



# Essential Skills & Career Exploration: Empowering K-12 Students for the Future

September 10, 2024



**I-WIN**

Illinois Work-Based Learning  
Innovation Network



# Goals for Today's Session

- Share resources and best practices to support the design and implementation of essential skills activities and career exploration
- Offer practical strategies to support you in preparing students for success in work-based learning experiences



# Agenda

- Welcome
- [Center for the Future of Arizona](#)
  - New K-5 career exploration curriculum
- [GPEAK](#) system for developing and assessing the Illinois 10 essential employability competencies
  - New [training site](#) with all GPEAK curriculum now available for educators
- Next steps and upcoming events



# I-WIN

Illinois Work-Based Learning  
Innovation Network

Explore the [I-WIN Resource Hub](#)  
and [subscribe to the newsletter](#)



Highlight and explore  
innovative models for  
work-based learning



Engage in conversations  
on creating sustainable,  
high-quality models  
that provide broader  
and more equitable  
access, focusing on  
building social capital  
for historically  
marginalized learners



Build connections  
among communities to  
share best practices,  
learnings and resources



Identify needs for state  
policy changes or  
support systems



# Arizona Pathways to Prosperity

## Career Exploration

Center for the Future of Arizona



## Mission

Center for the Future of Arizona brings  
Arizonans together to build a stronger and  
brighter future for our state.



# Arizona Pathways to Prosperity

# Arizona Pathways to Prosperity



Systems of **college and career pathways** that span grades K-14+, enabling students to **transition smoothly through high school**, into **higher education**, and onto **family-supporting careers** particularly in **H3 sectors** like information technology, energy, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing



# CFA Pathways Key Elements

## • Career Exploration

- 8th Grade Education Career Action Plans
- K-5 Curriculum
- Middle Grades Curriculum
- Strategic Planning

## • Early College Programs of Study

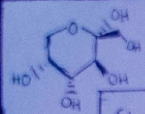
- Dual Credit Pathways
- K-12/Post-Secondary Collaboration
- Externships and content related professional development

## • Work-Based Learning

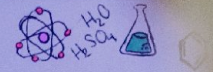
- Virtual Internships
- Hybrid Career Shadows
- Apprenticeships/Youth Apprenticeships



# Career Exploration



## Chemical Engineer



Chemical engineers design chemical plant equipment and design processes for manufacturing chemicals such as gasoline, synthetic rubber, plastics, detergents, cement, paper, and pulp, by applying principles and techniques of chemistry, physics and engineering.

Average Annual Income  
\$132,450

### Education

- Bachelor's degree in chemical engineering at a 4-year university (ASU has this program)
- Schools: Arizona State University, University of Arizona, Stanford, MIT, Cal Tech, UC Berkeley, etc.

### Certification

Engineers in the U.S. must pass the Fundamentals of Engineering exam & graduate engineering curriculum. Professional Engineers graduate from an accredited institution and pass a certification exam as well as have 4 years of experience.

### DEGREE RECS

4-year Bachelor's degree in chemical engineering

### Did you know?

- Chemical engineers are the backbone of process industries.
- Chemical engineers are responsible for the safety of millions of products.
- Chemical engineers often work with computer software such as CAD to make their designs as accurate & efficient as possible.
- Some key skills required to work as a chemical engineer are strong knowledge in chemistry, physics & structural engineering, analytical & programming skills, and creative and quick problem solving skills.
- There are many branches of chemical engineering like biotechnology, food engineering, pharmaceutical engineering, etc.



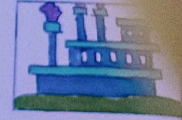
### RELATED JOBS

Biotechnology, Chemical engineer, Color technologist, Energy engineers, Nuclear engineers, Petroleum engineers, Product/process development scientist, etc.



### How does chemical engineering use cyber security?

Because chemical engineers often use computers to store data and make their designs more accurate it is important for them to avoid things like phishing emails and make sure they have strong passwords to keep their own information as well as their company's information protected. Also, in some cases, chemical engineers may be working on classified projects, so they must understand how to keep information protected.



How are Color technology and Chemical Engineers related? How are they different?  
(I love the picture)

average annual income \$132,450... how long I need to work in to receive higher mt's.

