges and universities. There are some great opportunities within these two-year programs and four-year programs are not for everybody. Right now, the major role of Gateway is recruitment and onboarding new partners. That's something we must, even in sustainability mode, need to spread our wings, expand our network, and build on what we already have. We must support our students in all those different opportunities."

"We have so much manufacturing and engineering in this town. It'd be great to just continue to spread. Those kids need to continue to see those different opportunities, and what those different engineering and manufacturing roles are. While Gateway's main role is to recruit and onboard those new partners, they also support us in other ways. For example, they help us plan some of our major events like See Your Future Expo. They help support us in colleges as well, to which our freshmen are taken for visits."



It takes a village to raise these kids and provide the learning and career opportunities they rightly deserve, and that's for sure in an urban setting.

**Alexander DeBaker**

Executive Director of Academies & Transformation,  
Racine Unified School District

One of the challenges experienced when we go from a traditional system to the innovative model of career academies, is a greater consequence when there are changes in personnel. Many educators weren't trained in the way that we work within a career academy model. For example, most teachers weren't trained in academies and the superintendents didn't necessarily come all the way up through the system. The idea of changing key personnel in the leadership positions, whether it be a superintendent, director of academies, or principal can be difficult. Alex offered his perspective. "Yes, but one thing about the academies is that it's something that's not going away. That alone helped us support and manage changes in leadership. It's something that we do – something we embed in everything that we do. In fact, we're actually rolling the academy mind-set back to middle school. I think some of the more difficult challenges we face is we're losing teachers to leadership positions, because they are passionate about what the academies have to offer for our students. Now we're replacing teachers and filling leadership roles with people who know the academies and want to continue to build on them."

"Of course, that means we must do a lot of professional development. Everybody goes through it. We have different training that every teacher goes through, and we have changed the way we write our job descriptions to include project-based learning and participation in different academy events. It's an expectation that our staff members are taking in these things, and we do academies one-on-one project based. There's some other teaming professional development that we do as well. That said, there is a challenge here that we've discussed, and that need is the lack of onboarding for academy administrators. It's something that we can't ignore, because while we usually build from within, we might occasionally get an administrator who, for example, comes to us from Milwaukee or Kenosha."

## Reflections and Suggestions

- Communication, communication, communication. Use billboards, radio, whatever you can to get the word out. Share what is trying to be achieved. Let the public know that this is about being career ready. Let the community know and get the backing behind it. Let them know that no matter where their child ends up, there's going to be opportunities for them.
- Have a true champion for the cause in your community.
- Discuss with the steering committee how the work with the academies can be better embedded into community partnerships. Get away from the relational partnerships and get to a place in which it is the way the partner does business.
- As part of Master Plan 3.0, our new process of onboarding of partners includes the opportunity to be mentored by partners that champion the work. Highlight those that have best practices and can speak to the keys of building and sustaining an effective partnership.



We have so much manufacturing and engineering in this town. It'd be great to just continue to spread.

### **Alexander DeBaker**

Executive Director of Academies & Transformation,  
Racine Unified School District

## UNITED KINGDOM



### Community Profile

The United Kingdom has five stages of education. The five stages include the early years, primary years, secondary education, Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE). Children begin their education at the age of three. Between the ages of five and 15, they are required to attend school (compulsory). After that, continued education is a choice. There are three zones of administration (England, Scotland, and Wales) and while there are some differences between the zones, the educational system is, for the most part, the same.

There are four stages in compulsory education. In stage one, pupils ages 5 -7, are introduced to basic knowledge subjects ranging from English, mathematics, and history to physical education and music. In stage two, with students ages 7-11, there is more focus on core subjects of English, math, and science with assessment testing at the end. In stage three, students ages 11-14 study English, mathematics, science, history, geography, art and design, music, physical education, modern foreign languages, design and technology and computing. At the end of stage 3, some students may take their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) or other national qualification testing. Stage four is for students 14-16. They are taught the core subjects of English, mathematics, and science; the foundation subjects of computing, physical education, and citizenship; plus, one additional subject (arts, design and technology, humanities, or modern foreign language). At this stage is the most common period for GCSE and other national qualifying testing.

When stage 4 is over, Britons must participate in a standard examination which determines if they qualify (or not) for higher level education. In the UK, there is a distinction between a college and a university. College is a Further Education (FE) institution which prepares young people (post 16) and adults for further study (FE & HR) and employment. A university is a licensed Higher Education (HE) institution at which students can earn a degree.

