

## What academic and career experiences can help my student prepare for life after high school?

In today's rapidly changing world, parents and caregivers need to ensure that students are equipped for life beyond high school—whatever path a student chooses.

To guide families, we draw on research to highlight **academic and career experiences** in middle school and high school that can help prepare students for college and careers.



## Promising practices to equip students for college and careers

This resource is part of a **college and career readiness series for families** from the [Regional Educational Laboratories](#) at the U.S. Department of Education. The activities featured are just some of the evidence-based or promising practices available to support college and career readiness.

### Academic experiences



Taking **advanced and accelerated courses** in middle school and high school puts students on track to graduate, enroll in college, and earn a degree.<sup>1</sup> Students also are better prepared for more demanding coursework in college, reducing the need to pay for remedial classes.<sup>2</sup>

*Examples:*

- Advanced honors classes
- College credit courses



Taking **higher level math** in high school primes students for in-demand jobs in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)—and pays off in higher incomes.<sup>3</sup>

*Examples:*

- Algebra I and II
- Precalculus
- Trigonometry
- Calculus

**College credit programs** enable students to earn college credits while in high school, often for free, and boost students' chances of earning a college degree.<sup>4</sup> College credit programs include:

**Advanced Placement (AP)**  
College courses taught in high school. Students who pass the related AP examination earn college credits.

**Concurrent Enrollment**  
College courses taught in high school. Students earn both high school and college credits.

**Dual Enrollment**  
College courses taught at a college campus or online. Students earn high school and college credits.

**Early College High Schools**  
Mix of high school and college courses. Students earn a high school diploma and an associate degree.



## Career experiences



**Career and technical education** enables students to explore occupations and identify those that match their interests, talents, and goals. Students can build skills and earn industry credentials in a variety of career pathways.<sup>5</sup> Research finds multiple positive impacts for students.<sup>6</sup>



**Work-based learning** offers students real-world experience.<sup>7</sup> Activities range from workplace tours and job shadowing to paid internships, apprenticeships, and school-based businesses.



### Read more about it

#### Academic Experiences:

- [Taking College-Level Courses in High School Gives Students a Jump Ahead on the Pathway to College](#) (REL Northeast & Islands)
- [Supporting Your Child in Developing Math Skills for Future Success](#) (REL Appalachia)

#### Career Experiences:

- [What Is Career and Technical Education?](#) (REL Midwest)
- [Examining the Impact of Career and Technical Education](#) (REL Central)
- [You're Hired! The Skills Employers Seek in New Hires](#) (REL Mid-Atlantic)

## Guiding questions for parents and caregivers



Use the following questions to guide conversations with your student:

- What advanced courses and college credit programs are available at my student's school? Which ones align with my student's career interests and goals?
- How can I encourage my student to take advanced and college-level courses? How can I build my student's confidence that they can excel in these types of classes?
- What career and technical education pathways and work-based learning experiences does my student's school offer? Which of these offerings align with my student's career interests and goals?

## References

- <sup>1</sup> [The Effects of Accelerated College Credit Programs on Educational Attainment in Rhode Island](#) (REL Northeast & Islands, 2021); [Ask an Expert: College- and Career-Readiness Interventions](#) (REL Appalachia, 2022).
- <sup>2</sup> [Four Pillars of Support for High School Students' College and Career Readiness](#) (REL Appalachia, 2022).
- <sup>3</sup> [Advanced Course Offerings and Completion in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math in Texas Public High Schools](#) (REL Southwest, 2017).
- <sup>4</sup> [Ask an Expert: College- and Career-Readiness Interventions](#) (REL Appalachia, 2022).
- <sup>5</sup> [What Is Career and Technical Education?](#) (REL Midwest, 2022); [Examining the Impact of Career and Technical Education](#) (REL Central, 2021).
- <sup>6</sup> [What We Know About the Impact of Career and Technical Education: A Systematic Review of the Research](#) (Lindsay et al., 2024).
- <sup>7</sup> [Gaining Real-World Experience: Strengthening Career Pathways Through Work-Based Learning](#) (REL Midwest, 2023).

## Learn more



[relsouthwest@air.org](mailto:relsouthwest@air.org)



@RELSouthwest



[ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/region/Southwest](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/region/Southwest)

This document was prepared under Contract 91990023C0003 by Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest, administered by the American Institutes for Research. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Institute of Education Sciences or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.