

## Introduction

In 2018, the Kansas City Real World Learning Collaborative was conceived from the idea that stakeholders from schools, communities, businesses, and industry could work together to reimagine the high school experience for future graduates. At that time, what existed were some deep, immersive, work-based student learning experiences offered by school districts, their business partners, and intermediaries. But, while these experiences were tremendously valuable to the students they served, they were boutique offerings that, in their current form, were not scalable to reach all students. They were, however, the seeds of what would become a region-wide effort to provide equally valuable experiences to every high school graduate and, by doing so, simultaneously improve student potential outcomes while meeting workforce demand.

Four years later, in 2022, These same education and business stakeholders would convene multiple times to inform what would come to be known as the Real World Learning 2.0 Strategic Plan. This plan signaled a transition from a start-up collaborative to a more mature movement beginning to take hold in the Greater Kansas City region. It also signaled a hopeful pathway to achieving the 2030 goal of every student graduating high school with at least one of these experiences known as a Market Value Asset (MVA).

At the heart of the Real World Learning (RWL) Strategic Plan were strategies and action plans in four key focus areas: Students, Capacity, Communication, and Partnerships, and the recognition that, like the RWL stakeholders, none of the focus areas operate in isolation. To that end, the Real World Learning team at the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation (RWL at EMKF) endeavored to organize around the strategic plan in ways that would reach more deeply into critical points within the Collaborative. Doing so would require a significant increase in group learning opportunities. If true regional success were to occur, professional learning not only had to occur at every level, but it also had to be continuous and possess critical feedback loops. It needed just enough built-in systemic agility to allow for adjustments to meet ever-evolving needs while simultaneously staying within a path leading to high-quality Market Value Asset attainment and a focus on access and equity for all students.

## Strategic Focus Areas

1. Students
2. Capacity
3. Communications
4. Partnerships

## An Active Two-Sided Market

Real World Learning in Kansas City requires an active two-sided market between education and employers. As in many markets, this regional 'community of communities' has historically struggled to find efficiency and equity in bringing both sides together for meaningful and sustained engagements. As the network of districts adopted a common framework, language, and practice, employers' ease of navigating to an appropriate entry point increased. Then, something amazing began to happen: businesses more effectively created activities that helped young people better understand their skills and the professional network that could help them establish a meaningful career pathway.

Additionally, just as school districts were finding success in creating opportunities for students, industry leaders began coming together to approach talent acquisition and development differently, creating a natural opportunity for coordinated K-12 engagement. In some cases, employers even dedicated staff to do so.



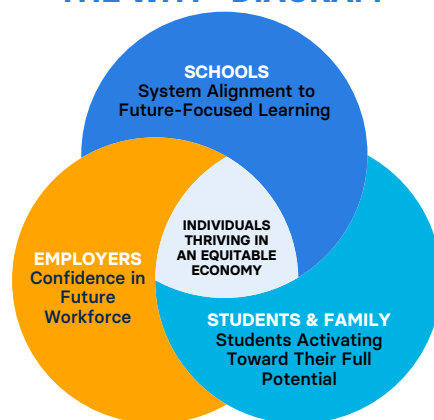
[Link to article on the RWL website and access hyperlinked resources and companion stories](#)

## Honing In On “The Why”

At first glance, it is easy to look at the definitions of the Market Value Assets and think, "Okay, these are mainly learning experiences where students gain professional skills valuable in the workplace." While this statement is true, it cannot be overstated that a high-quality MVA experience changes how a student thinks about themselves and navigates the world around them. As one Kansas City area school administrator put it, "Market Value Assets are the vehicle to The Why, but the Why are Student Outgrowths. In her book *Who You Know*, Julia Freeland Fisher argues, "...those students who might benefit most from deeper, stronger, and more diverse relationships are often those least likely to make it to, much less through, college." But when a student has a deep, rich, immersive MVA experience, they:

- Grow into a different person because they see and understand firsthand the benefits of social capital (deeper professional relationships),
- Know how to seek feedback from adults outside of school and family,
- Can envision the next steps in project management,
- Are proactive with themselves and other humans,
- Are now more comfortable working in new and unfamiliar contexts,
- Are thinking about their interests and potential careers,
- Can communicate clearly to diverse audiences,
- Doesn't just collaborate but collaborates to an end,
- Can work through difficulty and
- Can research in a way that is refined toward a possible solution.

