



FORD NGL



OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

CHRISTIAN COUNTY, KY

Explore Visit
JUNE 2021

FORD NGL TEAM

Paula Chaon, Roadmap Coach
Donna Gilley, Implementation Coach
Starr Herrman, Implementation Coach



TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Executive Summary](#)

[Overview of Ford NGL Process](#)

- Purpose of *Explore* Phase
- Phase 1: *Explore* Objectives and Focus Questions

[Observations](#)

- Overall Observations: Strengths
- Key Matters that Need Further Discussion and/or Not Observed
- Christian County School District: Gateway Academy
- Employer/Community Observations

[Overall Considerations and Challenges](#)

[Recommendations](#)

- Recommended Activities for Phase 2: *ENVISION*

[Conclusion](#)

[Appendix](#)

- The Ford NGL Community Roadmap
- Objectives and Focus Questions
- Data Collection Process and Methods
- *Explore* Phase Activities: Key Stakeholder Meetings



Executive Summary

The requirements of the workplace are constantly evolving. States and municipalities need a powerful, scalable, and responsive strategy that serves their students and is aligned with workforce demand. Ford Next Generation Learning's (Ford NGL) approach addresses this challenge with a robust, sustainable solution. Built around a community-connected, career academy (CA) model, Ford NGL provides the roadmap, processes, and support required to guide communities from implementation through sustainability. This model will prepare high school graduates with improved academic performance; 21st century workplace skills; relevant credentials; and post-secondary and in-demand, high-wage, high-skill career pathways. Students graduate ready to enter a state's workforce, and employers benefit from a viable and local talent pipeline.

Ford NGL conducted an initial assessment *EXPLORE* visit including meeting with key stakeholders of Christian County and the career technical center, Gateway Academy, to evaluate the potential for a community-connected approach to education transformation.

Community leaders, educators (secondary and post-secondary), and employers in Christian County showed tremendous support for this type of transformation. There is widespread desire to strategically align community and school efforts toward achieving county prosperity through the implementation of career academies. With this in mind, Ford NGL identified five key elements essential to moving Christian County forward.

Key elements include:

1. A culture of equity and access for all students.
2. Structures, roles, responsibilities, processes, and policies to enhance strategic business engagement and provide meaningful, experiential learning for all students.
3. Career academy design featuring wall-to-wall implementation with college and career advising and exposure.
4. 21st century pathways which are aligned with local and regional workforce needs and drive CA program offerings.
5. A communication plan.

This report provides the Ford NGL team's findings and recommendations for readiness of career pathway design, academy implementation, and business alignment that will serve as the basis for any future work with Ford NGL and partner organizations.

We believe Christian County will benefit from a strategic, scaffolded approach to planning and implementation of these key elements. Implementation is a challenging journey that requires commitment from all stakeholders to be able to deliver the Ford NGL long-term outcomes while implementing with fidelity. Ford NGL can provide the model, guidance, training, and ongoing coaching necessary for unifying the effort and driving sustainability. In addition, the professional development and training we provide can be drawn from and applied throughout the Ford NGL Roadmap.



2. OVERVIEW OF THE FORD NGL PROCESS

Purpose of the *EXPLORE* Phase

Christian County Public Schools (CCPS) requested support from Ford NGL in order to envision what the Ford NGL Model for a community-connected approach could look like in Christian County. The Ford NGL team visited Christian County with the goal of achieving the following specific objectives for Phase 1: *Explore*.

1. The community will understand the benefits and features of transforming the secondary-school experience using the Ford NGL community-driven approach.
2. Ford NGL will understand the community data and the community's current readiness status.
3. The community will have sufficient information about Ford NGL, the Ford NGL Roadmap, and Ford NGL services available in order to support a decision on next steps.

