On PaCE to Thrive

A Guide to Cultivating Community Action for College and Career Readiness

IllinoisPaCE





About

Preparing students for life after high school requires a shared commitment from the entire community. Grounded in the Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) Framework, this guide is designed to help schools, families, businesses, and community partners work together to support students in achieving college and career success. By aligning efforts and taking coordinated action, communities can create meaningful pathways that empower every learner to thrive beyond graduation.

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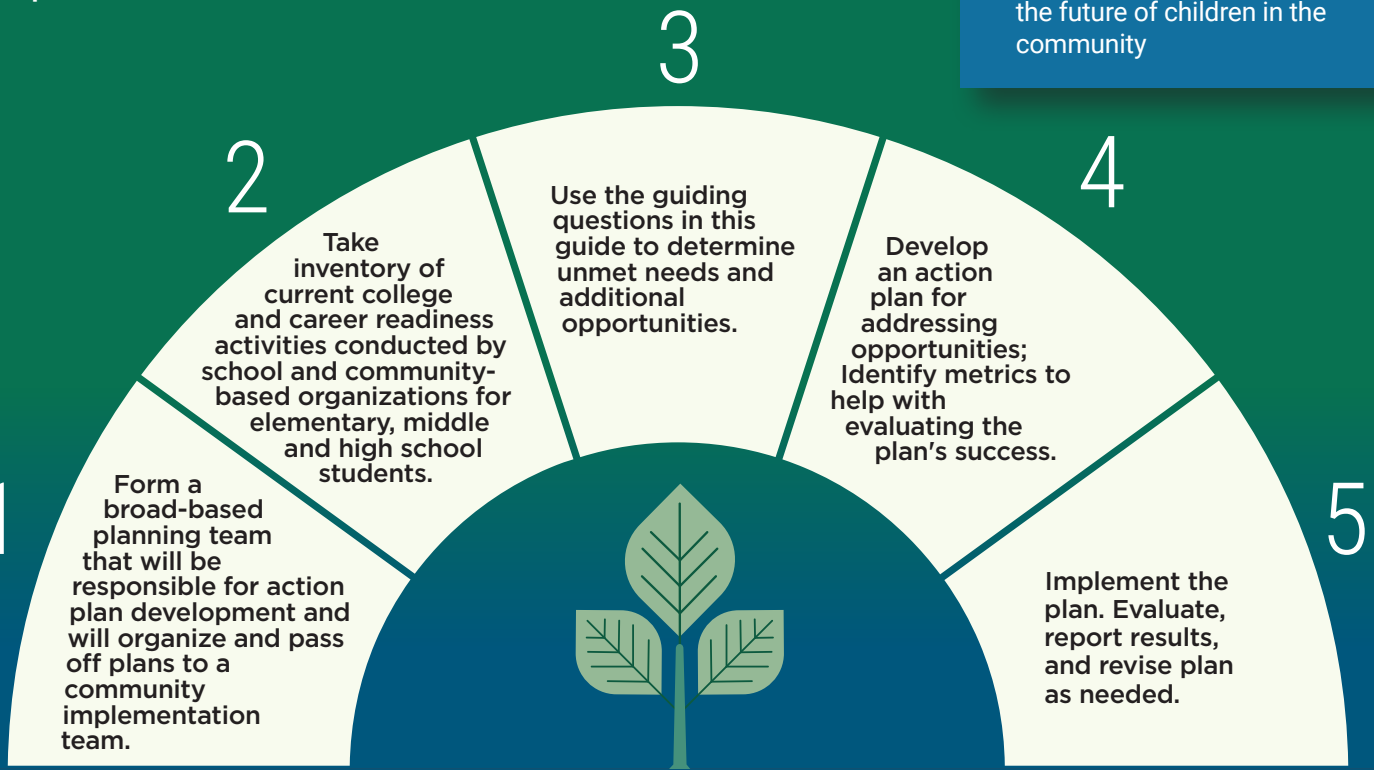
A local community can change its future through collective action on essential components of economic and social success. One of those essential issues is readiness for college and for living-wage careers. Built on The Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) Framework, this guide is a resource for schools, families, businesses and community organizations to take collective action for success. Teams may already exist within organizations looking to take collective action or may need to be brought together. Some of the many activities listed in the guide may already be in operation but need more support. Others will present new opportunities. The activities are organized around three key areas for student success, which are directly linked to the community's future.

