



CASE STUDY

ElevateEdAZ and YouScience partner to connect education and business

ElevateEdAZ is focused on aligning education to the needs of Arizona's leading industries based on YouScience® Aptitude & Career Discovery insights.



Supporting career training in area schools

Bridging the gap between Arizona's high schools and its employers poses several challenges. Companies want a well-prepared workforce and need a strong talent pipeline to draw upon. They want to create connections with schools, educators, and students to help develop the skills needed to fill jobs, but face difficulty doing so. School administrators and educators, on the other hand, want to prepare and train their students to fill these jobs but may not have the resources to do so.

That's where ElevateEdAZ, an education initiative of the Greater Phoenix Chamber Foundation, comes in. ElevateEdAZ's mission is to bridge the gap between schools, businesses, and the community by promoting pathways and increasing student enrollment in career and technical education (CTE) programs in school districts across the greater Phoenix area. The initiative looks to expose students to the high-wage, high-demand careers available, provide them with work-based learning experiences and opportunities to earn early college credit and industry-recognized credentials.

ElevateEdAZ partners with school districts and individual schools to provide resources to help support their CTE programs and get students career-ready. Many schools need assistance determining students' aptitudes to guide them into the right pathways while promoting various industries and the types of jobs available in those fields. Initially, the schools partnering with ElevateEdAZ used interest-based career guidance software programs. These programs measured student interests, but not their aptitudes. That changed when ElevateEdAZ partnered with YouScience to use student aptitude data to better guide students into best-fit careers.

"We were drawn to YouScience because the science behind it helps us show what different high-wage, high-demand careers can look like and helps students understand different career pathways," said Kaycee O'Neill, director of talent, ElevateEdAZ. "Interest-based surveys didn't align with our goal of trying to increase enrollment into high-wage, high-demand pathways because student's interests are typically based on their environment and what they've been exposed to."



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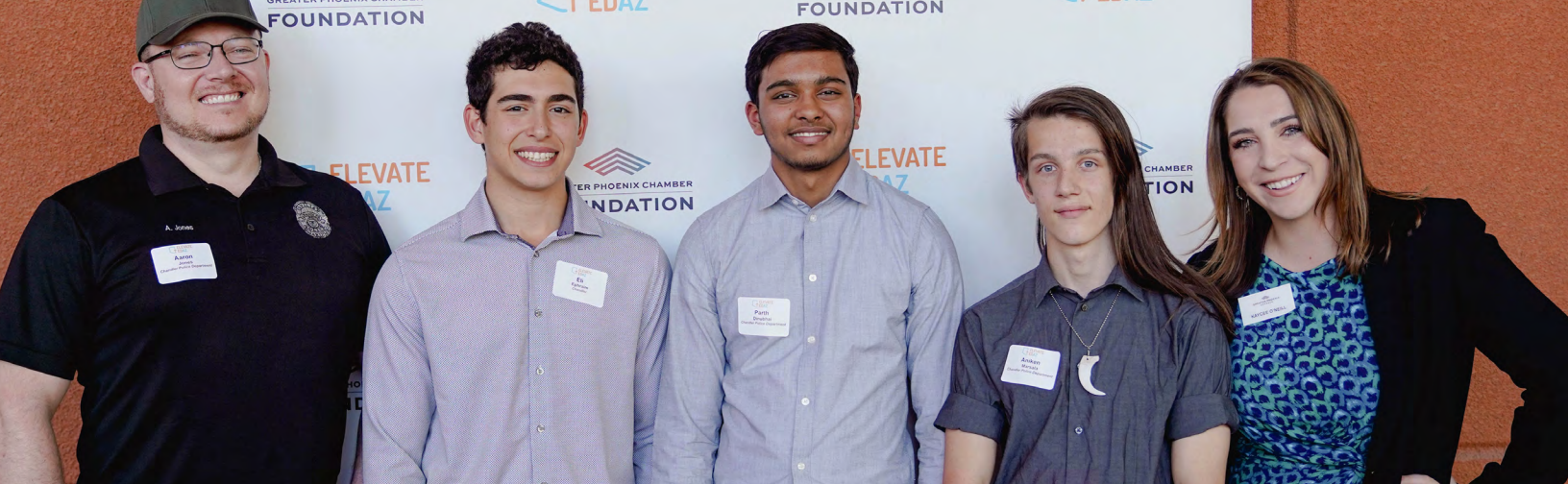
—Kaycee O'Neill, director of talent, ElevateEdAZ

Solution

A test run and early success

In 2020, ElevateEdAZ launched a pilot program to use Aptitude & Career Discovery in five schools in the Phoenix Union High School District, one of Phoenix's largest school districts. Schools were encouraged to start aptitude testing with freshmen students so results could be used in their sophomore years to pick a high school CTE program or pathway. With the results, administrators could now track student trends throughout their high school careers to evaluate how YouScience is influencing their pathways.

Administrators soon discovered that Aptitude & Career Discovery helped these schools fill an exposure gap with students regarding their career aptitudes and pathways. After seeing the success these schools had, the district looked to expand the use of YouScience into the rest of their campuses.



Setting students on career pathways

Due to its successful pilot program, ElevateEdAZ has also sponsored Aptitude & Career Discovery in six high schools in the Mesa Public Schools District, the largest in the Phoenix metro area. One school, in particular, has experienced tremendous success using YouScience to promote its career education: Mesa's Westwood High School.

