

MIDDLE SCHOOL CAREER FAIR TOOLKIT



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Why a Career Fair?

Career fairs are a helpful way to let students explore different career options and journeys.

Students can hear from professionals about their day-to-day activities and connect classroom learning to future career opportunities.

Community members can contribute to helping students prepare for life after high school.



Toolkit Overview

This guide is meant to provide some best practices for planning and implementing a career fair at your middle school. Texas OnCourse has a number of resources to support career fairs. The guide includes a section outlining these tools, as well as suggested activities for integrating them into your career fair.

Best Practices

Identify the goal(s) of a middle school career fair:

- Expose students to career pathways in all five endorsements
- Expose students to high-growth, high-demand career opportunities
- Expose students to postsecondary options such as community colleges, tech schools, and the military
- Give students the opportunity to ask questions of someone in the career.

The goals of your career fair will help determine the format and structure of your career fair.

Reflect on past activities, speakers, format, etc., of successful career fairs.

- Exhibit hall format (use gym or cafe to house speakers)
- Small group presentations repeated several times for students to attend, based on a schedule
- Including hands-on activities
- Including presentations from Texas Workforce Commission and Texas Workforce Solutions
- Inviting local technical schools
- Inviting industry partners

What has worked well in the past? What are some areas for improvement?

Prepare professionals before the day of the event.

Recruiting professionals to present at your career fair can provide your students with an opportunity to ask questions and learn from them. Not all presenters may have experience presenting to middle school students. Be sure to help them feel prepared.

Provide all speakers with a format or guidelines for their presentations:

- Is there a time limit for presentations?
- Will they be repeating the presentation?
- How many students should they expect?
- Is A/V available?

Remind them of the age of the students they will be speaking to:

- Any technical terms used in the profession should be explained
- Ask that they refrain from traditional sit-and-get presentations
- Aim to be interactive and engaging

Give suggestions on ways to create interactive presentations

- Showing a brief video
- Bringing items from their profession to the classroom
- Planning a hands-on activity

Provide them with clear instructions on parking, checking in at the office, and a schedule of the events:

- Have a student guide them to where they will be presenting
- If your campus is large, provide clear signage to guide presenters
- Remind presenters to bring a photo ID and check in at the office

Welcome them when they arrive with snacks and drinks, if possible

- Providing coffee and snacks is a small gesture that will make them feel welcome
- Give each presenter a bottle of water, especially if they are presenting more than once

Set clear expectations for students:

- Are they rotating to different rooms?
- Do they need to bring questions to the presentations?
- Do they need to complete a handout before or after the career fair?
- Will they need to do anything with the information they learn during the career fair?
- See lesson 1.2: What is College and Career Readiness? (in the Texas OnCourse [middle school curriculum guide](#)) for extension activities that can be completed by students.

Build a team and start planning two or three months before the day of the event:

- Identify who at your campus will need to be involved
- Consider A/V needs like projectors, screens, TVs, speakers
- Determine your space needs for the event
- Determine your need for tables and chairs

After the event, be sure to send thank-you notes to all presenters. Students can help write the notes:

Ask them to write down one or two things that stood out from each speaker's presentation

Refer to the Texas OnCourse [middle school curriculum guide](#). Unit 2, lesson 5.4 has a handout on the components of a thank-you note.

Have a plan in case a presenter cancels at the last minute:

- Consider where students will go if a presenter is no longer available
- Are other staff members available to fill in for the presenter?
- Do you have other activities for students to work on?



Using Texas OnCourse Resources

Texas OnCourse provides several free resources you can use before, during, and after your school's career fair.

[MapMyGrad](#) is an interactive website that helps students and families understand endorsements and career paths. Students can start developing a graduation plan based on the course offerings at the high school they will attend.

A space-themed game designed specifically for middle schoolers, [MiddleGalaxy](#) makes career and college exploration so accessible and fun that students don't realize they're engaging in mandatory schoolwork.

[Share Your Road](#) is an online platform where real-life Texans share their career stories with students across the state. These stories expose Texas students to opportunities they might otherwise not know about.

Our [middle school curriculum guide](#) includes lesson plans integrating our digital tools and aligned with Texas education standards for college and career. Simple and easy to use, the lessons can be implemented in any school.



Additional Lessons

Game Plan: Get Your Head in the Game using MapMyGrad

Time required: 45–60 minutes

Essential question: What’s available to me in my new high school?