# Career Exploration

## Students

Most young people get little advice about education pathways to careers, and career possibilities

## Families

Few families understand the future labor market—or even the current one

## Teachers

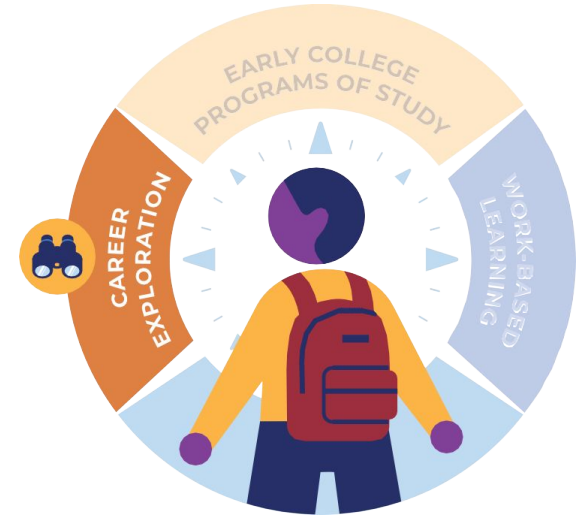
Teachers typically have little experience of contemporary high-growth industries and know little about labor market data and shifts in education and workforce



**CAREER CONNECTED  
PATHWAYS**

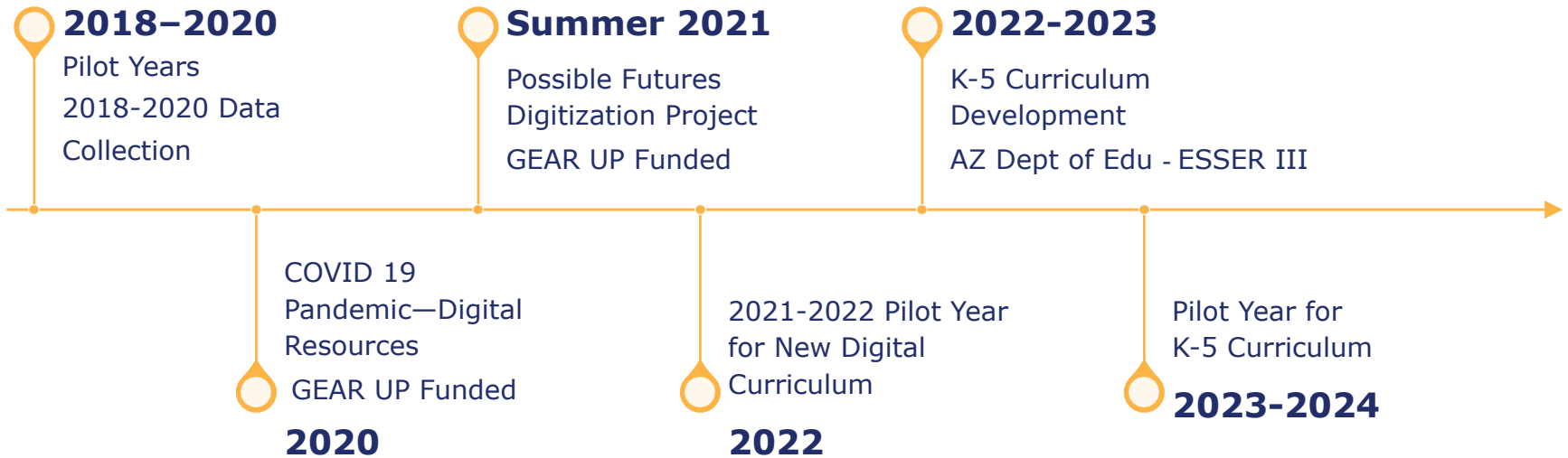
# Career Exploration

- ✓ K-5 Career Exploration Curriculum
- ✓ 6-10 Career Exploration Curriculum
- ✓ District/School level career exploration program planning and supports
- ✓ Career Exploration Summer Camps
- ✓ 8th Grade Education Career Action Plans
- ✓ MyFutureAZ Implementation
- ✓ Externships for Educators