### United Kingdom and Ford NGL

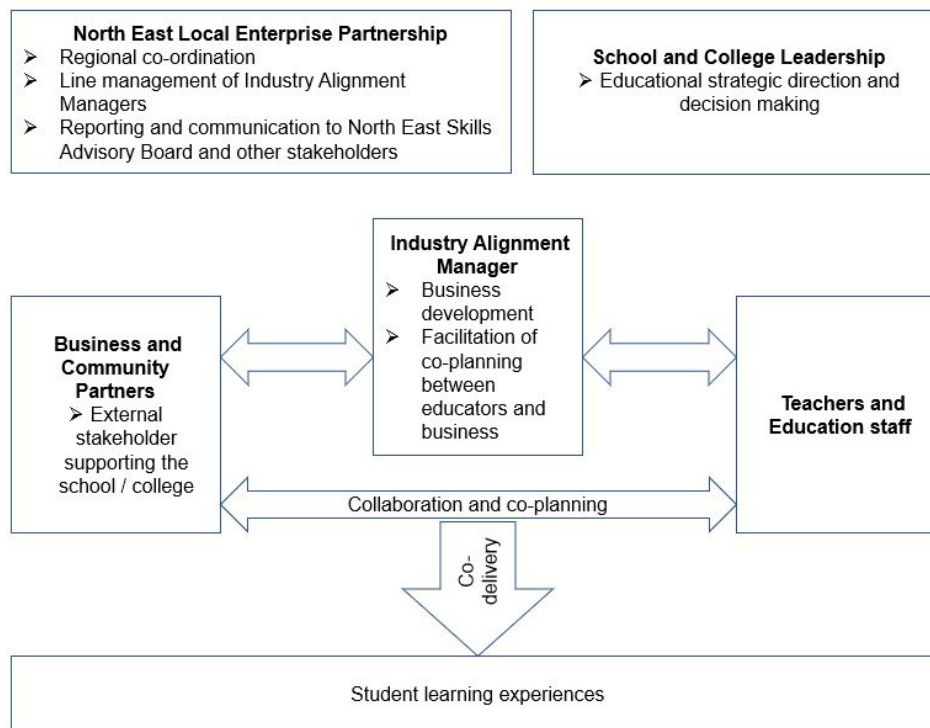
In September of 2017, Olly Newton, the Director of Policy and Research for the Edge Foundation based in London, visited the Ford NGL community in Nashville, Tennessee. Accompanying Olly were representatives from City and Guilds, the CBI, British Gypsum, the North East LEP, Trent Academies Group, Excelsior Academy, Churchill Community College, and Northam High School. Edge is dedicated to shaping the future of education to meet the demands of the 21st century global economy and ensure opportunity for all. The contingent left the visit inspired by Nashville's legacy of educational transformation to create a version of the Ford NGL Model in the UK.

Beginning in September 2018, three pioneering local schools (Excelsior Academy, in Newcastle, Churchill Community College and Northam High School, both in North Tyneside) began introducing elements of the Ford NGL Model into the school curriculum. By July 2019, three additional schools joined (Castleview Enterprise Academy in Sunderland, James Calvert Spence College in Amble and Sunderland College, Northumberland College and Hartlepool Sixth Form) which constitute Education Partnership North East.

### Forum Participants

- Judith Quinn, Vice Principal, Sunderland College, Education Partnership North East
- Neil Willis, Regional Lead, Education Challenge, North East Local Enterprise Partnership

## Community Structure



## News, Views, and Observations

Neil Willis, Regional Lead, Education Challenge, North East Local Enterprise described his organization’s role this way, “Our role has changed a bit over time, but really our function is the convening organization. Initially we talked to education institutions about the model and about the partnership work. We tried to identify who was interested in exploring new models and pushing the boundaries beyond what they might have done traditionally. What are some new ways in which they can effectively engage with industry to have a direct impact on learners and young people? That first piece was really a kind of brokerage piece but trying to keep different organizations focused on some key elements that we all could agree on. We attempted to identify the key elements that could be translated within the constraints of the UK system while trying to share best practice of what that could look like.”

“As a convening organization, we oversaw the sharing of what was going on in different institutions and sharing practice from wider networks. Then, the nitty gritty of the work was about seeing how our strategic economic plans and development could be brokered between industry and the institutions. Areas of shared interest needed to be explored by the specialists and the educators on how that is interpreted to have the most positive effect and impact on young people. Bringing new organizations and new industry to the table; facilitating introductions from our other networks; and cultivating views that start to develop relationships between the educator and the employer – that’s what we were about. That initial facilitation was about the effective brokerage of relationships.”