Career focus: Team building, goal setting, career exploration

Materials Needed

- Notebook paper
- Access to MapMyGrad website and Grad Planner
- List of available extracurricular activities at your school
- “Thinking about Extracurricular Activities” (following this lesson); one per student
- “Spot Your Sport” (following this lesson); one per three or four students

Basic Outline

Students discuss planning for high school and extracurricular activities.

Students access the Texas OnCourse site and MapMyGrad.

Students complete the handouts “Thinking About Extracurricular Activities” and “Spot Your Sport.”

They will use the list of available extracurricular activities and group discussion to fill in other spaces.

Students will complete the MapMyGrad grad planner to begin thinking about courses that align with their endorsement. Which ones are required, and which ones interest them the most?

Students will write or print out a copy of their high school personal graduation plan and/or list five clubs with sponsors for a ticket out the door.

Activity 1 (20–25 minutes)

Tell students that today you will be focusing on creating a draft high school personal graduation plan using MapMyGrad. Students will create an account in the Texas Grad Planner to set up their draft plan, guided each step of the way by the educator, counselor, or adviser.



Activity 2 (10–15 minutes)

Provide a list of available extracurricular activities.

Students will individually complete the handout “Thinking About Extracurricular Activities” by filling in each column according to the instructions.

Discuss some positive aspects of their extracurricular experiences. Ask the students what life lessons they gained from their experiences.

Activity 3 (10 minutes)

Have groups of three or four students brainstorm to complete “Spot Your Sport.”

Have students fill in the columns according to the directions.

Conclusion (5 minutes)

Optional: have one member of each group come up to the board and provide information on a sport or club to share with the entire class.

Quality Teaching Strategies

Use a variety of visual representations of content and skills.

Provide cooperative learning opportunities.

Access and/or build students’ background knowledge and experience.



Thinking about Extracurricular Activities

Directions: List activities for each column. Add what you know about each activity.

Activities I have participated in:	Activities I'm currently participating in:	Activities I want to participate in:
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		



Spot Your Sport

Directions: Look through your student handbook or discuss with your group to complete the grid below. Afterward, write about the activity you're most interested in and explain what steps you can take to become a part of this school group.

Name five fall sports	Name the coach for each sport	Name five clubs	Name the sponsor of each club	Interested in participating?
1.		1.		Let the sponsor know!
2.		2.		Attend a meeting!
3.		3.		Send an email expressing your interest!
4.		4.		Find someone in the club!
5.		5.		Find someone on the team to give you info!



Career Planning: What I Want to Be beyond Graduation

Time required: 45–60 minutes

Essential question: How can I continue my career planning?

Career focus: Goal setting, preparing for the future

Materials Needed

- Access to [Texas Career Check](#) website
- Access to [MapMyGrad](#) website for endorsement quiz

Basic Outline

Each student will take the Career Interest Survey on Texas Career Check.

Students will look at jobs likely to grow in the future.

Allow students to brainstorm ways they can begin preparing for their career in high school by selecting an endorsement area.

Activity Introduction (5 minutes)

What is your life going to look like if you don't plan your career? Allow the students a couple of minutes to brainstorm, then have them quickly discuss their thoughts with a partner. Finally, have them share out their answers and discuss the possible scenarios. Remember, not everyone will want to go to college, but you can highlight alternative options that lead to future satisfaction: postsecondary training or the military. If students are shy about discussing or are stuck on visualizing, here are a couple of scenarios to further the discussion:

- Let's say you do well in college, but partway through you change majors. You were never sure what you wanted to study. You spend an additional two years in school and another \$30 to \$40K in student loans to make up for the lost credits. You make it through college and land a job. But the job is very different from what you anticipated. Now you will need to take the time to decide your new path. What steps do you need to take to make it happen?
- Or perhaps, you get your education. You find work that you enjoy, but then your entire industry is made obsolete by a new technology. Layoff time! Could you have seen this coming if you'd done some career planning? How about if you view learning as continual, something that doesn't stop once you get a degree? It's never too early to start planning your career, even as a sophomore in high school!

We'll start today's discussion with a career interest survey to give you an idea of what broad career fields may be suited to your personality.

Activity 1 (15–20 minutes)

Give each student the Texas Career Check Interest Profiler web address (<https://texascareercheck.com/ExploreCareer/InterestProfiler>) and allow enough time to complete the survey.



Activity 2 (5 minutes)

Have students brainstorm ways they can begin preparing for their areas of career interest now. Suggested answers include:

- Taking classes that parallel or support their field of interest (endorsements)
- Targeting postsecondary schools that support their career goals
- Getting good grades
- Being involved in varied extracurricular activities that will support their field of interest
- Volunteering in places that support their career interests

Have a scribe at the board to record answers.