**CAREER CONNECTED  
PATHWAYS**

# The Possible Futures Network



# Career Exploration Student Outcomes



Gain awareness of and exposure to a wide array of careers



Increase self-awareness and begin to form their potential occupational identity



Develop employability skills



Develop foundational technical skills as appropriate



Be positioned to make more informed educational choices



Transition to high school with an actionable plan for next steps

Source: [\*Broadening the Path: Design Principles for Middle Grades CTE\*](#)

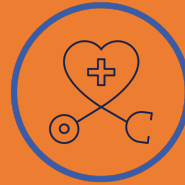
# POSSIBLE FUTURES

## CURRICULUM MODULES

### SKILLS FOR SUCCESS



### STEM- PLORATION



### LENSES ON THE FUTURE



# The 8<sup>th</sup> Grade ECAP

By the end of 8th grade, middle school students should...

- Develop an “8th grade ECAP” that includes completing a **career assessment**, identifying possible careers, building out a career profile, and creating a 4–6-year educational plan.
- Gain **exposure to and awareness** of local and national career opportunities and career clusters.
- Increase **self-awareness** and begin to incorporate occupational interests into self-identity.
- Develop awareness and interpersonal connections to the **world of work** through experiences with potential employers, professional role models, and mentors.
- Develop **professional skills** as outlined in the [5-8 Career Literacy Standards](#).



CENTER  
FOR THE FUTURE OF  
ARIZONA



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# Graduation & Career Planning Tool.



Bring LIVE Labor Market Information into your classroom using this Arizona-specific Career Exploration tool.  
[myfutureaz.com](https://myfutureaz.com)

K-5

Possible

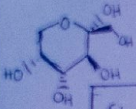
Futures

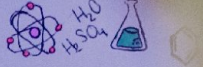
Curriculum

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Did you know?


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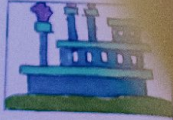
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
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# K-5 Curriculum Development Project



# Elementary Curriculum

Students use the Self, Security, and Society *Lenses on the Future* to...



Learn more about their interests and strengths.

