

CONCEPT PAPER

READY, SET, THRIVE

Transforming Education & Workforce Development in Oklahoma

A three-initiative strategy to ensure every Oklahoma student graduates prepared for a successful life, a family-sustaining career, and a thriving economy.

AUTHOR
Damon Gardenhire

CONTACT
405.313.8363 · dgardenhire@linchpinresources.com

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SEED Research

Social Entrepreneurship & Enterprise Development
linchpinresources.com

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Executive Summary

01 SECTION ONE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Are Oklahoma's high school graduates ready for life? Are they graduating with options of either career or college, with good job prospects that put them on track for the 'success sequence' and low or no-debt higher education choices?"

Oklahoma is poised for tremendous economic growth within the next decade. Aerospace represents the second-largest chunk of the state's GDP at \$44 billion annually. Biopharma, agricultural science, film, electric vehicle manufacturing, and tourism are emerging alongside traditional oil and gas. A critical shortage of nurses must be addressed. Teaching faces a perennial shortage gap.

In each case, there is a disconnect between industry needs and how "job ready" graduating high school seniors are for these opportunities. As Amanda Ripley found in "The Smartest Kids in the World," some Oklahoma employers have located expansion projects elsewhere because they couldn't find qualified workers locally.

The goal: students who graduate prepared for work that earns a family-sustaining income, with multiple paths to personal and professional fulfillment.

A win-win solution where every sector of education has a seat at the table, where supply meets demand for future workforce needs.

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Initiative 1: Ready to Launch

02 INITIATIVE ONE READY TO LAUNCH: CAREER-CONNECTED LEARNING HIGH SCHOOLS

The first major initiative focuses on establishing six career-connected high schools over three years. Each school's founding leader and district or charter partner would receive a \$225,000 seed grant (\$150,000 in the planning year, \$75,000 in the launch year), totaling \$1,350,000 across two cohorts.

These schools offer practical career pathways in high-demand sectors: aerospace, oil and gas, Oklahoma's emerging film industry, tourism and hospitality, agricultural science, healthcare, teaching, and the emerging electric vehicle industry base in Oklahoma and Northwest Arkansas.

Career-connected learning high schools ensure students are not just academically proficient but life-ready and industry-ready, graduating with an associate's degree and real-world credentials that offer the prospect of good-paying jobs immediately after high school graduation.

In Phoenix, "high school doesn't refer to a building but a personalized path of experiences that teenagers create for themselves." In California, San Joaquin A+ created a seed fund sparking innovative new schools, including a viticulture high school preparing students for high-paying jobs in the Lodi Valley's wine industry.

Oklahoma has the same opportunity. Working with the Greater OKC Chamber, the Oklahoma State Chamber, industry leaders, innovative school district leaders, and higher education partners, the seed fund would grant awards to selected districts or charter networks each year.

At the core of this initiative is a commitment to "Opportunity Pluralism," championing multiple paths to success beyond the traditional college degree.

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Budget & Structure

03 SECTION THREE SEED FUND STRUCTURE & BUDGET

The "Ready to Launch" Oklahoma Career-Connected Learning Fund provides seed grants distributed across two cohorts, with three schools in each cohort. The total budget of \$1,350,000 is distributed over three years.

YEAR	COHORT 1	COHORT 2	TOTAL
Year 1	\$450,000	N/A	\$450,000
Year 2	\$225,000	\$450,000	\$675,000
Year 3	N/A	\$225,000	\$225,000
Total	\$675,000	\$675,000	\$1,350,000

BUDGET ASSUMPTIONS
• Each Cohort Founding Leader receives a \$90,000 stipend in the planning year.
• Year 1 planning year funding includes \$60,000 for ancillary costs from OPSRC per founding leader.

• Each Cohort Founding Leader receives \$75,000 stipend in the launch year, with additional salary costs offset by district or charter network partner.

PARTNER COMMITMENTS
District or charter partners receiving seed fund awards commit to a 10-year minimum operational pathway for the school, continual engagement with OPSRC to ensure progress and quality, and quality assessments in years 3 and 5 of operation.

Industry partners would sponsor schools with possible naming rights and immediate access to graduates. A minimum income guarantee for graduates should be considered to attract interest and buy-in.

