

## Insights from the Nevada Future of Learning Network

# Professional Development on Learner-centered Approaches

The [Nevada Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education](#) recognizes the fundamental role of educators and leaders in building and sustaining a learner-centered, future-ready education system. The Commission’s vision includes “deeply preparing and sustaining teachers and leaders to create the conditions Nevada’s young people need to embody the Portrait of a Nevada Learner” ([NCIEE 2025](#), p 6). The Nevada Future of Learning Network facilitated 60 hours of professional development for educators and leaders across the state at the 2025 Virtual Winter Institute: *A Portrait of a Learner* hosted by the Nevada Association of School Administrators. The Winter Institute (Institute) consisted of 25 sessions over 17 days, grouped by the attributes of the Portrait of a Nevada Learner: **empower**, **connect**, **impact**, and **thrive**. The vision for the Winter Institute was designed using three guiding questions:

1. What could the future of learning in Nevada look like if every student were empowered, engaged, and ready for what’s next?
2. What will it take for educators and leaders across Nevada to grow and sustain a learner-centered movement together?
3. What changes in thinking, teaching, and leading are needed to bring the Portrait of a Nevada Learner to life in every classroom and community across the state?

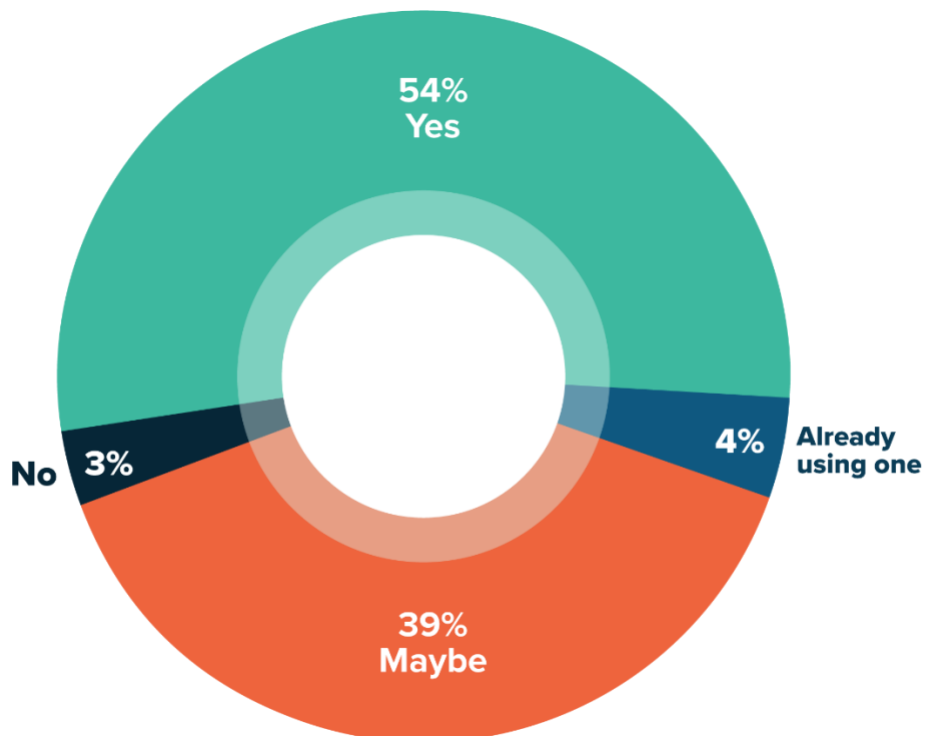
The [Nevada Future of Learning Network](#) is a coalition of districts, leaders, educators, students, and community partners building a learner-centered, future-ready education system. It launched in 2023 as part of the Nevada Department of Education’s (NDE) effort to create the statewide [Portrait of a Nevada Learner](#) and advance [personalized, competency-based learning](#).

This brief highlights the results of a survey administered at the end of each day of the Institute to provide feedback to session presenters and understand perceptions of its impact on teaching and learning. It is part of a collection of briefs providing insights from activities facilitated by the Nevada Future of Learning Network. The survey data in this memo covers the first 15 days of the Institute where 276 educators and leaders attended at least one session and responded to the survey, with the number of session participants ranging from 143 to 212. On average, educators and leaders attended 10 of the 15 days, with 52% attending 12 or more days.