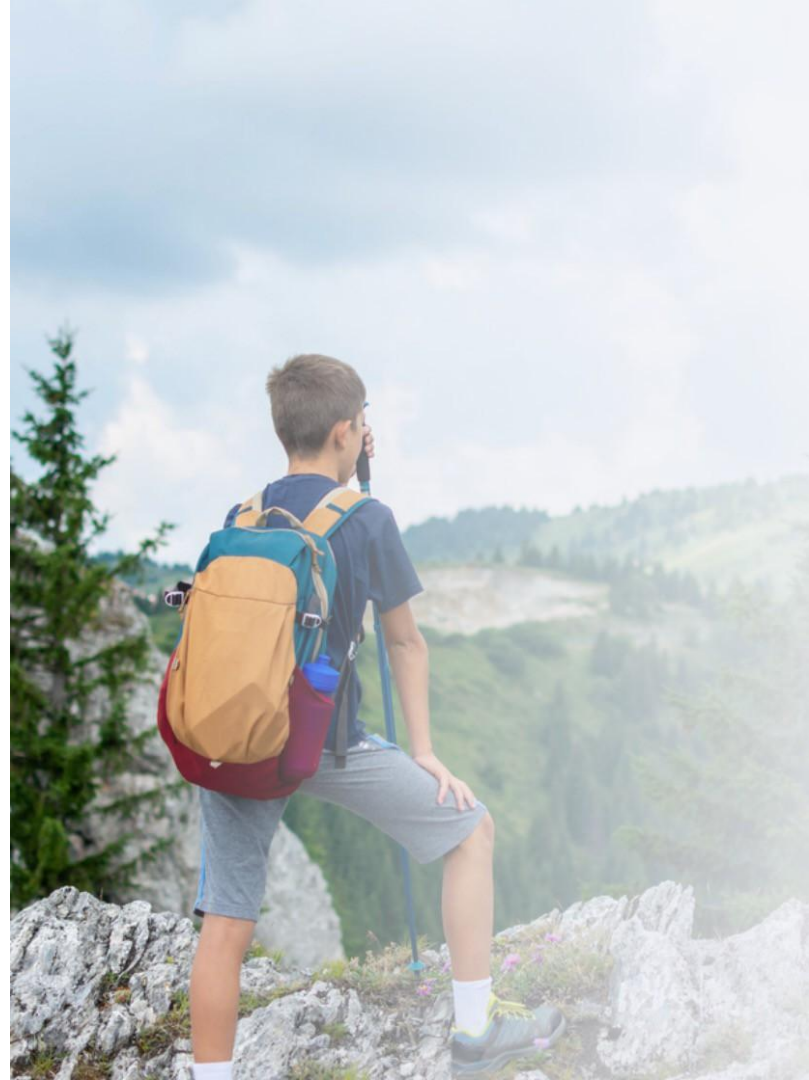


Explore how they can use those to contribute to society.



Chart a path to future success.

Contact CFA Project Manager, Maya Watts, [maya.watts@arizonafuture.org](mailto:maya.watts@arizonafuture.org), to learn more!



# GRADES K-2

Using the Self, Security, and Society lenses, students learn about their individual identity, set personal goals, develop problem solving skills and explore careers that support their community.



Lesson	Guiding Question	Learning Targets
<b>Lesson 1 - Self: All About Me Book</b>	How do I tell others what I want and what I need?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can explain to others what I want and what I need.</li> <li>I can talk about how I feel and the things that are important to me.</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 2 - Security: To Infinity and Beyond!</b>	How do I set goals, and how do I reach them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can make a plan to achieve a goal I set for myself.</li> <li>I can check if I am following my plan if the plan helps me.</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 3 - Security: Back to the Drawing Board</b>	How do I make good decisions when I am solving a problem?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can follow steps to make good decisions when I am problem solving.</li> <li>I can use information I learn to guide my decisions.</li> <li>I can learn from my mistakes and change my decisions.</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 4 - Society: Community Connections and You</b>	How do I connect with the people and world around me?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can explain how working with others helps all of us to reach a goal.</li> <li>I can use kind words and helpful suggestions to be a good teammate.</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 5 - Self: My Place in the World</b>	What is my community, and how do I fit into that community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can describe my community and the role(s) I have in my community.</li> <li>I can explain why it is important to be responsible to other people in my community.</li> </ul>

# Elementary Curriculum

Instructional Materials Example from Grades K-2 Lesson 4: Society: Community Connections and You

Yip walked to the shop two doors down and saw a friend.  
It was Mr. Sprout. “Good morning, Mr. Sprout,” said Yip. “It’s one fine Saturday to be a professional.”



“Oh, I don’t know,” said Mr. Sprout. “Part of my job as a professional is to sell Yupples healthy food. I wish I could help them learn how healthy food keeps their bodies strong so they can work and play. After all, you only get one body!”

## GRADES 3-5

Using the Self, Security, and Society lenses, students learn more about their interests and strengths, explore how they can use those to contribute to society, and chart a path to future career success.

### Lesson Guiding Question Learning Targets

**Lesson 1: Self—What’s Your North Star?**

What is the value that guides me?

- I can work with a group to brainstorm a list of ideas.
- I can collaborate with others, even when we disagree.
- I can describe my identity and my North Star Value.
- I can relate North Star Values with careers.
- I can describe basic survival needs.

**Lesson 2: Security—Needs Versus Wants**

Are there things I would like to buy? If I really want something, can I afford it?

- I can distinguish between the needs and wants.
- I can describe the needs that require money for them to be met.
- I can explain how the amount of money I have affects my spending choices.

**Lesson 3: Security—How Money Works**

Where does your money go?

- I can analyze how income affects my lifestyle and spending choices.
- I can set goals for how much money I need to save for backup funds and for luxuries such as vacations.

**Lesson 4: Society—Solving Community Problems**

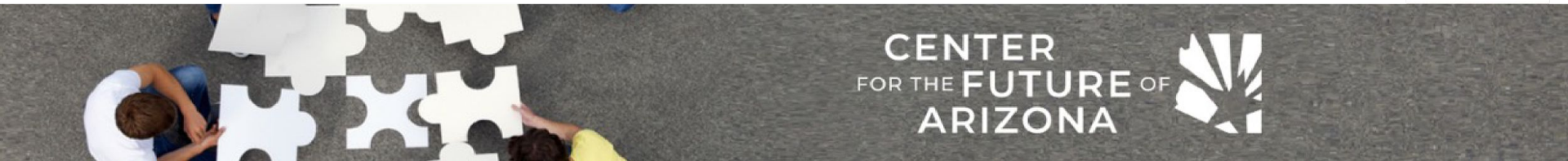
What are my responsibilities to my communities?

