

# Program Theory & Research SUMMARY

**The best way  
to predict the  
future is to  
create it.**

-Abraham Lincoln



According to Savickas (2010), entering today's work world requires more effort, deeper self-knowledge, and greater confidence than ever before. A global economy has provided the opportunity for greater access to jobs, allowing individuals to explore a range of careers not previously accessible to them. Along with the changing dynamics of a global economy, a greater increase in job mobility has created work that can be considered "peripheral" in nature, allowing workers to move from assignment to assignment, rather than selecting and entering a lifelong, permanent job. This transformation of the labor force calls for the reconceptualization of careers as boundaryless and ever changing. And as a result, requires more of student preparation programs than ever before (Kalleberg, 2009).

## What is Blueprint for Tomorrow?

*Blueprint for Tomorrow* is a career readiness program funded by the Amador County ROP, operated by the Amador County Unified School District (ACUSD). At its launch, *Blueprint for Tomorrow* includes a career awareness curriculum for grades 4-6 and a career guidance curriculum for grades 9-12. Visionary work for this program maps out comprehensive K-12 career readiness programming and the development of future assets. This program invites students to take a front seat in designing, aiming for, and ultimately achieving personal success as it relates to postsecondary life.

*Blueprint for Tomorrow* guides students through a trajectory; recognizable in branding, style, format, and approach. While comprehensive in nature, *Blueprint for Tomorrow* is nimble in programming

to allow for the entry and/or re-entry of students at all levels K-12. This program adopts a strengths-based approach and is founded upon principles and frameworks of 21st Century career readiness best practices and research. The following narrative is a summary of foundational models of career development/advisement, theoretical approaches to career readiness, career readiness milestones P-K-12, and the value of Career and Technical Education, work-based learning experiences, and dual enrollment.

**This program invites students to take a front seat in designing, aiming for, and ultimately achieving personal success as it relates to postsecondary life.**

**The road to success  
is constantly under  
construction.**

-Lily Tomlin



# Foundational Models of Career Development/Advisement

Perhaps the best tools we have for career readiness preparation in schools are Career and Technical Education (CTE) and career counseling and advisement. Paired together in a comprehensive program, schools can provide career readiness opportunities expanding the capacity for each learner to find meaningful and rewarding work.



**“Work should be an exciting blend of challenge and accomplishment that is engaging and meets an individual’s personal and professional growth needs. Beyond providing fiscal support, a person’s chosen career ideally should provide mental**

**stimulation, a creative outlet, an opportunity to contribute to society and the well-being of others, and feelings of personal value, pride, mattering, and mastery.”**  
**(Curry & Milsom, 2017)**

*Blueprint for Tomorrow* programming is guided by two nationally adopted sets of standards. The first is the California Department of Education’s [Standards for Career Ready Practice \(https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/ct/sf/documents/ctescrpflyer.pdf\)](https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/ct/sf/documents/ctescrpflyer.pdf). The Standards for Career Ready Practice were prepared by the California Department of Education. These standards are an adaptation of the “Career Ready Practices” adopted by the Common Career Technical Core (CCTC). Second, is the American School Counseling Association’s (ASCA) Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Every Student. These are a series of mindset and behavior standards that describe the knowledge, skills, and attitudes students need to achieve academic success, college and career readiness and social/emotional development.



When students are given permission to capitalize on their strengths, high levels of engagement and productivity result.

Lastly, *Blueprint for Tomorrow* utilizes a **strengths-based approach**. According to Martin Seligman, former president of the American Psychological Association, a focus on strength-building in career readiness activities may have more powerful effects than any other specific strategy (Harris, 2007). When students are given permission to capitalize on their strengths, high levels of engagement and productivity result. This approach promotes self-awareness and efficacy by emphasizing intrapersonal strengths. Through strengths exploration, students recognize and can become curious about their personal influence on their

postsecondary trajectory. According to Kosine (2018), "Exploration and dialogue are key components in discovering one's self and we cannot expect students to engage in such activities without structure and guidance."