## Future of Learning in Nevada

Participants considered the need to transform their education system toward a learner-centered, future-ready model, and then identified opportunities for innovation, leadership, and impact. Participants were asked about their perceptions of the need to shift toward a learner-centered, future-ready education system after the 4th day, which was the end of the **empower** section, and after their 15th day, which was the end of the **impact** section. On both days, over 96% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that education in Nevada needs to be learner-centered and future-ready, and 94% strongly agreed or agreed that they understood how the Portrait of a Nevada Learner or a locally-developed portrait could be used to advance student learning. Approximately 58% of participants indicated that their district should use or were already using a local portrait or the Portrait of a Nevada Learner.

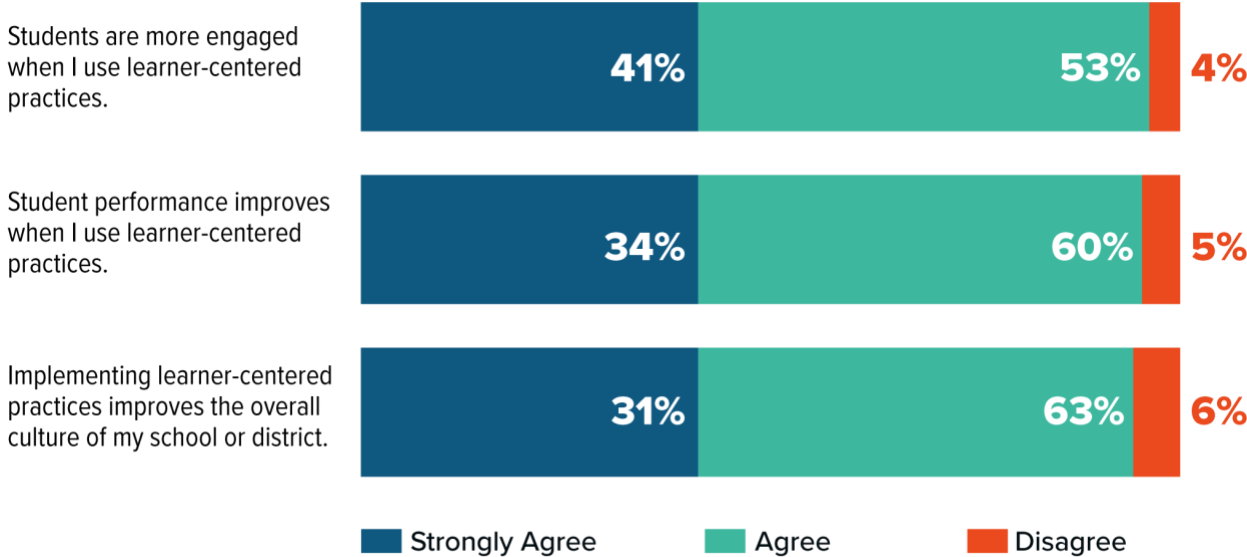
### Do you think your district should use the Portrait of a Nevada Learner or a local portrait that emphasizes durable skills?



# Growing a Learner-Centered Approach to Education

Participants heard from other districts in Nevada about how they are implementing learner-centered practices and had opportunities to consider how they might incorporate similar practices into their own schools and classrooms. Of the 192 participants who responded to the survey, 114 (59%) implemented learner-centered practices this school year. These participants reported that implementing learner-centered practices positively influenced their school and their students. Approximately 94% strongly agreed or agreed that implementing learner-centered practices improved the culture of their school. Approximately 96% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that their students were more engaged when learner-centered practices were used, and 95% strongly agreed or agreed that their students' performance improved.

## Perceived impact of implementing learner-centered practices



Of the 78 participants that did not implement learner-centered practices, 76 (97%) strongly agreed or agreed that a shift toward learner-centered practices would increase student engagement and student achievement. As one educator shared in an open-ended response

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“Understanding learner-centered practices helps me create environments where students are more engaged and take greater ownership of their learning. The concept of outbound change showed me how even small instructional shifts can accumulate into meaningful improvements for students.”