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Implementation Timeline

04 SECTION FOUR IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE & METRICS

Ready to Launch rolls out in phases, starting with three schools in the first year and three more in the second. This phased approach allows for careful planning, evaluation, and refinement based on initial learnings.

YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEARS 4-10
Planning (Cohort 1) Select first three school districts, identify founding leaders, develop curriculum and partnerships.	Launch (Cohort 1) Launch first three schools, select and plan for next three schools.	Expand (Cohort 2) Evaluate first cohort, launch second cohort of schools.	Sustain & Scale Continue operation, conduct quality assessments, refine models.

SUCCESS METRICS
Successful Launch
Establish and operate six career-connected high schools within the three-year timeframe.

Industry Partnerships
Establish sustainable partnerships between schools and local industries.

Student Readiness
Achieve measurable improvements in student readiness for specific career paths.

Labor Impact
Demonstrate a positive impact on local labor shortages in targeted sectors.

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Initiative 2: Ready for the Future

05 INITIATIVE TWO READY FOR THE FUTURE: MARKET-VALUE ASSETS

Ready for the Future empowers students with market-value assets, providing them with essential certifications that enhance employability and career readiness. Students gain valuable, real-world experience through internships that complement their academic achievements.

Inspired by Kansas City's implementation, this initiative partners with local businesses and industries to ensure students are prepared for the real world of work. This approach strengthens the ties between educational institutions and the business community, creating a robust pipeline of talent that meets the evolving needs of Oklahoma's economy.

The concept draws on the "success sequence": finishing high school, securing a full-time job, and building a stable family. This sequence is critical for fostering long-term economic growth and individual prosperity.

POLICY PRIORITIES
• Clear regulatory barriers and obstacles for high school-level apprenticeships, internships, and certifications.
• Boost the number of available career counselors throughout Oklahoma.
• Enhance ICAP implementation and connectedness to market-value asset portfolios.

This is not just an education initiative. It's an economic development strategy to attract companies, drive growth, and improve quality of life.

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Initiative 3: Ready for Innovation

06 INITIATIVE THREE READY FOR INNOVATION: CUTTING-EDGE EDUCATION

Ready for Innovation drives forward cutting-edge solutions through the development of a robust innovation center, ideally in the Greater OKC metropolitan area. This initiative is modeled after the PEAK Innovation Center (Fort Smith) and the Blue Valley Center for Advanced Professional Studies (Kansas City).

The initiative focuses on creating state-of-the-art facilities and advancements that foster technological and industrial developments. By investing in innovation, we prepare students for the jobs of the future, ensuring that Oklahoma remains competitive in a rapidly changing global market.

POLICY PRIORITIES
• Increased state investments in technology infrastructure and R&D institutions.
• Boost availability of STEM education programs citywide and statewide.
• Innovation summits, hackathons, and events to involve the tech community.

Staying ahead of the curve and using innovation as the engine of economic growth.

CREATING THE RIGHT CONDITIONS

Academic Excellence	Practical Skills	Dynamic Workforce	Global Competitiveness
Ensuring students receive a strong foundation in core subjects.	Equipping students with the hands-on abilities needed in today's workforce.	Nurturing an adaptable workforce capable of meeting tomorrow's challenges.	Ensuring Oklahoma's workforce remains competitive on a global scale.

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Impact & Call to Action

07 SECTION SEVEN IMPACT & CALL TO ACTION

THE IMPACT OF READY, SET, THRIVE

INITIATIVE	KEY FOCUS	EXPECTED OUTCOME
Ready to Launch	Career-Connected Learning High Schools	Graduates with real-world credentials aligned to industry needs
Ready for the Future	Market-Value Assets & Certifications	Enhanced employability and career readiness
Ready for Innovation	Innovation Center Development	Preparation for immediate jobs and industries of the future

JOIN THE MOVEMENT
We need industry partners willing to sponsor key industry-driven high schools. We need community partners. And we need philanthropic partners willing to step into this space to make our three key initiatives a reality.

Ready, Set, Thrive is not just about education reform. It is about building the workforce Oklahoma needs, ensuring every student has access to pathways that lead to fulfilling careers and prosperous lives.

WHAT MAKES THIS UNIQUE?
This is a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that addresses the entire spectrum of workforce development. By combining career-connected learning, market-value assets, and innovation, Ready, Set, Thrive creates a holistic ecosystem that prepares students for success from every angle.

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dgardenhire@linchpinresources.com
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