- Career exploration and development
- Postsecondary education exploration, preparation, and selection
- Financial aid and literacy

Implementation teams should include leaders and/or other members of local entities, groups, and organizations:

- Elementary, Middle, and High schools
- Community Colleges and other two-year colleges
- Four-year colleges
- Career services offices from postsecondary institutions
- ISACorps
- Public libraries
- Chambers of Commerce
- Service organizations and community-based organizations
- Religious organizations
- Afterschool programs
- YMCAs/YWCAs
- United Way (local)
- Governmental agencies
- Businesses
- Other entities essential to the future of children in the community

Sample Process



Guiding Questions — Career Exploration & Development

Use these questions to identify unmet needs and additional opportunities.

Late High School Students (11-12)

- What supports are in place in school and the community for students and families preparing for life after high school?
- Resume/personal statement/goals and steps to attain those goals
- Interviews for internships/jobs/scholarships
- Job/internship searches and applications in their career pathway
- Earning and receiving industry-based certifications
- What opportunities help students to strengthen their preparation for postsecondary institutions and careers in these areas?
  - Early college credit programs (Advanced Placement, Dual Credit, Articulated Credit)
  - Professional certifications or credentials
  - Team-based challenges related to career pathways
  - Capstone projects
  - Community service related to career options
- How are families of English Language Learners (ELL), first-generation, low-income and students with special needs supported in making postsecondary decisions related to careers?
- What classes integrate a career focus through real-world, problem-based learning?
- In what ways are students encouraged to reflect on their interests and skills in order to improve preparation for a wide range of careers?

Early High School Students (9-10)

- How are students transitioned from thinking about career clusters to identifying careers of interest and making plans for the future in school and in the community? What opportunities are there to do the following?
  - Hear from alumni and community leaders
  - Visit businesses
  - Learn about credentials required for various jobs
  - Identify summer or other out-of-school activities aligned with career interests
- How are students' career interests used to create a schedule of courses for school?
- How is career planning a part of school coursework and extracurricular activities?
- What opportunities are there for leadership roles for all students within various clubs and activities?
- What opportunities exist for community service work?
- How are families of ELL, first-generation, low-income, and students with special needs included and supported in more in-depth career planning with their students?
- What opportunities do students have to participate in problem-based learning that integrates a career focus in classes?

Middle School Students (6-8)

- What is needed for students to learn about the 16 career clusters as they begin identifying career options?
  - Introduction to all of the career clusters
  - Mechanisms to learn more about individual careers
  - Opportunities to identify their interests
  - Career exploration events
  - Connections to career professionals
  - Integration of career activities into classroom work
  - Development of soft skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, problem solving, curiosity, etc.)
- How are students' plans for high school aligned with their interests and career pathways?
- How are learning opportunities in the classroom contextualized with real world situations and careers?
- How are families of ELL or first-generation students included and supported in making career exploration plans with their students?
- How are families of students with special needs supported in exploring careers with their students?

Elementary School Students

- What opportunities do students have in school and the community to learn about different careers?
- How are student interests connected to the 16 career clusters in school and outside of school?
- What supports are in place for identifying and communicating with families of ELL or first-generation students about career exploration and development?
- How are community leaders involved in connecting student interests to work skills?
- How are students exposed to pathways other than those modeled at home?

