




**CREATE SUCCESSFUL FUTURES
WITH CAREER CRUISING FOR K-12:**
A BEST PRACTICES GUIDE



Career Cruising for K-12 aims to help every student succeed and create meaningful opportunities in school and beyond. When career development starts early and is an intentional process, students build and act on a plan based on **personal interests, skills, and preferences**. When educators and parents understand a student's pathway, that knowledge helps them **encourage achievement at higher levels**.

We've had conversations with hundreds of educators over the years to learn what's really important in creating successful futures. Thanks to those conversations and extensive user research, we've refined our program and support services to help more students, educators, schools, and districts meet their goals. As we've evolved, we've taken a more holistic approach to what we offer because **future readiness is about more than just career development**.

We created this guide to show you how educators and administrators across North America are using **Career Cruising for K-12 to increase student engagement and achievement, promote successful transitions, and ensure every student is future-ready**. Whether a new or seasoned Career Cruising user, we hope you gain inspiration for using the program through the success stories and ideas on the following pages.

Let's get started!

"Big Picture" Program Objectives

Identifying objectives is an important step in creating a successful future readiness program for students. Once objectives are in place, you can structure activities and lesson plans with a clear mission in mind.

Here are a few ideas to get you started!

■ Infuse College and Career Planning Across Curriculum

The Pennsylvania Department of Education requires school districts to have comprehensive K-12 guidance plans as part of Chapter 339 requirements. To support the plan, Parkland School District implemented Career Cruising for K-12, starting with the **Spark!** elementary program in the 1st and 2nd grade curriculum. With no dedicated career classes and limited counselor resources, staff also weaved the program into the grade 7-10 curriculum, with career development activities led by guidance counselors, library media specialists, and health and physical education teachers. “Career Cruising has created a common language for us,” says Jason Henry, Parkland School District’s curriculum supervisor for secondary education.

■ Increase Student Engagement and Retention

Temple Independent School District in Texas has “anchor programs” at the high school level that let students take dual-credit courses and gain practical knowledge in areas like health sciences and manufacturing. Using **Career Matchmaker** and **Course Planner**, middle school students in the district can explore if these “anchor” options match their interests before making high school course selections or picking CTE programs. Every 8th grade student also meets with a counselor to create, update, and review their 4-year plan. “Career Cruising has greatly increased the enrollment of students in our CTE courses – 86% of our student body enrolled in a CTE course last year,” says Temple High School lead counselor, Amy Contrucci. “Because of our CTE classes, we’ve seen an improvement in attendance because students are connected and in a class they enjoy.”

■ Introduce Students to Career Development Early

School counselors at Grand Prairie Independent School District in Texas use embedded activities in Career Cruising's **Spark!** elementary program to build students' confidence and good manners starting in K-2. "We talk about soft skills in the workplace and then correlate those skills to classroom behavior," says Dana Jackson, director of guidance for the district. "It's a way for us to say, 'You shouldn't stop this behavior just because we say so – you should stop because it will prepare you to be more successful in the future.'"

■ Help Students Create Future-Focused Course Plans

The London District Catholic School Board in Ontario uses Career Cruising to set, meet, and promote the province-mandated Individual Pathways Plan for grades 7-12. The district sets portfolio completion standards and corresponding activities for each grade. Grade 8 teachers use **Course Planner** to guide students through the high school course selection process and make parents aware of students' 4-year plans. Students also pick two alternates per class selection to "add another layer of information and thoughtfulness to their schedule," says Michelle Boughner, the district's student pathways coordinator.

■ Support Students with Special Needs

Jennifer Kluesner, a career development coordinator at Oakland Schools in Michigan, says the **Learning Styles Inventory** and **Career Matchmaker** assessments help transition students build skills and create a post-secondary plan with transition coordinators. Career Cruising's [correlation document for transition students](#) outlines how to use the program to align with National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET) standards, and an "alternative completion standard" option lets educators set a different set of graduation or learning plan requirements for students with special needs.