PHASE 1: *Explore* Objectives and Focus Questions

The Phase 1: *EXPLORE* activities included preliminary research on the community and schools; Gateway Academy school visits on two campuses; and meetings with key stakeholders (detailed in the [Appendix](#)). Since school was out, the team did not get to visit the high schools to conduct student and teacher focus groups. Within the context of these broad *Explore* objectives, the Ford NGL team focused on the essential questions to assess the community's readiness for transformation. These questions can be found in the Appendix.

3. OBSERVATIONS: CHRISTIAN COUNTY

On June 7 and 8, Ford NGL completed an *EXPLORE* visit including meeting with key stakeholders of Christian County, the school district, the high schools, and the career technical center to evaluate the potential for a community-connected approach to education transformation. Based on the Ford NGL team's discussions with community and school representatives, we are presenting the following set of four findings that address the Phase 1: *EXPLORE* outcomes.

In addition to these information gathering interviews, we were able to gain a sense of the culture and the level of energy around transformation. All stakeholder groups spoke of the strong sense of commitment to public education and increased opportunities for students. They highlighted similar strengths and were open and honest about the challenges they face and the opportunities they envision.



Overall Observations: Strengths

1. District Leadership

- The superintendent is committed to college and career readiness for *all* students.
- The district leadership is ready to support the transformation.
- District leaders have visited other Ford NGL communities in order to better understand and envision the model for CCPS.
- The district has strong internal leaders and has designated Jessica Addison to interact with Ford NGL to lead this initiative for the long-term.

2. Business Community Engagement and Sustainability

- There are strong ties to a wide variety of business partners and consistent commitment across business, non-profits, post-secondary institutions, and foundations. The community seems ready to support the transformation to community-connected learning.
- Key local business and community partners have expressed their commitment to supporting the model and the consolidation. They see the transformation as the way to ensure the success of all children while supporting workforce development and economic prosperity for their community.

3. Elements of the Career Academy Design at Gateway Academy

- There are some terrific building blocks that will support the move to the career-academy model.
 - Multiple pathways
 - CTE labs and equipment
 - Post-secondary partnerships
 - Business partnerships and co-op opportunities
 - Pursuit of industry certifications (ProStart, etc.)
- The observations of the Gateway Academy are detailed below in the observations of schools section.

4. Local Impacts and Resources

- Resource allocations and cost savings with a consolidation are an added bonus. With the availability of ESSR (Elementary and Secondary School Relief) funds for construction, timing is perfect for this transformation.
- CCPS is committed to career education and development as evidenced through their financial commitment to CTE programming. Many districts rely on Perkins funding for most equipment purchases, but all career and technical education (CTE) equipment has been purchased with LEA (local education agency) funding, and the CTE facilities at Gateway Academy have been modified and updated throughout the years. There are always opportunities for improvement, but, overall, the CTE labs are adequately equipped and maintained.
- Hopkinsville Community College is a local partner that helped align 17 pathways through their Perkins V Plan. Additional post-secondary partners were excited about developing further engagement opportunities.



Key Matters that Need Further Discussion and/or Not Observed include:

- Any targeted industry reports from the Economic Development Council (EDC)
- High Schools (Usually this visit consists of meetings with the students, teachers, and counselors, however, school was not in session, so the team did not visit.) Ford NGL would like to visit during the fall session to finish the visit and have discussions with high school staff, teachers, and students. (*We will add Christian County and Hopkinsville high schools to this report after that visit.*)


CHRISTIAN COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT: Gateway Academy

Observations include input from district and school administration; however, since school was not in session, teachers, students, and parents were not available for interviews.

Gateway Center has two separate buildings with multiple pathways. There are multiple elements of the career academy model which can serve as a site which helps others envision what this model may look like. Gateway has multiple pathways to connect students in their elective options, and they are intentionally designed to align with targeted industries via the Perkins V needs assessment.

