Addressing a Missing Link in Implementing Career Pathways In K-12 Education:

The Role of Building Bridges to Careers's Professional Development for Educators

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

This research shows that without BB2C's Community and Career Connected Learning Professional Development, educators are likely to relegate career pathways, learning careers and community, as merely an alternative education structure that will reach only some students (e.g., apprenticeships, career tech).

However, when PD supports educators to bring career pathways into the core content classroom, all students can build awareness and connections to local employers, workforce opportunities, and networks for the future.

Educators told researchers that the PD offered by BB2C was unlike any other PD they have ever received, and without it, they would not be able to offer opportunities for students to interact with businesses and community partners in a way that integrates deeply with course content.

Ensuring that educators have professional development that keeps them up to date with evolving business and community needs while also offering tangible pedagogical support for integrating career pathway information into classroom curriculum is a key missing link in the current initiatives to provide more career-based learning for students.

If educators are not offering community and career connected material or opportunities in their classrooms, students miss key opportunities and information to access career pathways and build skills necessary for the workforce.

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Educators Need Professional Development to Support Business-Community-Classroom Connections

TRADITIONAL APPROACH vs. **BB2C APPROACH**
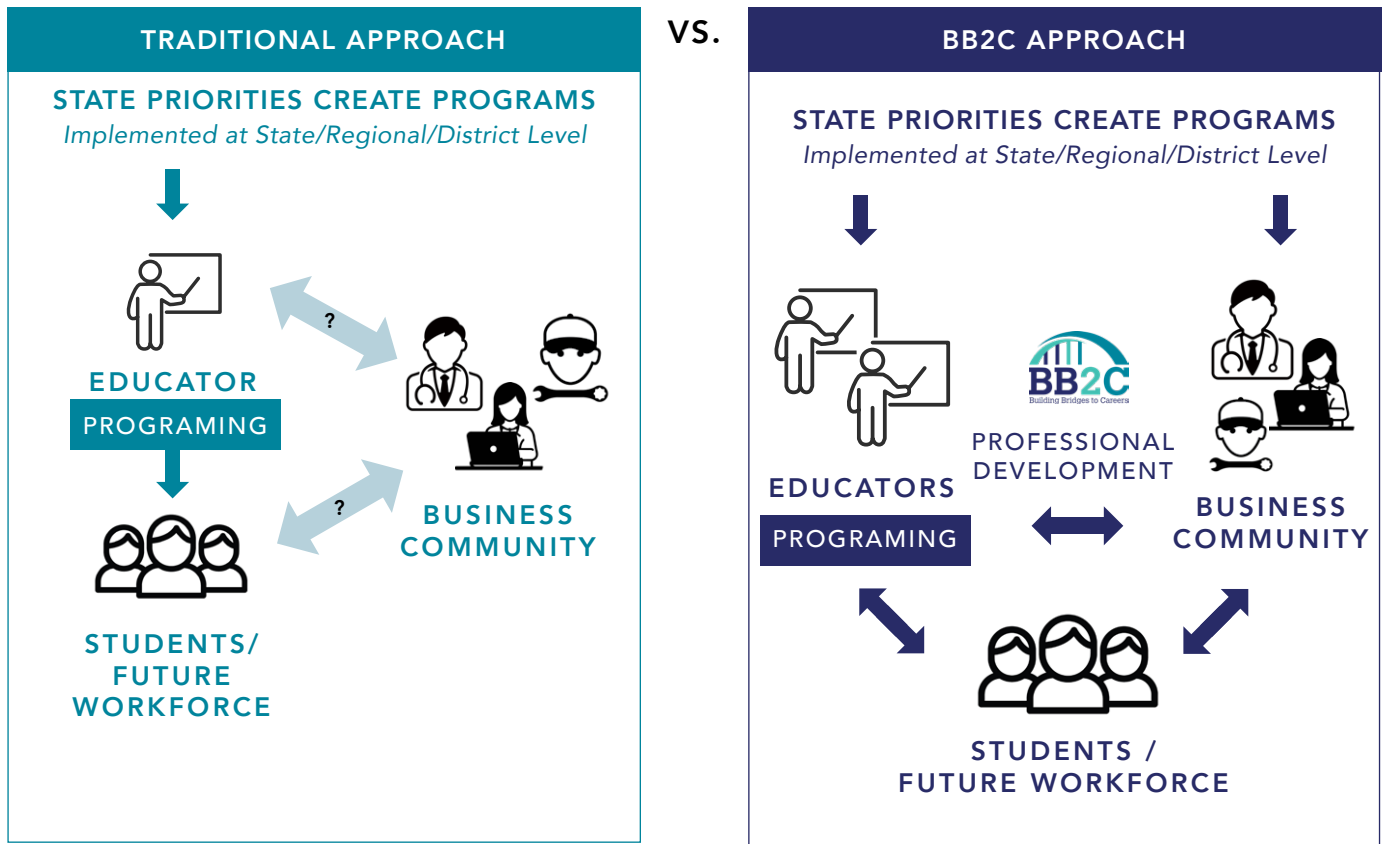
Educators from this research clearly indicate that ongoing PD supported by local boundary-spanning organizations such as BB2C effectively supports integration of career pathways into core content areas. This research found that educators believe communities and businesses distrust youth and schools, and overcoming this negative relationship is paramount to creating thriving communities. In fact, in their definitions of thriving communities, only the educators who participated in BB2C's PD mentioned youth and schools as part of a collaboration to community thriving.

The BB2C Community and Career Professional Development generated authentic interactions between the community and the school, as businesses and organizations brought intractable community problems to the youth to solve. While not planned, this became a form of public relations that educators see as a point of recovery, where support for the school becomes stronger through the hope businesses and organizations perceive.

At the classroom level

This research shows that professional development aimed at purposeful collaboration of education-business-community in the classroom needs several key elements:

1 **Adaptive, flexible professional development** that moves educators from awareness to agency in practice through viewing both educators and the communities they serve as assets in a thriving community model.

2 **Intermediary or support staff** to assist with identifying business partners, networking, and ongoing dialogue between educators and business or community partners

3 **Co-planning time with business and community partners**

4 **1:1 Community and Career Connected Learning coaching** throughout the year after the initial professional development acting as a feedback loop for educators to facilitate fidelity of implementation, alignment, and ongoing engagement

At the district and state level

This research shows that professional development aimed at purposeful collaboration of education-business-community in the classroom needs several key elements:

1 District and building **administration prioritizing Community and Career Connected Learning with explicit goals** to help educators navigate the tension between career pathways and end-of-year accountability tests.

2 **District and administration dedication of resources** (time, PD, or investment with intermediary) to support Community and Career Connected Learning

3 **Collaborative time within the daily schedule** to integrate Community and Career Connected Learning into various courses instead of a stand-alone course or disconnected effort

4 **Ongoing and continual emphasis on community and career connected learning priorities** in order to continue to integrate across district initiatives and to keep current with the changing needs of the community

Building Bridges to Careers(BB2C) and The BB2C Network

BB2C is a regional non-profit organization that connects students with career pathways and community resources through Community and Career Connected Learning (CCCL).

BB2C provides a continuum of career exploration opportunities such as events, job shadowing, career fairs, and exploratory internships to offer hands-on experiences and workplace skills to students. BB2C leverages a holistic approach to community economic development[1] that breaks down boundaries and creates synergy between organizations in the region with an asset-based emphasis on youth as the future workforce and leaders of a thriving community.

BB2C Network: A Regional Community and Career Connected Learning Network
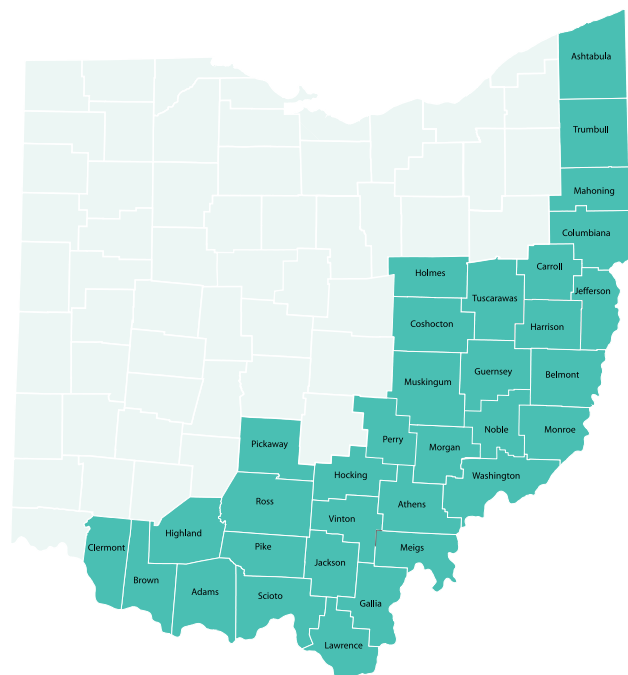
Community and Career Connected Learning

Community and Career Connected Learning (CCCL) is a dynamic learning theory that integrates community partnerships and career awareness into experiential, place-based learning[2]. This learning system extends beyond classroom walls, enabling students to participate in an active learning process alongside educators, community members, and local industry partners. By fostering partnerships with local businesses, organizations, and community leaders, CCCL creates authentic learning experiences that resonate with students. These experiences, rooted in real-world contexts, provide a meaningful bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Community and Career Connected Learning Theory

CCCL is a learning theory that, in practice, results in a continuum of experiences for students that range from exploratory to deeper immersion. Research shows that by beginning with exploratory experiences of the local community and career fields, students build the confidence, skills, and commitment necessary to choose and participate in longer, more immersive experiences in a particular career field.