### “THE WHY” DIAGRAM



Simply put, their Why is our Why. When a student grows through Real World Learning, these Outgrowths are evident. They become a new and improved version of themselves, aware of their skills and abilities with a new confidence that is truly justified.

## Access and Equity:

### Why KC’s Real World Learning Collaborative is Unique

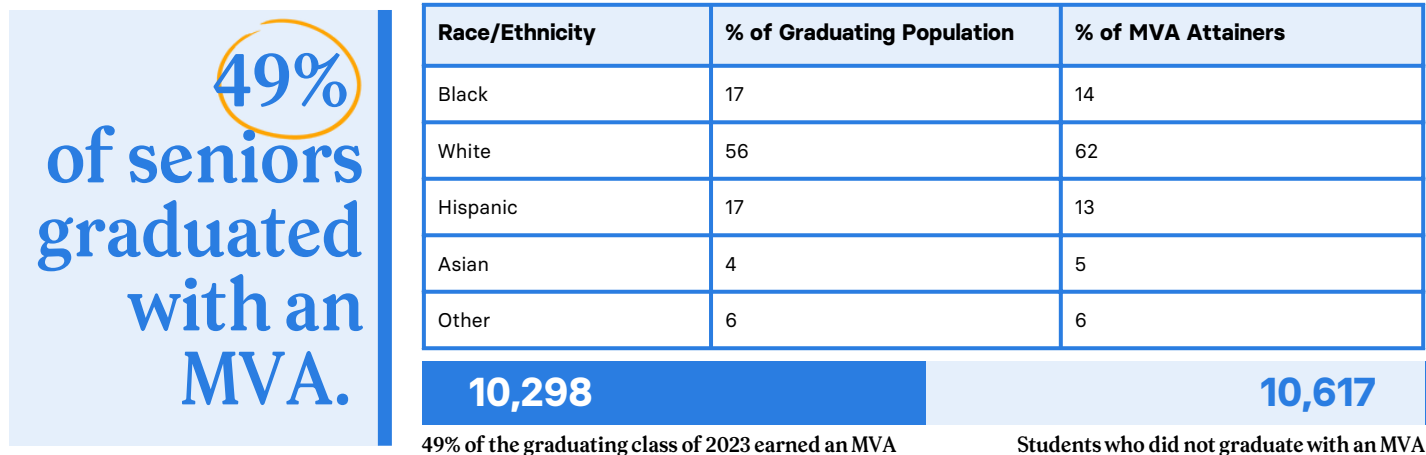
The term “Real World Learning” is not unique in itself, but what makes Kansas City’s Real World Learning collaborative unique is important to note. The promise of this Kansas City Collaborative centers around the primary goal of every student graduating high school with at least one Market Value Asset by 2030. Doing so means that each participating school district must figure out how to overcome barriers that prevent historically marginalized populations from reaping the benefits of Student Outgrowths. These are the same students who benefit most from their obtainment. It has been said that MVAs are “uniquely elegant” because while MVA definitions are standard across the Collaborative, and therefore Student Outgrowths are too, the way each school, classroom teacher, and business partner (altogether, a micro-ecosystem) organize themselves to ensure all their students can access them, is as unique as they are. In Kansas City, the 80+ high schools that make up the RWL Collaborative are a diverse lot. Both rivers and a state line separate these schools. They can be classified as urban, suburban, and rural and have diverse socio-economic, racial, and ethnic student populations. Yet, each school has purposefully included RWL in its strategic plan and earnestly endeavors to achieve the above-stated overarching goal.

