CAREER KICKSTART

*Experience real **careers**. Make real **connections**.*

2025 Pilot Program Report

presented by:

ISSAQUAH SCHOOL DISTRICT 411

ISSAQUAH SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

SANMAR

Executive Summary

Career Kickstart was a free, two-week immersive summer experience designed by the Issaquah School District and funded by the Issaquah Schools Foundation to help high school students explore a wide range of career pathways. Open to rising juniors and seniors from Issaquah High, Liberty High, and Skyline High, the program received 164 applications, from which 50 students were selected via random lottery. Ultimately, 46 students participated.

The program featured a dynamic blend of workshops, worksite visits, and job shadowing opportunities. SanMar Corporation generously hosted three workshop days, providing professional space, employee support, t-shirts, and snacks. Workshop activities included career assessments, elevator pitch development, resume feedback, professional writing practice, informational interviews, networking guidance, and alumni/industry panels. Students also received professional headshots.

Worksite visits allowed students to engage with major employers including Microsoft, Seattle Children's, Bank of America, PACCAR, Boeing, and Starbucks. The program culminated in 1–3 day job shadows at 16 different local organizations such as Bassetti Architects, Hargis Engineers, Hermanson Construction, King County District Court, and Proliance Sports Medicine.

Career Kickstart successfully introduced students to diverse career options, strengthened their professional skills, and fostered meaningful connections with local employers—laying the groundwork for future expansion across all Issaquah high schools.



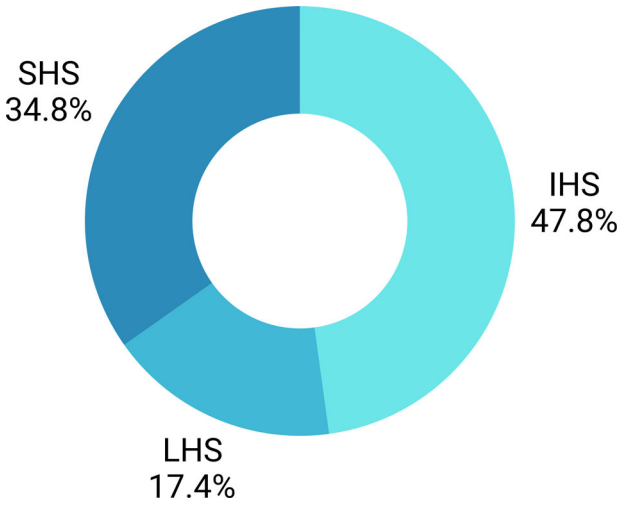




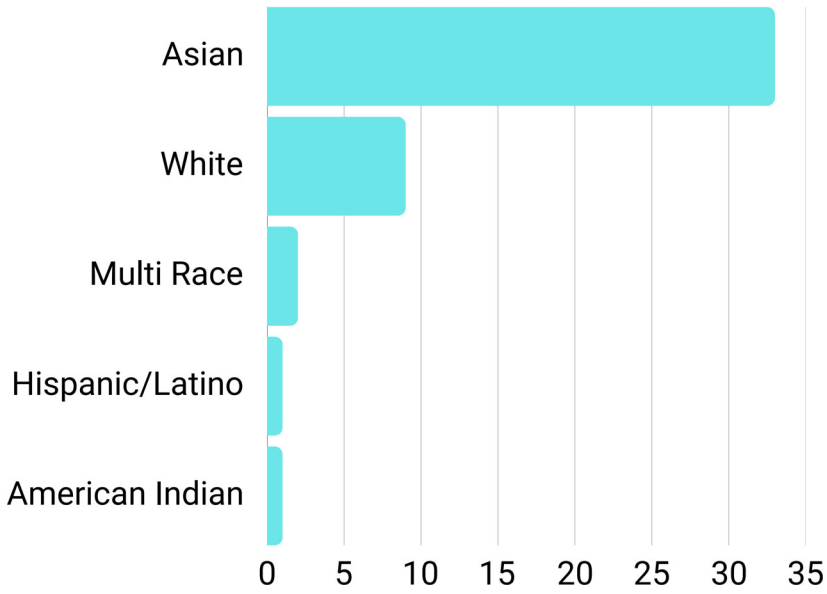
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Student Demographics

