

Advancing Career Pathways Across Alberta

System Approaches to Developing and Sustaining Industry Partnerships

May 12, 2026

Featuring Stories of Practice from Palliser School Division, Sturgeon Public Schools, and CAREERS The Next Generation

The goal of a CASS Learning Guide is to apply research, deepen understanding, and enhance professional practice within the Alberta context. With a focus on optimum learning for all students, a Learning Guide provides an opportunity to enhance system leader knowledge, resulting in quality school leadership and teaching throughout Alberta.

Summary

The webinar “System Approaches to Developing and Sustaining Industry Partnerships” is the second session in the three-part series *Advancing Career Pathways Across Alberta*. Designed for system education leaders, this session focuses on building purposeful strategies to develop and sustain partnerships that strengthen career pathways for students.

Through stories of practice from Palliser School Division, Sturgeon Public Schools, and CAREERS: The Next Generation, participants explored how school authorities and partner organizations are identifying shared priorities, building sustainable relationships, clarifying roles and processes, and expanding access to meaningful, real-world learning experiences that support student career planning and successful transitions.

Findings from the 2025 Career Education Professional Learning Needs Assessment

The *Professional Learning Needs Assessment Results Executive Summary - For Career Education* (Alberta Professional Learning Consortium & College of Alberta School Superintendents, 2025) identified industry partnerships as one of the most urgent professional learning priorities across respondent groups. Respondents emphasized that building and sustaining partnerships with local and provincial industry leaders is essential for providing authentic, real-world learning experiences that connect classroom learning to labour market needs. This finding provides important context for the webinar, which focuses on system approaches to developing, sustaining, and scaling partnerships that support coherent career pathways for students.

[Webinar Recording Link](#)
[Webinar Slides](#)

Acknowledgements

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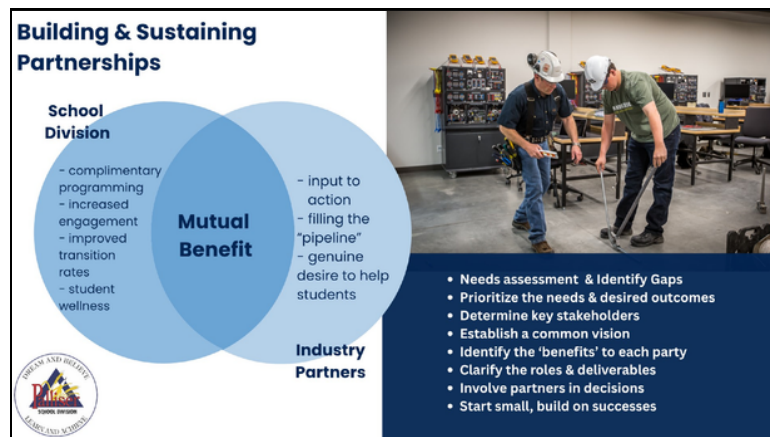


Carmen Larsen

Director of Learning and Curriculum
Palliser School Division

(4:13)

Palliser School Division has developed a strong approach to building and sustaining industry partnerships that support career exploration, work-integrated learning, and successful student transitions. This work is supported by dedicated off-campus education teachers and a career practitioner who help connect students with meaningful workplace experiences aligned with their interests, strengths, and future goals.



Palliser begins by mapping and identifying partners through existing relationships and established connection points, including the Registered Apprenticeship Program, work experience, industry events, CAREERS: The Next Generation, postsecondary partners, and community networks. New partners are invited to engage through low-risk entry points, such as school division events, professional learning

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opportunities, or classroom presentations. Consistent communication and an “ear-to-the-ground” approach help Palliser understand what is needed in the community and industry.

As partnerships develop and scale, Palliser focuses on mutual benefit, shared vision, student readiness, appropriate placements, and clear roles for all partners. The Prairie Winds Fire Academy demonstrates how starting small and building on promising practices can create hands-on learning opportunities, support industry-recognized certifications, and contribute to local workforce development. Palliser’s story also highlights the importance of thinking long-term, planning for sustainability beyond individual champions and grants, collaborating with neighbouring school divisions, and ensuring student access to meaningful opportunities remains central to partnership decisions. Palliser’s story also highlights the importance of long-term planning, continuity beyond individual champions and time-limited grants, collaboration with neighbouring school divisions, and keeping student access to meaningful opportunities central to partnership decisions.



