

WORKFORCE READINESS



The City

Salina, Kan.

110 Average number of students served during the school year

60% Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ Foundations
- ▶ Non-profit

Introducing students to new interests, opening their eyes to potential career pathways

The private sector spends more than \$164 billion every year on employee education and training to close workforce skill gaps and more than 1 in 3 workers agree that they do not have the education and training they need to get ahead. These issues beg the question: how do we sufficiently prepare youth to enter the future labor market as adults? Afterschool and summer learning programs are integral partners in this effort, providing students a ladder of supports that offer a step up for future success and help them reach their career aspirations.

Overview

The City helps expose middle and high school students to new careers and career pathways in their community through its partnership with the Education Practice & Immersion for Credit (EPIC) project. Developed by the Kansas Enrichment Network (KEN) through a grant from the Kansas Department for Children and Families, EPIC began as a pilot project to help rural communities develop youth workforce skills. Through a combination of field trips, hands-on activities, and online programming, *The City* students explore careers such as culinary arts, zoology, and health sciences, and earn digital badges that demonstrate the skills and competencies they have learned.

A typical day for students

Each day at *The City* has a different focus, alternating through combinations of homework assistance, life skills, enrichment activities, faith-based programming, and EPIC programming. After time set aside for homework help and academic support, students participate in enrichment and career development programming, ranging from opportunities for physical activity to bringing in guest speakers from the local police department, fire station, and hospital. Afternoon programming is intentionally flexible to accommodate students who arrive later due to their participation in other afterschool activities.

Outcomes

The City currently completes an informal evaluation of EPIC and has found that EPIC's participants increased their college and career awareness, their readiness for high school and high school technical programs, and their college and career readiness.

Challenges

Employees are missing critical foundational skills that employers desire.

The ability to work in teams, problem solve, and communicate effectively are among the principal skills that employers consistently report desiring in their future hires, yet employers report difficulties finding potential and current employees possessing these set of skills.

Employers find it challenging to hire a workforce with the technical skills needed for open positions.

In a 2017 survey of 500 leadership and human resource staff, 3 in 5 agreed that it was “common for job applicants to lack the technology skills important for success in their career.” Additionally, although more than half of the current U.S. labor market is comprised of middle-skills jobs, only 43 percent of workers are trained for these jobs.

Employers struggle to find candidates with job experience when looking to fill open positions.

A survey of 400 employers found that candidate’s lack of experience was one of the top reasons reported by employers when asked why it was hard to fill positions and that 9 in 10 employers were more likely to consider hiring a recent college graduate if they had an internship or apprenticeship with the company.

Read [Building Workforce Skills in Afterschool](#) to learn more.



Program characteristics

While The City provides students a wide variety of supports and activities, including homework help and faith-based programming, its partnership with EPIC enables the program to build students’ enthusiasm for career exploration and introduce students to college and career opportunities that will help them practice the skills they will need later in life. To connect students to different careers based on their interests, The City students and staff determine a theme, or “track,” each semester.

Through each track, students gain a closer look into the field and a better understanding of the jobs available and the skills required. For instance, students in the culinary arts track participated in a variety of cooking activities, learning the science behind cooking and the ways that changing a recipe can change the flavor or structure of food. The unit included a field trip to a local stadium to talk about the food service industry, discussing the ins and outs of catering and serving clients in a large venue.

Students earn badges for each track they complete, adding to digital portfolios that document their accomplishments. The City and EPIC are currently working toward students earning academic or elective credits for program participation.

Program history

Established in 2007, The City was created to address the low graduation rate of minority students in Salina’s public schools. As the program grew, leadership realized that helping students set future goals and plans was key to increasing high school graduation rates. In 2014, The City partnered with the Salina Area Chamber of Commerce and KEN to pilot EPIC, with each party working toward the goal of connecting Salina youth to potential career pathways in the community.

Recommendations

helping students explore career pathways:

From The City

- ▶ Prepare your students for the career connection you are introducing them to. Whether it is bringing in guest speakers or organizing a field trip to a local business, give students background on the career, what to expect, and what is expected of them.

From EPIC

- ▶ Showcase the diversity of jobs in your community. Reach out to your local Chamber of Commerce to find local business and industry partners.