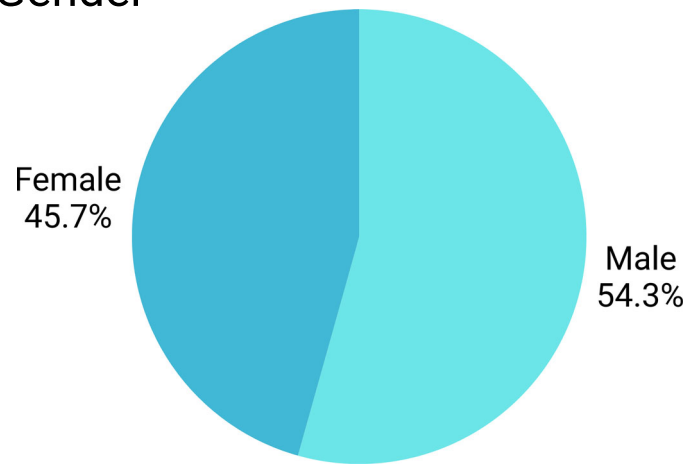
High School



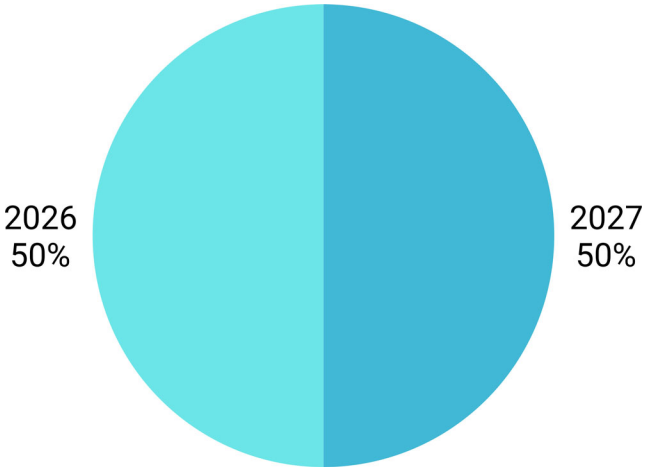
Race/Ethnicity



Gender



Graduating Class



Special Services

10 students with an IEP or 504

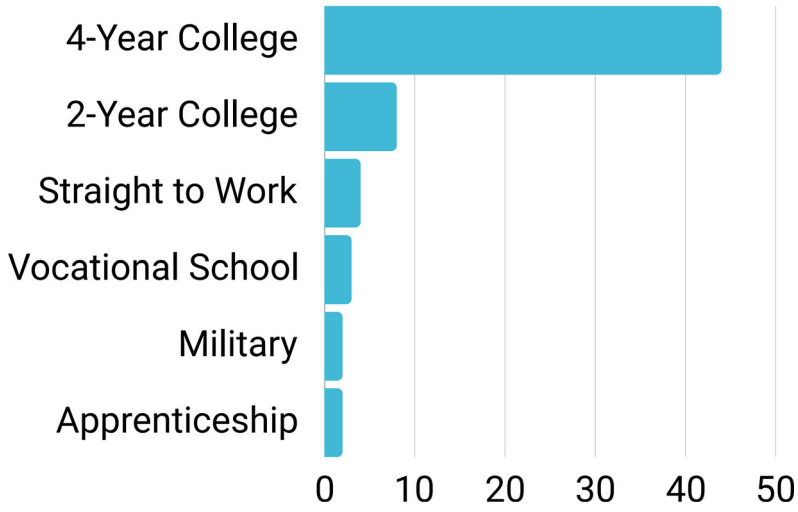
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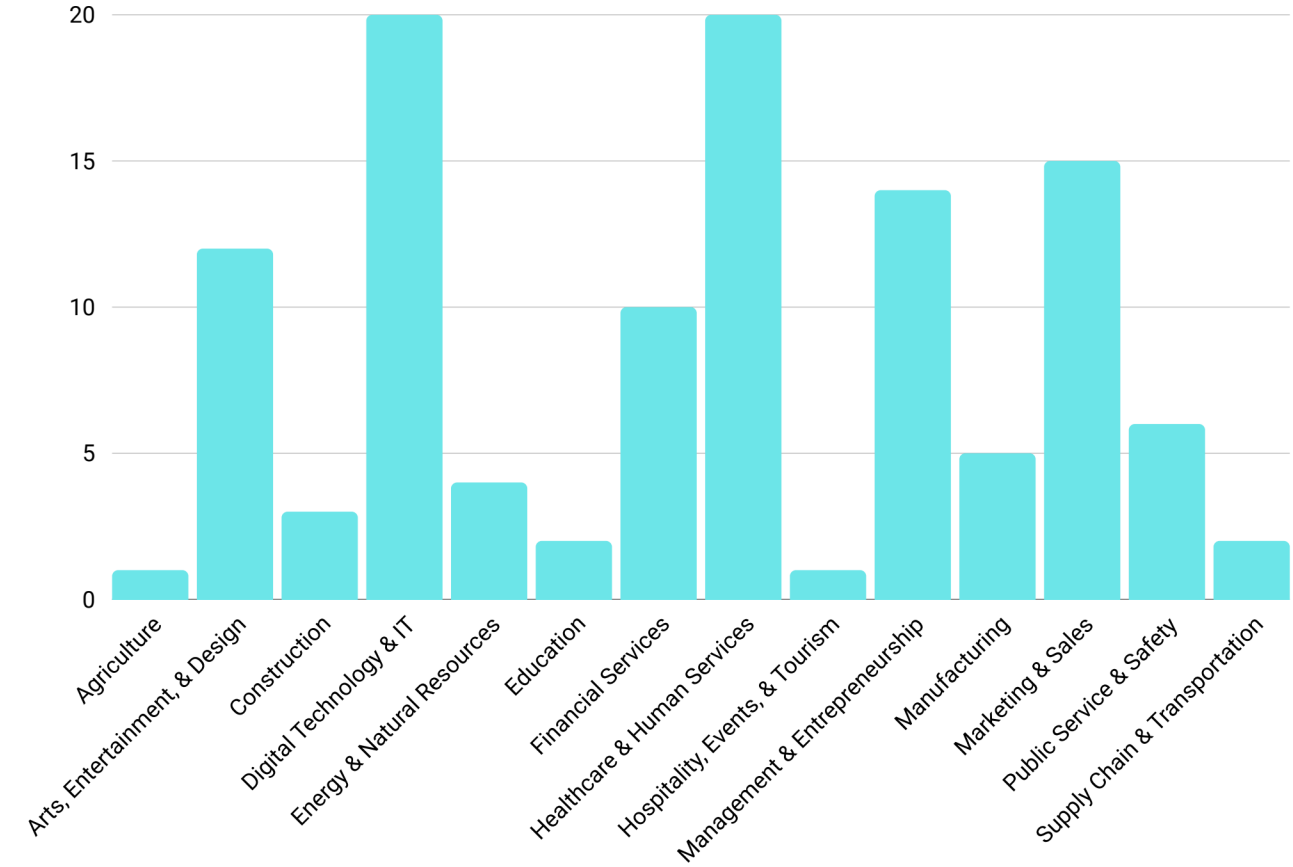


Post-High School Pathway Interests

Students checked all they were considering



Post-High School Career Cluster Interests



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Workshops

Monday, August 4

- Facility Tour
- Decode Your Career DNA: Understanding Xello Self-Assessment Results
- First Impressions Matter: Elevator Pitch
- Crafting the First “Hello”: Professional Writing



Thursday, August 7

- Level Up: Workplace Challenge Lab
- Skills That Matter: Industry Insights Panel
- The Power of a Good Question: Informational Interview Basics
- Resume Work Time
- Professional Headshots
- Informational Interview Practice



Thursday, August 14

- Expressing Gratitude: Job Shadow Thank You’s
- Life After High School: Alumni Answers Panel
- Resume Hot Seat
- Tell Your Story: Career Kickstart Recap



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Workshops

4.74

Average Rating



100% of students...