The school started using Aptitude & Career Discovery at the beginning of the 2021-22 school year with the help of a grant from ElevateEdAZ. Historically, Westwood has had a strong CTE program, one that's integrated into the overall curriculum. Students are strongly encouraged to take at least one CTE class during their high school careers, and incoming freshmen are assigned a career exploration teacher so their career exposure begins early.

"YouScience plays an important role in this process of getting students started on their journey," stated Maddie Winship, college and career coach at Westwood High School. "We want all freshmen to take this test, so they not only know more about themselves but also from a school perspective. We have data about what students are interested in, who we want them to talk to, and where we want to take them."

"I think that was the catalyst; we can utilize YouScience in a way that's targeted and different than anything we have done before," said Allison Seitz, career explorations teacher at Westwood High School.

Discovering aptitudes

A key component of Westwood High School's CTE strategy is its H3 Academy (H3 stands for high-wage, high-demand, high-skill), the career academy on campus. Beginning in the 10th grade, students are placed in a career-path cohort with the same group of students throughout the day, and each class is aligned to a specific career or industry. For example, their math classes focus on welding-related math; in English, they're learning technical writing, and so on. Westwood administrators and faculty spent 2022 recruiting students and their families to participate, with the academy launching at the beginning of the 2023-24 school year. Connecting with students' families was critical in driving overall participation, with YouScience playing an important part.

"The number one person to influence a student's registration is a parent. Students care about what their families think they should do," observed Chris Gilmore, principal at Westwood High School. "We need to educate parents on what these careers are and what's needed in our economy to benefit not only students but also our state."

“When YouScience came around, we educated our students about what their aptitudes are to help make those decisions a little easier, and help their families make those decisions better.”

—Chris Gilmore, principal, Westwood High School

Impacts

Creating a VIP experience

To get parents fully invested in the mission of the H3 Academy, Westwood held an exclusive VIP parents' night event in January 2023. The idea was to make students and their parents feel special, wanted, and have a sense of purpose at the school. Administrators also wanted to change the narrative that students on the college path were superior to students on the career path. The guest list was based on metrics generated by YouScience aptitude assessments to invite students most likely to enroll in the academy.

"We wanted to invite the students who had the highest likelihood of actually enrolling," stated Winship. "We pulled YouScience data to create rosters of 'VIP' students who showed high aptitude and high interest in each field. Pulling that data allowed us to create a roster for each of our four career pathways."

"We sent out fun invitations that said, 'Save the date for this event.' When students arrived, we told them which of their pathways had heightened aptitudes. One student even said that it felt like Harry Potter being sorted for a house: 'I'm in the welding house, or I'm in the engineering house,'" said Winship.

More than 170 students attended the event, where they and their parents got the opportunity to explore Westwood's four career pathways—welding, engineering, manufacturing, and automotive—across classrooms on campus. They also toured the school's \$2 million advanced manufacturing facility as well as toured its auto and welding labs. Teachers were also on hand to talk about the CTE sequences for each pathway and what it takes to succeed. Representatives from Mesa Community College and various local industries—like Boeing, Empire Cat, and others—were available to discuss pathways over the long term and what kind of jobs they could lead to. At the event's conclusion, about 100 students enrolled in the H3 Academy, the success can be linked back to aptitudes uncovered by Aptitude & Career Discovery.

"YouScience gives us the assessment to help guide students into one of the great pathways we have here. They may have an interest in culinary arts, but they also may have an aptitude for advanced manufacturing, of which they were unaware," Gilmore noted. "Let's help them explore that and guide them into these great programs we have on campus, and let's get them plugged in."

A partnership built for success

This model of cooperation between ElevateEdAZ and Phoenix-area school districts can be adopted by other chambers of commerce and districts in communities around the country to better their CTE programs and skill development. Chamber members have connections in the business community and can use these connections to prepare students for successful careers. Employers know what skills are in demand and what training and certifications are needed to obtain those skills.

"Our students deserve this type of education, career exposure, and connection. They're our future," O'Neill declared. "If we want to keep up with the demands of our workforce and society, we need to invest in them."

"That's investing time and resources but also giving them a chance to get business exposure, working experience, and more. I would suggest that chambers reach out to their members and see what their hiring needs are. Then, connecting with their schools, see what CTE programs are available, and how students are getting employer exposure and work experience." O'Neill suggested.



Organizations at a glance:

ElevateEdAZ

Greater Phoenix Chamber Foundation, Phoenix, AZ

During the 2023-24 school year, ElevateEdAZ benefited students by:

- Placing 212 students in internships
- Facilitating job shadows for 992 students
- Providing 23,277 career awareness and development touchpoints

Westwood High School

Mesa, AZ

- 3,564 Students
- Grades 9-12

Summary:

Challenges

- Bridging the gap between education and state industries
- Promoting career exploration and pathways
- Educating students and their parents about high-demand, high-skilled careers
- Driving enrollment in CTE programs

Solution

- YouScience® Aptitude & Career Discovery

Results

- 18 high schools using solution
- 12,659+ Aptitude & Career Discovery assessments given
- 100 students enrolled in Westwood's H3 academy

