

## A paradigm shift: four bold career pathway guarantees for all

Imagine if every K-12 public-school system ensured that all students received the following four bold guarantees:

Guarantee No. 1: 100 percent of students engage in up to four career pathways, learning and earning programs with targeted mentors, starting in 1st grade continuing through 12th grade with paid apprenticeships and jobs from a broad business network.

Guarantee No. 2: 100 percent of students can earn up to an associate degree by high school graduation at no cost.

Guarantee No. 3: 100 percent of students receive at least six months of entrepreneurship and "power-skills" training in seventh through 12th grade.

Guarantee No. 4: 100 percent of students can pursue up to seven Industry Recognized Credentials (IRC) by graduation including certifications from Microsoft, CISCO, OSHA/Industrial Powertools, ProStart foodservice, RISE Up Sales, ACT Work Keys, and Missouri as Pharmacy Technicians.

Today, in Jennings School District, we ensure that all students receive these guarantees. While this is the Jennings Warrior Way, such guarantees are possible for all in St. Louis and beyond.

The reality today for most children is over 50 percent of U.S. public-school students are impoverished. People feel the effect of a 125 percent increase in public college costs in one generation.

Sadly, although the cost of college degrees has skyrocketed, the value of many degrees has diminished. Over 60 percent to 65 percent of all jobs will require some industry training typically taken after high school but not necessarily a college degree.

So, we redesigned the school system by placing such education and training in primary grades for construction and architecture, coding, and healthcare and continued it through middle and high school levels. By starting in elementary school, students complete nearly 10,000 hours of career-technical skills training during high school. This allows our students to do advanced doctoral research with UMSL and Washington University with pay in various areas like systems dynamics, genomics, and bioinformatics. Others work on building mobile library hubs, hospitals, or rehabbing houses and earn \$20 per hour with benefits from Niehaus Building Services and full rides to the University of Missouri from Clayco with work and mentors.

This shows three things. First, such an education is a great equalizer. Secondly, greater access to outstanding opportunities like these is an equity super-sizer. Thirdly, a system-wide paradigm shift is essential for this redesign.

Prosperity occurs when proficient preparation meets personalized opportunities with powerful partners.

One example of such partnerships is the award-winning workforce develop-

ment initiative, STL.Works. It launched at the St. Louis American Center with over 600 attendees on August 6th, after months of planning with RBC CEO, Kathy Osborn, and other leaders. Over 100 Fortune 500 companies committed to this paradigm shift and getting more youth and adults to work.

These bold career pathway guarantees and powerful partnerships are proof positive that we as a community can:

- Empower children and adults in a way that produces 100% graduation and career placement despite the zip code.
- Eliminate millions of dollars of college debt and the false choice of either college or career by doing both careers and college credit funded by business.
- Engage students in learning and earning early in life.

A zip code should not confine anyone. Every student can thrive. But it requires a paradigm shift with bold career pathway guarantees for all.

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The opinions expressed in this column are the columnist's alone and do not reflect the opinion of the owners or staff of *Community News*.