**"The MVA, for all its efforts, changes how schools operate, how community partners interact with schools, and even what it means to be a high school graduate."**

The other "Why," of equal importance, has to do with schools and business partners. As school districts push more deeply into RWL to provide high-quality MVA experiences for every student, the school itself changes. This change is no small matter. For each of the four types of MVAs; work experiences, entrepreneurial experiences, regionally-vetted industry-recognized credentials, and college credit, there are hundreds of subject area applications for which they can be aligned to match the content area needs of a classroom, a business, or industry partner, as well as the interest and aptitude of the student. In short, the MVA, for all its efforts, changes how schools operate, how community partners interact with schools, and even what it means to be a high school graduate.

# 31 School Districts and Charters all working toward the same goal

While there is still work to do, at the conclusion of the 2022-23 school year, 22% of the total high school population that makes up the Kansas City RWL Collaborative (89,011 students from 31 school districts) completed at least one MVA, and 49% of seniors graduated with at least one MVA. Of the population of seniors who graduated, students of a particular race/ethnicity represented the percentages below:



To achieve this level of participation and earnestly work toward the goal of 100% graduate obtainment, high school staff are identifying strategies that work best for them and then finding and collaborating with like-minded educators in other school districts. In doing so, the Collaborative is strengthened, the focus is kept on access for all, and a learning ecosystem is created where both best practices and strategic errors get shared in real-time.

It is important to note that while RWL is primarily a high school endeavor, most school districts in the Collaborative have recognized the importance of stair-stepping-related programming at both the elementary and middle school levels. To that end, districts have added student interest and aptitude assessments at these lower levels, allowing for career exploration tied to each student. This serves to motivate younger students as they learn about their unique talents and how they apply to possible careers. The strategy also pays dividends when these same students reach high school and are able to select MVA experiences in career fields that fit their aptitudes and interests.

## Strengthening the RWL Collaborative

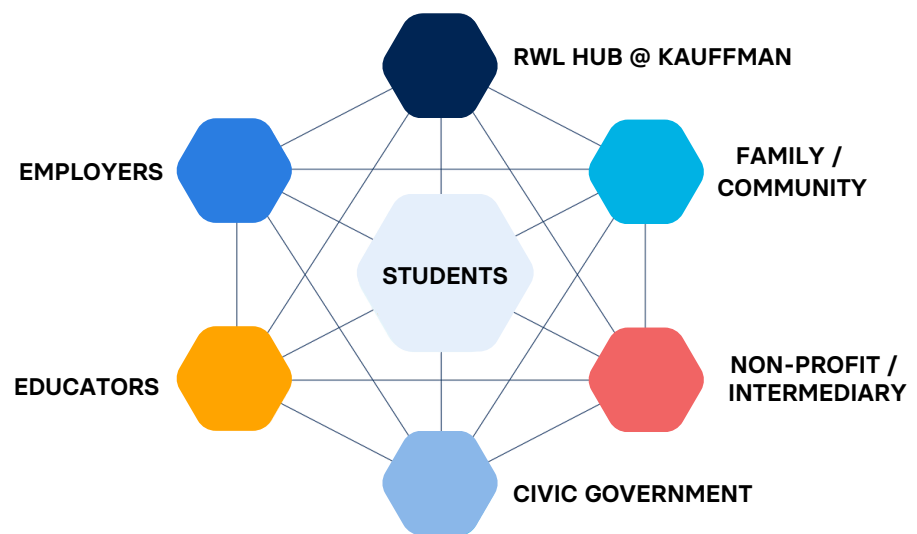
In their recent publication, "Ecosystems for the Future of Learning," the Carnegie Foundation recognizes the value of a systemic approach to creating ecosystems supporting educational change. Kansas City's Real World Learning Collaborative was cited in the publication for good reason. Building a collaborative requires buy-in from stakeholders. That buy-in was reinforced with the ratification of the RWL 2.0 Strategic Plan. Activating the strategic plan is synonymous with creating and fortifying the ecosystem. This effort is happening today through a series of ongoing professional learning convenings. With touchpoints at every level of the school organization, these convenings are designed to build "sustainable capacity" for creating and growing MVA experiences. Examples of this are:

- The Annual Superintendent Retreat
  - Retreat for immersive strategy sessions.
  - Outcomes guide future RWL focus areas.
- Local and National Tours of Innovative Schools
  - School leaders and partners observe innovation in other schools, inspiring possibilities of what schools could be.
  - Creates a fertile environment for ideation and collaboration
- Real World Learning Principals Fellowship
  - Specifically targets high school principals who are primarily responsible for ensuring success in their buildings.
  - Focus areas include systems thinking, change management, and best practices collaboration.

- Communities of Practice
  - Quarterly convenings designed to focus on each of the four types of MVA's
  - Opportunity for knowledge sharing, networking, and organizational learning
- Peer Learning Network
  - Convenes important functions of high school educators to work in close-knit equivalent-position groups.
  - Examples are teachers, RWL coordinators, school counselors, and instructional coaches.
- Master/Apprentice Teaching Program
  - Classroom teachers who are "masters" at integrating Client Connected Projects (CCP) into instructional content areas (not on top of) provide year-long peer-to-peer professional training to apprentice teachers.
  - Apprentice teachers' capstone project is the successful implementation of CCP instruction and a successful CCP experience for their students.
- Navigating Change Workshops
  - Helps RWL coordinators build their skill set to better understand and manage change in their lives
- Coordinated Industry Engagements
  - Offered in partnership with industry associations, large-scale exploratory events, educator externships, and hiring fairs for graduates that all districts can access
  - Healthcare engagement launched in 2023 and expanding into 2024
  - Design and Build engagement launching in 2024
- ProX Summer Internships
  - Stand-alone paid summer internship program
  - Provides supplemental professional learning opportunities for students

Additional ecosystem support occurs through the engagement of intermediary partners who provide learning opportunities that increase quality MVA attainment opportunities with a focus on sustainability, access, equity, and eliminating barriers to obtainment. Examples are:

- [Blue Valley CAPS](#)
- [The Cambrian Group](#)
- [DeBruce Foundation](#)
- [Getting Smart](#)
- [History CoLab](#)
- [Junior Achievement 3DE](#)
- [KC Stem Alliance](#)
- [Northland CAPS](#)
- [On The Up](#)
- [Prep KC](#)
- [ProX](#)
- [Startland](#)
- [Success Ready Student Network](#)
- [Uncharted Learning](#)



## Student Voice

A key component to the work of Real World Learning is ensuring student agency exists in each MVA experience. When voice and choice are proactively planned, Student Outgrowths are all but assured. This idea is a common tenant built into professional learning opportunities within the collaborative. The EMKF RWL Team also wanted to embed student engagement into the regional ecosystem itself. Currently, students from every high school have an opportunity to participate in three specific programs: Student Voice, Student Journalism Lab (J-Lab), and Student Ambassadors (at their high schools).

**To date, over 100 high school students participate in these activities, helping to guide the RWL effort while simultaneously earning an MVA for their work.**

# Data and Evaluation

## **MDRC:**

Information feedback loops are crucial to measuring ecosystem progress and overall impact. Because unbiased and uniform data collection is critically important, RWL at EMKF is utilizing the independent data consultant, [MDRC](#), for student MVA data collection. There have been three cohorts of school districts who have entered into the Kansas City RWL collaborative since its inception in 2018. As each of the 31 school districts applied for incentive grants to enter into the initiative, they also agreed to a data-sharing agreement with MDRC as the principal collection agent. Doing so required a great deal of initial trust from school district leaders and their boards of education. RWL at EMKF promised that each district's specific student MVA data would only be shared with their district leader and that only the aggregate data of all 31 districts/schools would be publicly available. Districts are reporting a combined student demographic data of over 89,000 students.