■ Promote In-Depth Career Conversations with Students

Students in the engineering program at Riverside High School in North Carolina are called to the Career Center at the end of their junior year for a 45-minute interview guided by assessments and activities done in Career Cruising. "Using the portfolio data, we encourage students to build skills-based resumes, explore career details and clusters, evaluate college options, and fully prepare for the next stage of their lives," says Tim Velegol, the school's engineering department coordinator and CTE department chair. Students have another meeting in their senior year, where their **My Plan** portfolio content is used to prepare college applications and provide teachers and counselors with details to support reference letters.

■ Provide Structure to Career Development Initiatives

The Midland County Educational Service Agency in Michigan introduced a career development initiative across four public school districts, combining in-class career and academic exploration with community-based events for grades 6-12. In 10th grade, students attend a career fair with local employers in industries like chemical engineering, marketing, health care, and construction. Eleventh grade students participate in “Reality Store” and mock interview events in partnership with the Midland Area Chamber of Commerce. Prior to the events, students complete the **My Skills** and **Career Matchmaker** assessments to explore careers and interests. “It’s not about pushing students in a certain direction – it’s about empowering them to understand their options,” says Don Johnson, Career & Technical Education Coordinator at the Midland County ESA.

■ Meet State/Provincial Mandates

The Kentucky Department of Education implemented Career Cruising in 2005 to move off the paper system of the state-mandated Individual Graduation Plan (renamed the Individual Learning Plan). Districts, schools, and the KDE can generate real-time reports to track student progress; Career Cruising also enables the implementation of consistent standards across the state. Kentucky’s ILP completion rates have topped 90% for the past four years, with many schools hitting the 100% mark. “The ILP is the best tool I’ve seen for college and career readiness,” says Lisa Huddleston, principal at Livingston County Middle School. She sets – and meets – annual ILP completion deadlines of March 1st for students and April 1st for parent sign-off.

■ Motivate At-Risk Students

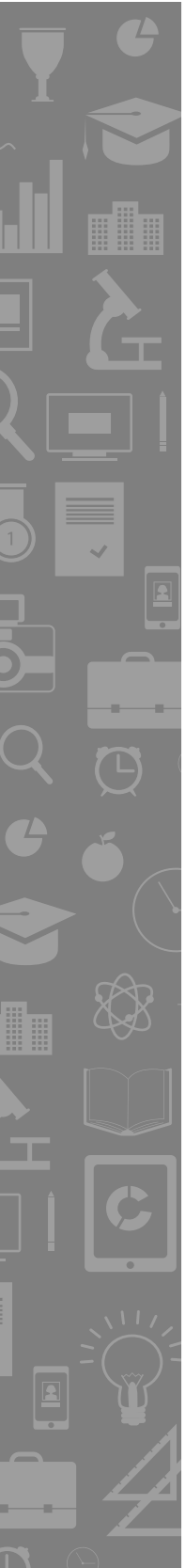
High school students in the Drug Prevention Program at Grand Prairie Independent School District in Texas use **Career Matchmaker** to start planning their futures. School counselors use it in group sessions to further motivate students and improve their academic outlook. “Using the program gives them hope – it’s a way for us to say, ‘this is what you can do if you choose a drug-free lifestyle,’” says Dana Jackson, director of guidance for the district.

“The biggest thing Career Cruising does is give a backbone to our Career Development Initiative. It allows us to connect – and continue connecting – the dots between school and careers all the way through grades 6 to 12.”

Don Johnson,
Career & Technical Education Coordinator,
Midland Country Educational Service Agency

Career Development Activity Ideas

The best career development activities get students excited about the future, make learning relevant, and integrate future-ready skills into core classroom learning. Find embedded activities and worksheets in the program, or take a cue from the schools on the following pages.



■ Create a “Career Day” Based on Student Interests

Freshmen at Olympia High School in Illinois select three careers to investigate in detail – one primary and two back-up choices – from their list of 40 **Career Matchmaker** suggestions. Based on their selections, students are grouped by career cluster to participate in the school’s “Career Day on Wheels.” Each group visits two or three workplaces in the region, which introduces them to industries of interest and deepens their connection to the community.

■ Teach Financial Literacy in Math Class

Math students at John Fraser Secondary School in Ontario explore the educational requirements, earnings, and career paths for their top three careers based on their **Career Matchmaker** results. Using salary and labor market information in the career profiles, they calculate wages by hour, day, week, month, and year for each of their chosen careers and present findings to the class.