Dan Stephen

Division Principal
Sturgeon Public Schools
(24:28)

Sturgeon Public Schools has taken an intentional, evidence-informed approach to developing industry partnerships that support student career pathways. Rather than trying to do everything at once, the division began by identifying career sectors with strong student interest and regional workforce demand. This included considering student need, local workforce priorities, alignment with career and technology studies (CTS), dual credit and collegiate programming, existing labour shortages, strong local employers, and capacity for meaningful student experiences.

Lessons Learned: What to Prioritize and What to Avoid

Prioritize

- Student and community needs
- Build relationships before programs
- Invest in coordination capacity
- Be flexible and responsive
- Celebrate Wins
- Focus on Sustainability
- Create authentic, high quality student experiences

Avoid

- Trying to scale too quickly
- Overcomplicating partnerships
- Launching programs without operational support
- Failing to prepare students for workplace expectations
- Working in silos across schools

This work is grounded in existing school and community connections, including local government, parents, employers supporting work experience and Registered Apprenticeship Program placements, and other community organizations. The division focused on building a smaller number of high-quality relationships where there was mutual benefit for students and industry. These connections often began through low-risk entry points, such as classroom speakers, facility tours, and short job-shadowing opportunities, which then grew into broader opportunities over time.

As the work evolved, Sturgeon shifted from individual school-based efforts to a more coordinated division-wide model. Dedicated leadership roles, clear expectations, regular check-ins, and centralized communication helped reduce duplication, support employers, and expand opportunities across multiple schools. Sturgeon’s story highlights the importance of responding to student and community needs, building relationships before launching programs, investing in coordination capacity, preparing students for workplace expectations, and scaling carefully. This experience reinforces that strong partnerships are built through trust, shared purpose, responsiveness, and consistent communication over time.



Stefan Rudkowski, President and Chief Executive Officer;
Claudio Quinteros, Regional Manager, Calgary
CAREERS: The Next Generation
(36:00)

CAREERS: The Next Generation supports school authorities across Alberta by helping connect learners, schools, and employers to career pathway opportunities. This work begins with intentional focus rather than random outreach, considering student pathways, local labour market demand, curriculum alignment, CTS, work-based learning, and high-demand, high-access sectors. This helps guide engagement in areas where supervised workplace experiences are available and industry demand is strong.

CAREERS works with employers, industry associations, chambers of commerce, local governments, employer groups, and organizations with multiple locations across the province to create scalable opportunities. A key part of this work is approaching industry with clear value, such as supporting talent pipelines, workforce readiness, and community investment, while making participation easier through coordination, screening, paperwork, communication, and funding opportunities

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such as the Alberta Youth Employment Incentive. These relationships often begin through structured, low-risk entry points, including classroom career talks, site visits, employer interviews, and short-term work experiences, then grow into more sustained pathway opportunities over time.

As a provincial connector and system broker, CAREERS helps sustain this work by engaging industry at both operational and strategic levels. This supports centralized employer relationships, shared language and expectations, more consistent processes across schools, and clearer evidence of impact. CAREERS' story highlights that industry engagement is a system strategy, not an add-on. The impact of CAREERS' partnership work is reflected in the quality and consistency of student experiences, as well as the strength of the employer relationships that support them.

Building the Partnership: What Actually Works

From "Asks" to Value-Based Collaboration

- Approach partners with **clear value** (talent pipeline, CSR, workforce readiness)
- Make it **easy to participate**
- Offer **structured, low-risk entry points**
- Position CAREERS as the **connector and coordinator**



Designing Your Industry Partnership Strategy Conversation

(57:30)

What criteria or thinking guided where you chose to invest your time and energy? What did you intentionally decide not to pursue?