Community and Career Connected Learning Encompasses a Wide Range of Experiences
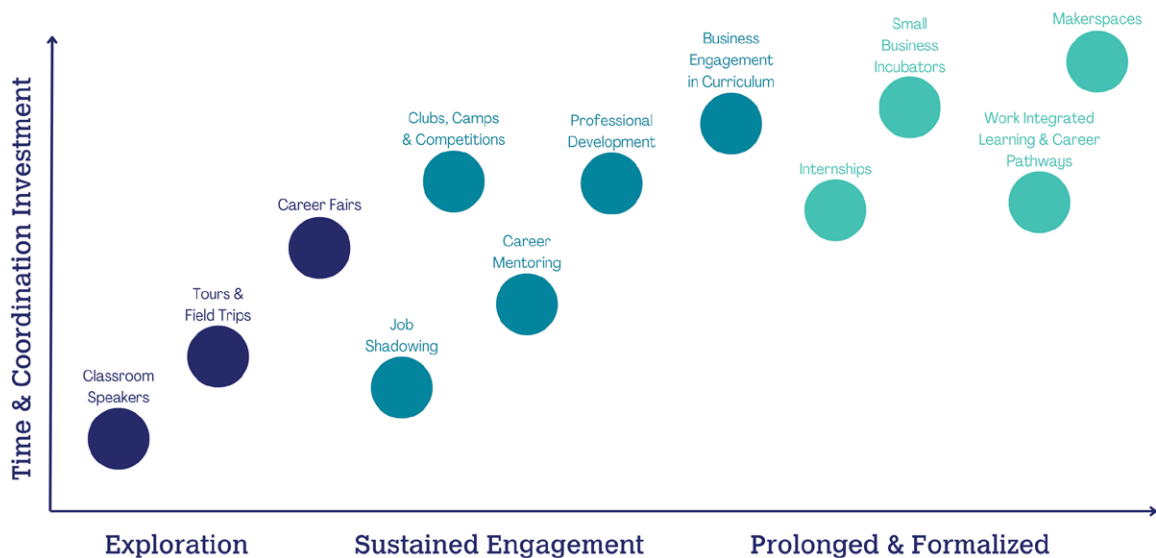
The CCCL learning theory combines many business-education partnership strategies with the goals of exposing youth to the many available job opportunities and connecting employers to the next generation of workforce.

Teaching Community and Career Connected Learning to Educators Through Professional Development:

BB2C has long understood that educators play a pivotal role in shaping the future workforce and community leaders. CCCL empowers educators by integrating real, place-based experiences and career exposure opportunities within the curriculum, making learning relevant and engaging. Through CCCL, learning is directly applicable to the needs of both students and the community. By connecting classroom content to real-world problem scenarios and the transferable skills relevant to local professions, educators become facilitators of exploration, enabling students to discover their passions and potential career paths.

Community and Career Connected Learning

An Umbrella Term for Many Approaches

Career Pathways
Work Integrated Learning
Career Connected Learning
Work-based Learning
Career Mentoring
Internships
Community Engaged Teaching
Linked Learning
Apprenticeship Programs
Connected Learning

BB2C's Professional Development for Educators

On an individual educator level, BB2C supports a range of professional development (PD) opportunities, modeling both informal, exploratory programs as well as formal and prolonged experiences that fit and can grow within existing educational structures.

Recognizing educators' multifaceted roles and responsibilities, BB2C helps teachers identify, utilize, and maximize existing assets to elevate CCCL on any level both in the classroom and as an extracurricular offering.

PD opportunities range from synchronous courses to program facilitation and support. Current synchronous opportunities include a CCCL Resources course and Teacher Tours, an immersive experience which provides educators the opportunity to tour local businesses, learn about local educational pathways, and explore student aptitude data aligned to local industry opportunities.

BB2C offers PD to all educators, including administrators, guidance counselors, and teacher candidates (university students not yet in classroom positions). BB2C has offered PD throughout Ohio and nationally in other states such as Colorado through a partnership with Generation Schools Network.

BB2C's Real World Problem Scenario

One example of adaptive CCCL PD is BB2C's Real World Problem Scenario. The Real World Problem Scenario connects educators with businesses or community partners who work in fields/industries that reflect the curriculum educators are teaching in the classroom. The educators and business or community partner are led through a collaborative process to develop a problem that students will solve. At the heart of BB2C's Real World Problem Scenario is the inclusion of the business or community partner in classroom lessons to co-facilitate the introduction to the problem, serve as a resource as students solve the problem, and assess the students' final solutions. This program is facilitated at multiple levels, to meet the needs of resources of educators.*

Equipping educators with the skills to become CCCL advocates within their institutions, the train-the-trainer modality of BB2C's Real World Problem Scenario enables educators to not only master CCCL principles but also share their knowledge with peers, creating a ripple effect of expertise within an educational community. Recognizing the need for flexibility, the self-paced and microcredential modalities of the Real World Problem Scenario allow educators the opportunity to learn and integrate CCCL concepts at their own pace. These self-paced options can be integrated into CCCL coursework or available as standalone opportunities.

*NOTE: Importantly, when BB2C facilitates the Real World Problem Scenario, classroom teachers are paired with partners from both large and small businesses, entrepreneurs, nonprofits, government agencies, or community organizations such as foundations, port authorities/development districts, higher education entities, etc. BB2C includes all kinds of working professionals in the Real World Problem Scenario, including sole proprietors or independent contractors. For clarity, from this point forward in the report, we refer to this wide array of business and community partners involved in BB2C's professional development as simply "business partners."

BB2C's In-Depth, District-Wide Professional Development for Educators

BB2C offers PD that is implemented at the district level and is meant to spark systems-change for districts seeking to make career pathways and CCCL as part of every class at every grade level. BB2C understands that career and community exploration is often relegated to a separate class or experiences that don't connect with the rest of the school day.

During the district-wide PD, BB2C staff explain the CCCL learning theory and lead educators through the Real World Problem Scenario, connecting them with a business partner for development of a classroom activity. In addition, BB2C provides an in-depth coaching modality that includes personalized sessions that equip educators to implement the real-world problem scenarios into their curriculum. This in-depth guidance ensures educators are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of CCCL. In addition to one-on-one coaching, this model also provides cohort facilitation of the program that brings together multiple teachers to approach problem scenarios through an interdisciplinary lens.

Therefore, the BB2C district-wide PD specifically targets core content educators (educators who teach math, language arts, science, and social studies) in order to build career pathway connections in all classes for all students.

In addition to adaptive programming, BB2C provides in-depth, embedded CCCL support in these districts. Focusing on teacher engagement in CCCL, BB2C helps educators facilitate and sustain a variety of programming focused on purposeful engagement of business partners in the classroom by:

- **Collaborating with educators to create field trips to local businesses** where students can explore job opportunities where course content is used.

- **Supporting innovation in the classroom** by providing support connecting to field-specific industry professionals to support educators' own ideas for CCCL.

- **Providing intensive support through mock interviews and soft skills training via business partner engagement in the classroom.** This not only prepares students for the job market but also enhances educators' capacity to impart these crucial skills.

- **Establishing meaningful connections between educators and professionals in various industries,** BB2C supports career connections and pathways that benefit both educators and the broader community.

- **Facilitating experiential internship and job shadowing opportunities for students within local businesses,** BB2C works to solidify the link between education and real-world applications.

- **Helping educators build capacity and work toward sustainability,** BB2C assists educators in developing speaker series that bring industry experts directly to the classroom. This initiative enriches educators' knowledge base, enabling them to inspire and inform students about diverse career paths and opportunities.

These in-depth PD experiences not only equip educators with the necessary tools to implement CCCL effectively, but also elevate the overall educational ecosystem. Proficient educators contribute to a more engaged student body, better preparing them for the challenges of the real world. Additionally, schools benefit from an enriched learning environment, and the community at large experiences the positive ripple effects of a well-prepared and inspired workforce.

As one PD participant reflected when asked, "In a few words, can you list the essential components of a thriving community?"

BB2C's Theory of Change

"

I think a thriving community is one where there's a lot of working parts. I think it's a kind of cycle because everything seems to impact others. What impacts the school is going to impact the people of the community, which is going to impact the businesses, and businesses are going to impact the schools. I think it's a constant cycle."

EDUCATOR
District 2

About the Research

The research team examined how BB2C, working as an intermediary organization, creates thriving communities through sustained forms of professional development that support teacher candidates and Preschool through high school teachers with the implementation of CCCL.