Sample Calendar of Activities for Students — Career Exploration & Development

Late High School Students (11-12)

Fall (August–December)

- Create a resume and personal statement
- Participate in mock job interviews
- Attend workshops to find and apply for internships
- Serve as a leader in their extracurricular activities
- Register for appropriate dual credit, AP, or IB courses aligned with a career pathway
- Consult with the local community college about any articulated credit earned as part of a career tech course
- Volunteer at nonprofit organizations in your interest area (e.g., animal shelter, homeless center, food bank, hospital)

Spring (January–May)

- Participate in career-oriented team challenges
- Participate in assessments for industry credentials
- Participate in mock job interviews
- Participate in projects and presentations involving industry volunteers

Summer (June–August)

- Participate in an internship or other work-based learning opportunity connected to career interests
- Become a regular volunteer at organizations connected to career interests and/or personal values

Early High School Students (9-10)

Fall (August–December)

- Participate in a workshop series on careers in the community and hear from professionals about careers of interest; follow up with a professional by phone, email, or letter and ask for advice on preparing for their own career
- Participate in a career fair with specific local institutional information about the amount and type of education required[1]
- Enroll in classes that will build as part of a career pathway
- Participate in school/community activities that build relationships with career professionals (e.g., Rotary Youth Leadership, Kiwanis Key Club, Leo Club)
- Volunteer at local nonprofit organizations in your interest area (e.g. animal shelter, homeless center, food bank, hospital)[2]
- Participate in a small group workshop on postsecondary options for undocumented students[3]
- Develop an individualized plan to transition to postsecondary life.[4]

Spring (January–May)

- Participate in career pathway-oriented visit days (e.g., manufacturing day)
- Participate in assessments for industry credentials
- Connect with mentors for STEM career pathways projects[5]

Summer (June–August)

- Volunteer at organizations connected to career interests and/or personal values[6]
- Job shadow career professionals during summer months[7]

Middle School Students (6-8)

Fall (August–December)

- Complete a career cluster survey
- Complete a module that explores careers connected to career clusters of interest and write a reflection about which careers are most interesting or appealing and why
- Choose a career cluster of interest and develop a plan for high school which supports that area of interest
- Participate in community group activities that emphasize your interests and careers[8]

Spring (January–May)

- Participate in a career exploration day with a parent or family member
- Visit workplaces aligned with career interests
- Participate in career pathway-oriented visit days (e.g., manufacturing day)

Summer (June–August)

- Participate in career exploration activities offered by community organizations
- Participate in community service activities that build relationships with career professionals (e.g., Rotaract, Kiwanis Kids, Leo Club)
- Participate in summer reading programs and camps that emphasize different student interests and their connections to careers and STEM content

Elementary School Students

Fall (August–December)

- Participate in career highlights days and ask questions of professionals in eight of the 16 different career clusters[9]
- Engage with professionals who work with the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, 4-H, and other student groups and ask about activities to explore careers
- Attend community programs with business leaders to build relationships with career professionals

Spring (January–May)

- Participate in career highlights days and ask questions of professionals in eight of the 16 different career clusters
- Participate in a group service project for the local community (e.g., food drives, soup kitchen)

Summer (June–August)

- Participate with family members in workshops that introduce the 16 career clusters with professionals from the community
- Participate in summer reading programs and camps that emphasize different student interests and their connections to careers

Guiding Questions — College Exploration, Preparation & Selection

Use these questions to identify unmet needs and additional opportunities.

Late High School Students (11-12)

- In what ways can students catch up or speed up (e.g., AP or dual credit) in preparation for their postsecondary goals?
- How are students encouraged toward rigorous 12th grade experiences in the school and the community?
- In what ways are students assisted in the school and the community as they select and enroll in postsecondary institutions aligned with their career plans?
  - Participate in college fairs
  - Visit colleges
  - Track entrance requirements
  - Choose schools to apply to (3-5 match, one safety and one reach)
  - Apply to postsecondary institutions
  - Select the best fit postsecondary institution
  - Complete the admissions and enrollment process
  - Enlist in the military
- What supports are in place in the school and the community to help students and families, including English Language Learners (ELL) and first-generation students, to understand and prepare for the complete college experience?
  - Pre-college
    - Educational requirements
    - Cost
    - Entrance exams
    - Applications
    - Financial aid applications and assessments
  - During college
    - Pay bills
    - Stay on top of coursework/time management
    - Navigate college support systems
  - After college
    - Expected starting salary
    - Repaying student loan debt
    - Mid-career salary
- How does the community celebrate the career paths of students with special needs as a part of the celebrations for the accomplishments of traditional students?
- What supports help undocumented students to navigate the college application and selection process?

