

## Case Study Snapshot: Ford Next Generation Learning

An example of a company that is deeply engaged in cradle-to-career efforts is Ford Motor Company Fund (Ford Fund), the philanthropic arm of Ford Motor Company. One of Ford Fund's initiatives is Ford Next Generation Learning (Ford NGL). Ford NGL offers a variety of education-workforce solutions including guiding communities to build career and interest-driven academies for students in communities across the United States and in the UK that focus on improving high school graduation rates, student preparedness for the workforce and life, employer-community relations, and boosting local economies.

Ford NGL utilizes a community-driven approach to achieve the following:<sup>17</sup>

1. Increased community prosperity shared by all
2. A strengthened talent pipeline
3. More young people prepared for college, careers, lifelong learning, and leadership
4. Increased educational equity and justice
5. The capacity to continue and go further

Ford NGL supports more than 40 communities across the country that utilize Ford NGL's approach to developing and sustaining the career academy model to transform the high school experience of local students. To improve students' preparedness for future jobs, Ford NGL academies focus on embedding academic, 21st century, and technical knowledge and skills in students' high school curriculum, both in the classroom and out of the classroom through work-based learning experiences. The academies require the collaboration of various stakeholders in the community, often including school district, civic, industry, and nonprofit leaders.

**“We would spend millions (of dollars) on curriculum and teacher development, but the departure of a teacher or a principal would make our efforts lose momentum...we eventually realized if we could get the community engaged, then we could actually create a transformative model.”**

- Cheryl Carrier, *Executive Director*, Ford Next Generation Learning

While the career and interest-driven academies vary across the communities, all of them share the following three characteristics:<sup>18</sup>

- The career or thematic program of study selected by the student leverages an area of personal interest and integrates it with core academic knowledge. This integrated program of study is offered within a small learning community.
- The academies are not stand-alone programs but are a part of a district strategy to offer a portfolio of approaches (“multiple pathways”) so that every student has the opportunity to choose a program that fits a personal interest.

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- The programs offer extensive real-world contact with adults currently working in the field or area of interest, and they enable students to earn dual enrollment, industry-recognized certifications, and/or articulated college-level credits while still in high school, while developing the attitudes and mindsets necessary to be successful in their future education and careers.

### Why Ford NGL developed this approach

Henry Ford started more than 70 technical schools in his lifetime and was a strong believer in “learning by doing.” As part of the company’s vested interest in their local communities, Ford has invested in teaching and learning in the classroom for more than 30 years. After years of learning and investing millions of dollars on curriculum and teacher professional development, Ford Fund realized their efforts lost momentum with the departure of a teacher or a principal. This led them to create a scalable and sustainable approach leveraging the career academy model. Eventually, Ford Fund established their approach to developing career academies (community-connected learning), a model that gets the entire community engaged in a way that can actually transform the educational system and outcomes of a community. The Ford NGL approach includes the Ford NGL Framework and Roadmap and a team of coaches that guide the community through the 5 phases of the Roadmap, which include applying the Ford NGL principles, setting the right structures and processes in place to ensure transformational, sustainable change, community development of the plan, and the implementation of the framework and on-going continuous improvement.<sup>19</sup>

In creating community buy-in and support, the model is not reliant on one system actor (e.g., a teacher or principal), but becomes proudly co-owned by the district and community.<sup>20</sup> This model provides the opportunity for employers and civic leaders to engage with students and teachers in a very meaningful way and to align their resources to support the needs of the students, district and their own workforce needs.

### PRINCIPLES

#### FORD NGL uses the following principles to guide their work with communities:

- **EQUITY**  
All students, including those furthest from opportunity, must have access to, and support in, pursuing learning and work opportunities.
- **STUDENT VOICE**  
All students must have choice, ownership, and agency in pursuing their learning and career aspirations.
- **COMMUNITY CONNECTED APPROACH**  
All stakeholders in the community-schools, families, business, postsecondary, and community organizations share responsibility and accountability for designing, implementing, and sustaining the transformation, including the way they communicate, collaborate, and coordinate around their work.
- **PASSION**  
All stakeholders will demonstrate a relentless quest for excellence- a blend of mind and heart- in pursuing our goals.
- **INNOVATION**  
All stakeholders will continually innovate with new forms and ways of preparing young people for success and fulfillment.