To understand this, the team focused on two rural Appalachian Ohio school districts concluding two year contracts with BB2C's professional development team using a purposive sampling technique. BB2C facilitated district-wide, in-depth professional development in each district beginning in 2021, with data collection beginning in the spring of 2023.

Why study educators' perceptions and experience of professional development?

Empirical research illustrates that a lag time of decades is required to link educational reform initiatives to positive impacts on workforce and community development.[3] The resulting limitation for rural schools and communities and the intermediary organizations serving them is they are trying to responsibly use resources to address community thriving barriers in real time. Studying educator's perceptions in relation to PD provides researchers with a time-sensitive approach to gather reliable data that verifies to a reasonable extent the likelihood educators are effectively implementing research-based practices that will contribute to community thriving and continue to do so. Likewise this data can inform immediate policy decisions.

Research methods of this study

Thirty-five educators working in Appalachian Ohio school districts or enrolled in teacher education programs participated in 30-60 minute semi-structured and focus group interviews. Interviews focused on (1) educators' definition and indicators of thriving communities, (2) educators' experiences with CCCL, and (3) educators' perception of BB2C's professional development on community thriving. Further, 16 BB2C and district documents related to CCCL professional development were collected for analysis to validate BB2C's impact on community thriving.

Data collection and analysis took place from April 2023-March 2024. The team used the principles of qualitative applied policy methodology to address three research questions:

1. What factors of CCCL do educators perceive as the most impactful in creating thriving communities?

2. What factors of BB2C's PD specifically contribute to engagement in CCCL as a means to thriving communities/placemaking?

3. What funding and organizational structures are needed to support district-wide implementation of CCCL?

This is an applied policy study that uses qualitative methods to evaluate the desired professional development outcomes related to community

thriving.***** These outcomes are contingent on how educators' lived experiences and long-standing values intersect with complex community issues.

Data analysis began with the review of transcripts and administrative documents and the development of a framework designed to gather evidence of how BB2C's professional development relates to community thriving. The framework included five themes that included three to seven subthemes each: (1) educator background, (2) thriving community, (3) CCCL impact factors, (4) CCCL district wide, systems change, (5) evidence for policy. The research team used the framework to index units of data within transcriptions and administrative documents before sorting and summarizing data indexed within each theme. Analysis then progressed to interpreting linkages amongst the themes.

To establish reliability two team members tested the index with a subset of three transcripts, making necessary revisions. To maintain reliability (1) ten of the thirty-one transcripts were indexed by two or more team members and fidelity of implementation errors were corrected during four team meetings; (2) all indexed data was charted and cleaned for errors overlooked during periodic review.

To verify the accuracy of findings the team included in the sample two comparison groups:(1) teacher candidates participating in a two year cycle of CCCL PD led by BB2C and (2) educational professionals in Appalachian Ohio who implement CCCL for a district that has a weak tie (or no tie) to BB2C.

*Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer are most often credited for introducing applied policy researchers to "framework" as a form of qualitative analysis. See Ritchie, J. & Spencer, L. (1994). Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In A. Bryman & R.G. Burgess (Eds.) Analyzing qualitative data (pp. 173-194). Routledge. The technique has been refined across several decades with the focus remaining on how to systematically work through large qualitative datasets on complex societal issue, while generating time-sensitive results that inform social action and policy. See Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nichols, C.M., Ormston, R. (Eds.) (2014). Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers (2nd ed.). Sage

BB2C Professional Development is Different

There is resounding agreement across educators that BB2C's PD is distinct from other PD they've participated in.

Some likened the BB2C PD to project based learning but mentioned that BB2C's PD has a quality of aliveness not present in other types of PD. Educators repeated the idea that in other PDs or classes, community connections was a pedagogical idea mentioned "in passing" or covered quickly without substantive educational structure or praxis examples. A lack of clear guidance left educators unable to implement this theoretically "good idea" in their classrooms.

Beyond Just a Buzzword: Real Implementation in Classrooms

Both veteran and new teachers alike said they had heard "buzzwords" like "real world connections," career pathways, and "problem-based learning" during other PDs. Although educators understood and wanted to connect the classroom to career and community resources, they were missing clear examples of how to connect classroom learning to community and career content.

"

We were always told, "You've got to make real life situations for them [the students]." But we never really had the resources to do that. Now, we have the resources to actually do that. And I think it's even more important today than it even was 10 years ago."

EDUCATOR

District 2

In contrast, BB2C PD provided the platform for agency. Veteran educators especially mentioned that education is subject to trends that change quickly and often. These veteran educators mentioned that BB2C's PD delivery and structure allowed them to both integrate a new activity in their classrooms and also connect the BB2C PD with other district initiatives. Many educators expressed a desire to continue working with BB2C in the same thorough capacity beyond the length of the PD.

Key Impactful Pieces of BB2C's Professional Development

Many educators use words of transformation when describing the BB2C PD. Educators described a few aspects of BB2C's PD as not only different from past PD but as the catalyst for the agency they took in bringing the community into their classrooms. BB2C's PD gained traction through:

1. Immediate relevance combined with ongoing coaching support
2. Connection to state standards

> "
> A game changer for me."
>
> **EDUCATOR**
> *District 2*

> "
> Everything else has always been teacher directed, exploratory by the student, basic information. This is the first time that it has actually been integrated into class."
>
> **EDUCATOR**
> *District 1*

> "
> BB2C... I mean, they just kind of opened my eyes to that kind of stuff."
>
> **EDUCATOR**
> *District 1*

Immediate Relevance Combined with Ongoing Support Via BB2C Coaches

Educators mentioned that the structure of the PD delivery enabled the PD to be immediately relevant in their classrooms. Day one of the PD not only provided information on the activity but also facilitated the first connection with the business partner and problem generation. Educators were able to leave the PD with a clear plan of implementing in their classrooms and access to classroom materials provided by BB2C.

Another strength of the BB2C PD mentioned by educators was the BB2C coaches who met with educators throughout implementation to assist with troubleshooting, ideas for implementation and assessment, or brainstorming. Educators cited this key difference–ongoing interaction with BB2C– as standing in stark contrast to PD they had received in the past.

District sets priorities and collaborates with BB2C to select business partners for classroom participation PD day involves explanation and examples of CCCL and PBL. The second part of the PD day, educators meet their business partner and develop/plan the classroom activity Educators implement over a period of months with BB2C coaches helping plan, troubleshoot, fill in gaps. Educators finished with classroom activity work with BB2C coaches to implement further CCCL in the classroom. BB2C staff find willing business partners who align with classroom content Educators identify potential overlaps in other district priorities to integrate CCCL for ongoing PD.

"

Many times PD is a one and done situation. [BB2C's PD] is a continual process where we get feedback throughout. And that's super beneficial. It's so nice to have you guys coming through the coaching process, and even having the business partner's perspective giving us that feedback."

EDUCATOR
District 2

Previous non-BB2C Methods of Professional Development Delivery Described by Educators

District sets priorities

▼

PD delivered in one time, sit-and-get presentation mode by outside presenter

▼

Educators implement on their own

▼

District priorities change a year or two later

BB2C Professional Development Sustained Coaching Model Described by Educators

District sets priorities and collaborates with BB2C to select business partners for classroom participation

▼

PD day involves explanation and examples of CCCL and PBL. The second part of the PD day, educators meet their business partner and develop/plan the classroom activity

▼

Educators implement over a period of months with BB2C coaches helping plan, troubleshoot, fill in gaps.

▼

Educators finished with classroom activity work with BB2C coaches to implement further CCCL in the classroom. BB2C staff find willing business partners who align with classroom content.

▼

Educators identify potential overlaps in other district priorities to integrate CCCL for ongoing PD
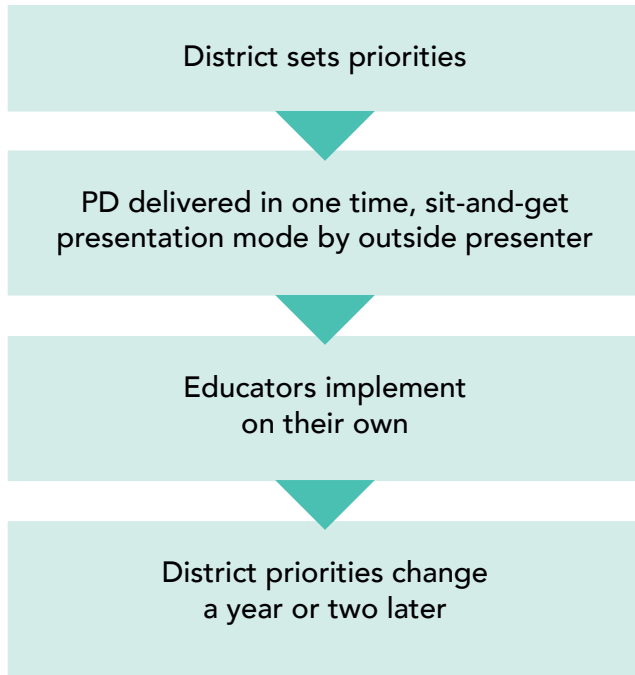
Connection to State Standards Resolves Key Tension for Educators

For educators, a key tension was resolved by the BB2C PD. Educators consistently mentioned the state content standards and state tests as the guiding force of their classroom lessons and structure. For many teachers, any classroom activity that deviated from a pure focus on learning the standards constitutes a critical cost of instructional time. However, the BB2C PD structure was successful in addressing this tension for educators through designing the Real World Problem Scenario collaboration on the educator's particular state standards

The ongoing coaching support helped some educators overcome initial feelings of discomfort or uncertainty with engaging in a new pedagogical method. For many teachers, how to incorporate career information in a content area classroom is not clear and seems like something extra to do during the already full school day. Educators repeatedly said that BB2C coaching helped demystify this by helping them to "wrap their brains around" community and career connected learning and how exploring career pathways could be a meaningful part of any classroom.