Building blocks to the career academy model observed:

- CTE courses are available to all students. There are a wide variety of offerings at Gateway Academy. Students must apply to enroll, and all students have been accepted in the past. The CTE programming at Gateway has been well thought out. It is aligned with industry needs and offers certifications in all areas. This is evidenced by the growth from 294 students seven years ago to 949 projected for next year. This programming will serve as a foundation as the academy model is envisioned.
- CTE facilities: While we were unable to see the high school CTE labs, the labs and facilities at Gateway Academy are well equipped. While some upgrades would enhance pathways to ensure the most up-to-date equipment, the current equipment has been well maintained. It will continue to serve the needs of the community as the district begins to build strong academies.
- Project-based (PBL) or inquiry-based learning: Gateway Academy is committed to project-based learning as an instructional method. All summer school programming is being delivered through PBL, and during our visit the Ford NGL team was able to see students working collaboratively to solve real-world problems. Additionally, teachers across the district were trained on using PBL instruction in 2015. While many teachers are not currently using PBL in their classrooms, the concept of inquiry-based learning will not be new to them. Given the right support, teachers can shift their instructional practices back to PBL and reinstate PBL showcases to highlight student projects to the community.
- Work-based learning (WBL) for students: There is a commitment to WBL in the Christian County community. Several Gateway students participate in co-op, and this continuum can be strengthened with more intentional business and community collaboration.

- 
- Post-secondary partners offer (or are planning to offer) dual enrollment, dual credit, and industry certifications.

Employer/Community Engagement Observations


- Participants voiced concerns that students are not preparing for life after high school. They hope for an increase in learning real life skills (financial literacy, professional skills, responsibility, work ethic, etc.) as well as career skills.
- Employers reported a willingness to engage but want to understand what they are being asked to do and commit to for the long term. Employers indicated that they would like an intentional and streamlined approach to the requests for business involvement.
- Businesses recognize that current programs do not serve all students. They were excited about the possibility of wall-to-wall career academies that would provide opportunities for every student.
- Groups also liked that the model allows students to start early with self discovery and career exploration.

Overall Considerations and Challenges

1. **Equity:** At Ford Ford NGL we often use the term “all means ALL.” Currently, we see that some students have great opportunities, but not *all* students have five adults in their life to be their advocate. While we were unable to meet the students, conversations with other stakeholders led us to believe that there are significant differences in the student learning experience, especially authentic learning experiences through project-based learning, early career exploration, and readiness for post-secondary opportunities. We did not see a consistent plan for making ALL students college, career, and life ready.
2. **Potential consolidation of two high schools and the Gateway Academy is a major consideration.** There is a vision to enhance the resources, support, and relationships with business and the community for all students in Christian County. There is a window of opportunity given ESSR funds to invest in the infrastructure of the schools. Both existing high schools are in dire need of significant updates. The vision of consolidation to build one new, state-of-the-art high school allowed leaders to envision how career academies can benefit all students.

Consolidation does present an unique opportunity to put abundant resources into one school while having all staff in the same location. Having a large high school actually works well under the career academy model since the academy themes break the school into small learning communities of 250-400 students. The academy model is known for creating more personalized learning and better relationships among students, faculty, and staff due to its smaller size. However, we also recognize that a change of this magnitude comes with a variety of challenges.

3. **Perception:** There is a rich history of community division between the two Christian County high schools. While some of the good-spirited rivalry still exists to some degree, many



stakeholders believe this is more of a perception instead of a current reality. Further, many adults that were part of that school culture over the decades feel the students of today are much more united than many would think. That is evidenced in the Gateway Academy which has a blended population from both high schools. The CA model provides an excellent opportunity to unite not only the schools, but the entire community.