- Felt very or extremely engaged during the Workshop Days at SanMar
- Feel slightly or much more confident in their ability to explore and navigate career paths that are a good fit for them, after participating in Career Kickstart
- Would recommend Career Kickstart to a friend

"What did you learn during Career Kickstart that you think will help you most in the future?"



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Worksite Visits



Tuesday, August 5

- Bank of America | Seattle
- Seattle Children's | Seattle
- Microsoft | Redmond





Wednesday, August 6

- Starbucks | Seattle
- PACCAR | Renton
- Boeing | Renton

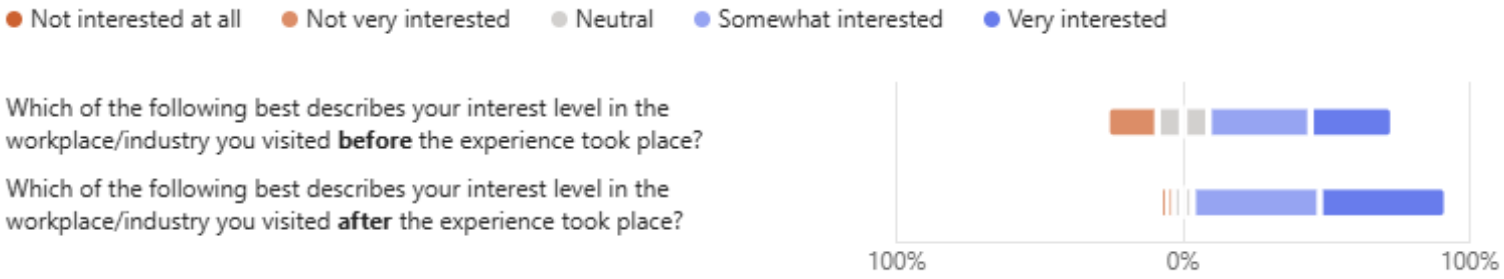




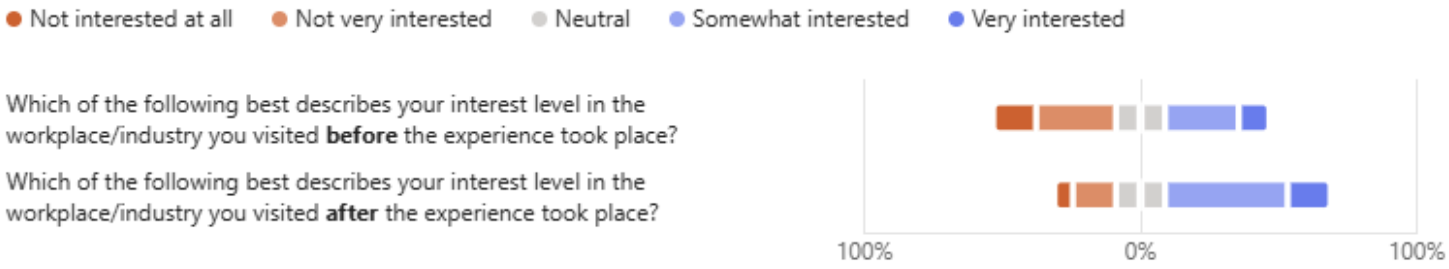
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Worksite Visits

Career Interest Worksite Tour #1



Career Interest Worksite Tour #2



"It inspired me to think of career options that have a blend of technical and creative skills."

"It taught me a lot about real world work and gave me more jobs to consider for my future, which before I was a lot more worried about."

"I think it showed me that there are more jobs than I previously thought there were and there are more options than you think."

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Job Shadow

"But the best part was certain employees who you could tell truly enjoyed their jobs and spoke with a certain passion that made you want to know more."

"Biotech research doesn't necessarily mean involving yourself in the research process itself -it can extend to manufacturing and managing between processes."

"I learned that nursing requires a lot of communication and has a plethora of specialties. There are various paths you can take to becoming a nurse."

"Being able to see income statements, cash flow statements, and balance sheets in use by an actual professional [was cool]. These three statements are key in the financial world and it's so interesting seeing someone use them in her job."

Job Shadow Hosts

Students visited in groups of 1-6

Bassetti Architects | Seattle	Out of the Box Manufacturing | Renton
Bruker Spatial Biology | Bothell	PACCAR | Renton
Hargis Engineers | Seattle	Proliance Sports Therapy & Rehab | Issaquah
Hermanson Construction | Kent	SanMar | Seattle
King County District Court | Redmond	Sequoia Scientific | Bellevue
Kirwin Financial | Issaquah	Swedish Medical Center | Seattle
King County Library System | Issaquah	University of Washington | Seattle
Okta | Bellevue	Well & Table | Issaquah

Family Feedback

97.1% of families felt that Career Kickstart was *very* or *extremely* **valuable** to their student

94.1% of families feel *slightly* or *much more* **confident** in their student's ability to explore and navigate career paths that suit their interests and strengths, after participating in Career Kickstart

"We're extremely pleased with Career Kickstart program. My student definitely benefited a lot and gained so much experience from it."

"I am very grateful that my child was able to participate in such a productive program, and I hope more high schoolers can benefit from it."

"This was an amazing program for students! Well organized and well executed!!"

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Community Feedback

100% of community members felt that their overall experience engaging with students was extremely or mostly **positive**



"It was rewarding seeing the engagement by the students in the sessions. They asked thoughtful questions."

"It was inspiring to see their curiosity and engagement, and to help them connect technical knowledge with the communication and teamwork skills that are essential in the workplace".

"The part I enjoyed most was sitting down at the end and talking about what they learned, and to hear what questions they had. I was pleasantly surprised with how perceptive the students were."

"Bright, energetic and enthusiastic students."

Challenges to Solve

The pilot program was a strong first step in providing career readiness experiences,, allowing the team to test several experiences and gather feedback quickly. This experience and feedback provides insights to consider as the team explores opportunities to expand and scale these experiences to all students.