Judith Quinn, Vice Principal, Sunderland College described their working relationship and her role further, “Neil Willis and I would meet regularly and frequently. Together we clarified our priorities and got the approach in place regarding what we were going to focus on. Our college focus areas were students’ wider skills development, project-based learning, rich stakeholder engagement, and quality-teaching professional development. I chaired regular progress meetings regarding our Ford NGL and discussed how we are progressing against each of our four

focus areas. It always included our North East Local Enterprise Partnership liaison officer, and it always included the cross-college teams. That was really important to make sure the work continues and is sustainable into the future. When I say the work I mean curriculum involvement, careers involvement, student services, and our business development team. Being able to draw on those partnerships which are already in place and determining how we were then going to make them even better is key. How we have taken that work forward with our employers and our community stakeholders is really the blueprint for our employer advisory groups.”

“Initially we were focusing on the health and social care sector. That was the first advisory group we set up and is now established as our health and social care academy of excellence. There is a wide employer base that covers the sector. Charity-based organizations, local authorities, and the National Health Service (NHS) provide involvement on that side. Again, it obviously includes key stakeholders within the college and always includes the representation from the North East LEP. For us, that’s been the key driver in making sure we have support in place and carry on with the framework and genuine transformation that happens across the college culture. It is pivotal around curriculum planning, what happens in the classrooms, and the opportunities for students and staff. For me, that employee advisory group has been the key driver internally with the relevant stakeholders involved.”

Neil added, “The Ford NGL Model features a steering committee. I think, in the very early days, we did set up a group specifically for this work. From a governance and structure standpoint, we still do. All of our actions are reported through our governance structures. We’ve got a skills advisory panel on which Ellen Thinnesen, the CEO of the college group, sits. I report on our work on a quarterly basis. There is ultimately some funding provided, and they hold me to account for what’s going on. Also, I report into our North East Ambition advisory group that helps when we hit a barrier, need a solution to a challenge, or require access to other networks. North East Ambition supports schools and colleges with the mission to provide the best possible career guidance for children and young people in our region. So, we don’t have a steering group as such, but we do have governance and advisory groups that we use and tap into. In many ways they perform functions similar to those of a steering committee.”

It is fair to say that the model implemented in the United Kingdom is a different model from the Ford NGL Model as implemented in many of its North American communities. What is common is that the core idea is still there. It was just modified and customized for the United Kingdom system, and it took some time to evolve to where it is today. “Yes, I think that is so,” said Neil Willis. “If we wind the clock back, at first it was an interpretation of what we saw during the first visit to the Academies of Nashville. Some of the best practices had to do with employer and industry engagement. For us, our initial work was very much a pilot – an exploratory phase. Later in phase two, we put in some resources in terms of industry brokerage. Among the challenges faced were very different approaches to leadership, to how things were implemented, to building capacity within individual institutions. Where those were addressed, progress is still being seen and is sustained. So, in one of those initial schools that whole approach is still embedded and keeps rolling, even though there’s probably been six changes of leadership at the top.”



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“By the time we moved to two, we had learned some hard lessons and figured some things out. We saw some of the things that worked and some that didn’t, both within the education system and in the role we played. We had to figure out what worked well in terms of building sustainable relationships with business and how to support that with how we worked. Early on, we sometimes got too involved in the day-to-day, and perhaps that was just a result of trying very hard to get things moving. What we learned as we moved on to cohort two is that ultimately, the leaders in education and the practitioners in education must find a way that not only ‘works’ but makes the desired, favorable, and significant impact on young people.”

“Therefore, we probably took a step back from being so involved in the doing and instead put more of our effort in the convening. We focused on the work we were doing with business and trying to find more of our role in things like bringing the groups together and making sure that there was purpose to those convening sessions. We learned that when we bring people together from industry and education, there must be a purpose for that hour, those two hours, those three hours. We had to make sure that plans, actions, and ownership came out of the time invested. If you don’t, the lesson learned is that you will quickly lose interest on both sides. For us it was about making sure that there was purpose and structure to that convening role. Sometimes it is as much about stepping back to reassess as it is about leaning in.”

The Ford NGL Model is essentially an American model. In the UK system, while some components could be embraced, some don’t quite fit. Said Judith, “I think what has been most impactful for our college was the actual focus of the framework. It’s not just education telling employers what they need. It was recognizing that to reach all students in the college and prepare all learners for the next step, the need for wide community involvement must be embedded in teaching and learning practice and opportunities. That connection with employers has probably been the key part of the framework for us. I think that in the traditional UK education system and FE colleges, you assume that everybody is getting access to employer engagement and that it’s really impacting teaching, learning, and professional development. When you truly reflect on what has been happening, it may be just in the pockets of an organization. For me, the big thing about the framework was that real change in mindset and culture and about how you transform the partnership – working to make sure that it genuinely embeds into the classroom – all classrooms.”