"

Honestly, this professional development, when it was introduced to me, it made me feel uncomfortable. But here at [District 2], we know that it's good to feel uncomfortable sometimes. So I, you know, I welcomed it. And we did it. And it's been a huge blessing. It's just been a wonderful experience. And I'm glad that I embraced it."

EDUCATOR
District 2

Shifting Educators' Classroom Practices and Perceptions

Educators described their decision to teach in rural schools through references to their intergenerational history with the immediate or surrounding rural area.

Similar to other studies of why early- and mid-career professionals return to rural areas[4], the rural educators in this study indicated their career pathways were driven by familial ties and a positively oriented sense of place.

Their intergenerational factors included one or more of the following:

- Growing up in the immediate rural area or the nearby rural area

- Proximity to family networks

- Having both strong and acquaintance ties to the community that create a sense of "pride, "belonging" and "safety"

- The desire to contribute to multiple community capitals through professional and civic involvement

Thriving Community Framework Including all Community Capitals[5]

BUILT CAPITAL

FINANCIAL CAPITAL

NATURAL CAPITAL

POLITICAL CAPITAL

Thriving Community

CULTURAL CAPITAL

SOCIAL CAPITAL

HUMAN CAPITAL
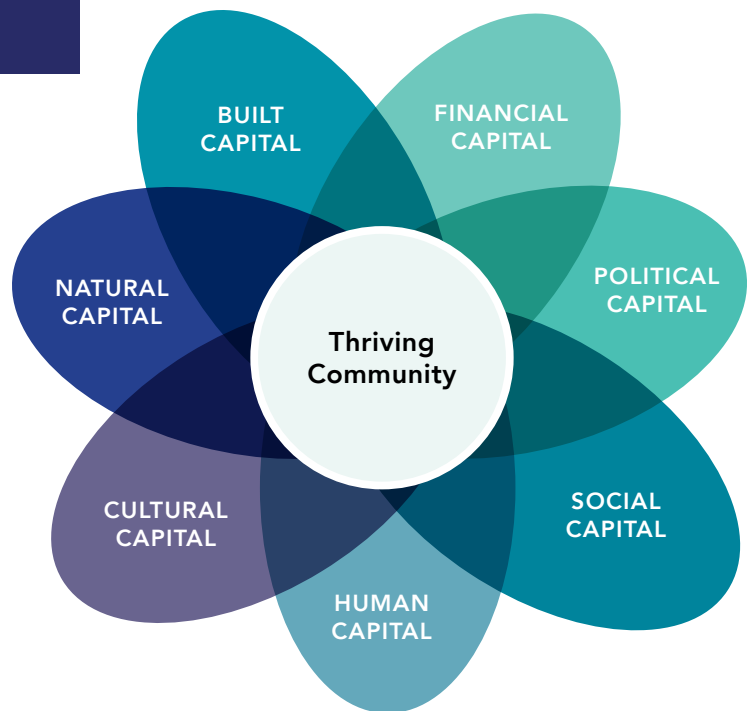
Moreover, the intergenerational factors that drive their career pathways into rural schools appears to complement the agency educators are finding through CCCL. The processes they describe are nonlinear, but involve:
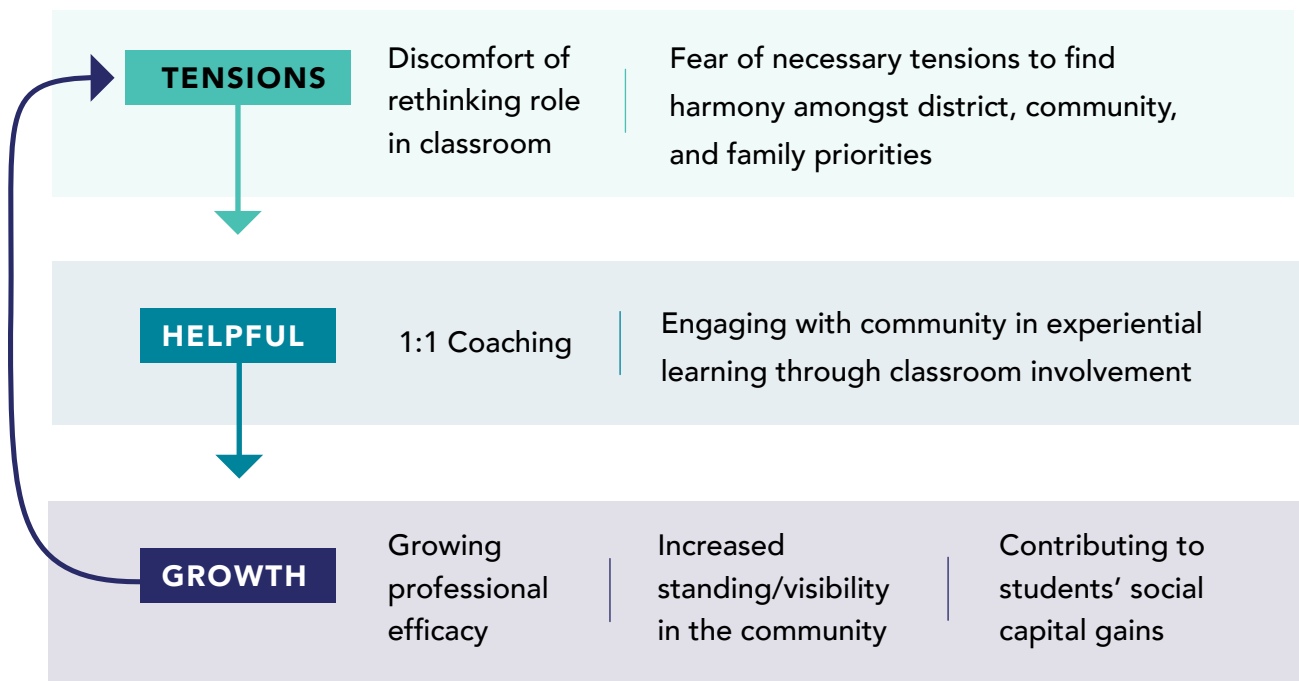
- **Rethinking their role** in the classroom and accepting the discomfort this requires

- **Becoming unafraid of the necessary tensions** involved in finding harmony amongst district, community, and family priorities

- **Engaging with the community through BB2C's Real World Problem Scenario** and in the community through related forms of experiential learning

- **Growing their professional efficacy** through strengthening their standing within the community by engaging with business partners and organization

- **Contributing to students' social capital gains**

Educators indicated that CCCL – the focus of the PD – can move educators from being concerned with community thriving to having agency in community thriving.

Continuous Development Cycle

TENSIONS	Discomfort of rethinking role in classroom	Fear of necessary tensions to find harmony amongst district, community, and family priorities	
HELPFUL	1:1 Coaching	Engaging with community in experiential learning through classroom involvement	
GROWTH	Growing professional efficacy	Increased standing/visibility in the community	Contributing to students' social capital gains

Providing Professional Development for Educators Impacts Student Learning

Educators told researchers that the BB2C PD gave them a new way of teaching, which impacted student learning.

Through the process of co-creating a classroom activity with a business or community partner who then became part of classroom learning, educators developed an opportunity for students to learn course content in a rigorous, holistic way that exceeded academic expectations. Educators mentioned that the CCCL PD also afforded students the opportunity to build professional skills and make connections outside of their family networks. Educators reported that student learning was impacted in the following areas with the BB2C PD:

1 Relevance and student voice

2 Opportunity for failure and deeper learning

3 Awareness of assets in community and sense of belonging

Relevance and student voice

The exploration process inherent in CCCL — exposing students to different careers, opportunities, individual business owners, and community members — was viewed by educators as a process that ultimately showed students classroom learning was relevant beyond the school walls. Educators reported that students demonstrated engagement and added agency because students had choice in solving the business partner's problem and could see the relevance of their work beyond the classroom.

Educators credited two key pieces of the BB2C PD that created relevance and voice for students:

1. **The "novel" experience of an adult from the community** (from a business or community organization) who presented the learning activity alongside the educator

2. **The problem students solved in the classroom activity was a real, unsolved problem** faced by the business or community organization.