Challenges included:

- **Limited Reach:** The pilot served only 50 rising juniors and seniors across the district's three comprehensive high schools—approximately 1.7% of the total junior and senior population. This limited reach underscores the need for broader access.
- **Job Shadow Logistics & Liability:** Coordinating job shadows presents liability concerns for the district. Host organizations require background checks, and student participation involves managing permission slips and other legal documentation, all of which add cost and complexity. The management and logistics for securing these shadows was also time intensive for coordinators.
- **Alignment with Student Interests:** Matching students with job shadow experiences that align with their specific career interests proved difficult. With diverse aspirations, it's challenging to meet every student's expectations.
- **Transportation & Staffing Costs:** Worksite visits require funding for transportation and careful coordination of chaperones.
- **Volunteer Sustainability:** The program relied heavily on a small group of dedicated volunteers and community partners. There is concern about overextending these individuals, potentially leading to burnout and reduced future participation.
- **Equity & Demographic Representation:** The program aims to expand participation and specifically reach those who may benefit most from career readiness support.

Recommendations

To create a scalable, sustainable, and equitable career readiness pathway for all students, the following grade-level recommendations are proposed. These initiatives build on the success of the Career Kickstart pilot and aim to build upon middle school career experiences and scaffold career exploration throughout high school.

9th Grade: Worksite Visits

- **2025–26 Pilot**: Coordinate small-group worksite visits during SBA testing days, targeting 50–100 students per high school.
- **2026–27 Goal**: Expand worksite visits to reach broader groups or all 9th graders during PSAT and SBA testing days, integrating career exposure early in the high school journey.

10th Grade: Industry Insights Panels

- **2025–26 Pilot**: Host career panels during Flex Time, featuring professionals from sectors such as healthcare, business, trades, and technology.
- **2026–27 Goal**: Formalize panel series and increase student participation through targeted outreach and integration with Advisory/Homeroom time and/or HSBP lessons.

11th Grade: Career Kickstart Workshop Day

- **2025–26 Pilot**: Offer a one-day Career Kickstart event for a limited number of students selected via lottery, or host optional workshop sessions during Flex Time. Workshop sessions would include networking guidance, resume building, informational interview practice, and professional headshots.
- **2026–27 Goal**: Scale the event to include all juniors district-wide, with support from PTSA, ISF, and local Chambers of Commerce.

12th Grade: Senior Exit Interviews

- **Ongoing**: Continue the district's existing Senior Exit Interview (SEI) process.
- **2026–27 Enhancement**: Encourage all seniors to complete a self-organized job shadow experience before graduation, supported by instructional resources and community partnerships. Students could share their experience during their SEI.

Closing

The Career Kickstart pilot program demonstrated the power of immersive, real-world experiences in preparing students for life beyond high school. Through workshops, worksite visits, and job shadows, participating students gained valuable insights into professional environments and developed essential career readiness skills.

While the program faced logistical and equity-related challenges, the overwhelmingly positive response from students, staff, and industry partners highlights its potential for broader impact. With thoughtful adjustments and strategic planning, Career Kickstart can evolve into a scalable, inclusive initiative that reaches a wider range of students across the Issaquah School District.

The recommendations outlined in this report offer a roadmap for expanding access, deepening engagement, and embedding career readiness into the student experience year-round. By continuing to build strong partnerships and centering student needs, Career Kickstart can become a cornerstone of post-high school preparation for all ISD students.

"I enjoyed all of it, I don't think there was even one day where I showed up not wanting to be there; everything was genuinely useful, and I loved the resources that were provided."



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Appendix

CAREER KICKSTART DATA REPORT

Workshop and Overall Program Data

What motivated you to participate in Career Kickstart?

Top Themes

Career Exploration: Students had a desire to learn about various career paths and clarify their interests.

Real-World Experience: Students were excited to gain firsthand exposure to professional environments and see what jobs are really like.

Skill Development & Preparation: Students were focused on building practical skills to prepare for future careers.

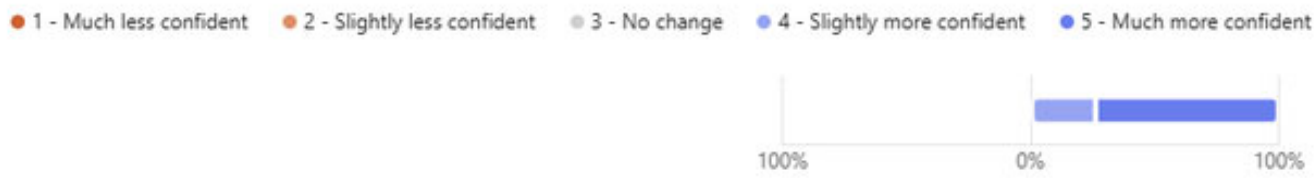
How useful was each workshop session?



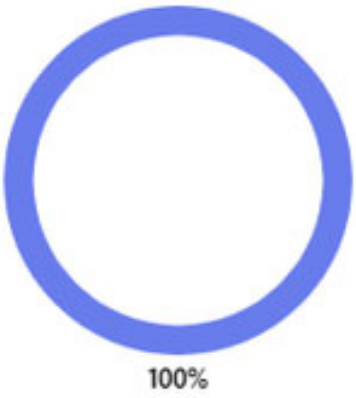
How engaged did you feel during the workshop days at SanMar?



After attending Career Kickstart, how confident do you feel in your ability to explore and navigate career paths that are a good fit for you?



Would you recommend a program like Career Kickstart to a friend?



What was your favorite part of Career Kickstart and why?

Job Shadowing & Workplace Tours

Students consistently mentioned how valuable it was to visit real workplaces and observe professionals in action.

Quotes:

- *"Doing the job shadowing was probably my favorite because I got to learn about a new company, what they do, what they make, and how each work location ran."*
- *"The most favorite part was getting the opportunity to tour different kinds of workplaces. This allowed me to better understand how people work day to day, and also realize in what kind of field I would like to work myself."*
- *"Job Shadowing experience because I was able to observe a tech professional in the field I was interested in (computer science/data science) and get an insight on different aspects of tech careers to pursue after I graduate college."*

Exposure to Career Opportunities

Students appreciated discovering new roles and industries they hadn't considered before.

