



River Valley School District

River Valley School District (RVSD) is located in Blairsville, Pennsylvania—45 miles East of Pittsburgh. Currently, RVSD serves 1,465 students, 52% of whom are on Free or Reduced Lunch. With five buildings and 129 teachers. As a Lighthouse District, it demonstrates a deep commitment to developing future-ready learners through a systemwide foundation that prepares ALL students with academic and social-emotional supports rooted in real-world experience. According to district leaders: “The hiring of a visionary superintendent, Philip Martell, ignited the district’s innovative approach to creating classrooms that feature the latest technologies to prepare learners for ever-evolving, highly technical industries.”

This district has successfully implemented the World of Work Framework (K-12) to provide all students with the resources for career discovery beginning as early as kindergarten. Using the John Holland Theory of Career Choice (RIASEC), learners identify career paths based on their aptitudes and interests. The World of Work framework—reinforced throughout grades K-12—cultivates learners’ career development and exploration of paths to gainful employment.

Students in RVSD have the opportunity to learn about careers, gain skills-based experiences, meet professionals in their fields of interest, and practice career-related skills. As a result, learners have a personalized career experience that is relevant to the “real-world” and enables them to map their educational goals and maximize their investments in post-secondary education.

RVSD attributes its shift toward its workforce development narrative with the 2015 opening of its STEAM Academy, which currently offers engaging, career-driven learning opportunities in an area where options are limited. The district asserts that: “No student should be denied a career pathway based on program capacity or availability.” With the addition of the STEAM Academy, RVSD four new career pathway courses for students to pursue: Cyber-security, E-sports, Electrical Occupations, and Sports Medicine and Rehabilitative Therapy. Each program ensures that students thrive in a classroom experience that emphasizes innovative lab experiences.

RVSD is committed to enriching students’ educational landscape by connecting education, government, and the private sector to create new opportunities for students to prepare for the future. The district currently partners with more than 50 regional, national, and international companies as part of this process. Additionally, RVSD has established a Business and Industry Local Advisory Council (BILAC) to design and evaluate programs of study and career/technical education courses. Other partnerships include collaboration with the U.S.-Czech Business Forum, the Pennsylvania Labor and Industry Panel, a CompTIA Partnership, and the Pittsburgh Technology Council.

In addition, RVSD offers College in the High School classes and Dual Enrollment through a post-secondary partnership with the University of Pittsburgh, the Pennsylvania College of Technology, St. Vincent College, Seton Hill University, and the Indiana University of Pennsylvania. STEM Academy

students may also earn post-secondary credits through articulation agreements with numerous colleges and universities.

A unique example of innovative cross-institutional partnerships in RVSD involves shared leadership between the district and the Pennsylvania College of Technology (PCT). The two organizations have a joint employee, Dr. Randy Zangara, who is currently Director of the RVSD STEAM Academy and Executive Director of the Career and Technical Education partnership at PCT. Under his guidance, district students explore and gain real world experience in careers in regional industries. The next phase of the district's five-year plan will be the development of a Career Hub in partnership with area Chambers of Commerce, providing career resources to students beyond the district's borders.

According to Ed Hidalgo, Chief Innovation and Engagement Officer for Cajon Valley Union School District: "Across the nation, as school leaders scramble to integrate career related teaching and learning, River Valley is developing a system-wide foundation to prepare all students for a path to gainful employment...[The] work is advancing because of a visionary superintendent, aligned board leadership, and the engagement of teachers, school leaders, community partners, parents, and leaders from exemplary post-secondary institutions."