Opportunity for failure and deeper learning

Educators described CCCL as building capacity for higher levels of academic rigor in the classroom and creating engagement by illustrating the relevance of course learning material. The business partner present in the classroom served as the main catalyst for deeper engagement, more comprehensive skill application, and capacity for students to learn material in a deeper, more thorough way.

"

This style of learning is that these kids feel like they have a voice and a chance to prove something to these community partners. So [the students] feel valued. And that part you can't get with any other PBL just like basic understanding of this project, learning is completely different for that reason, it's that specific piece that I think the relational part is huge for them.."

EDUCATOR
District 2

The problem-based learning component of the Real World Problem Scenario draws from Illinois Math and Science Academy PBL template that is referenced frequently throughout the PD. The Real World Problem Scenario this model inspires represents the first time that many educators engaged in a cyclical, process oriented learning activity (as opposed to a linear, product oriented activity). Educators said the cyclical nature of the activity, where students were prompted to test a solution then realize they needed to return to the research and discovery phase before iterating another solution, prompted deep engagement with course material and other skill development. Many educators also remarked on the business problem-solution aspect of the BB2C PD that allowed students to fail, and to be supported by not only the teacher, but the business partner.

Awareness of assets in community and sense of belonging

Many educators mentioned the necessity of CCCL in rural areas in combating the deficit perception of limited opportunities in rural areas. CCCL is viewed by educators as creating a sense of awareness of opportunities and belonging for students.When career pathways are brought into the core content classroom beyond merely offered as an alternative educational structure utilized by only a few students, all students can build awareness and connections to local employers, workforce opportunities, and networks for the future instead. Educators provide examples of their students moving from awareness to agency, similar to their own move towards action.

"

I think that's also been a kind of hidden success -- watching [the students] struggle through the process. Kind of taking your hands off, letting the kids struggle, letting them fail forward to problem solve and collaborate and come up with new ideas."

EDUCATOR
District 2

Some teachers did point out that CCCL in the classroom is a challenge for some students who could not persist past the cyclical, inquiry-based nature of learning necessary for PBL. Conversely, it was this same open-endedness of the pedagogy that allowed other students to experience a sense of choice, agency, and voice.

Educators in the teacher comparison group showed limited ideas about the possibilities of CCCL in the classroom. The educators who had not received BB2C's PD referred to CCCL opportunities for students only in the context of one-day service learning projects, field trips (e.g., theme park), telling students about the career center, or verbally mentioning how class material relates to the "real world." When teachers lack PD support to more deeply implement CCCL, educators narrowly focus on career tech or "informing" students about the "real world," which has limited impact on student learning.

"

You don't know what you don't know. And so by, you know, having these different speakers and hearing about these different places, and, you know, employers that can open up some doors to people that might not have otherwise known or realized what else was out there."

EDUCATOR
District 2

Educators' views of Thriving Community Impacts Career Pathways

A fundamental component to BB2C's PD is the idea of community. Community, as it is understood here, is the interdependence of people, places, and social groups within a physical landscape that informs their interactions.[6] Most of the educators highlighted three components necessary for a thriving community:

1 Intracommunity collaboration

2 Assurance of local economic/employment opportunities

3 Youth and Schools

Intracommunity Collaboration

Intracommunity collaboration refers to businesses, schools, and society positively interfacing for the betterment of the community. Nearly all of the educators addressed the importance of intracommunity collaboration and assurance of local opportunities in their definitions of a thriving community; however, only the educators who participated in BB2C's PD mentioned youth and schools as part of this collaboration. Further, educators who received BB2C's PD were more likely to refer to a thriving community as a cycle.

The teacher comparison groups' absence of centering youth or schools in a conceptualization of a thriving community is particularly interesting given the educators are educators and, presumably, involved with the schools and youth at both an economic and social level.

> **It's really kind of a cycle because everything seems to impact others. What impacts the school is going to impact the people in the community, which is going to impact the businesses, and the businesses are going to impact the schools."**
>
> EDUCATOR
> *District 2*

Assurance of Economic Opportunities:

Further addressing the idea of a thriving community, most of the educators view economic opportunities, local empathy, and community-minded businesses as key indicators of a thriving community. As an aggregate, the educators mentioned these three indicators the most frequently. The educators' responses, as well as other suggested indicators, are displayed in Figure 1.

Nearly half of the educators highlighted economic opportunities as a key indicator. The educators stressed the importance of economic opportunities in the immediate as well as the future.

In addition to economic opportunities, educators' second most frequently mentioned indicator involved the presence of a social safety net or various non-market ways that community members support one another. Local empathy dovetailed with the view of businesses as being community-minded, or as supportive of the community, youth, and schools in ways beyond simply offering employment opportunities.

> "You just think about, what are your own children going to do when they become adults? And, so, you start to think and worry. You want them to be around and to raise families here because they feel safe and whatnot, but you want them to have opportunities that maybe a smaller community doesn't offer, job wise and career wise."
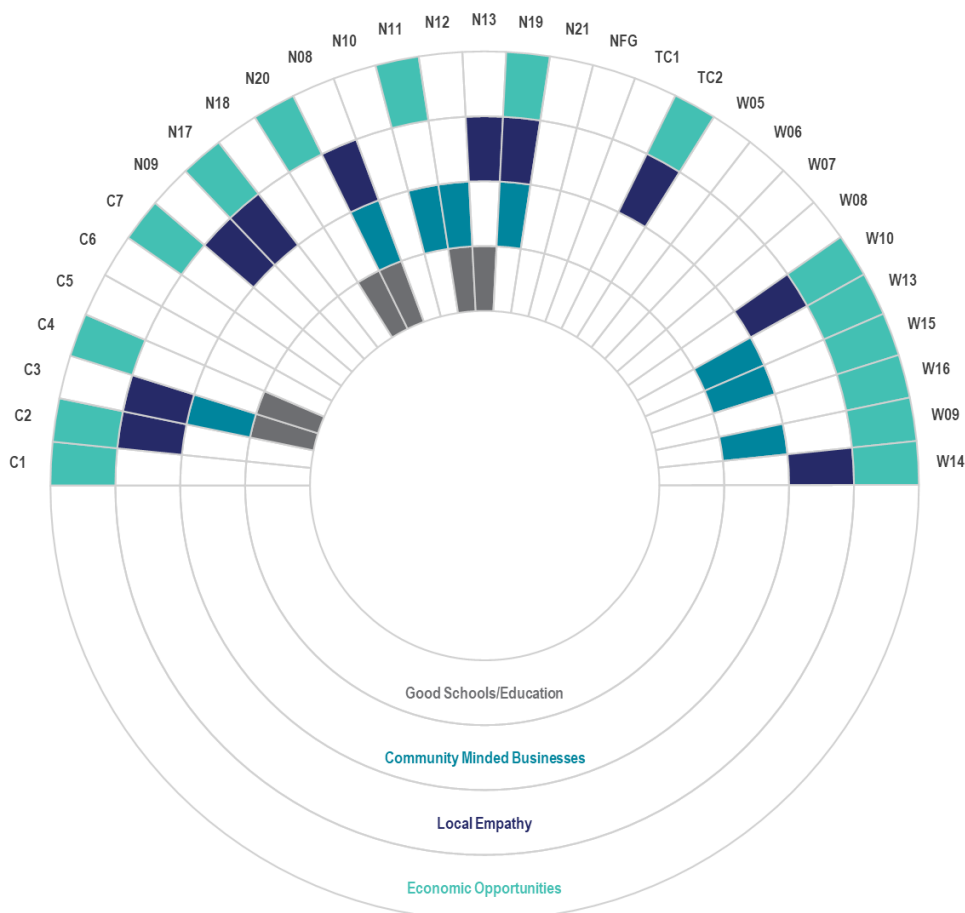
EDUCATOR
District 1

Youth and Schools

In discussions about community thriving, educators presented mixed perspectives about the role of youth and schools in creating thriving communities. Two groups, Teacher Candidates and educators from District 1, did not mention good schools/education as an indicator of a thriving community. Notably, the Teacher Candidates also did not center schools/youth as a key component of a thriving community. However, the Teacher Candidates were the only group to highlight diversity as an indicator, while educators from District 2 were the only ones to prioritize transparency/honesty and communication. The importance of these indicators to educators from District 2, coupled with the fact that other groups did not mention them, suggests there could be county-specific issues related to these indicators.

Most educators view Economic Opportunities, Local Empathy, and Community Minded Businesses as key indicators of a thriving community

Tensions Educators Perceive as Limiting Community Thriving

The educators also reflected on the barriers preventing their communities from thriving. While some barriers were county specific, the educators generally agree that the primary factors preventing the communities from thriving are:

1. Intracommunity dissonance

2. Poverty

3. Youth readiness and/or school quality

In addition to the three primary barriers, the educators also noted poor technology infrastructure and poor health as barriers with less frequency.

Intracommunity dissonance

Intracommunity dissonance refers to businesses, schools, and society failing to interface or collaborate for the betterment of the community. Addressing intracommunity dissonance is a barrier educators perceived as necessary to overcome for whole community thriving.