Quotes:

- *"Participating in the job shadows and touring the companies because it showed me more job opportunities."*
- *"Worksite tours because I was able to see what type of workplace environment I could potentially be working at in the future."*
- *"I enjoyed going to both Seattle Children's Hospital and Starbucks, and I learned about roles I have never heard of!"*

Professional Skill Building

Students highlighted how the program helped them grow professionally, especially in communication and soft skills.

Quotes:

- *"Meeting so many new older, more experienced people and being in new scenarios that required me to put on my 'professional' and more 'social' self—it helped a lot with my soft skills!"*
- *"Going to job shadows and gaining confidence in my ability to communicate professionally."*
- *"I enjoyed both the trip to Bank of America and the professional headshots the most because both are opportunities that would've been hard to arrange on my own."*

What did you learn during Career Kickstart that you think will help you most in the future?

Professional Communication Skills

Students learned how to write emails, conduct interviews, and communicate effectively in professional settings.

Quotes:

- *"I actually have had to use the email tips and professional advice about writing them three times since I learned about it."*
- *"Professional writing, informative interviews, and starting conversations with people you don't know."*
- *"The three most important things that will help me the most include conducting informational interviews, coming up with an elevator pitch, and writing/communicating better professionally."*

Career Exploration & Self-Awareness

Students gained insights into different career paths and learned to think beyond just choosing a college major.

Quotes:

- *"My work personality styles and the long list of recommended careers for them… I should think more outside of just what major I want to do, like what I want to actually work as."*
- *"How to conduct interviews better, what daily life is like at many workplaces, and how to get better at making professional connections."*
- *"Many professionals are eager to help high schoolers explore new careers."*

Practical Tools for Career Readiness

Students learned tangible skills like resume writing, elevator pitches, and informational interviews.

Quotes:

- *"I learned how to make a good resume, how to do an informational interview, and how to figure out what I should do as a career!"*
- *"Elevator pitch, informational interview, arriving early."*
- *"How to write resumes, the 6 career types, and how to conduct an informational interview."*

Are there any topics you wish had been covered, or topics you wish we had spent more or less time on? Are there any additional experiences you would've liked to have?

Quotes**:**

- *"I wish I had been able to go visit a lawyer or a judge as that has been my true passion for a while now and I really wanted to know what their day to day looks like."*

- *"I would have liked to spend more time on job site tours at different places. I think it would have been nice to see lots of different industries."*
- *"Honestly, maybe any internship opportunities or ways to work with tech professionals instead of just job shadowing would have been better."*
- *"I was expecting the resume workshops to be more in depth and give real feedback and how to tailor my experiences to a specific job I might be looking for."*
- *"I think less time could have been spent on how to write a professional email… the 'bad' email examples got repetitive."*
- *"I think it would have been good if we had more opportunities to conduct interviews, as being able to hold a good interview is a really important skill."*

Student Suggestions for Expanding Career Kickstart

- Promote the program through weekly school news videos and flyers in hallways to reach more students.
- Host a weekend career fair for all ISD high school students to learn about careers, practice interviews, and more.
- Offer opportunities to shadow professionals during or after school on select days.
- Integrate Career Kickstart content into flex times, such as during morning announcements.
- Provide optional presentations in spaces like the theater, allowing students to sign up for sessions on specific career topics. Include engaging speakers who can talk about their jobs and answer questions.
- Teach elevator pitches and networking soft skills in classes beyond business, and consider hosting a summer career fair for upperclassmen.
- Create weekly summer camps to expand access to the program, even if challenging to run consistently.
- Offer short one- or two-day programs during school breaks (e.g., winter or spring) that include field trips and job shadows.
- Run Career Kickstart year-round, giving each student a two-week experience at some point.
- Develop a separate Career Kickstart program for each school or offer it as a class to increase visibility and participation.
- Connect with CTE teachers and coordinators to organize career talks by tech professionals during the school year, possibly in the library or auditorium. Also explore internship and expanded job shadowing opportunities.

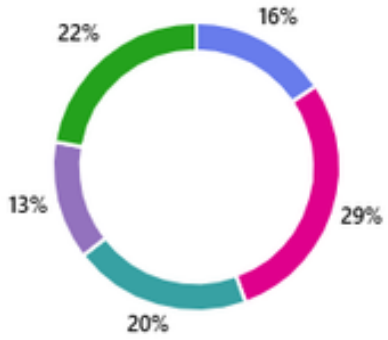
Job Shadow Reflection and Feedback

Which of the following did you do during your job shadow?