She continued, “As far as Strand 1 (Transform Teaching and Learning), we’ve used the (Ford NGL) Framework very intentionally to drive our strategic plan and our vision and particularly our goal of a career focus curriculum. One of the key things has been setting up advisory groups, particularly in priority skill shortage areas. Now we’ve got them in the health and social care area. We’ve got them in housing, innovation, and construction. We’ve got them in the creative industry too. Those, for me, have been a key driving factor to make sure robust curriculum development and relevant employer engagement really does reach the classroom. Now this is informing a hundred percent of our curriculum plan. It informs changes to our curriculum offering. This is from our further education programmes and up to higher education programmes.”

“It has allowed us to galvanize those employers to engage and not just on short term touch points with the college and short-term touch points with students. It has been more about that real, genuine, sustainable longer-term partnership. That’s what I’ve



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seen as part of using the framework. By that, I mean, it isn't just about employers coming in and teaching in the classroom. It is about them informing the curriculum, being happy to be involved in long-term projects, and so on. I've also seen that employers are realizing that this is mutually beneficial. The work they are doing with our young people in the college is informing their practice back in the workplace. We have these employer advisory groups, but if there is an employer telling us about a particular skill shortage in their industry, we will set up a subgroup to focus on that and make sure we are addressing everyone's needs. We'll keep adjusting the subgroups depending on the needs on both sides and what's going to benefit students more. It's not a static plan."

"In the UK, the curriculum is quite fixed, especially at the secondary level. School performance is based on learning certain academics and attaining certain qualifications. That's not going to change in any hurry," said Neil.

"What we have changed is the relevance of how you deliver subject X or subject Y and how you engage employers in that process. That piece is key across everything – the skill development and relevance piece. It's an aspect of what we do that is big and it's growing. Since we started in the national landscape, the recognition of the need to develop the skills of employability including real-world problem solving and critical thinking is increasing on a national scale."

As part of that national shift, and new development in the UK educational system is that of T-Levels.

A T-Level is a nationally recognized qualification for 16 to 19-year-olds that takes two years to complete. Leading businesses and employers helped design the program. Students spend 80% of their time in the classroom and 20% on a minimum nine-week placement with an employer. Schools and colleges set their own entry requirements such as what GCSE grades are required. Points are earned from completing a T-Level and the points can be used to apply to a university or another type of higher education. A student can also use a successfully completed T-Level to pursue a higher-level apprenticeship or as the basis for a job application.

According to Neil, "There is a growing discussion and work around T-Levels. The government is saying that there are different pathways and different subject areas of T-levels, and there are targets in terms of the number of learners that will engage with those. They offer young persons a different pathway. The key part of it, and why I find it interesting, is because employer industry engagement has been integral. In some ways, the government could have just replicated something that we've already established."

Judith observed, "There has been a shift in mindset about the importance of technical skills development. This is at all levels, really. It has never been more prominent, right up to higher education levels four and five. I think what worked well from a timing perspective is our focus on employer engagement and real community involvement. That focus must happen if you are talking about the technical skills and that holistic development of a student. For us, the timing was perfect, because as the importance of technical skills education was coming on board, it was at the same time we were working through the framework and really maximizing the importance of our employees and stakeholder engagement to inform the way we teach the curriculum. Also, as Neil mentioned, it's the way that we holistically develop a student. It's those transversal skills, as well as the technical skills and knowledge, that's going to make them successful in their careers, in their life, and in education."



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“In our role as a college we really use things like this enhancement and innovation to really push forward. As part of our mission, we want to be a place shaper and really influence the skills agenda. Just to give you a couple of examples, I regularly meet with what’s called the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), which is sponsored by the Department for Education (DFE). What we have been doing is exactly the type of things I am talking to them about. Obviously, I meet with them because we’re introducing T-levels, but I’m actually talking to them and giving them case studies about why we have been successful in implementation. The country has been struggling regarding the elements around the substantial industry placements. We haven’t had that issue because of the groundwork we put in around sustainable, mutually beneficial relationships with the community and with employers. We also welcome people from the DFE at director level, and when we talk about what we provide as a college, this is a key section that I share. They don’t need to tell us how to address workforce needs as we are already out front, forming the way that we will raise the technical skills and address skill shortages of the region.”