Activity 3 (10–15 minutes)

Have students take the short quiz on the MapMyGrad site to identify their endorsement area (<https://texasoncourse.org/tools/mapmygrad/>).

Activity 4 (10–15 minutes)

For additional information, students can go to Occupation Trends on the Texas Career Check website (<https://texascareercheck.com/ExploreCareer/OccupationTrends>) to see if their fields of interest are growing.

Conclusion

Career planning can never start too soon. Begin by discovering your personal strengths and areas of interest. What kinds of activities interest you most? Then, volunteer your time and take classes in that field. If you're bored within a few weeks, this wasn't the career for you – better to find out now. After doing an in-depth study of the career, review the things you like, things you don't, and what you can fix. Understand that even a dream job has pros and cons. Finally, consider the projections for future jobs within your area of interest. Do experts think the future looks bright for your area, or will you battle millions of other people for a few spots in the field?

Quality Teaching Strategies

- Collaboration
- Background knowledge
- Questioning
- Summarizing
- Technology
- Student goal setting

Big Bucks and Big Wallets

Time required: 30–45 minutes

Essential question: How long does a career last, and who gets the money you earn?

Career focus: Choose a career that fulfills your passion, because you'll spend most of your time at work.

Materials Needed

- Whiteboard and markers
- Paper and pencil (students) to draw buckets
- Calculator (students, or teacher gives one to a student)

Basic Outline

Introduction: People who enjoy their jobs tend to be much happier than people who don't like their jobs.

Intro Activity: Calculate how much of your life is spent at work.

Main Activities:

- Discuss why it's important to like your career.
- Use buckets to show who gets the money you earn from your career.

Activity Introduction (5 minutes)

People who love their jobs tend to be much happier than people who don't, regardless of how much money they make. How you earn your money will be one of the most important decisions you'll ever make.

First, let's calculate how many hours you will work in your life.

Write the equation with blanks on the board. Fill in the numbers as students calculate them.

$$\underline{\quad} 8 \text{ hours/day} \times \underline{\quad} 270 \text{ days/year} \times \underline{\quad} 40 \text{ years} = \underline{\quad\quad\quad} 86,400 \text{ hours}$$

Over your career, you'll spend about 86,000 hours at work. Would you rather be doing something you love, or something you don't even like?

Activity 1 (5–10 minutes)

Ask the students to define the phrase "liking your job." What does that mean to different people? Some may say they like their job if they make a lot of money, some may say they like their job because of the people they work with, etc.

Have students give reasons why it is important to enjoy what you do for a living.

Possible answers:

- You spend a lot of time there.
- It makes you feel like you are accomplishing something.
- You are proud of your work.
- It helps others.
- You learn new things.
- You'll be good at it.
- You will be easier to live with.

Activity 2 (10–15 minutes)

Have students draw four buckets on their sheet of paper. The teacher/counselor draws buckets on the board. The teacher/counselor can also have students work in groups.

Teacher/counselor: "Who will get all the money you earn in those 86,000 hours? Let's say you earn \$40,000/year."

Bucket #1 – 17% Income Taxes

Have students calculate 17% of \$40,000 (\$6,810), and write \$6,810 on the first bucket

Bucket #2 – 6% Social Security

Have students calculate 6% of \$40,000 (\$2,480), and write \$2,480 on the second bucket

Bucket #3 – 1.5% Medicare

Have students calculate 2% of \$40,000 (\$600), and write \$600 on the third bucket

Bucket #4 – 75% Me

Have students write \$30,000 on the fourth bucket.

Different taxes add up to about 25% of everything you make.

Have students name some things that the federal government uses the money for. Examples: the military, roads and bridges, national parks, student loans, research on diseases, etc.

Conclusion (5–10 minutes)

What did we learn today?

We spend a lot of time at work.

People who enjoy their job are happier than those who don't like what they do.

You don't get to keep all that you earn. The federal government (Uncle Sam) gets paid first.

Quality Teaching Strategies

Using inquiry-based problem solving with students in all content areas.



About Texas OnCourse

As Texas' definitive resource for college and career preparedness, Texas OnCourse equips middle and high school students for postgraduation success. Students discover and prepare for future opportunities with our career and college exploration and course planning tools. Parents and guardians stay on top of vital information and milestones to keep their child on track. And educators connect to professional learning tools and an essential roadmap to guide their students to plan for their own futures. Texas OnCourse is an initiative from the University of Texas at Austin, in partnership with other institutions of higher education, the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. For more information about Texas OnCourse, visit texasoncourse.org.