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## Changes in Thinking, Teaching, and Leading

Participants learned about strategies, tools, and mindsets they could use, test, or adapt in their own context. These included the NCIEE Roadmap, artifacts and case studies of schools and districts, an agency continuum, and the KnowledgeWorks Navigation Tool among others. At the end of each day participants were asked if they felt capable of incorporating the strategies, tools, or mindsets from the session(s) in their setting, and their likelihood of doing so. On average across the 15 days, 93% of respondents felt capable of incorporating the strategies, tools, or mindsets from the session(s) into their setting, and 92% were very likely or likely to do so. Approximately 96% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that the strategies, tools, or mindsets would increase student engagement and student achievement. Participants seemed to walk away from the Institute seeing both the need and the benefits of a shift toward a learner-centered, future-ready approach to education and had strategies, tools, and motivation to begin to engage in that effort.

## Getting Started

Educators and district leaders considering a shift toward more learner-centered, future-ready education practices could consider the following questions:

- What professional development is available to enhance learner-centered practices in my school or district?
- How can we implement more learner-centered practices and measure their influence on teaching and learning?
- How can the Portrait of a Nevada Learner be applied in my context to guide learner-centered practices and structures?

## Resources

- [Nevada Future of Learning Network](#)
- [KnowledgeWorks Portrait of a Leader](#)
- [Nevada Innovation Guide](#)
- [Nevada Future of Learning Network Case Studies](#)

The information shared in this brief is based on the 2025 Virtual Winter Institute survey. There was a total of 276 respondents. The Virtual Winter Institute was hosted by the Nevada Association of School Administrators. This brief was made possible with the generous support of KnowledgeWorks and the Nevada Department of Education. For more information about KnowledgeWorks, please visit <https://knowledgeworks.org>.

Zweig, J., & Kennedy, K. (2026). Insights from the Nevada Future of Learning Network: Professional Development on Learner-centered Approaches. Retrieved from <https://www.nvfutureoflearning.org/jobs/evidence-based-one-page-briefs>.

## Insights from the Nevada Future of Learning Network

# Student Engagement

The [Nevada Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education](#) envisions a Nevada where “every student has voice, choice, and agency over their learning journey,” ([NCIEE 2025](#), p 4). This brief highlights how educators and leaders across Nevada are implementing learner-centered practices, and perceptions of student engagement because of those practices. It is part of a collection of briefs providing insights from activities facilitated by the Nevada Future of Learning Network.

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## Educators as Facilitators

Educators shared how they experimented with more learner-driven activities to foster student engagement and ownership over their learning. According to a survey administered at the Nevada Future of Learning Convening in January 2026, 80% of respondents strongly agreed and 20% agreed that students would have more ownership of their learning if Nevada shifted to a more learner-centered, future-ready approach to education.

- **Collaboration Skills:** An educator shared how she provided choice with scaffolding to build students’ collaboration skills as part of their local Profile of a Learner. Learners chose who they worked with on their math assignments but were required to check their answers and check in with their teacher if they struggled with any concepts. The teacher explained that it took “some time and trust to build, but they know that these are the steps we are going to take to make sure that we are successful.”

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“I think that collaboration and feedback...makes a big difference in what I'm able to get out of them and what they're willing to try.”

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- **Innovation Time:** A district leader described how one elementary school had “a block of time for an hour-and-a-half called “innovation [block]” every Monday. Each teacher hosted an activity based on their own expertise and students’ interests, such as gardening, Legos, and karate. Students signed up and engaged in the activities with students across grade levels. The principal shared data demonstrating an increase in attendance following the launch of innovation block on Mondays. “Kids are getting some experiences that they don't necessarily have the opportunity to experience outside of school. They want to be there.”
- **Care and Community:** In one school, educators were cultivating student care and safety through a hydroponics lab. The lab provided students who were previously expelled from school a chance to start anew. “The students are taking ownership of their plants [...] Their behaviors have gotten better because they have something to care for and nurture.”