■ Involve Community Members in Future Readiness

The Kentucky Department of Education and the Department of Workforce Development hold an initiative called Operation Preparation every March. Trained volunteer community advisors meet with 8th and 10th grade students across the state and review the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) in Career Cruising, including assessment results, saved careers, and interest inventories. Structured conversations allow students to talk about their goals and learn more about careers from people outside the classroom.

■ Introduce Career Projects in Lesson Plans

Brenda Galyan, a family and consumer sciences teacher at Jackson Creek Middle School in Indiana, asks students to complete the **Learning Styles Inventory** and **Career Matchmaker** assessments and pick three careers from each cluster. After they research and determine their top career choice, each student prepares a 10-slide presentation to improve their public speaking skills. They then make paper figures to match their career picks – for example, a psychiatrist sitting on a couch or a pediatrician holding a baby – that are hung in the classroom for the school year. “You get so many artistic kids and this is a way for them to really express themselves,” says Galyan.

■ Practice College Essay Writing

Shawn Murphy, a history and health teacher at McBain Rural Agricultural School in Michigan, uses Career Cruising to get high school students thinking about their interests and potential pathways. Once they've narrowed their career search to two or three choices, they research post-secondary programs in the **Explore Education** section and practice applying to a school by writing a 300-500 word essay that includes challenges they've overcome. "Even if a student isn't planning to go to college, I still have them write it," says Murphy, who follows the assignment with a job shadow project in the student's career of interest.

■ Make Student Portfolios a Must

Whitewater High School in Wisconsin mandates a Career and Academic Portfolio as a high school graduation requirement. Students complete Individual Learning Plans, attend planning conferences with counselors, and deliver a portfolio presentation at the end of their senior year to community members who ask questions and provide feedback. Career Cruising is used as the ILP and contains students' career and academic research, academic work samples, financial planning projects, personal fitness plans, and a log of at least 10 hours of community service.

■ Raise CTE Awareness

The Midland Educational Services Agency in Michigan introduced a Career and Technical Education showcase to bring attention to different programs across the county. Based on data from **Career Matchmaker** assessments, counselors identify 10th grade students who could be good candidates for programs in accounting, health care, welding, building trades, and more. The showcase has contributed to a “significant increase” in CTE enrollment, says CTE coordinator Don Johnson, and the number of students who attend a CTE program that’s not in their home school has increased tenfold over the past four years.

■ Introduce Group Career Research Projects

After completing the **My Skills** assessment, 8th grade students at Ventura Park Public School in Ontario choose three careers from their results and are put into groups based on career clusters of interest. Each group creates a career display board and a presentation of their cluster based on their various career choices, including salary range and responsibilities. Students also write a research paper on their top career choice, which helps them understand how education and skills training relate to income.

■ Hold a Resume Workshop

In high school CTE classes at Grand Prairie Independent School District in Texas, teachers show videos from different **Career Profiles** and assign activities to expand students' knowledge of their future possibilities. Students then use the **Resume Builder** to prepare for job searches and college applications.

■ Career Scavenger Hunt

As part of their comprehensive, standards-based career exploration and education program, Baldwin High School and Harrison Middle School in Pennsylvania hold a scavenger hunt where students complete the **Learning Styles Inventory** and **Career Matchmaker** assessments and learn about prominent local careers in their area. The hunt also requires students to identify a career of personal interest, dig into the details of that career, and link it to their current studies.

Pro Tip: School Selector

“ My favorite tool in Career Cruising is the School Selector. I've used it countless times as a high school counselor to assist students and parents in finding the “best match” school. The flexibility of being able to skip around is paramount! For example, if a student says they want to play baseball in college, I can easily use School Selector to find the programs in a matter of minutes that they'd be able to fit into. I can then move onto topics such as location, admission difficulty, and more to further hone in on what factors will help the student feel most comfortable at their chosen school. ”

Calvin Phillips,
Career Cruising Trainer and former school counselor

How to Take Action with Reports + Data

The Career Advisor Management System (CAMS) generates reports at both the individual and aggregate level, enabling educators and administrators to make data-driven decisions about career education and planning.