4. **Governance and leadership at the community level.** Ford NGL has learned from our most successful communities that having a convening organization at the community level is important for sustainability, advocacy, and assistance with the career academy model. This governance structure helps to ensure that the model is truly a community-connected transformation.
5. **Business/Civic Engagement:** Most stakeholders indicated there was little business engagement in the school. That said, there is a desire from both the business and post-secondary communities to help students understand career opportunities and have authentic learning experiences. Gateway Academy students have opportunities to participate in co-op during their senior year, but there seems to be few structured opportunities for all students to participate. That is especially the case when connected to general education core classes. The business engagement that we observed was specific to Gateway students and organized by school staff.
6. **College and Career Advising and Exposure:** There is a lack of evidence that shows systematic processes and structures to ensure all students have access to and a plan for college and career advising and exposure. Gateway provides programming for some students that probably includes some WBL. Some students receive college planning, but there is no plan to impact all students. Further, there was a consistent belief that most graduates were not prepared for college and career. Stakeholders reported that many students do not really know what they want to major in or are not prepared academically to succeed in college. Likewise, students that go straight to the workforce often lack entry-level employability skills.

Recommendations

Conduct benchmarking site visits or virtual tours.

Due to the complexity and constraints associated with designing a potential new building, it would be beneficial to first experience a variety of building styles that support career academies. An additional resource Ford NGL can provide is a tour of school facilities designed by the architectural team specifically for the academy model. CCPS might also want to consider convening a core team to attend a Ford NGL study visit.

Continue to build a culture of equity and access.

The focus groups noted that not all high school students have adequate access and support to be successful. The Ford NGL team focused on several areas including project-based learning, career and college advising, work-based learning, career and technical education, and readiness for post high school success. Systems and structures need to be assessed to ensure every student has the support they need to be successful in all aspects



of high school. Work needs to be done with stakeholder groups to define and develop structures that ensure all students have access to the support needed for their individual success.

Understand the roles of the convening organization, and work to secure commitments.

The role of the convening organization is to offer strong leadership and advocacy and be able to get the right people to the table. This role can be managed or shared by several organizations, and the Ford NGL Network has a variety of examples of organizational structures being used to fill this critical role. Ford NGL recommends a meeting with the rotaries, Ed Foundation, chamber of commerce, United Way, EDC, and/or others to discuss the convening organization's roles and responsibilities.

Design a college and career advising and exposure strategy.

CCPS should provide a scaffolded approach for preparing students to make post-secondary plans. All students should be provided grade-appropriate opportunities and activities to explore post-secondary options. College advising activities and exploration could include, but are not limited to, college/university tours, college application assistance, information on financial aid resources and scholarship opportunities, and social and emotional counseling. Career exposure and development could include, but are not limited to, aptitude assessment aligned to pathway offerings, guest speakers, industry tours, job shadowing experiences, internships, co-op experiences, pre-apprenticeships, and youth apprenticeships. This work could be launched in a Freshman Seminar course in which students learn how to transition from middle school to high school. In the course students also learn about the pathway offerings available in their school, and they complete an aptitude test which helps them start their college and career advising and exposure journey.

Ensure effective communication.

There is community-wide support and ownership for public education in Christian County. Communication and marketing has begun with key stakeholders and should continue as part of the strategic process. Ensure the message and outreach include diverse populations within the community. Make sure to include a narrative around the perception of a divided community that doesn't exist within the schools as evidenced by Gateway Academy. Share examples of how the two schools unite to include award winning teams of students who collaborate and achieve. Develop a "Frequently Asked Questions" section for the website and/or other channels of distribution.

Ensure strategic alignment of the academy themes to the targeted industries.

Work with the regional workforce, EDC, local business, and post-secondary to review workforce projections for Christian County over the next ten years. Complete a pathway assessment with current CTE pathway offerings and develop a plan for phasing in high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand pathways that will provide the talent needed in the community. Likewise, create a plan for sunseting pathways that do not lead to the high quality careers that lead to life-sustaining earnings.



Assess and build structures, processes, and policies to enhance strategic business engagement.

Complete an asset map of all business and community partnerships across CCPS.

Determine areas of industry need, and recruit additional partners as needed. Work with the steering committee to develop structures and processes for business and community partnerships to occur equitably. These partners will be utilized to provide the time and talent with students to help move students through low-intensity (guest speakers, career fairs, and industry field trips) to high-intensity (job shadowing, internships, co-ops, pre-apprenticeships, and youth apprenticeships) career exposure and training opportunities. This can occur as part of the Ford NGL Master-Planning Process.