"

We need to be working together towards common goals, that we all need to be focused on similar outcomes. Part of that is through business advisory councils and community agencies, chambers of commerce, things like that, where everyone's working together."

EDUCATOR
District 2

Poverty

Generational poverty or the experience of poverty in the community was cited by educators as a barrier to community thriving. Across all educator groups, educators demonstrated an awareness that although certain aspects of the community might be changing or shifting, gaps in income equality and the complexities of the experience of poverty prevents the whole community from thriving.

The prioritization of these two items, intracommunity dissonance and poverty, aligns with the thriving community indicators educators mentioned; specifically, the focus on community-minded businesses and economic opportunities.

"

While the communities may have affluent families or areas, "…there's still a lot of poverty, a lot of homelessness, a need for food, for employment, for the necessities to be able to travel to employment, or access to internet to gain employment."

EDUCATOR

District 1

Education quality and community perceptions of youth readiness

The third most frequently mentioned barrier limiting communities is youth readiness or education quality. The educators discussed how district or state priorities impact their individual pedagogical approaches which limits their ability to provide a quality education. Others were concerned about a lack of resources in schools (technology infrastructure, facilities, enough faculty, etc.) impacting student education. According to the educators, much of this distrust ties to stereotypes pertaining to a generational cohort.

Notably, one participant highlighted racism as a barrier to their community thriving. Teacher Candidates, the only group to mention racism, was also the only group to identify diversity as an indicator of a thriving community. As such, while this is not a widespread phenomena, it is notable that the most recently trained individuals are acutely aware of diversity concerns and how these relate to the community as a whole.

Educators also stressed that they feel community members distrust youth and their readiness to participate meaningfully in the workforce and life of the community.

"

...we're still struggling to convince business and industry that our youth is ready. They're, you know, Millennials and all this. They have this reputation that is sometimes unfairly bestowed upon them. While there may be some negatives that we can pin on an entire generation of young people, there are also some really great things...I think the biggest hurdle is still convincing business and industry that our youth really are ready and that they are preparing to become tomorrow's workforce."

EDUCATOR
District 2

The Community Changes by Participating in the Classroom

Educators described the partnerships established with businesses and organizations through BB2C's Real World Problem Scenario as mutually beneficial, bridging the relationships amongst youth, schools, and the community. They also emphasized the partnerships disrupted negative community views of both youth and schools.

Most educators locate themselves within the community in their professional role, but also through personal ties (parent, members of civic organizations, religious affiliations). When reflecting on CCCL's impact on the community they are doing so through the wider lens of intergenerational community knowledge and experience, educators uniformly believe rural schools are essential to thriving communities, but recognize varying levels of intracommunity dissonance. This dissonance is characterized as the ways schools, businesses, local government, and the community at large struggle to find harmony amongst their priorities. Notably educators reflect on cycles they have witnessed during their personal and professional histories with the community when frustration between the school district and community create barriers to community thriving. Two current examples were distrust in youth and misgivings about the school's capacity to foster local workforce and economic development.

Educators described the partnerships established with businesses and organizations through BB2C's Real World Problem Scenario as mutually beneficial, bridging the relationships amongst youth, schools, and the community. They also emphasized the partnerships disrupted negative community views of both youth and schools. Educators believe CCCL offered a pathway to recover these relationships as community members gained direct knowledge and experiences of what goes on in schools and began to recognize unsung strengths youth displayed through BB2C's Real World Problem Scenario interactions. Further, the PD generated authentic interactions between the community and the school, as businesses and organizations brought intractable community problems to the youth to solve. While not planned, this became a form of public relations that educators see as a point of recovery, where support for the school becomes stronger through the hope businesses and organizations perceive.

Educators suggest the community benefits from:

• The opportunity **to address youth outmigration by introducing youth to opportunities in the community**

• Engagement with youth that **helps businesses and organizations recognize the skills youth possess** and the assets youth can bring to the community

• The future potential that CCCL interactions **will lead to more youth staying in the community after high school** or returning to the community following post-secondary education

"

Well, I think that the local community now defines themselves as having a relationship and relying on our students, not just adults. Also, at, you know, a partnership with our local districts, there's two districts within our community. And I think that it's very important that they make relationships with the students, not just adults."
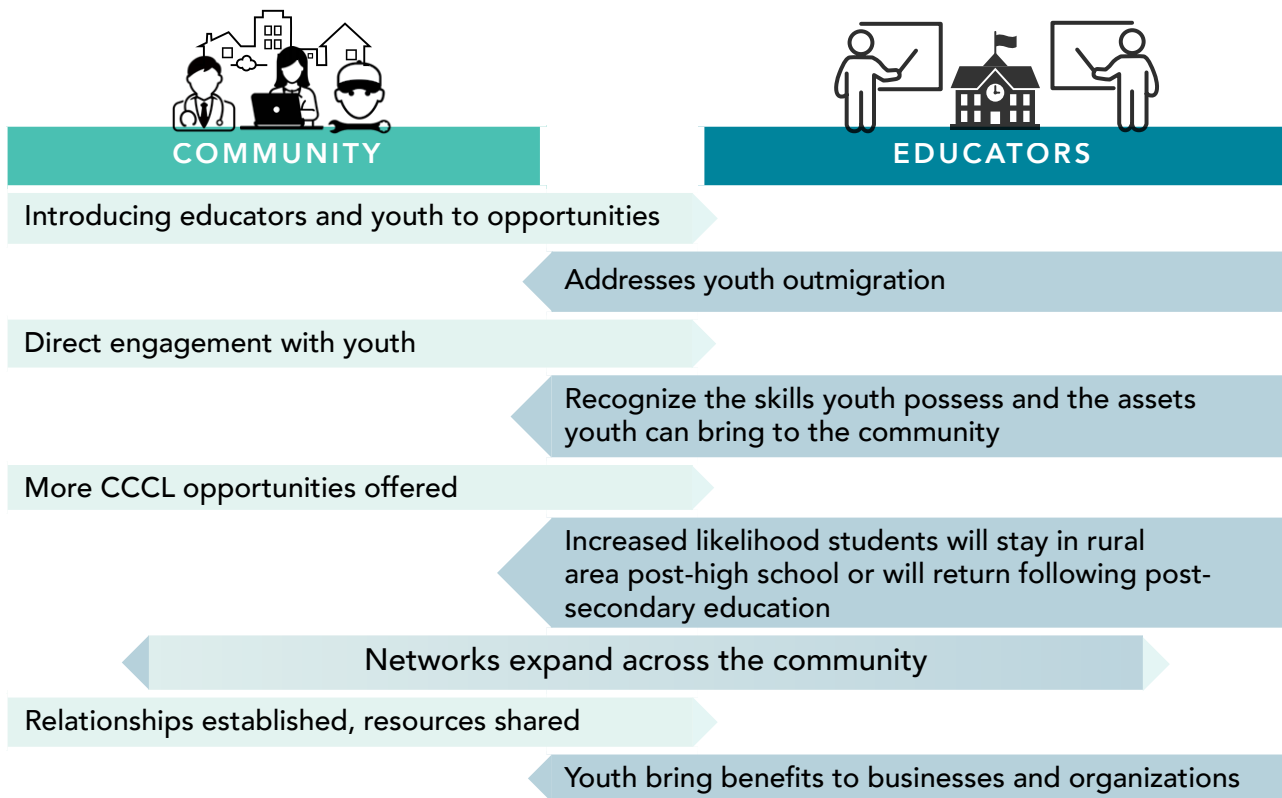
EDUCATOR
District 1

Educators also indicate the community benefits as CCCL builds new networks and strengthens existing relationships that are local and in direct benefit to the community. Educators cited 13 such examples naming specific interactions that described one or more of the following:

- Ongoing, mutually **beneficial relationships established between youth/the school and businesses and organizations**

- Instances where **youth brought named benefits to businesses and organizations**

- **Named connections or the growth of networks** that extend across the community

Community and Career Connected Learning Fosters Change in the Community

COMMUNITY	EDUCATORS

Introducing educators and youth to opportunities

Addresses youth outmigration

Direct engagement with youth

Recognize the skills youth possess and the assets youth can bring to the community

More CCCL opportunities offered

Increased likelihood students will stay in rural area post-high school or will return following post-secondary education

Networks expand across the community

Relationships established, resources shared

Youth bring benefits to businesses and organizations

PD Moves Educators' To Take Agency in Community Thriving

As one participant remarked when describing what makes for a thriving rural community:

> **"**
>
> **So I believe a thriving rural community is one where all stakeholders whether that be community agencies, educational partners, business and industry partners, where they're working collaboratively towards similar goals. While they may have individual goals that are specific to their path or their entity, I believe that having overarching goals for the entire community is vital."**
>
> EDUCATOR
>
> *District 1*

The PD fosters this vision of community thriving through its process oriented approach where all actors (students, businesses and organizations, teachers) have agency in community thriving. Data indicates two facets of the PD that others can look to replicate:

1. The PD is Bi-directional, giving educators agency in community thriving

BB2C intentionally designs the PD to have bi-directional impacts. BB2C recognizes educators as the guides (consistently using this moniker throughout the PD) who engage youth with businesses and organizations through BB2C's Real World Problem Scenario and other forms of experiential, place-based learning. Yet, BB2C also asks educators to become active educators in CCCL. Through this participation, educators gain agency in their communities. This is in stark contrast to traditional educator PD which promotes a linear process that is product or outcome focused.