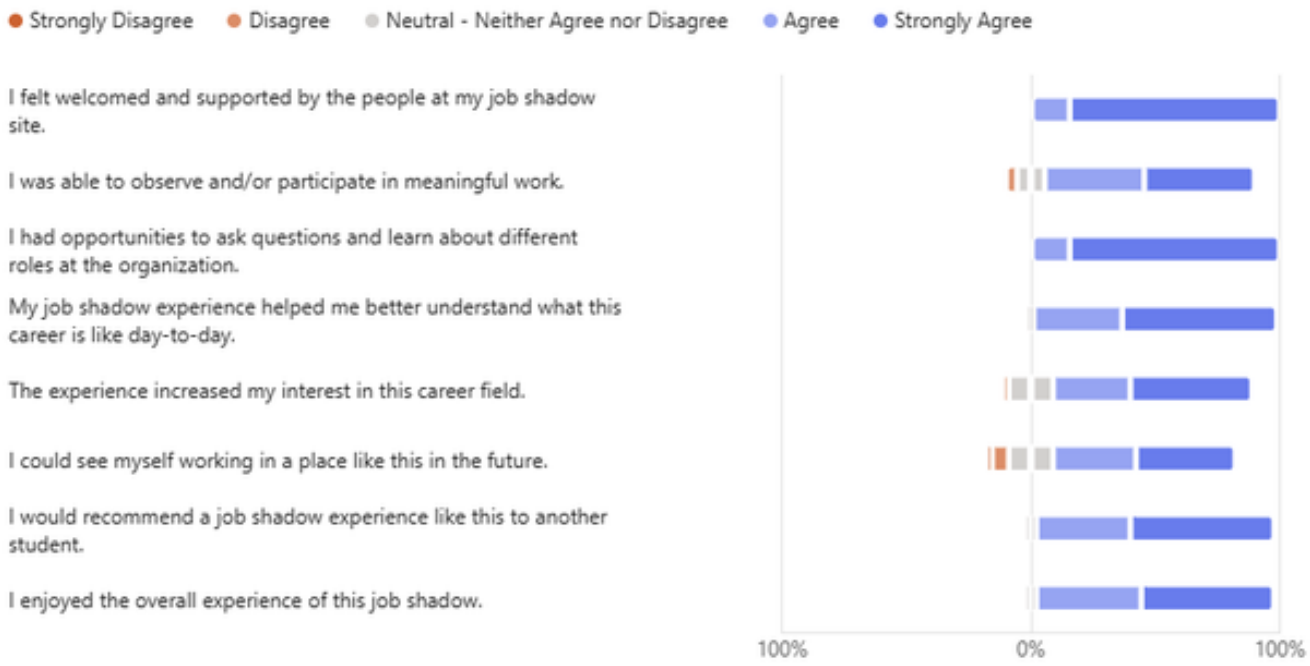


How many informational interviews did you conduct?





Let us know about your job shadow experience.



Interest: Before and After Job Shadow



What did you learn about this career that you didn't know before?

Career Pathways & Role Discovery

Students discovered the wide variety of roles within industries they were interested in, often learning about jobs they hadn't known existed.

Quotes:

- *“I wasn’t aware about all the different fields within the architecture firm… I’m interested in marketing, and they have a marketing team. They also have an environmental specialist, interior designer, graphic designer, and more.”*
- *“I just learned about all the different options that are within the field I wanted to study. I also learned about what each of those roles are and which ones sounded the most interesting to me.”*
- *“There are many other pathways in the career that I didn’t know about before. For example, child life specialist.”*

Realities of the Workplace

Students gained insight into the day-to-day responsibilities, pressures, and practical aspects of working in various fields.

Quotes:

- *“Just how much pressure can be put on you when you're doing the job and making the decisions that can impact people’s life.”*
- *“I learned about their overall workflow and organizational strategies. I also learned that a lot of working in video is being flexible to new challenges and being able to work on different parts of the video process, from scripting to filming to editing.”*
- *“I learned that everything in architecture is super detail oriented and that everything needs to go through an extensive review to ensure that it can be used.”*

Skills & Knowledge Gained

Students learned specific skills and concepts related to their fields of interest, including technical, soft, and industry-specific knowledge.

Quotes:

- *“I learned the importance of financial literacy.”*
- *“I learned a lot about the various types of traps cybersecurity departments deploy and how they’re always under attack.”*
- *“That the hard skills/knowing the tech are less important than having good soft skills due to AI taking over much of the technical processes of these jobs.”*

What skills or qualities do you think are important for someone in this career/field?

Career Awareness & Exploration

Students gained a deeper understanding of the variety of roles and pathways available within different industries.

Quotes:

- *“I wasn’t aware about all the different fields within the architecture firm… I’m interested in marketing, and they have a marketing team. They also have an environmental specialist, interior designer, graphic designer, and more.”*
- *“There are many other pathways in the career that I didn’t know about before. For example, child life specialist.”*
- *“I just learned about all the different options that are within the field I wanted to study. I also learned about what each of those roles are and which ones sounded the most interesting to me.”*

Adaptability & Flexibility

Students learned that many careers involve shifting responsibilities and require flexibility in daily tasks.

Quotes:

- *"I learned that you can get moved from roles within a business, so you aren't tied down to just one position."*
- *"There is a lot more variety to what you do—you're not just doing the same job over and over again each day."*
- *"Working in video is being flexible to new challenges and being able to work on different parts of the video process, from scripting to filming to editing."*

Communication & Collaboration

Students recognized the importance of clear communication and teamwork in professional environments.

Quotes:

- *"I learned that nursing requires a lot of communication and has a plethora of specialties."*
- *"There is a chain of command and everyone that is part of the project... needs to work together in order to deliver the final product."*
- *"I learned how implementing effective and concise communication and language in manuals... helps them build things better and more efficiently."*

Technical & Industry-Specific Knowledge

Students gained insights into specialized knowledge and tools used in various fields.

Quotes:

- *"I learned a lot about the various types of traps cybersecurity departments deploy and how they're always under attack."*
- *"I learned that software and hardware can be used together to create great things that can be beneficial to lots of different people."*
- *"I learned about data analysis and data science and its role in the library system and understood databases a lot."*

Realistic Expectations & Workplace Demands

Students developed a more realistic understanding of the pressures, responsibilities, and structure of professional life.

Quotes:

- *"Just how much pressure can be put on you when you're doing the job and making the decisions that can impact people's life."*
- *"I learned that everything in architecture is super detail oriented and that everything needs to go through an extensive review."*
- *"All the work that you have to keep organized."*

If you could do your job shadow again, is there anything you'd change or do differently?

Asking More Questions

Many students reflected on the importance of being curious and engaging more deeply by asking questions.

Quotes:

- *"I would ask more questions even though I asked a lot."*

- *“I wish that I had known what we were doing as I would have prepared more questions.”*
- *“I would ask her more questions about her journey to this point in her career.”*

Desire for More Hands-On or Workplace Experience

Students expressed interest in being more actively involved in real-world tasks or seeing more of the actual work environment.

Quotes:

- *“I would definitely involve the actual workplace more.”*
- *“I would like to do more hands-on work, and actually work on the diagrams or work with the equipment.”*
- *“I feel like maybe getting to see the big machines and getting to actually use it more in person would be better and more data.”*

Preparation & Engagement

Some students noted they could have been better prepared or more engaged during their experience.