## **Urban Education Research Center (UERC):**

More recently, RWL at EMKF has engaged with the [Urban Education Research Center](#) at the University of Missouri Kansas City to develop a teacher and student survey tool to be administered after each [Client Connected Project \(CCP\)](#) experience. This brief survey tool is designed to determine if Student Outgrowths are achieved as a result of a CCP experience. The survey tool is testing the theory that quality CCP experiences result in Student Outgrowths. It has not been designed to evaluate teacher instructional quality, only that CCP's result in a students' acquisition of outgrowth characteristics.

The teachers (and their students) participating in the [CCP Apprentice Teachers program](#) are among the first to utilize the survey. Teachers across the collaborative who have successfully integrated CCP into their classroom core content will also be asked to take and administer the survey. The hope is that by applying this methodology, compiled survey results will begin to communicate the value of this one type of MVA more accurately.

# Kansas City RWL Collaborative Goals for 2024

The following are recommended goals for 2024 related to the RWL Strategic Plan and the ongoing effort to strengthen the Kansas City RWL Collaborative. These goals will assist each participating school district in increasing capacity for sustainably developing student MVA opportunities and effectively removing barriers to access.

1. Emphasize the 'quality assurance' of all MVA experiences to ensure they are of high quality and implemented with fidelity as outlined by the Collaborative.
2. Develop and implement a data collection platform so school districts can more easily and accurately upload their comprehensive student MVA data to MDRC.
3. Initiate post-graduate evaluation of the impact of a student MVA experience.
4. Communicate transformative stories of students and teachers to share best practices and create greater community awareness.
5. Focus efforts on credentialing teachers who have successfully mastered the implementation and curriculum alignment of MVAs in the classroom.
6. Strengthen regional employer network while working with trusted business partners to better understand how they perceive the value of Student Outgrowths in the workplace, leading to an employer-valued MVA micro-credential.
7. Elevate regional learning and national understanding by hosting a national symposium on Real World Learning in Kansas City.
8. Strategize how [ProX Summer Internships](#) and other "out of school" MVA opportunities can be expanded and enhanced.
9. Devise strategies to enhance the alignment and communication between the current Kansas (Post Graduate Assets) and Missouri (Success Ready Student Network) initiatives and each school district's RWL efforts.
10. Onboard and engage "Cohort 4" school districts (three districts).

## Goal

We are working together to ensure that by 2030 all students in the Kansas City region graduate with one or more Market Value Assets.

**75** High Schools  
**31+** School Districts  
**89,000** Students

## Mission

Committed to intentionally disrupting and reinventing education in the Greater Kansas City Region, the mission of Real World Learning is to ensure students, empowered by their sense of purpose and their connection to community, graduate with durable skills attained through a transformational regional collaborative distinguished by

- Meaningful, authentic, customized experiences
- Commitment to equitable outcomes with a goal of inclusive prosperity.
- Deep connectivity among community partners
- Entrepreneurial and innovative mindset.
- Value added to business and community.

## Objectives

All students will:

1. Acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for life success.
2. Exercise ownership in their learning.
3. Develop life-changing and mutually beneficial connections with their community and individuals in it.

## Guiding Principles

### Partnership

We will commit to partnerships with business, industry and community leaders which are rich, mutually beneficial and ever-evolving.

### Agency

We will commit to creating a culture where adults adopt the role of facilitator creating opportunities for every student to acquire Essential Skills by engaging in self directed deep learning experiences.

### Collaboration

We will operate as a regional collective, leveraging resources, engaging a shared regional language and adopting a belief in the life-changing value of Real World Learning experiences for all learners.

### Advocacy

We will work to align organizational systems and policy advocacy to ensure quality, equity and growth.