*Blueprint for Tomorrow* is standards-driven with a strengths-based approach. Instructional materials provide educators and learners with course activity objectives aligned with national models. The overarching goal of this guidance is to better equip learners to understand their strengths and skills to truly develop a satisfying career trajectory.

# Theoretical Approaches to Career Readiness

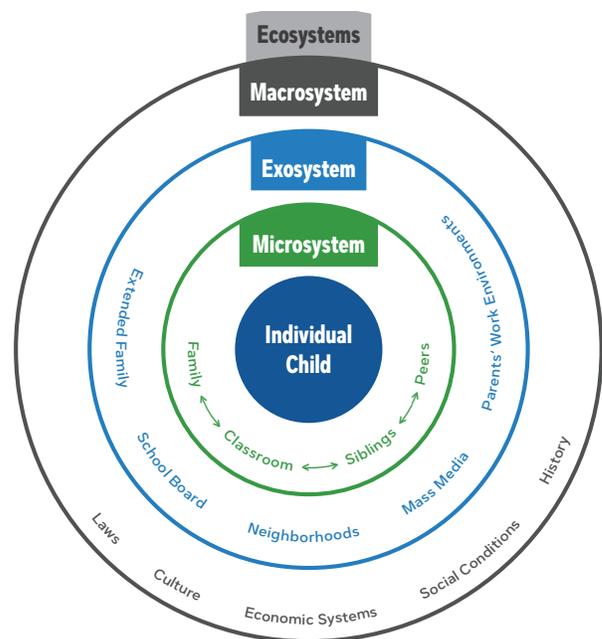
Along with national models, career development programming can be advised by theoretical approaches. The following is a summary of popular career counseling theories and paradigms as used by experts in efforts spanning from vocational rehabilitation to identity development that have guided initial development work in *Blueprint for Tomorrow*.

## Career Construction Theory

Using this approach, career counselors focus on identity and desired states rather than personality. They also focus on adaptability versus maturity, and intentionality rather than decidedness. Career stories as told by the individual are highlighted rather than scores provided by aptitude tests. According to Savickas (2010), a constructionist perspective highlights flexibility, employability, commitment, emotional intelligence, and lifelong learning. Career Construction follows the Life Design paradigm, allowing the worker to define themselves outside of their career so when a job is lost or transitioned, the sense of self is not also lost.

## Bioecological Theory

This theory highlights the importance of an individual's environment in their preparation for careers. Layers of environments (i.e. family, school, community) shape individual perceptions and interactions. Bronfenbrenner (1977) stresses the importance of considering not only a child's developmental level, but also the environments with which the individual interacts. A focus is placed on those who exist in the individual's microsystem including parents, teachers, counselors, and community members. This layer is most influential on a child and therefore are vital to be included in career preparation conversations and activities.



# Social Capital Theory

This theory recognizes the impact of resources available to an individual within their social structures. According to Bourdieu (1986), children can acquire opportunities based on the networks they have access to, and the experiences provided to them (both tangible and intangible). An example of this could be connections inherited by birth. Individuals who might have more social capital would be members of a royal family versus a child born into a low-income household. Another way individuals can acquire social capital is from the investment of energy, assets, and resources from someone with higher social capital.

These theories can be found as foundational elements of *Blueprint for Tomorrow*. Examples include but are not limited to:

**Career Construction Theory** – Curriculum leads learners towards desired states through self-reflection and conversations about lifestyle desires. Classroom discussions have an overarching theme of lifelong learning.

**Bioecological Theory** – The district already addresses this by intentionally designing classroom environments that provide career development experiences and expose students to where they may fit in a variety of ecosystems. This program utilizes career awareness, career exploratory experiences, work-based learning experiences in their community, and dual enrollment as ecosystem layers.

**Social Capital Theory** – Social capital is built in students through the investment of energy, assets, and resources by educators in the district. Dual credit is a specific example of providing social capital opportunities to learners.

# What is Career Readiness?

The Association of Career and Technical Education (2010) defines career readiness involving three major skill areas:

1

**Core academic skills** and the ability to apply those skills to concrete situations in order to function in the workplace and in routine daily activities.