Quotes:

- *“I would’ve definitely provided myself with questions in the future.”*
- *“I would go to sleep earlier the night before so I could engage even more.”*
- *“I would try to get to know the person I was shadowing better, and I would ask more questions.”*

Program Structure & Variety

Students suggested changes to the structure of the program to reduce repetition or increase variety.

Quotes:

- *“Do a one-day shadow—I learned a lot more the first day and the second day was sort of a recap.”*
- *“Less presentation, more shadowing actual job and attendance in impactful meetings.”*
- *“I believe I reheard a lot of information from the 3 days—a lot of redoing the same things.”*

Confidence & Communication

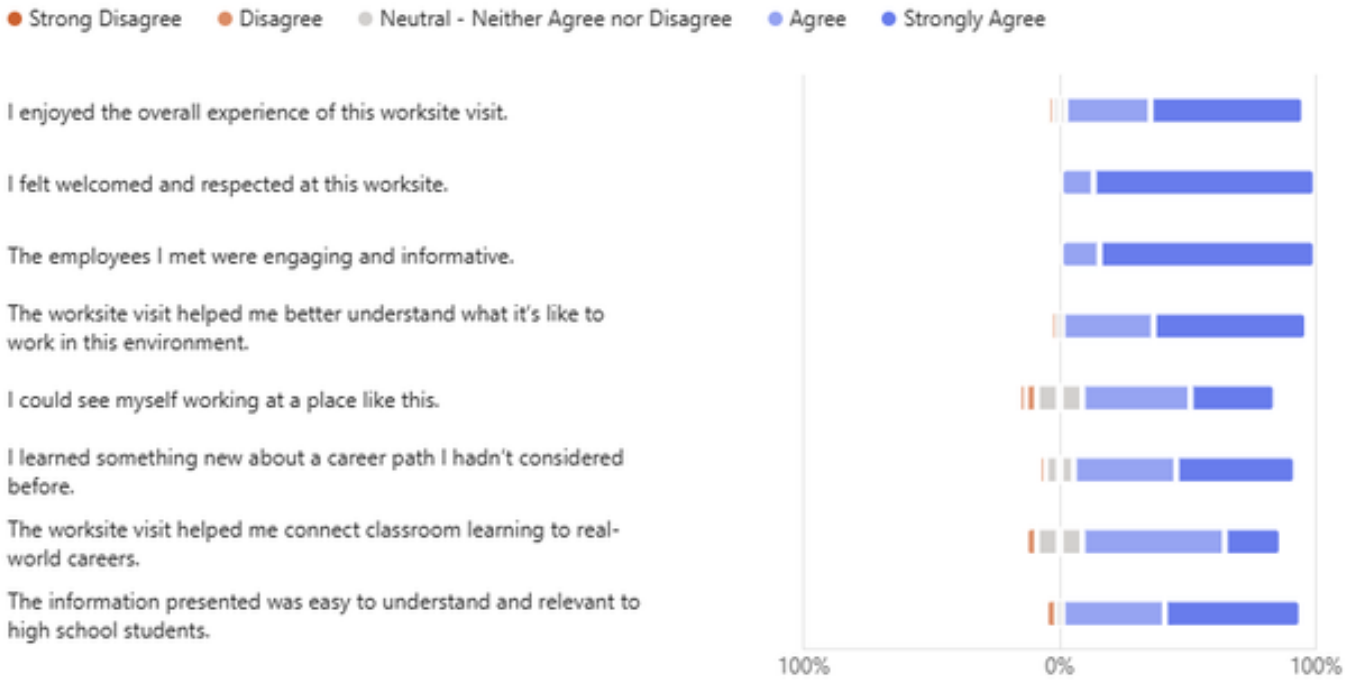
Some students reflected on their own communication and confidence, wishing they had spoken up more.

Quotes:

- *“Speak more during conversations.”*
- *“Ask more questions about things I was confused about.”*
- *“Put more emphasis on design, and maybe list one other extra interest to explore.”*

