



Classroom Connections

Linking National Middle School Association to middle level classrooms around the world

Ask a class of young adolescents what they would like to do when they grow up, and you can expect to find some not so realistic choices. In a classroom survey of 30 eighth graders from the Bronx, 28 students included pro athlete, actor, model, or singer/rapper among their career interests. Clearly, it is highly unrealistic that this number will actually achieve fame and fortune.

What can educators do to connect young adolescents to exciting, yet attainable career possibilities? How can we encourage them to prepare for work they will be passionate about?

This edition of *Classroom Connections* explores ways parents and teachers can support young people in identifying career options that match their interests and abilities.



Career Development in Young Adolescents

It's not all that difficult for early adolescents to imagine themselves as runway models or rock stars. In fact, it is developmentally appropriate for the first of three stages spanning pre-teen to young adult years. In the first (fantasy) stage, young people believe that anything is possible, despite obvious talent deficits or odds against succeeding. *I will live in a mansion, drive a luxury car, and have an entourage to do my bidding.* In the second (tentative) stage, students assess their skills and interests against the requirements of a career. *I like my teacher; maybe I could be a teacher, too.* By the third (realistic) stage, a young person selects a career with an idea of the consequences of that choice. *As an outdoor educator, I can inspire kids to enjoy nature as I do.* Adults can support students' career development by helping them see the wide variety of available careers and by providing specific information about how to reach their goals.

What Families Can Do

Supportive families encourage their children to "be all that they can be"—to attempt the hard stuff needed to succeed. Some tips:

- Encourage children to take challenging classes—Begin with the end in mind, taking courses that will allow college as an option or expand students' interests beyond their current comfort zone.
- Express concern for your child's future—Remind students of the need for a high school diploma and further training beyond high school. The mission is to help them prepare for a job they'll love.
- Share workplace stories—Talk about what you like about your job.



- Model expected work behaviors—From punctuality to teamwork to respect, draw connections to what is expected elsewhere—school, sports, family.
- Help interpret the realities of work—Wonder aloud what a difficult work situation looks like from the other person's point of view.
- Instill expectations that family members will do their best in difficult situations—Your motto? *We can get through this together.*
- Make informal contacts for exploring occupational choices—Encourage your child to talk to friends and family members about career interests.

What Schools Can Do

- Community service—Help your idealistic middle schoolers make the world a better place. Community service teaches workplace skills, helps develop a sense of self-efficacy, and looks great on a resumé.
- Career days—Invite local business professionals or alums to come to school and talk about what they do and how they got where they are today.
- Job shadowing—Make visiting real people in the workplace part of your students' education.
- Informational interviews—Teach your students how to ask questions about job duties, career paths, and potential openings.

What Teachers Can Do

Help students match their own interests and skills with on-the-job requirements. Use want ads or online job descriptions to help your students strategize for their futures.



My Strengths & Skills

I'm applying for _____ (job title).

In the left-hand column, list the skills your job requires.

In the right-hand column, describe how you've shown this skill.

What skills are needed on this job?	How have I shown this skill?
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.

Resources & Links

Info for Educators

www.roadstosuccess.org

A career exploration, education planning program for students in grades 7–12. Includes links for parents, students, and teachers. E-mail Kate for information on starting a program in your district. (cc@roadstosuccess.org)

www.dosomething.org

Lots of ideas for changing the world, one industrious teen at a time.

www.jobstar.org

Job hunting links and advice. Don't miss the Hidden Market section, a must for 21st century job seekers.



www.quintcareers.com

Great background material for those interested in brushing up on their job seeking skills.

www.jobshadow.org

Want to start a Job Shadow Day in your district? This Web site tells you how.

Info for Students

Bureau of Labor Statistics Career Information, 2006–2007

Edition: <http://www.bls.gov/k12/index.htm>

This is a government Web site written especially for middle school students. Up-to-date info on salaries and job outlook. Easy navigation.

JobProfiles.org: <http://www.jobprofiles.org/index.htm>

Real people have taken the time to answer questions about their jobs, and they are very honest!

WetFeet: <http://www.wetfeet.com/Content/Careers.aspx>

Find career overviews, requirements, job outlook, career tracks, and compensation. For fun, click on "Real People" to find the stories of people who have the career you want.

NextSteps.org: <http://www.nextsteps.org/finder/profiles.html>

Careers are listed in alphabetical order, from "bad breath doctor" to "tattoo artist." You won't find basic info about college requirements and salaries here. You will find interesting interviews with people who have these jobs.

<http://thefunworks.edc.org>

More than 300 middle school students from around the country worked on this Web site, linking their interests and hobbies to future careers. Fifty different careers are featured.



Classroom Connections is published by National Middle School Association (NMSA) as part of our ongoing commitment to middle level education. For more information about NMSA, visit us online at www.nmsa.org. To purchase *Classroom Connections* in bulk, please call **1-800-528-NMSA**. To share a topic idea for a future issue, please contact NMSA Assistant Executive Director Jack C. Berckemeyer at jberckemeyer@nmsa.org.

This issue of *Classroom Connections* was written by Kathy Kinsner, the director of curriculum development for Roads to Success, a non-profit organization that offers a 7–12 comprehensive, in-school career development and education planning program. For details, visit www.roadstosuccess.org.