Early High School Students (9-10)

- Who can support students in determining their postsecondary plans in schools and in the community?
  - School counselors
  - Teachers, librarians and other school staff
  - Public librarians and other informal educators
  - Religious leaders
  - Business leaders in all 16 career clusters
  - Community leaders
  - Military
- Which areas should a student focus on when preparing, and in what ways are all students, including ELL and first-generation, prepared for their postsecondary goals?
  - Academic preparation
    - attendance
    - grades
    - rigorous courses
  - Extracurricular activities
  - Community service and activities
  - Leadership opportunities
  - Mentoring programs
  - Campus visits
  - Development of soft skills
- What opportunities are there for students to apply learning to existing problems and situations?
- How are families of students with special needs provided with resources for understanding and making choices among postsecondary options for their students?
- What opportunities help undocumented students to receive support and direction in considering postsecondary options?

Middle School Students (6-8)

- How are students encouraged to build an on-going relationship between community service, student interests, extracurricular activities, and postsecondary studies?
- How are cultural expectations respected and addressed when introducing families to the importance of a postsecondary education?
- What opportunities are there for students in the school and the community to attend classes or activities or challenges/events held on local college campuses (i.e., tours, concerts, summer camps, Saturday Fair)?
- How are students' high school course plans aligned with their postsecondary goals?
- How are families of ELL or first-generation students included and supported in making high school plans with their students?
- How are families of students with special needs connected to supports and resources to assist their students in the transition to and success in high school?

Elementary School Students

- How can schools and communities introduce students to the idea of going to college?
- In what ways do the schools and the community communicate with students and families about postsecondary expectations? What efforts are made to ensure that all families are included?
- What opportunities are there for students to go to local college campuses for Saturday events or summer camps?
- How are these opportunities shared with all students?

Sample Calendar of Activities for Students — College Exploration, Preparation & Selection

Late High School Students (11-12)

Fall (August–December)

- Participate in a college fair[10]
- Participate in school activities supporting postsecondary education
- Take SAT, ACT, and AP exams[11]
- Participate in College Application Month activities, including workshops focused on choosing colleges to apply to and how to complete and submit college applications
- Become a leader in student activities, clubs and/or sports. Keep a record of your activities to use for scholarship applications[12]
- Visit the Disabilities Resource Centers on the campuses of postsecondary schools of choice
- Participate in a parent university as a family to understand the process and experience of attending a postsecondary institution.
- Take any required assessments for enrollment into post secondary programs (e.g., placement tests, CLEP tests, language tests)

Spring (January–May)

- Complete a profile in a scholarship service system of choice to access scholarships
- Participate in National College/Signing/Decision Day

Summer (June–August)

- Visit colleges of interest[13]
  - Navigate each college's online portals
  - Register for and attend orientation
  - Take placement tests
  - Register for classes
  - Complete housing forms
  - Make a plan for getting to campus and/or arrange transportation

Early High School Students (9-10)

Fall (August - December)

- Participate in a college fair
- Participate in school activities supporting a postsecondary education
- Register and take the PSAT or other college entrance practice exams
- Increase responsibility within student activities, clubs and sports and keep a record of your activities to use for scholarship applications
- Visit the campuses of postsecondary institutions
- Participate in a parent university as a family to understand the process and experience of attending a postsecondary institution.