“So, from our perspective, we are doing some of that national work. In addition to setting an example through our work, we work with key outside organizations. For example, we worked with the Gatsby Charitable Foundation careers benchmarks and are now working with them on technical education and T Levels. It is very much about raising awareness and sharing best practices. Another organization we work with is the Edge Foundation. It is an independent organization with the mission to inspire the education system to give all young people across the UK the knowledge, skills, and behaviors they need to flourish in their future life and work. Like us, they believe in high quality professional education and training, a broad and balanced curriculum, interactive and engaging real-world learning, and rich relationships between education and employers. Edge has set up what’s called Edge Future Learning Leaders, which Ford NGL is a part of, as is Sunderland College. We talk about this type of work because it centers around real-world learning and community-connected learning. The connection they have around policy and research is linked-in to what’s happened in our region.”

It’s clear that the work done at Sunderland College and its efforts in the region is groundbreaking. The model has been successfully implemented in a post-secondary application. In the United States, implementation has been primarily at the secondary level, bridging into the post-secondary, and now, in some communities, there is expansion planned or taking place into the elementary. Why has the focus been so different in the UK, and will it expand into the secondary levels? According to Neil, “If we compare what we see in the flagship academies of Nashville (although it was a secondary phase) to what you see here, it reflects where we’re at in the FE setting. Students have for the most part chosen a pathway from the things that they’ve studied, from the advice they have been given, and from the experiences they’ve had. Generally, they’ve chosen a pathway, and to get to the qualification piece as part of that pathway, they need employer/employee engagement. Although the student ages are different when compared to Nashville, it felt to me like a natural overlay at the college. Things that may be different are things like where people convene. When it comes to the secondary levels in the UK, because of the regimented way the



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government sets performance measures for the schools, it is unlikely you could get to the point of setting pathways like we do.”

Judith agreed, “I think schools can be more restricted regarding certain qualifications that they must attain. As far as colleges, some have that technical framework and a link with employers. Where we are further ahead at Sunderland is in what those connections are about and the different elements of what’s best for a student program. We have used our flexibility to build up a study program that’s relevant for our students and relevant for the region. What we offer is certainly not just about a qualification. It is about a whole package of skills, attitudes, behaviors, and activities that makes sure students are ready for that holistic development. For us, this framework has reinforced how important it is to really have that cross-curricular connection. It’s something that we’ve benefited from as we’ve worked through our transformation.”

## Reflections and Suggestions

- Always go for the “why we are doing this” and really lead on that message. Talk about what has been the impact on students. Talk about the impact on teachers and the staff. Talk about the impact on business and the community at large.
- Find and align with the leaders and decision makers who have the authority to allow change.
- It’s amazing to see the impact this transformational approach can have on all learners, but it is truly inspirational when you see the impact on disadvantaged learners when they make that genuine connection with stakeholders and employers.
- Make sure you have a clear strategy with clear messaging. Establish real leadership buy-in with somebody who’s going to drive the vision, strategy, and messaging forward and report at both the organizational level and at a regional level.
- Pilot your framework as we did with health and social care. Before starting to expand, get it right at a manageable scale, so you can build up your approach.
- Take the time to start the process effectively by bringing the community together. Figure out exactly what needs to be done and why and know that the “why” is extremely important. Then, put the plan together slowly to get it to a place where you can start implementing effectively. Support the implementation with facilitation, brokerage, and collaboration. If the clarity is there and if sufficient time and care is taken in planning and implementation, stakeholders will grab hold and continue the momentum.
- Slow is smooth and smooth is fast. Do not start your community-connected learning and your employer engagement until you’re fully ready and set-up for success. The worst thing you can do is start something unprepared and gain a reputation for wasting the time of employees and partners. So, be ready. Once you start, you must keep it going, and it must be sustainable and mutually beneficial.

# NOTES

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**For more information about  
Ford Next Generation Learning  
contact [info@fordngl.com](mailto:info@fordngl.com)  
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Ford NGL mobilizes educators, employers, and community leaders to prepare a generation of diverse young people who will graduate from high school ready for college, careers, and life—prepared to apply their passion and skills to improve and contribute to their communities and to succeed in the 21st century economy.

First and foremost, students are at the center of everything we do. All youth, especially those furthest from opportunity, deserve an education that nurtures their talents and full potential, preparing them for whatever future career path they choose. At the heart of our approach is a fundamental shift in mindset about what it means to prepare young people for college, careers, and life.