CONCLUSION

Based on the observations obtained from our site visit and related data collection activities, the Ford NGL team concludes that Christian County is making considerable progress in their readiness to undertake this educational transformation. There is a growing understanding among district and school leaders regarding the Ford NGL Model and what it would take to implement.

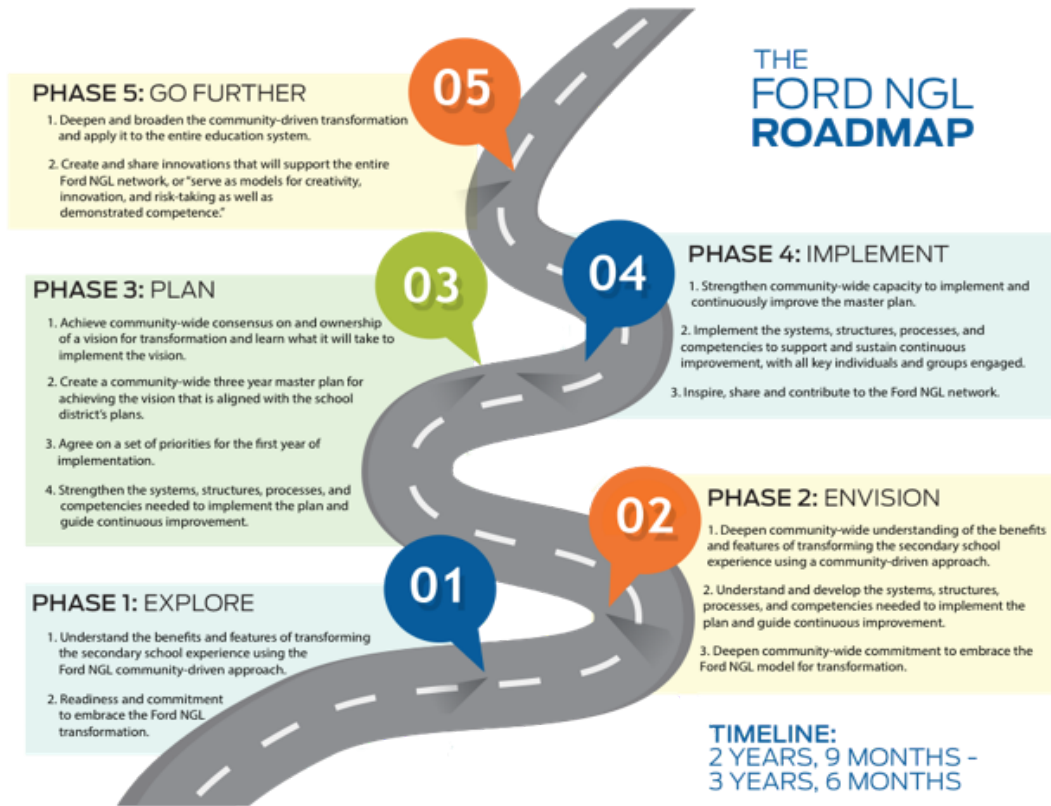
There is an opportunity to align various programs and priorities under the career academy umbrella and unify the community around education. This will provide clarity in vision and direction, streamline the processes, and secure intentional access to partners to increase the scope and quality of the transformation.

When county leaders decide to take advantage of this opportunity, they can build on a foundation of competence, capacity, and commitment. They can move into Phase 2 of the Ford NGL transformation process and finally *Envision* a new day in education and community prosperity.

Appendix

The Ford NGL Community Roadmap

The Ford NGL high school transformation model is community-connected. Building an effective organizational structure comprised of capable and dedicated members is critical for success. The Ford NGL Community Roadmap has five phases, each of which has defined outcomes.