Work Site Tour Data

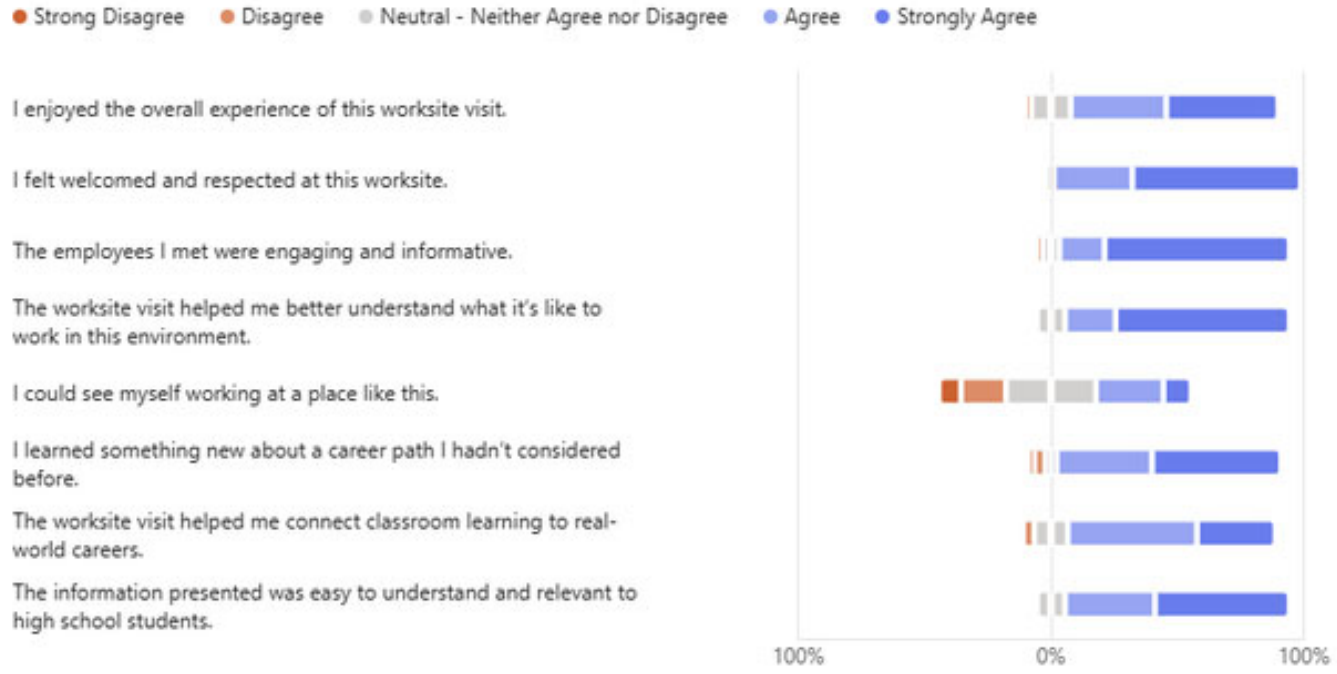
Overall Experience Worksite Tour #1



Career Interest Worksite Tour #1



Overall Experience Worksite Tour #2



Career Interest Worksite #2



Student feedback themes and support

Career Exploration

Students gained exposure to new roles and industries, often discovering career paths they hadn't considered before.

Quotes**:**

- *"She shared her salary and it truly inspired me to explore other options."*
- *"Radiology department… how many years of schooling they went through to get that job."*
- *"I've always wanted to be a Software Developer… now I'm very interested in becoming one."*

Workplace Culture

Students noticed and appreciated the atmosphere, employee attitudes, and values within the worksites.

Quotes**:**

- *"Radiology stood out… they all shared jokes and looked like their life was fun."*
- *"People that worked in community outreach… I could just feel how passionate they were."*
- *"I enjoyed the manager of the financial advisors role because she traveled a lot."*

Skills and Qualities

Students identified essential skills needed in various roles, including soft skills like communication and adaptability.

Quotes**:**

- *"They said their plans weren't set in stone."*
- *"You need to be creative problem solvers. Critical thinking a lot to look for problems."*
- *"Employees needed teamwork and technical/mechanical skills."*

Experiential Learning

The hands-on nature of the tours helped students connect classroom learning to real-world applications.

Quotes:

- *"It was interesting to see them make the medicines and the workflow."*
- *"Radiologist… low stress compared to other jobs in the medical field."*
- *"Seeing the offices… made me feel like I was in their shoes."*

5. Nonlinear Career Paths

Students were surprised and reassured by the diverse educational and professional journeys of the employees they met.

Quotes:

- *"Most of the employees didn't think they would end up where they are today."*
- *"There are lots of different parts in working in a hospital."*
- *"The production manager role... more leadership than coding."*

6. Inspiration and Motivation

Many students left the tours feeling inspired, more confident, and excited about their future possibilities.

Quotes:

- *"It gives me hope that whatever I become in the future I'll enjoy doing it."*
- *"I was really excited to hear about being a software engineer."*
- *"It made me even more passionate about pursuing computer science."*

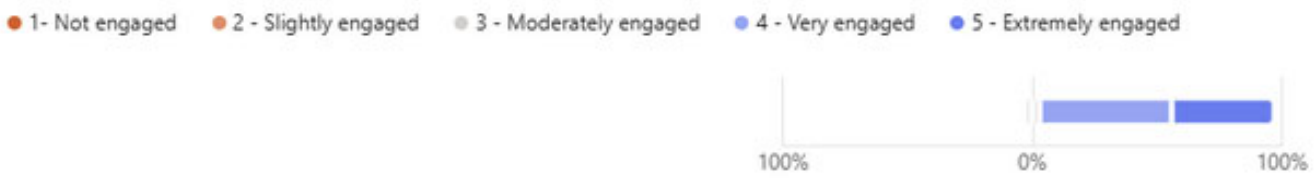
Family Feedback

34 respondents

How valuable do you believe Career Kickstart was for your student?



How engaged did your student seem with the program?



After your student participated in Career Kickstart, how confident are you in their ability to explore and navigate career paths that suit their interests and strengths?



Would you recommend a program like Career Kickstart to other families?



Professional Partners Feedback

How would you rate your overall experience engaging with students during your session?



What aspects of your session(s)/experience(s) did you find most rewarding or impactful – or which aspects did you enjoy most?

Student Engagement & Curiosity

"They asked thoughtful questions and I could see some of them taking notes and really buying into what we were saying."

Mentorship & Knowledge Sharing

"I found it rewarding to pay forward the mentorship and knowledge I've gathered through my college and early career to the future engineers of this generation."

Real-World Exposure & Career Exploration

"Being able to introduce the students to specific fields of healthcare, such as pharmacy and radiology, since those aren't typically what comes to mind when someone thinks about healthcare."

What's a soft skill (also known as durable skill, transferable skill, employability skill) that you'd encourage students to focus on developing as they enter the working world? If you can't narrow it down to just one, feel free to share a few!

Professionalism & Workplace Readiness

Communication & Interpersonal Skills

Curiosity & Self-Driven Learning

Confidence & Self-Presentation

Adaptability & Tech Readiness (AI and new technologies)

If you were on a hiring team, what's one thing that would make a recent graduate positively stand out in a job interview, and make them a top candidate for the position?

Curiosity & Willingness to Learn

"Willing to try new things, be curious, work well with others."

Employers value candidates who show genuine interest, ask thoughtful questions, and demonstrate a growth mindset.

Preparation & Engagement

"Showing genuine enthusiasm, coming prepared and being on time."

Being well-prepared and engaged signals professionalism and respect for the opportunity.

Communication & Storytelling

"Storytelling! Be prepared to share stories from your personal, professional or school life that demonstrate WHY you are interested and qualified for a specific job."

Effective communication, especially through personal stories, helps candidates connect and stand out.

Confidence & Authenticity

"Be confident and comfortable, aiming to connect on a personal level with the hiring team. Try not to use 'canned answers' to questions."

Confidence paired with authenticity makes a strong impression and builds trust with interviewers.

Adaptability & Resourcefulness

"Being resourceful – taking a little bit of information/direction and running with it."

Employers appreciate candidates who can adapt, problem-solve, and take initiative even with limited guidance.