The CCCL PD cannot happen without the educator's active and ongoing guidance of the business partner and students through the iterative process. Moreover, each individual educator crafts the adaptable curriculum process in unique ways to fit their own personal strengths while also supporting the overall curriculum design for the year.

In these traditional forms of PD educators are positioned to "deliver" material to students and "measure" results. In traditional forms of PD, the material or latest trendy program is seen as the active agent creating change and the educator is seen as a passive force to pass along the information to students. However, BB2C's PD positions educators as working within the process alongside youth, businesses, and organizations.

2. Community and Career Connected Learning Professional Development Creates Positive Community Connections for Educators, Schools, and Students

BB2C PD recognizes and activates the teachers' agency, framing it as actions towards community thriving. Of note, educators consistently reported they believe the community has a negative view of youth and/or the school and posited that CCCL addresses these negative feelings by generating authentic interactions amongst youth, schools, businesses, and organizations. Further, educators described how relationships once strained or estranged began to recover.

This is social capital in action, achieving what is imagined in theory, educators described not only how youth, businesses, and organizations but also the ways schools gained access to resources and networks. In turn, change was fostered and opportunities were secured. Of specific importance is the social capital acquisition cited reached beyond individual youth in multiple instances, linking to prior research on rural community thriving that pinpoints the necessity of social capital that is local with community level benefit.

The educators often outlined ideas for how to enhance community thriving. These primarily focused on one or more of the following

- **Intracommunity collaboration**

- **Community-minded businesses**

- **More economic opportunities**

- **Work education for students/youth.**

> Of note, educators consistently reported they believe the community has a negative view of youth and/or the school and posited that CCCL addresses these negative feelings by generating authentic interactions amongst youth, schools, businesses, and organizations.
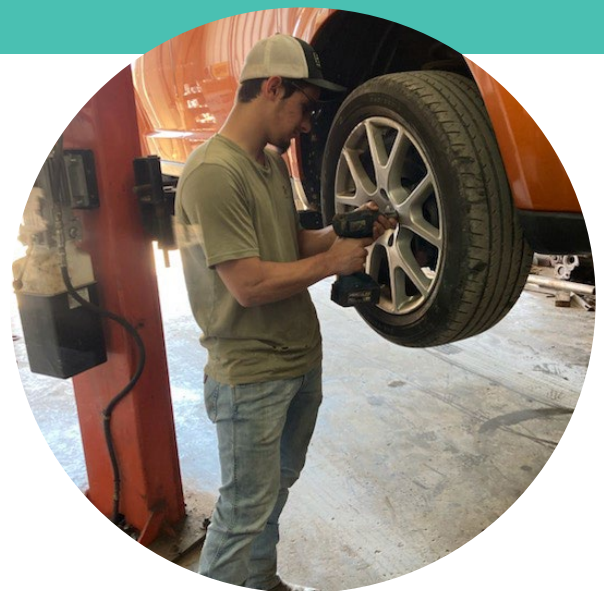
Further, when asked to identify resources to continue CCCL educators appeared to also be reflecting on how to build their relationships with businesses and organizations, and the community at large. They believe these relationships require

• **Resources,** especially materials that help students navigate the structure of CCCL activities like Real World Problem Scenario.

• **Time for educators and businesses or organizations to co-plan** and become comfortable with co-facilitation strategies.

• **Experiential learning in the community,** which also requires the time to plan these experiences with community partners and time allotted for students to be in the community during the school day/year.

• **Feedback on implementation** of the experiential learning process.

What Educators Need

Educators report that including career exploration and community involvement as a purposeful part of classroom curriculum is a process that requires support in multiple forms.

Educators understand CCCL classroom activities as different from typical pedagogy and that integrating a business partner into the classroom requires networking that takes time and consistent communication to realize. In order to build the knowledge and connections educators need to facilitate CCCL activities in the classroom, educators suggested this works best as a system wide approach and reported needing the following:

- **Intermediary or support staff** to assist with identifying business partners, networking, and ongoing dialogue

- **Professional development** and ancillary materials related to implementation

- **Time allotment within the daily schedule** as either an individual course or deeper thought to CCCL being a holistic form of inclusion in various courses instead of a stand-alone course or disconnected effort

- **Co-planning time with business partners**

- **District and building administration prioritizing CCCL** to devote time to planning, developing, and networking for CCCL

- **1:1 CCCL coaching acting within a feedback loop** for educators to facilitate fidelity of implementation, alignment, and ongoing engagement
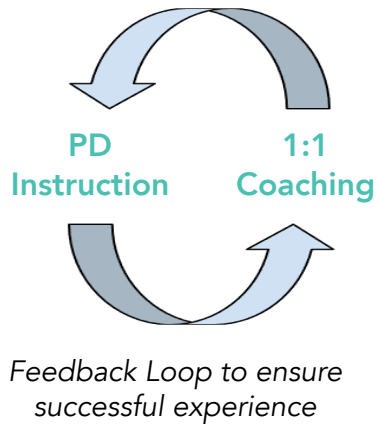
RESOURCES to support connections to business and classroom implementation

PD Instruction — 1:1 Coaching

TIME in the contracted day to support development, co-planning, and cross-initiative coordination

Feedback Loop to ensure successful experience

DISTRICT SUPPORT

District sets priorities for CCCL, takes a systems approach, and provides financial/positional support

Supports for Sustaining Student Engagement with Community and Career Connected Learning

Educators expressed an understanding that a district focus on career pathways and CCCL requires a systems change that takes a few years to establish followed by an ongoing administrative commitment to sustain. These observations were consistent across educators from districts engaged in yearlong PD, the comparison group of teacher-candidates also engaged in yearlong PD, and the comparison group of teachers NOT engaged in district wide PD. By supporting educators to develop the knowledge, connection, and skills to integrate CCCL and career pathways into the classroom, all students are exposed to and better positioned to take advantage of career pathway opportunities. Educators cited the following supports as necessary for sustaining student engagement with CCCL in a comprehensive way. Emphasis was given to including many experiential opportunities for students.

District level supports:

- **Financial support for classroom materials and field trips:** Experiential learning where students can learn material in the community context creates engagement that educators identified as a place for ongoing support.

- **Managing the schedule to accommodate CCCL:** Some immersive CCCL experiences require flexibility of the daily schedule and communication across departments and buildings.

- **Hiring supporting positions whose job it is to focus on CCCL implementation district wide/building wide:** Educators whose districts prioritized CCCL to such a degree that they created a funded educator position whose sole job was to network with community organizations and businesses to create CCCL opportunities both inside and outside the classroom was seen as valuable for sustained systems change by educators. These supportive positions save teachers time, facilitate learning for both teachers and students, and create opportunities for students.

How can BB2C help alleviate barriers to CCCL?

Educators mentioned several barriers to implementing CCCL in the classroom which BB2C can continue to address. For many educators, CCCL activities mark a departure from "normal" classroom activities and require time and a willingness to tolerate the uncertainty of having a stranger in the classroom and lack of one "right" answer to classroom activities. The 1:1 coaching was repeatedly mentioned by educators as a support that helped them to tolerate uncertainty and move forward. Educators also discussed the importance of structured materials that serve as guideposts to students as they work through CCCL processes, especially Real World Problem Scenario. BB2C has designed several graphic organizers and rubrics for these purposes and can continue to embed signposts within the PD to draw attention to these as well as the expansive Real World Problem Scenarios library housed on the BB2C website.

State Testing and District Policies: As stated throughout this report, educators see state testing as in conflict with CCCL and career pathways. Because of state accountability measures and emphasis on students passing state tests that are publicized widely when the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce release their annual report cards, educators view CCCL as too risky. To take time away from traditional ways of teaching the standards and risk students not passing the state tests is a risk many educators feel they cannot afford to take.

However, the educators that did engage with BB2C's PD ultimately found that CCCL activities enrich engagement with the state standards and content area. Key pieces that helped educators overcome this barrier included the flexibility of the Real World Problem Scenario where educators can adapt CCCL classroom activities to their yearly plan and comfort level. Also, intensive coaching and other educator support is necessary to overcome fear of the possibility that students might fail. BB2C already shares this awareness with educators and includes how to align CCCL with the standards throughout the PD–especially the video series used for micro credentialing. Importantly, BB2C strives to move standards and CCCL alignment to make greater inroads to community thriving, as noted at the close of the second video introducing educators to Real World Problem Scenario:

"

For us at BB2C the key is learning content standards through engaging students actively and fully in the process of learning about their community."

