

# Community Connections: Career and Community Exploration

Community Connections & Career Exploration is designed to build vocational readiness through real-world, community-based experiences. This program emphasizes the generalization of workplace skills, helping students apply what they learn across careers. Through hands-on participation, students develop employability skills while actively engaging with their local community.

Students participate in product development and business enterprise, community service projects, guided retail and budgeting activities, cooking-based experiences, and career exploration with community professionals.

Students practice safety awareness, consumer skills, leadership, and civic responsibility while gaining exposure to a variety of career pathways. Students build confidence, independence, and transferable skills that strengthen long-term vocational and post-school outcomes.

## Core Vocational & Community Skills:

- Workplace readiness and employability skills
- Career Exploration
- Communication and social interaction
- Money management, budgeting and consumer skills
- Organizational skills and task completion
- Product development, sales and fulfillment
- Leadership and responsibility
- Civic engagement and community participation
- Practice and generalize vocational skills across multiple settings

## Community Connection Components:

### 1. Product Development & School-Based Enterprise

- Students engage in product creation and development with the expectation that completed items are brought back to their home schools to be sold through school stores or pop-up opportunities.

### 2. Community Service & Civic Engagement Projects

- Students participate in structured community service and civic engagement projects. This includes creating care bags for local hospitals and family support organizations, assembling food pantry bags, and completing seasonal community-focused initiatives.

### 3. Money Management & Consumer Skills

- Students engage in guided community-based shopping experiences in which they manage a set budget, compare prices, track purchases, and make informed decisions based on value and need, building skills in budgeting and financial literacy, problem-solving and decision-making, and consumer responsibility.

### 4. Culinary Skills & Cooking-Based Vocational Experiences

- Students engage in guided cooking and baking activities that emphasize food preparation, recipe sequencing, measurement, kitchen safety, cleanliness, and professional expectations, while working alongside guest chefs to build skills in time management, task persistence, teamwork, quality control, workplace hygiene, and exposure to culinary career pathways.

## **5. Career and Community Exploration**

- Students participate in career exposure and community guest experiences through virtual and in-person sessions with professionals, authors, entrepreneurs, and community leaders, engaging in research, preparation, and structured discussions that build skills in career exploration, professional communication, active listening, question-asking, follow-through, and appropriate meeting etiquette.

## **6. Operation Sunshine**

- Operation Sunshine is a student-led initiative in which participants plan and carry out acts of community appreciation by researching and identifying recipients, creating food-based or handmade items, designing presentation materials, and executing deliveries, while building skills in planning and organization, collaboration, professional communication, workplace culture, and pride in completed work.

# **Functional Vocational Skill Development:**

## **Supports Long-term Outcomes in Employment, Training, and Independent Living**

- Career exploration and exposure to career pathways
- Understanding workplace routines, schedule and culture
- Demonstrating appropriate workplace behavior
- Managing materials and personal workspace

## **Vocational Instruction & Employment-Related Skills**

- Product creation and production skills
- Quality control and attention to detail
- Retail skills including packaging, presentation and presentation
- Task completion, persistence and following multi-step directions
- Role responsibility and accountability
- Teamwork, collaboration, and cooperation.

## **Community Experiences**

- Independence in the community environments
- Community resource awareness, safety and civic responsibility
- Communication in community settings

## **Independent Living & Functional Skills**

- Financial literacy and budgeting
- Price comparison and purchasing skills
- Planning, prioritization, and organization
- Problem-solving and decision-making
- Responsibility for shared goals