## Learners as Co-designers

Educators and leaders described how they incorporated learners’ interests, feedback, and preferences into their classrooms. These strategies provided opportunities for learners to have a voice in the educational experience and choices that help to make the work meaningful. Based on the January 2026 Nevada Future of Learning Network Convening survey, 83% of respondents strongly agreed and 17% agreed that students would be more engaged if Nevada shifted to a more learner-centered, future-ready approach to education.

- **Feedback and Ideas:** An educator has a large “parking lot” poster in the classroom where students can write questions, ideas, or shout-outs. Students are active with this board and leave notes about learning, such as “I have an idea to help us in this,” and social needs as well, “Can you please change the seats? They're distracting for me.” The educator acknowledged that it was challenging at times to keep up with all the comments, but because the opportunity for voice and choice has kept students engaged and taught them to advocate for themselves, she has prioritized addressing comments on the board.
- **Setting and Tracking Goals:** An instructional coach described how teachers were unpacking standards with their elementary students. Even kindergarten students were able to explain what proficiency looked like and what they “needed to do to be proficient at this standard.” Once they were proficient, they got a stamp or a sticker and took their data notebook home to communicate with their families about their learning progress. The instructional coach provided her perspective on the impact for students: “They can speak about their learning, and then it's more empowering for them, too, and they're motivated.”
- **Communicating Vision:** An administrator shared how students were involved in ideating about ways to communicate the district’s vision for their Portrait work. One student suggested that they “wrap a school bus with our portrait.” Though that idea was not possible, the district instead wrapped their district cars. A district leader visited the

student’s school and surprised him: “He was so excited to see his idea come to life!” Another student suggested creating stickers and was excited that her idea was chosen: “I showed up at her school one day to present the sticker, and it was lunchtime. So, we had an impromptu little assembly to celebrate her idea and give her the first sticker.”

## Getting Started

Educators who want to add more voice, choice, and agency into their classrooms could consider the following questions:

- What goals can students develop in my class? How can I incorporate standard operating procedures to help my students regularly track and reflect on their progress toward their goals?
- How can I introduce choice into an upcoming lesson? Is it possible to introduce content choices or allow students a choice in how they demonstrate their knowledge?
- How can I use the Portrait of a Nevada Learner or locally developed portrait to guide my approach to building more voice, choice, and agency into learning?
- When would feedback from my students be beneficial? Could I find opportunities before, during, or after a learning activity to build in intentional feedback?
- What opportunities exist for students to provide feedback at the school or district level to inform their learning experiences?

## Resources

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The information shared in this brief is based on 26 interviews and the 2025 Virtual Winter Institute survey. There were 192 respondents to the survey, 114 of which reported implementing a learner-centered practice, and 110 answered the impact perception question. The Virtual Winter Institute was hosted by the Nevada Association of School Administrators. This brief was made possible with the generous support of KnowledgeWorks and the Nevada Department of Education. For more information about KnowledgeWorks, please visit <https://knowledgeworks.org>.

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## Insights from the Nevada Future of Learning Network

# Teacher Empowerment

The [Nevada Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education](#) (NCIEE) believes that “Nevada’s educators are central to [their] vision of fostering voice, choice, and agency for all learners” and that educator development should be aimed at “preparing and sustaining teachers and leaders to create the conditions Nevada’s young people need to embody the Portrait of a Nevada Learner” ([NCIEE 2025](#), p 5). Educators and leaders in Nevada shared how a learner-centered, future-ready approach to education has changed their experiences in the classroom and in their schools. This brief highlights how a learner-centered, future-ready approach to education influenced educator experiences, and how district and school leaders contributed to positive work environments. It is part of a collection of briefs providing insights from activities facilitated by the Nevada Future of Learning Network.

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## Empowering Educators

Educators described ways that the Portrait of a Nevada Learner and other shifts toward learner-centered practices have given them agency and empowered them to continually improve their practice. Based on a survey of participants at a 2025 Virtual Winter Institute: *Bringing the Portrait of a Nevada Learner to Life* facilitated by the Nevada Future of Learning Network, 92% of respondents who implemented learner-centered practices strongly agreed or agreed that implementing learner-centered practices made them want to stay in their school or district, and 92% strongly agreed or agreed that they felt empowered to organize teaching and learning so that every student could thrive.