■ Plan Career Events

At Parkland High School in Pennsylvania, **Career Matchmaker** assessment reports showed that more than 1,000 students picked Health and Human Services as their first career cluster of choice, and 600 students picked it as their second choice. Parkland's secondary curriculum supervisor, Jason Henry, says this data helped him think ahead to new initiatives like health-focused career days.

■ Promote Personalized Learning

Lisa Huddleston, principal at Livingston County Middle School in Kentucky, relies on the **Learning Styles Inventory** assessment reports to help differentiate instruction depending on student needs. Teachers at the school get a copy of assessment data, and 7th grade students write a paper about their learning style and how to address a teacher who teaches in a style different to theirs. "One year we found out 73% of students were tactical, and most teachers were doing stand and deliver – we could definitely use that data to help them," says Huddleston.

■ Track Portfolio Completion Standards

Jennifer Kluesner of Oakland Schools in Michigan uses the **Incomplete Plans by Criteria** (My Plan) report to track portfolio completion across districts. “It’s very helpful to be able to click on each criterion and see a list of students who have not completed that particular activity,” she says, adding that the **Plan Completion Status Snapshot** is also helpful for viewing school-level portfolio completion numbers.

■ Plan Resources

At the London District Catholic School Board, the **Course Planner Completion Summary** and **Student Count by Courses** reports help district administrators allocate resources for the following school year. “The reports can help you drill down and start to see what courses are popular and what might not run so you can start to plan,” says Michelle Boughner, the district’s student pathways coordinator.

Pro Tip: Student List Notes

The student list in CAMS displays students’ name, grade, username, password, and **My Plan** completion status. The Notes section is a great place to record information about students, either privately for your own reference or to share with other advisors.

■ Gauge Student Interaction

Don Johnson of Midland County Educational Service Agency set up a usage tracking system to report the number of Career Cruising logins from “facilitated users” (educators guiding students through the program in the classroom) and the overall number of logins. At the end of the last school year, Johnson found that facilitated users hit more than 4,000 and overall logins reached more than 12,000, showing significant student usage outside the classroom.

■ Invite Guest Speakers

Josh Cole, the sole high school counselor at Oostburg High School in Wisconsin, meets with every one of the school’s 340 students at least once a year. He encourages them to use Career Cruising to “keep exploring their options,” and uses the **Career Clusters/Pathways Interests** report to recruit relevant guest speakers. “It’s valuable for connecting the real world to high school and explaining to students why they need to take certain classes,” says Cole.

Easy Ways to Promote Career Education

Successful educational programs engage and inspire staff, students, parents, and community members. Communication is crucial for increasing usage and helping stakeholders see the value of the program.

- Remind students how to log in to Career Cruising during morning announcements and highlight different sections around key times in the school year (SAT/ACT exams, college applications, course selection, summer job search, etc.).
- List login details in classrooms or provide access cards in computer areas to encourage students to take assessments and explore college and career options throughout the year. You can also include a shortcut to Career Cruising on the desktops of school computers for easy student access.
- Post Career Cruising posters around the school, including the main office, guidance office, bulletin boards, and the cafeteria.
- Share key documents and deadlines with students by adding them to their **My Plan** homepage, or send bulk messages using the CAMS messaging tool.
- Use your school's social media accounts to spread the word about Career Cruising and set reminders for college applications, summer job searches, internships and co-ops, portfolio completion, and more.
- Set up a Career Cruising demo station at student orientation and parent-teacher nights with a computer logged into the program. Designate a Career Cruising expert who can walk parents and students through different sections and features.

- Include details about Career Cruising activities and portfolio completion standards in newsletters sent home with students or in online classroom forums.
- Develop a student mentor program where older students can guide younger students through Career Cruising activities, discuss future options, and help hold them accountable to their goals.
- Offer Career Cruising presentations, meetups, or quick information sessions at staff meetings, and make login information readily available in teacher's lounges.
- Involve your entire teaching staff as advisors in the Career Advisor Management System (CAMS) and monitor program usage, looking for areas of improvement.

**We'd love to hear your career development and future readiness tips and ideas!
Connect with us on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to share your stories.**