Designing an industry partnership strategy requires system-level thinking, intentional focus, and clear criteria for decision-making. The discussion highlighted the importance of starting small while considering student interest, regional workforce demand, alignment with existing programming, and the capacity of both the school authority and industry partners to support meaningful experiences. It also emphasized the importance of avoiding overexpansion, transactional partnerships, or opportunities that do not yet align with system priorities. Together, these considerations help ensure partnership work is purposeful, sustainable, and connected to a larger career pathways strategy.

Getting Connected Conversation

(57:53)

How do students, families, and industry partners connect to opportunities in your system?

Connecting students, families, and industry partners requires intentional communication before, during, and after career-connected learning experiences. The discussion highlighted the role of off-campus teachers, career practitioners, school staff, and industry partners in helping students and families understand available opportunities through information evenings, newsletters, Try-a-Trade events, site visits, and other low-risk exploration experiences. It also emphasized the importance of thoughtful onboarding, clear expectations, and honest conversations about readiness, barriers, and fit so students are connected to opportunities that align with their interests, strengths, and future goals.

Analyzing Barriers to Industry Engagement Conversation

(1:04:59)

What might be limiting industry engagement, such as relevance, timing, capacity, or clarity, and how do you know? What adjustments would improve your ability to engage industry partners?

Analyzing barriers to industry engagement requires understanding the realities that shape both school and employer participation. The discussion highlighted barriers such as economic pressures, seasonal hiring timelines, employer capacity, and confusion about programs such as work experience and the Registered Apprenticeship Program. It also emphasized the importance of clear expectations, shared language, mutual benefit, and ongoing advocacy so that industry partners understand what is needed, how they can participate, and how student opportunities can align with workforce needs. Connection, coordination, communication, and consistency were identified as essential conditions for strengthening engagement over time.

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Expanding Your Industry Partnership Network Conversation

(1:09:53)

Who else could you connect with to broaden and strengthen industry partnerships, including partners you may not have previously considered?

Expanding an industry partnership network requires looking beyond familiar contacts and traditional placement providers. The discussion highlighted the value of connecting with industry associations, chambers of commerce, local governments, Indigenous communities, workforce development leads, and other school authorities to identify new possibilities for student learning. It also emphasized the importance of exploring less visible sectors, such as building operations and other emerging workforce areas, where students may not yet see clear pathways but where meaningful opportunities exist. Understanding industry realities, such as timing, capacity, economic pressures, and program clarity, helps ensure new partnerships are grounded in shared purpose, mutual benefit, and realistic expectations.

Strategic Next Steps Conversation

(1:15:21)

As your work has evolved, how has your approach to industry partnerships shifted, and what is guiding your current focus?

As industry partnership work evolves, school authorities and CAREERS: The Next Generation are moving toward more intentional, coordinated, and sustainable approaches. The discussion highlighted the importance of strengthening relationships, aligning partnerships with student interests and workforce needs, clarifying roles and expectations, and creating structures that support communication and consistency over time. Strategic next steps are guided by a continued focus on student readiness, shared ownership with partners, and high-quality experiences that can be sustained beyond individual champions or short-term opportunities.



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Research to Practice

Questions for reflection and dialogue within your local context

- What student interests, community needs, labour market trends, or workforce priorities are currently shaping your industry partnership work?
- How are industry partnerships connected to your school authority's broader career education, CTS, dual credit, work experience, Registered Apprenticeship Program, or collegiate programming?
- What criteria guide where your school authority invests time, energy, and resources in partnership development?
- How are students and families made aware of available opportunities, expectations, and possible barriers before committing to a pathway or placement?
- What barriers may be limiting industry engagement in your context, such as timing, capacity, relevance, clarity, funding, or student readiness?
- What structures are in place to sustain partnerships beyond individual champions, short-term funding, or one-time opportunities?

Additional Supports for System Education Leader Capacity

Alberta Professional Learning Consortium, & College of Alberta School Superintendents. (2025). *Professional learning needs assessment results executive summary: Executive summary - For career education*. <https://cass.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Career-Education-PL-Executive-Summary.pdf>

CAREERS The Next Generation. (n.d.). *CAREERS The Next Generation*. <https://www.careersnextgen.ca/>

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