- I can recognize problems in our community.
- I can gather relevant information about the problem we are trying to solve.
- I can evaluate the outcomes of decisions.

**Lesson 5: Security—Planting Your Future**

How can careers make a difference in the world?

- I can align my personal interests to a potential future career.
- I can describe the importance of personal goals.
- (Fifth grade) I can use data from digital resources to make informed choices.



# Elementary Curriculum

## Lesson Plan Example from Grades 3-5 Lesson 1: What is My North Star?



### Self: What's Your North Star?

#### Guiding Question

- What is the value that guides me?

#### Learning Targets

In this lesson:

- I can work with a group to brainstorm a list of ideas.
- I can collaborate with others, even when we disagree.
- I can describe my identity and my North Star Value.
- I can relate North Star Values with careers.

#### Standards

AZ 2-4 Career Literacy Standards

- Creativity and Innovation
  - 2.1 Use brainstorming techniques individually and in groups to enhance creativity on assigned tasks.
- Collaboration, Teamwork, and Leadership
  - 3.1 Demonstrate skills in working together, compromise, expressing opinions and responding to criticism.

Arizona Social & Emotional Learning Competencies

- Self-awareness (Identity)
  - Core Competency: Relating feelings and thoughts to behavior
  - Equity Elaboration: Engaging in identity exploration and coming to a resolution regarding one's own identity, Grounding in and affirming of cultural heritage(s)

Arizona English Language Arts Standards

- 3.W.1.a-b. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, using reasons to support one's point of view.
  - a. Introduce the topic or text, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.

#### Lesson Overview

While both jobs and careers achieve the same end goal- a paycheck- the core difference is one of mindset. A career is a long-term, professional journey grounded in a person's identity, values, and passions. In this lesson, Young Professionals (YPs) explore their own personal identity and the value that provides their North Star direction, that points the way to their best choices every day and for the future. Fulfilling careers can be chosen based on a person's values- their ethics or moral compass. From this reflection on their own values, students analyze careers from the lens of the values they feel are North Star guides for that work.

#### Lesson Agenda

Opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who are You? (10 min)</li></ul>
Work Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is My Identity? (45 min)</li><li>• North Star Values (20 min)</li><li>• What's Your North Star? (30 min)</li><li>• Careers and Values (30 min)</li></ul>
Closure	Reflection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on the Future (8 min)</li></ul> Debrief: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your Point of View (8 min)</li></ul>
Differentiation Strategies	ELA differentiation  ELA standards require all YPs to state an opinion in writing by introducing the topic, stating their opinion clearly, and organizing the reasons to explain their unique point of view. The graphic organizer is designed to support student written reflection aligned to the standards has been differentiated in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3<sup>rd</sup> grade: List reasons to support the choice of North Star value and the career that matches it</li><li>• 4<sup>th</sup> grade: Organize the detailed reasons to support the choice of North Star value and the career that matches it</li><li>• 5<sup>th</sup> grade: Create a logical organization for the detailed reasons to support the choice of North Star value and the career that matches it</li></ul>



# Elementary Curriculum

## Student Worksheet Examples from Grades 3-5 Lesson 1: What is My North Star?

### Guiding Question: What is the value that guides me?

#### Who Are You?

How would you describe yourself to someone else?

How difficult was it to describe yourself?



Very Easy



Easy



Neutral



Difficult



Very Difficult

### What Is Your North Star?

What's the connection between values and how we act?



What is your North Star Value? (This is your most important value.) Enter it in the space provided.

My North Star Value is:

### Careers and Values

Be sure to review the Career Cards in the online lesson before completing this activity. In this activity, you will work with your group members to do the following:

1. Choose a career from each career cluster.
2. Analyze each chosen career and match that career with what the group believes is the North Star Value for that career.
3. Explain how the North Star Value fits the career. (Your group may have some disagreements. Now is a good time to practice listening and collaborating.)