- **Educator Autonomy:** An administrator reflected on her past experience as a teacher when she was implementing personalized learning: “I had a lot of autonomy at my previous school... I could personalize everything that I did. I had to use a curriculum, but I was able to do the things that I thought were most impactful and important [...] Getting that experience so early on in my career was a blessing.” After teaching in other schools where that same level of autonomy did not exist, she confessed, “Once that autonomy is gone, it’s kind of like your passion is gone.”
- **Impact on Students:** An administrator emphasized that seeing students thrive is central to teacher engagement: “With personalized learning in particular, it is a very visible thing to see the impact on students. When personalized learning experiences are set up well, the students get to collaborate. You get to hear them have deeper discussions. And there’s a real context for what the students are doing in terms of how that applies to the world outside.” He continued, “Our vision-aligned educators are so inspired and so excited and looking forward to getting to do that work with our students.”
- **Portrait of a Nevada Learner:** An elementary school teacher shared how the Portrait of a Nevada Learner influenced the whole school. “I feel like I see it across my school in general and my school district where people who have been embracing the Portrait work have really found a lot of meaning, a lot of purpose, and a great deal of satisfaction.” The teacher also thought the district’s approach to the Portrait of a Nevada Learner empowered educators with more agency. As an example, the administrator asked for feedback before an evaluation on how the teacher would like to be evaluated. “I just don’t feel as stressed or upset about things that maybe I would have been before because of the way that the structures of the Portrait came out.”

## Administrator Support and Structured Time

Educators described how they’ve connected with colleagues to improve their practice and school culture through implementing learner-centered, future-ready practices. In these examples, administrators played an important role in building an environment where educators collaborated, advocated for what they needed, and were provided resources to do so. According to a survey administered at the Nevada Future of Learning Convening in January 2026, 65% of educators and leaders strongly agreed or agreed that their school or district had a culture of innovation, where risk-taking and continuous improvement were valued. Further, 65% of educators and leaders strongly agreed or agreed that their school or district had the flexibility and resources to advance personalized, competency-based learning.

- **Contributing to a Local Portrait of a Learner:** One district developed a local Portrait of a Learner, ensuring that educator voice was incorporated into the process. Educators across the district came together to discuss how they integrated personalized learning into their practice and heard examples of their colleagues’ approaches. According to an instructional coach, this effort led to signature practices that district’s educators implemented into their classrooms as part of their local portrait implementation.

- **Professional Learning Community:** An elementary teacher described the importance of weekly professional learning community meetings. She shared, “It is a great time for us to vent frustrations, workshop what's working and what's not, and share ideas with one another.” She considered their success to be built on “trust and discussion.”

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“I know that turnover right now is huge. Burnout is huge. But because of the work that we're doing, teachers feel supported to take risks. They know what is expected and where we are going with the work. And I think that leads to feeling more comfortable in a job that's already hard.”

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She continued, “And what's been really refreshing is, through this work that we've done, so many teachers have actually said that it has helped to make their job easier, that the goals and what we want to accomplish is clear.”

- **Educator Growth:** A high school teacher shared how he felt comfortable bringing questions or concerns to his school principal or superintendent, and that there were “opportunities for me to just become a better teacher.” He shared how the district is “constantly giving us opportunities to go to training.” These trainings felt both supportive and empowering. “I have such a nurturing district when it comes to this idea of just becoming a better educator,” he added.

## Getting Started

School and district leaders who want to create learner-centered, future-ready education systems that empower educators could consider the following questions:

- How can we apply the Portrait of a Nevada Learner to guide our approach to educator professional growth?
- What shifts in our structures, communication, or supports can be made to create an environment where innovation and continuous improvement are valued?
- How can risk-taking, agency, and creativity be nurtured? How can we encourage educators to try new approaches?
- What opportunities do we have to create space for educators to collaborate, support each other, and advocate for what they need to improve their practice? How can those needs be shared with administrators?

