

Is Your School Future-Focused?

A 10-Point Self-Assessment for School Leaders,
Principals, & District Administrators

Most schools think they're doing career readiness. Fewer are doing it well.

There's a difference between a school that has a career-related program and a school that is genuinely preparing every student for life after graduation. This assessment helps you see clearly which one you are.

How to use this assessment:

Read each statement. Check the box if it accurately describes your school today, not where you're headed, not your goals, but your current reality. Be honest. The gaps you find are your roadmap.

Part 1: Shared Vision & Leadership

- 1.** We have a clearly stated, school-wide vision that names career-connected learning as a priority – not just in our CTE wing, but across every subject and grade level.
- 2.** Our school's leadership team has co-created this vision with input from teachers, students, and families – and communicates it consistently to the whole community.
- 3.** Our mission statement or graduation profile reflects a commitment to preparing students for multiple pathways: college, trades, military, apprenticeships, and beyond.

Part 2: Classroom Practice

- 4.** Teachers across subjects, not just CTE, regularly make explicit connections between their content and real-world careers. This happens in daily instruction, not just during special units.
- 5.** Students in our school can name specific skills they are developing and explain how those skills connect to their interests and possible futures. This isn't limited to a single class or grade.
- 6.** Our classrooms foster a growth mindset: students are given low-stakes opportunities to practice strengths, learn from failure, and demonstrate leadership — not just produce work for grades.

Part 3: Career Development Continuum

- 7.** Our school has a documented, sequenced career development continuum — not a single course or one-time experience, but a progression that takes students from self-awareness to exploration to preparation across their years with us.
- 8.** We track students' career development progress over time using portfolios, benchmarks, or advising records — not just course completion. A counselor or advisor can look back at a student's growth and see a real story.

Part 4: Community & Family Engagement

- 9.** Our career readiness efforts extend beyond the school walls. We actively partner with families, community organizations, industry professionals, and local employers. Students have meaningful interactions with these partners, not just one-off career day appearances.

Part 5: Outcomes & Measurement

- 10.** We measure success beyond graduation rates and college acceptance. We have systems in place, or are actively building them, to track whether students entered their post-secondary pathway, persisted, and achieved their goal. We know what happened to our students after they left us.

Scoring Your Results

Count the number of boxes you checked above and find your results below.

8–10: Future-Focused Leader

Your school has the foundation. The priority now is deepening and sustaining the work, ensuring it reaches every classroom, every student, every year. Keep building.

5–7: Emerging & On Track

You're doing real work, but it's uneven. Some teachers and programs get it, the rest of the school hasn't caught up yet. The gap between your best and your average is your opportunity.

0–4: Early Stage

You have career-related activity happening, but it doesn't yet add up to a coherent approach. The good news: the framework is clear. You know exactly where to start.

Reflection: What the gaps are telling you

Every unchecked box is a conversation waiting to happen. Use these prompts with your leadership team, your department heads, or your school counselors.

If you checked fewer than 3 boxes in Part 1 (Vision & Leadership):

Career readiness won't take root until leaders own it publicly. What would it look like to make this part of your school's stated identity, not just a program, but a mission?

If you checked fewer than 2 boxes in Part 2 (Classroom Practice):

The future-focused mindset lives or dies in the classroom. Which two teachers in your building are already doing this instinctively? What would it take to help them model it for everyone else?

If you scored 0 in Part 5 (Outcomes & Measurement):

You can't improve what you don't measure. Even a simple one-year alumni survey would tell you more than your current data. What's one concrete step you could take this semester?

What future-focused schools do differently

- They treat career readiness as a school-wide mindset, not a single department's responsibility.

- They name students' strengths in the moment, in every class, every day, not just in advisory.

- They set goals with students and track them across years, not just at graduation.

- They extend their reach into the community so learning doesn't stop at the school door.

- They use every tool available, including AI, to give every student relevant, personalized guidance at scale.

Ready to go further?

See how Orchard helps schools do all 10 of these.

Orchard's AI career readiness platform gives every student personalized career exploration, goal-setting, and action planning – and gives counselors and administrators the data they need to track progress across the whole school.

Schedule your demo of Orchard here: www.orchard.careers/demo