Business Partner Expectations: Another barrier that educators perceived was also the dissonance between what business partners might expect from students versus what is actually reasonable given students age and background knowledge. At least initially, many educators reported worry that the business partner would perceive their classroom or students' abilities negatively because students simply are not able to operate at the capacity of adults. However, many educators report that after implementing, they found business partners to be supportive and surprised by the abilities and capabilities of students. Important in overcoming this barrier was 1:1 coaching, experience from other educators who had previously engaged in CCCL or BB2C PD, and administrator support, especially as a visible presence on days when business partners were present in classrooms.

Time: Time emerged as one of the most consistent barriers to implementing CCCL and career pathways in the classroom. Educators feel pressed for time during and outside of the school day to manage the many needs of students, meet the priorities of the district, and cover the breadth of state standards. This leads to a lack of time for educators to explore local assets and discover opportunities that they can then communicate to students or incorporate into classroom activities.

Educators emphasized the importance of time in the school day for professional development delivered by BB2C, an intermediary, so they could find out and "explore what's out there" in the local community. The time set aside with the professional development team to purposefully and efficiently co-create curriculum coupled with the time to engage with a supportive coach during implementation consistently emerged as a key way to alleviate a common barrier to CCCL.

Conclusion: Involve Educators

Educators reflected on their intergenerational connections to the immediate or surrounding rural communities as the driving factor for teaching in their district. Many educators described how this built the foundation of their concern for community thriving:

BB2C PD plays the critical role of building on this interest in community thriving by helping educators recognize their own positionality in the BB2C theory of change. Not only do they help them realize it, they help the teachers feel agency toward contributing toward it. The critical role this agency plays in meaningful contributions to community thriving, especially building individual and community level social capital, frames the final recommendations.
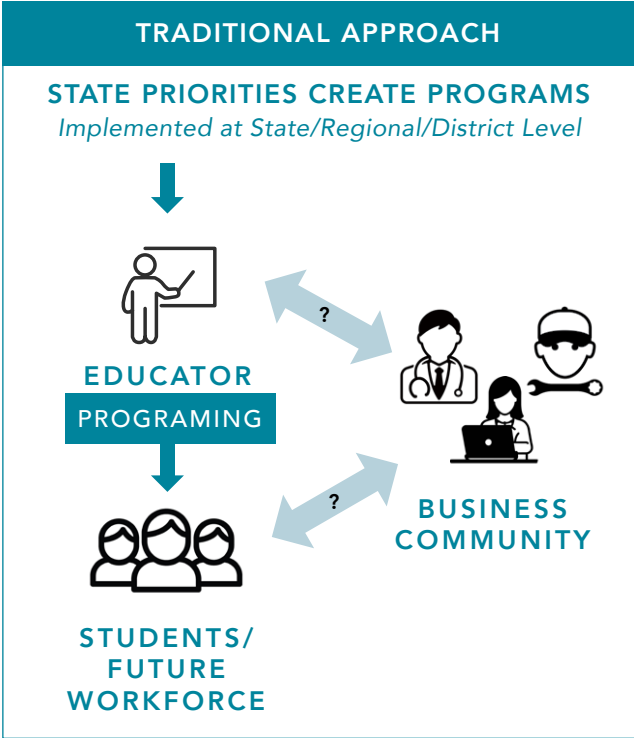
"

I grew up in this area... And then I attended Ohio State...and then wanted to move back to the same area and give back to a community that invested in me so much, whether that be through scholarships or other businesses and individuals that supported me through my college. And I just knew that I needed to invest in those students. Because there's so many more opportunities, and I feel like I can do the same."
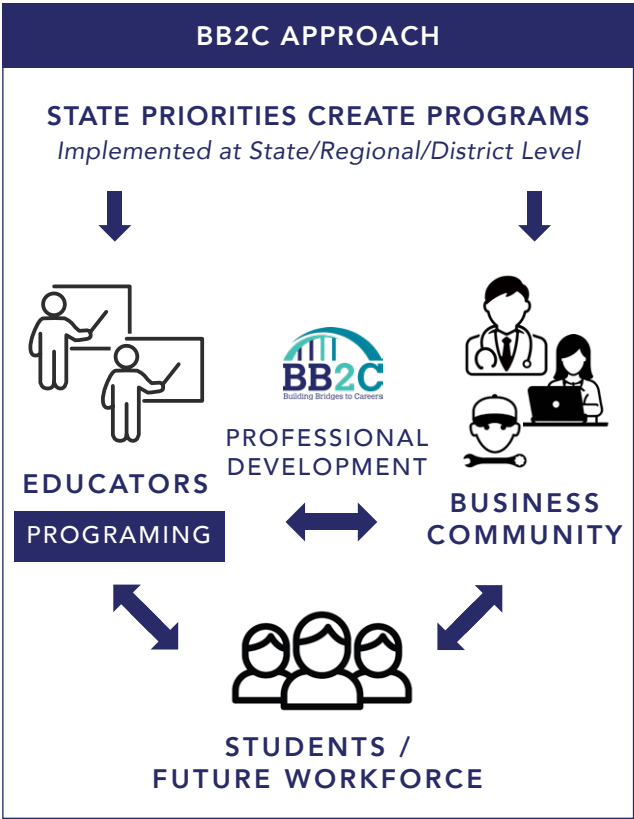
EDUCATOR

District 1

46

Educators are the Missing Link Connecting Thriving Communities to Successful Students and Successful Students to Prosperous Businesses

TRADITIONAL APPROACH

STATE PRIORITIES CREATE PROGRAMS
Implemented at State/Regional/District Level

EDUCATOR
PROGRAMING

STUDENTS/ FUTURE WORKFORCE

?

?

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

VS.

BB2C APPROACH

STATE PRIORITIES CREATE PROGRAMS
Implemented at State/Regional/District Level

EDUCATORS
PROGRAMING

BB2C
Building Bridges to Careers

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

STUDENTS / FUTURE WORKFORCE

Recommendations for Professional Development:

Educators have an awareness of the ways in which their work in the classroom and in schools contribute to community thriving. Adaptive, flexible professional development moves educators from awareness to agency in practice, which creates a systems change and provides opportunities for all students.

1 Professional Development for Community and Career Connected Learning and career pathways must be flexible and adaptive

2 Providing intermediary support for making initial business partner connections and facilitating purposeful engagement in the classroom is key for successful implementation in the classroom

3 Professional Development that positions educators as agential actors in selecting or modifying tangible assessment and activity support materials is more effective at helping educators resolve the tension between a new initiative and state accountability standards

4 1:1 Coaching enables educators to persist through tensions in re-imagining their role in the classroom in ways that facilitate lasting change from year to year.

Recommendations for Career Policy:

Educators are consequential to successful implementation of career pathway strategies embedded in school curriculum to improve community thriving by generating workforce readiness.

1 Educators understand the necessity for the Professional Development to be ongoing and continual in order to continue to integrate across district initiatives and to keep current with the changing needs of the community.

2 Clearly articulated district priority for Community and Career Connected Learning and facilitation of time during the school year/day for collaboration and networking is a key support for involving educators in career pathway development and implementation.

3 Educators should be invited to inform policy on community and workforce development correlated with public education.

[1] Shaffer, R., Deller, S., & Marcouiller, D. (2006). Rethinking community economic development. Economic Development Quarterly, 20(1), 59–74. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891242405283106

[2] Ricket, Allison L., Jacqueline Yahn, and Emily Bentley. "Rural Community and Career Connected Learning: Impacts of High School Internships Prioritizing People and Place." *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 39, no. 3 (2023). https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26209/JRRE3903; Yahn, Jacqueline J., and Allison Ricket. "The Rural Lifeworld as a Pathway to Career Identity: Lessons from a Non-School Internship Study." *Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy,* July 22, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1177/25151274231189453.

[3] To read broadly on this point see Eric Hanushek's body of work, especially Hanushek, Eric A., and Alfred A. Lindseth. 2009. Schoolhouses, courthouses, and statehouses: Solving the funding-achievement puzzle in America's public schools. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press and Hanushek, Eric A., and Ludger Woessmann. 2015a. The knowledge capital of nations: Education and the economics of growth. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. For specific discussion of how educational attainment correlates with economic gains see https://www-nber-org.proxy.library.ohio.edu/papers/w21770

[4] Sowl, S., Smith, R.A., Brown, M.G. (2022). Rural college graduates: Who comes home? Rural Sociology 87(1), 303-329. DOI: 10.1111/ruso.12416 and von Reichert, C., Cromartie, J.B., & Arthun, R.O. (2014). Reasons for returning and not returning to rural U.S. communities. The Professional Geographer, 66(1) 58-72.

[5] This figure has been altered based on Flora et al.'s Community Capitals Framework. Flora, Cornelia B., Jan L. Flora, and Stephen P. Gasteyer. *Rural Communities: Legacy + Change.* New York: Routledge. 2016.

[6] Heilman, R. L. (2021, June 14). Commentary: The semantic antics of "community." The Daily Yonder. https://dailyyonder.com/commentary-the-semantic-antics-of-community/2021/06/14/