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## Insights from the Nevada Future of Learning Network

# Workforce Readiness

The [Nevada Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education](#) (NCIEE) envisions a Nevada where the education system “seamlessly integrate[s] career exploration and work-based learning from an early age, offering students real-world experiences through internships, apprenticeships, and hands-on learning that align with classroom instruction” ([NCIEE 2025](#), p 5). This brief highlights how educators and leaders in Nevada made connections between the classroom and the real-world, and engaged learners in activities to prepare them for the workforce. It is part of a collection of briefs providing insights from activities facilitated by the Nevada Future of Learning Network.

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## Connections Between Classrooms and Careers

Educators described ways that they helped students connect learning to experiences outside of school through learner-centered, future-ready practice, and how they increased students’ exposure to different occupations through these out-of-school learning experiences. According to a survey administered at the Nevada Future of Learning Convening in January 2026, 79% of respondents strongly agreed and 20% agreed that students would be better prepared for the workforce if Nevada shifted to a more learner-centered, future-ready approach to education.

- **Farmer’s Market:** An elementary teacher shared how her 2nd grade students decided to have a farmer’s market in their school as part of their hydroponics lesson. The students visited each classroom to harvest crops, labeled them, and determined prices. The class set up a table with cashiers to sell their harvest. “They connected themselves to the community. They said, ‘Oh, I’m just like my mom when she does this,’ or, ‘I’m just like my dad when he does this,’ or, ‘I know that my parents go to a farmer’s market down the street,

and they buy things. And so I know what to say and do.’ And so I think they started to see themselves in a bigger picture.”

- **Hands-On Career Fairs:** A high school teacher described how their school went beyond a traditional career fair by providing hands-on experiences for students with employers from the area. For example, a medical flight company visited the school, and the company brought a helicopter and landed it on the football field for kids to see. “[...] they could touch the helicopter and see certain things. I mean, how does that not promote kids to go out and be successful?” The leader shared that while many students in the district had “no interest in going to a traditional college or university [...] there are a lot of kids that want to go to trade school and become an apprentice. And our district does a very good job of finding them a space and an avenue to make that possible.”
- **Internships:** A district leader shared that they have more than 60 students in paid internships within their community. Some of those students found that “those could very well turn into jobs for them right after high school,” and, for others, the experience led to “opportunities to go to industrial or trade schools...to come back and be a better employee.” The school district recognized that many of the employers in their community were looking for employees. “We target the workforces needed in our community with some of our courses” and provided students with opportunities to “be prepared for a job or for employment in the community if that’s what they want.”

## Supporting Transitions

Educators and district leaders described the importance of supporting students during transitions from middle school to high school and again from high school to college or careers. The transition moments are seen as opportune times for career exploration and hands-on experiences to prepare students for their future. According to the January 2026 Nevada Future of Learning Convening survey, 75% of respondents strongly agreed and 25% agreed that students would be better prepared to thrive in a changing world if they shifted to a more learner-centered, future-ready approach to education.

- **8th Grade Pathways:** A district leader shared how their 8th grade students engaged in a nine-week unit to answer these questions: “What have I learned up to this point? What are my future goals 10 years down the road? How do I backwards map where I want to be, to where I am now?” The unit culminated in visits to an employer and a college. “For almost all of them, that’s the first time they’ve ever been to a corporate work site as well as a college campus.”
- **Senior Transition Class:** The same district leader described a capstone class where students built a portfolio and shared evidence of their durable skills. They also learned how to do taxes, participate in mock interviews, write their resumes, and visit different employers. For those interested in college, they filled out college scholarship applications, and the FAFSA. The leader shared that this class was particularly important because families in their district have a range of economic circumstances. “We want to try to build the time and space for everybody to be able to do those things. And to me, that really focuses on being future-oriented and thinking about what that path is [for each student].”

## Getting Started

Educators and district leaders who want to enhance their focus on workforce readiness as part of a learner-centered, future-ready education could consider the following questions:

- What careers require the knowledge or skills that students learn in my class? How can I integrate those careers into learning activities?
- How might we expose students to colleges or careers while they are still in school? How can the community and district work together to prepare students for the future?
- At what transition points would students benefit from dedicated time and structures to consider their futures and build a plan to make their hopes a reality? What structures can help students execute their plans and address challenges that emerge?
- In what ways can the Portrait of a Nevada Learner or a locally developed portrait guide efforts aimed at ensuring that students are future-ready?

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