Spring (January–May)

- Review course catalogue features
- Learn about dual credit courses
- Learn about AP courses and test scores
- Enroll in classes for next year according to requirements for your postsecondary plans
- Enroll in classes for next year that earn early college credits (AP, Dual Credit, Articulated Credit)

Summer (June–August)

- Participate in group college visits to local institutions
- Attend summer camp or Saturday classes at a local college
- Attend summer school for remediation or acceleration opportunities

Middle School Students (6-8)

Fall (August–December)

- Participate in opportunities to hear from community leaders about attending college and how attending can be important to acquire livable wage jobs

Spring (January–May)

- Participate in a career exploration day with a parent or family member
- Visit workplaces aligned with career interests
- Participate in career pathway-oriented visit days (e.g., manufacturing day)

Summer (June–August)

- Attend summer or Saturday program at a local college
- Attend summer school for remediation or acceleration opportunities

Elementary School Students

Fall (August–December)

- Participate in discussions about why people go to college
- Participate in opportunities to hear from alumni about the college experience in different career clusters
- Participate in school activities to promote college-going (e.g., faculty alma maters, local sports heroes)

Spring (January–May)

- Attend activities in which college representatives talk about the difference college can make in your life and how to prepare
- Participate in opportunities to hear from alumni about the connection between student interests and high school activities

Summer (June–August)

- Attend summer or Saturday programs at a local college
- Attend summer school for acceleration or remediation

Guiding Questions — Financial Aid & Literacy

Consider these questions to identify unmet needs and additional opportunities

Late High School Students (11-12)

- What opportunities do students have in the school and the community to develop adult financial literacy?
- How are students and families, including English Language Learners (ELL), low-income, and first-generation students supported to complete their financial planning for the chosen postsecondary option?
  - Estimate costs of postsecondary attendance
  - Determine the financial return on investment of specific postsecondary options
  - Understand financial aid options
  - Apply for financial aid/scholarships/grants
  - Evaluate financial aid offers
  - Determine the role of debt in their postsecondary goal attainment
- What supports are there for undocumented students to navigate the financial aid application and decision-making process?

Early High School Students (9-10)

- What opportunities do students have in the school and the community to develop age-appropriate financial literacy?
- How are students and families assisted in completing a financial aid assessment?
- How are students and families informed about the general cost ranges of various postsecondary options and completing return on investment analyses?
- In what ways are families who are unfamiliar with postsecondary financial aid options, expectations, and outcomes supported to think through and fully understand their options?
  - Estimate costs of postsecondary attendance
  - Determine the financial return on investment of specific postsecondary options
  - Determine the role of debt in their postsecondary goal attainment

Middle School Students (6-8)

- What opportunities do students have in school and in the community to develop age-appropriate financial literacy?
- How can families of ELL or first-generation students receive support in planning for their child's postsecondary goals?
- Where can families go for assistance to better understand the financial return on investment of different postsecondary options?
- How do students and families get information about the general costs and potential return on investment of various postsecondary options?

Elementary School Students

- What opportunities do families have in the community to learn about planning for and financing a child's postsecondary goals?
- What additional supports are in place for the families of ELL, low-income, or first-generation students?
- What opportunities do families of students with special needs have to discuss and prepare for the financial future of their children?

Sample Calendar of Activities for Students — Financial Aid & Literacy

Late High School Students (11-12)

Fall (August–December)

- Participate in activities and workshops on how to find, apply for, and evaluate scholarships and other types of financial aid
- Participate in college and financial aid application campaigns and events:[14]
  - Attend a college admissions workshop
  - Attend a general financial aid presentation
  - Attend a financial aid application completion workshop[15]
- Review and understand communications on why completing the FAFSA is important
- Participate in activities and workshops on how to find, apply for, and evaluate scholarships and other types of financial aid
- Request application fee waivers

Spring (January–May)

- Participate in workshops or activities to compare financial aid offers

Summer (June–August)

- Meet with mentor to review the financial aspects of postsecondary choices
- Review tuition bills and pay required deposits and required deposits
- Identify and budget for non-tuition expenses (e.g., transportation, books, supplies, etc.)