During the Explore Phase, community members come to understand the benefits and features of transforming the secondary school experience using the Ford NGL community-connected process. The Ford NGL Explore Team also assesses the community's readiness and commitment to embrace the Ford NGL transformation.



Objectives and Focus Questions

These initial EXPLORE experiences provided a valuable context for the Ford NGL team in analyzing the district's readiness to formalize a partnership for the purpose of transforming its high schools to career-themed academies through the Ford NGL Roadmap process.

Within this broad objective, the team focused on the following questions:

- Does the district have a leadership team ready to back the transformation of their high schools?
- Are there strong existing pathways (sequenced programs of study in career and technical education) that can serve as building blocks for robust career academies?
- Are those pathways in line with the regional workforce needs as stated by the business community and identified by current workforce demand data?
- Does the district have a strong internal leader who will serve as the district representative? Does this person have clear support from the district superintendent and school board?
- Is the business community sufficiently organized to galvanize business support for the prospective career academies? Is there a solid candidate to serve as the convening organization and a leader to serve as community coordinator?
- Are there sufficient resources to fund not only each phase of the Ford NGL Roadmap, but also the professional development and facilities improvement that may be necessary to implement the community master plan in Phase 4?

Data Collection Process and Methods

The Ford NGL team compiled and reviewed a regional profile in preparation for and during the site visit of June 7 & 8, 2021. The profile includes the following reports, data, and focus group conversations with various key stakeholders.

DATA REPORTS

- [Strategic Plan for Christian County School District](#)
- [Community Report compiled by Ford NGL](#)
- [Perkins V Comprehensive Needs Assessment](#)
- [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Regional and Local Plan Guidance](#)



EXPLORE PHASE ACTIVITIES: KEY STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

June 7 & 8, 2021

Christian County Public Schools VISIT 6/7/2021			
Monday, June 7, 2021		Time: 9am - 4pm	Total: approx. 90 participants
Location: Christian County Middle School Performing Arts Center			
Address: 215 Glass Avenue Hopkinsville, KY 42240			
Attendees:			
Time	Activity/Topic	Location	Notes/Instructions
9am	Meet with District Leaders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bentzel, Hunt, Addison, Hancock, Ralston 	Stage at Performing Arts Center	Final prep/answer any last minute questions before shareholder meetings
9:30 - 11am	Community Shareholders- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chamber and Economic Development Council 	Performing Arts Center	12 invited + district team
11:15am - 12:15pm	Community Shareholders - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business Leaders Higher Education Partners 	Performing Arts Center	17 invited + district team
12:15-1pm	Lunch	Stage	Lunch Provided by?
1-2pm	Community Shareholders - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Agencies Non-Profit Organizations 	Performing Arts Center	20 invited + district team
2:15-3:15pm	Meeting with District Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Team Directors Principals 	Performing Arts Center	30 invited
3:30pm	Debrief with Jessica Addison/Review Day 2 Plan	Stage	

CCPS Visit 6/8/2021			
Time	Activity/Topic	Location	Notes/Instructions
8:30-10:30am	CTE Site Visit - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gateway Academy - Engineering Campus 705 North Elm Street Hopkinsville, KY 42240 - Behind the Board of Education Building Gateway Academy - Health Science Campus 	705 North Elm Street Hopkinsville, KY 42240 715 North Drive Hopkinsville, KY 42240	Summer Learning Institute Students will be in attendance Jessica Addison will facilitate and attend the school visits - Bentzel, Hunt, Morris, Hancock, Ralston are invited to attend.



11am-12pm	High School Steering Committee	CCMS Performing Arts Center 215 Glass Avenue Hopkinsville, KY 42240	33 invited + district team
12 -1pm	FORD NGL TEAM time/lunch	Stage at the PAC	Lunch Provided by??
1 - 2pm	Debrief with CCPS Leaders <ul style="list-style-type: none">Bentzel, Hunt, Morris, Addison, Hancock, Ralston	Stage at the PAC	