 Career	 North Star Value	 Rationale: How does that value fit the career?

- Extension of the Middle School Lenses on the Future Unit
- 10 lessons total (5 Grades K-2 lessons & 5 Grades 3-5 lessons)
- Grades 3-5 Lessons are digital and “traditional”
- Instructional materials, slides decks, student worksheets, and differentiation strategies included in each lesson
- **Align to [AZ Career Literacy Standards](#)** (and Math & ELA!)
- Arizona Labor Market Data
- 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Students Connect to **My Future Az**
- Free Media Playlist with EdgeFactor



# GPEAK

Jess Winn, STEAM Educator, Northern Illinois University P-20

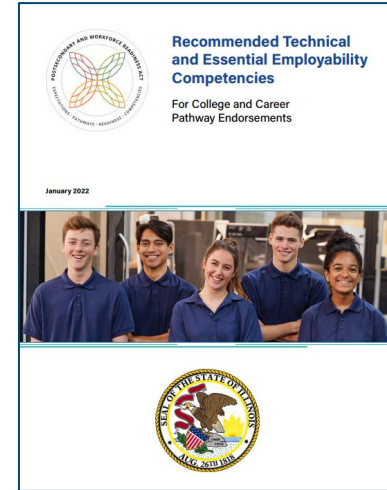
# What is GPEAK?

- The Greater Peoria Essential Abilities and Knowledge (GPEAK) system was developed to provide a regional approach for assessing and validating essential skills needed in the workplace.
- GPEAK measures an individual's demonstration of essential skills needed for meaningful employment while encouraging learners to reflect on their growth and development.



# Core Components of the System

<b>Performance indicators</b>	At the foundation of the GPEAK system are the ten Illinois' <a href="#">Essential Employability Competencies</a> which are each broken down into <a href="#">5 key actions and behaviors per competency</a> .
<b>Curricular resources</b>	GPEAK participants receive access to case studies, journal activities, reflection prompts, workshop ideas and mentor moments to help individuals reflect on and develop their essential employability skills.
<b>Assessment and Badging system</b>	GPEAK participants submit pre- and post-assessments and upload evidence to support the attainment of the GPEAK competencies. Validators review the information and award competency badges. Once an individual earns all ten badges, they will be GPEAK certified.



**Teamwork and Conflict Resolution:** Please mark the level that the Participant has achieved for each performance indicator

	Progression Level Attained			
	N/A	Learning	Demonstrating	Leading
Establishes a high degree of trust, confidentiality, and credibility with others to develop shared purpose	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Encourages others' contribution of ideas, opinions, and perspectives through thoughtful and positive interactions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coordinates with others to achieve identified outcomes and objectives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
De-escalates difficult situations constructively and positively	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is committed to solving problems/findings resolutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**Journal**  
Teamwork and Conflict Resolution

**Teamwork and Conflict Resolution Journal**

**Teamwork and Conflict Resolution: Individuals can use their understanding of working cooperatively with others to complete work assignments and achieve mutual goals.**

*In this journal you will find tools and activities to help you understand what skills teamwork and conflict resolution entail. Through self-reflection, activities, examples, and questioning, you will develop a better sense of why being a good team worker and being able to resolve conflicts calmly and efficiently are necessary in the workplace and how you can demonstrate those qualities to the best of your ability. You will be able to see your own growth by completing a self-check at the beginning and end of the process.*

**Self-Check**

**A. Consider This....**

*A person who knows how to work in a team builds trust with others. They keep information confidential, being sure not to gossip. They follow through on tasks assigned to them. They ask for others' ideas and perspectives and thoughtfully consider all input before making a decision. They communicate with other team members when needed. They seek to resolve conflicts through constructive, creative, and positive behaviors. They reflect on their own behaviors in a problem situation and assume responsibility for their own actions and mistakes.*

**B. Self-Reflection Questions** (consider your own experiences—classroom, work, or activities—and answer the following)

1. In your experience, what are three important aspects of teamwork?
2. How can you tell when a team is not working well together?
3. What are three things that would escalate a conflict?
4. What are three ways to resolve a conflict?