Early High School Students (9-10)

Fall (August–December)

- Complete a financial aid assessment with a family member
- Attend a workshop about financial planning for various postsecondary options with a family member including a section on return on investment

Spring (January–May)

- Participate in an activity that requires demonstration of financial literacy competencies like the Claim Your Future game for high school students

Summer (June–August)

- Participate in a family-based community challenge that requires the demonstration of financial literacy competencies
- Participate in Navigate or other transition to college programs

Middle School Students (6-8)

Fall (August–December)

- Participate in a parent-to-parent session on affording college; college financial aid staff may be on hand as a resource[16]
- Engage in activities to develop competencies in financial literacy related to earning income, buying goods and services, saving, using credit, financial investing, and protecting and insuring assets
- Participate in an activity that requires demonstration of financial literacy competencies

Spring (January–May)

- Participate in an activity that requires demonstration of financial literacy competencies

Summer (June–August)

- Participate in a family-based community challenge that requires the demonstration of financial literacy competencies

Elementary School Students

Fall (August–December)

- Learn about the importance of earning an income
- Learn about why people save and some guidelines for determining how much to save for future goals[17,18]
- Open community supported college savings accounts for each student[19]
- Participate in an activity that requires demonstration of financial literacy competencies

Spring (January–May)

- Learn about using credit
- Participate in an activity that requires demonstration of financial literacy competencies

Summer (June–August)

- Attend a financial literacy workshop for families
- Identify one or more financial goals for your family together







Additional Possible Activities

- Sponsor Parent University for parents of ELL/first-generation students to orient them to the process and experience of attending a postsecondary institution.
- Host recent alumni visit days for current students to talk with alumni at each level about what the next level is like.
- Distribute "class of" onesies to local hospitals to be given to babies born during the year.

Resources

- Achieve http://achieve.org/postsecondary-readiness
- Complete College America http://completecollege.org/
- URL: https://www.illinoisworknet.com/ilpathways/Pages/default.aspx
- Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) https://www.isac.org/
- https://www.isac.org/pace/il-pace-resource-materials.html
- Illinois Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (ILASFAA) http://www.ilasfaa.org/
- LEAP Liberal Education & America's Promise (AAC&U) https://www.aacu.org/leap
- Navigate http://www.dallasfed.org/educate/navigate/
- National Financial Educators Council https://www.financialeducatorscouncil.org/family-savings-challenge/O*Net https://www.onetoonline.org

Action Plan Template

Plan to take action on unmet needs or newfound opportunities.

Community Partner(s)/Champion _____

Goal (What are you trying to accomplish?) _____

Rationale (Why are you trying to accomplish this goal?) _____

Objectives What are you trying to accomplish?	**How?** Relationships, Methods, Activities	**Who?** Person(s) Responsible	**When?** Implementation Timeline	**Cost?** What would we need in order to be able to afford it?	**Status** Where are we in the process?

Illinois PaCE

Postsecondary and Career Expectations

Each student should have an individualized learning plan to help make decisions about career and post-secondary (PS) education or training, to plan a course of study, and to make financial aid assessments with family members.



By the end of 9th grade

A student should be supported to:

- complete a career cluster survey
- complete a career interest survey
- attend a PS options workshop
- select course work for PS/career plans aligned with the ISBE College and Career Readiness Indicators
- enroll as appropriate in early college credit courses
- outline a plan for community service and extracurricular activities related to PS plans
- attend a basic financial aid presentation with a trusted adult

A student should know:

- one or two careers for further exploration
- the relationship between HS coursework, attendance, and grades to PS plans
- importance of community service and extracurricular activities to PS and career plans
- general cost ranges of various PS options

By the end of 10th grade

A student should be supported to:

- visit at least one workplace aligned with career interests
- participate in activities related to their career cluster of interest
- select a career area of interest: enroll in career pathway (CP) as available
- explore opportunities along the Work Based Learning Continuum.
- connect and build relationships with 2-3 adults to support the PS and career selection process
- review coursework, and PS/career plans in relation to the ISBE College and Career Readiness Indicators (every year)
- attend a basic financial aid presentation with a family member

A student should know:

- educational requirements, cost, expected entry level, and midpoint salary for occupations in selected CP
- skills related to career interests
- different types of PS credentials and institutions
- general timing of PS entrance exams and applications
- benefit of early college credit opportunities to PS access and completion

By the end of 11th grade

A student should be supported to:

- revisit the career interest survey
- participate in a mock job interview
- create a resume and personal statement
- complete an experience within the Work Based Learning Continuum
- determine readiness for college-level coursework in math/ELA and enrollment in either “catch up” or “speed up” course
- complete at least one early college credit opportunity
- attend a college fair
- visit at least 3 PS institutions
- take at least one college entrance exam
- complete a Postsecondary Plan Workshop

A student should know:

- application deadlines, test timing, cost, and preparation for industry-based certification for CP
- entrance requirements, including application deadlines, for expected PS programs of study
- 3-5 match schools, one safety, one reach school for PS program of study
- negative impact of remediation on PS goals
- financial aid deadlines for chosen PS options

By the end of 12th grade

By the end of 12th grade a student should be supported to:

- complete at least two team based challenges
- obtain an internship opportunity related to the CP if applicable
- if applicable, receive industry-based certification(s) related to the CP
- address any remedial needs in math/ELA
- complete a financial aid offer workshop

A student should know:

- how CP courses and experiences articulate to degree programs at PS options
- estimated cost of chosen PS options
- affordability of PS options in relation to expected entry-level career salary and anticipated debt
- terms and conditions of any scholarship or loan

By 12/31 of 12th grade a student should have:

- completed 3 or more admissions applications to PS institutions
- ensure all steps in the PS admissions process are completed on time
- attended a Financial Aid Application completion workshop
- completed a financial aid application

ISAC Illinois Student Assistance Commission

Illinois State Board of Education

ICCB Illinois Community College Board

IBHE Illinois Board of Higher Education

Illinois PaCE Postsecondary and Career Expectations

At the middle school and early high school level, the Illinois Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) Framework is designed to provide students with guided exploration of postsecondary planning and options in a manner that is consistent with adolescent development. Meaningful participation in post-secondary preparation programs requires that students perceive college and/or career as possible and probable. Too often, programs are designed to serve only students who already have a college-going or career-oriented identity. The developmental work in the middle school framework is intended to prepare students to more fully engage with the PaCE Framework throughout the critical high school years.

By the end of 6th grade

A student should be exposed to:

- information about and examples of a wide range of careers
- language that emphasizes individual skills, strengths, and assets
- practices that develop a growth mindset

A student should be supported to:

- explore their interests
- practice their strengths
- develop their confidence in their abilities

By the end of 7th grade

A student should be supported to:

- engage in guided self-reflection
- articulate aspirations
- envision a positive future

- explore their habits
- create or change a habit
- record their progress
- explore career interests

- explore their strengths
- effectively ask for help
- understand a growth mind set

By the end of 8th grade

A student should be supported to:

- explore barriers to aspirations
- articulate personal strengths
- identify sources of motivation

- explore career interests
- develop an educational plan for at least one career interest
- compare possible financial futures
- complete a career cluster survey
- attend a career exploration day

- demonstrate a growth mind set
- explore learning styles
- map a support network
- complete a unit on education planning

A student should be exposed to:

- the concept of career clusters of interest
- relationship between community service/extracurricular activities and postsecondary (PS)/career goals
- be exposed to a financial literacy unit in a course or workshop



ISAC Illinois Student Assistance Commission

Illinois State Board of Education

ICCB Illinois Community College Board

IBHE Illinois Board of Higher Education

Endnotes

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