2

**Employability skills** (such as critical thinking and responsibility) that are essential in any career area.

3

**Technical, job-specific skills** related to a specific career pathway.



# Career Readiness Milestones

According to Curry and Milsom (2017) career development should follow a sequential trajectory allowing students to build upon previous knowledge, similar to core academic subjects. Research and understanding have allowed us to align career development activities with developmental milestones. A widely accepted model of grade level and career content knowledge including what children should be learning about careers can be found below.

Grade Level and Career Content Knowledge	
Grade Level	Career Content Knowledge
Pre-K–K	Community helpers, helper vehicles, career play
First	Tools of the trade, clothing of the trade, career vocabulary
Second	Career vocabulary, career clusters, typical day on the job
Third	Career pathways, relating work and school
Fourth	Postsecondary life, career pathways, relating work and school, technology and career exploration
Fifth	Postsecondary life, exploring all aspects of career, salary, typical day on the job, related careers, training required
Sixth	Interests and values related to career
Seventh	Creating a resume tying current activity to future career goals
Eighth	Transition to ninth grade, career pathway planning
Ninth	Deep career exploration and move toward commitment
10th	Postsecondary exploration, early workforce experiences
11th	College visits, essay writing, college application timelines, financial literacy
12th	College applications, college commitment, postsecondary transition

Adapted from Curry & Milsom (2017)

As previously mentioned, *Blueprint for Tomorrow* consists of two pioneer courses. The first is a series of activities designed for 4th–6th grade students. Activities are instructor-led and focus on career exploration with an emphasis in self-awareness and career readiness resources. The second is an online career guidance course developed for high school students who are interested in work experience education for high school credit or work-based learning experiences through their career technical education (CTE) program. This course is designed to aid learner success during the work-based learning experience. Future growth of this program includes:

1. Closing the gap between 6th grade and 9th grade through hands-on middle school/junior high school career exploration experiences.
2. Increased dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment opportunities.



According to American Student Assistance (2021), “One way [to enhance postsecondary success] is to draw a straighter line from classroom education to real-world experience and critical development of life skills, via work-based learning like internships, pre-apprenticeships, and cooperative education.” Work-based learning engages learners by exposing them to authentic tasks and tools while teaching them employability skills in real-time. These opportunities put classroom learning to work in the real world (Alfeld, 2013).

High-quality, work-based learning experiences help students increase motivation and understanding, explore careers, and develop critical understanding of the work environment. Research has also proven these experiences can increase school attendance and reduce dropout (Hughes, Bailey, & Mechur, 2001). Providing this hands-on experience as part of a learner's education plan is a cost-effective method of preparing learners for careers because it teaches current practices with modern technology and workplace culture (Stern, Rahn, & Chung, 1998).

Similar to work-based learning experiences, dual enrollment opportunities are leading to positive outcomes as they relate to college and career readiness. Not only is dual enrollment an avenue to build college awareness in students who may not have previously considered enrolling in a college course, it is an opportunity for CTE programs to increase their rigor and expand local course offerings. A study on dual enrollment participation in Florida and New York City uncovered a positive correlation between dual enrollment and high school graduation rates. Furthermore, students who participated in dual enrollment were more likely to enroll in post-secondary training (Karp, 2007). As an added benefit, dual enrollment can decrease completion time for a college degree.

Founded upon career readiness milestones, *Blueprint for Tomorrow* strives to ease the transition from education to career through career awareness, exploration, work-based learning experiences, and dual enrollment.

## Conclusion

Through career readiness milestones, foundational models of career development/advisement, evidence-based theoretical approaches, and recognizing career readiness milestones, *Blueprint for Tomorrow* brings relevant, strengths-based curriculum to the Amador County Unified School District through the reopening of Amador County ROP program, and funding through the state K12 Strong Workforce grant program. Utilizing core competencies associated with career readiness, *Blueprint for Tomorrow* will continue to build activities that promote early career awareness and planning, quality work-based learning experiences, and dual enrollment opportunities that are aligned with local labor markets.

**Every building  
is a prototype.  
No two are alike.**

-Helmut Jahn

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