*“The GPEAK assessments make you think about yourself and what direction you are going in your career. They give you an inner reflection about where you currently are, what areas you need to improve, what areas you are strong in, and what you need to look at in order to push yourself to be more successful, to gain knowledge and experience, and to refine your skills.”*

**Participant**

## ESSENTIAL EMPLOYABILITY COMPETENCY BADGES



# GPEAK Use Cases

Peoria Regional Learning Center utilized GPEAK for employer mentor skill assessments for work study program and alignment with PaCE

Rockford Public Schools developed a work study badging system to validate essential skills earned by students who have employment in the community

Career Launch Chicago youth apprenticeship program aligned their professional development trainings with the GPEAK curriculum



# Initiative and Self Drive

- 1) What should Xander do?
- 2) How could Xander use this situation to advance his professional goals?
- 3) What are some questions Xander should ask?
- 4) A certificated sub is required by law. How can Xander collaborate with the sub to initiate some of his ideas?
- 5) How could Xander use this experience to begin a professional portfolio?

Xander is an educational support professional, ESP, in an elementary school, who is currently studying to become a special education teacher. He works with students with varying disabilities in multiple classrooms throughout the day. He reports to and receives daily updates from one of the school's special education teachers. He also needs to communicate with each of his students' classroom teacher. His duties include monitoring behavior, assisting in physical tasks like eating, using the bathroom, riding the bus, moving from one classroom to another, and providing instructional support.

Xander is interested in taking on a more active role in his duties. He has been learning a lot in his studies and would like to implement a few ideas that he has. He will be leaving the school next year for student teaching but wants to leave a good impression for future employment in the school in which he currently works.

Next week, the special ed teacher will be at a two-day conference. Xander knows that many of the students do not respond well to a change in teachers. Xander feels that he could be responsible for the days' activities while the teacher is away. He knows he has great ideas and knows the students much better than a substitute would but is nervous about taking initiative in this situation.

# GPEAK Training Site

Now available for educators and mentors looking to implement components of the GPEAK system, the GPEAK Training site includes:

## **Tools for integration**

- Videos, facilitator guides, and outlined instructions offer easy to follow guidance to integration of GPEAK materials no matter the commitment.

## **Easily accessible content**

- Provides an independent guide to exploring all of the GPEAK curriculum organized by the essential employability competency

[Link to site](#)

# In the Works..

- Creating a video for each competency that can be utilized asynchronously by participants
- Facilitating communities of practice and technical assistance sessions on the curriculum for high schools interested in utilizing GPEAK

Interested in utilizing GPEAK? We are always here to thought partner on how you might integrate this in your community! Please email [hpenczak@niu.edu](mailto:hpenczak@niu.edu) if you would like to discuss this further and we can get a conversation scheduled with your team.



# Middle School Career Exploration

## Elm Middle School

- [Career Study Elective Course](#)
- [Overview video of course](#)
- [College and Career Pathways Video](#)
- [Course Selection Form \(including Career Study courses\)](#)

## Skokie Elementary District #69

- [Community Career Nights](#)

## Kewanee School District / Neponset Grade School

- [Career Exploration and Development Grant Plan](#)

*These models were developed as part of an Illinois State Board of Education SY21-22 grant opportunity for schools to pilot career exploration and career development experiences: [link to resources](#)*

# Questions? Thoughts?

What other resources do you use for supporting the development of essential skills?

How do you measure student growth and mastery of the essential employability competencies?

What else would be helpful as a resource, model, etc. regarding essential skills and work-based learning?

# Upcoming Events

## [VIP Tours at CareerSpark](#)

**October 2, 12-3 p.m.**

Join I-WIN for an in-person site visit to CareerSpark, an annual interactive career exploration event for 8th grade students in the Peoria region

## [Roundtable Discussion: Employer Partnerships](#)

**October 23, 12 p.m.**

Share insights, resources, and best practices on building and strengthening employer partnerships

## [Cultivating Internal Culture and Regional Systems for Work-Based Learning](#)

**November 14, 12 p.m.**

Learn how Valley View School District is deepening their support for stakeholders while increasing CDEs



**EdSystem**

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**Thank you!**

Heather Penczak, [hpenczak@niu.edu](mailto:hpenczak@niu.edu)

Dania Ibrahim, [dibrahim@niu.edu](mailto:dibrahim@niu.edu)