



*Austin High School's Packer Profile initiative focuses on five career pathways: (1) Engineering, Manufacturing, and Technology; (2) Business, (3) Education, Health Sciences, and Human Services; (4) Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources; and (5) Arts and Communication.*

## Packer Profile is Building Futures — One Freshman at a Time

Austin High School's seminar course strengthens academic, digital, and career-readiness skills for all ninth-grade students

*By Emily Hooland, Packer Profile Coordinator*

### Editor's Note

In the May-June 2025 edition of the Journal, we again showcased great things that are happening in our classrooms through our "What's Right with Public Education" theme. We had to hold four articles for space issues in May-June. For this issue, we have included articles featuring Austin Public Schools and Forest Lake Area Public Schools. In the September-October 2025 issue, we will include stories for the Cannon River STEM School (in Faribault) and Noble Academy (in Brooklyn Park).

Over the past two years, Austin High School has worked to change the game for students entering high school. Finding success and attaining credits at the start of high school is critical in getting students to the finish line and their diploma. We found students were struggling to attain credits during their first year and we needed to evaluate what we were doing as a school in order to best support students and increase our graduation rate. The work of the Packer Profile Seminar is one way we are changing the path for our students in exciting ways and is what's right with public education.

The Packer Profile is a district initiative focused on three elements: Career Pathways, Meaningful Learning

Experiences, and the Packer Portfolio. This is a direct result of feedback from students, staff, and stakeholder groups identifying the shared aspirations for students and what it means to be a graduate of Austin Public Schools. The Packer Profile focuses on preparing students for college, career, and life!

During the 2023-2024 school year, we took our first steps to implement the Packer Profile, a district initiative, into our ninth-grade grade classes. We focused on the top skills needed to find success in high school through lessons once a month in core classes. Throughout the year, we found students were developing important skills and attaining credit, but we just did not have enough time to tackle all that

# WHAT'S RIGHT WITH PUBLIC EDUCATION



*In the Ninth-Grade Packer Profile Seminar Course, students work to develop soft skills, academic skills, digital literacy, and more.*



*Through the Packer Profile initiative, Austin students focus on organizational skills, time management, self-advocacy, and more.*

was needed. This pushed us to the next level where we developed a full curriculum for ninth-grade students to be implemented as a required class.

In the Ninth-Grade Packer Profile Seminar Course, students work to develop soft skills, academic skills, digital literacy, how to plan for the future, pathways research, and development of their personal Packer Portfolio – all of which will prepare them for the future beyond Austin High School. The incorporation of soft skills really stems from the need to enhance employability of our students. This connects with the Austin Public Schools' Core Values: responsible, communicator, resilient, contributor, and learner which were established through focus groups. Explicitly teaching these skills is paying off in the work we see from students and their interactions.

Teaching students about various learning and study strategies has increased academic success and pushes our students toward higher credit attainment. They focus on organizational skills, time management, self-advocacy, study skills, and learning strategies. It is clear the implementation of Packer Profile and BARR (Building Assets, Reducing Risks) for all ninth graders has made an impact on student performance.

The teaming model of BARR has allowed our Profile teachers to collaborate with all core teachers and support the interventions through BARR. BARR interventions are often implemented by Packer Profile teachers in collaboration with core content teachers during our academic support days. Students have one academic support day per week allowing them to get the support needed and time to collaborate with peers in their courses. Having the support

of these two programs together makes an incredible difference for our students.

Additionally, we incorporated digital literacy into this course while connecting these concepts with personal safety and future implications. It is critical for students to understand the digital world and the footprint they leave. These lessons help them to be aware and responsible in their technology usage.

The creation of the four-year plan and portfolio allows students to explore their interests and research what options are available to them. We have five career pathways we focus on at Austin High School: (1) Engineering, Manufacturing, and Technology; (2) Business, (3) Education, Health Sciences, and Human Services; (4) Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources; and (5) Arts and Communication. Students take a deep dive into each of the pathways through research projects and exploration of SchoolLinks. We have found many students have discovered careers they never even knew existed and have been able to work to align their four-year plan for high school with their areas of interest and selected pathway.

When meeting our students at their level, we have been able to develop a course that not only helps them to get one step closer to graduation, it also allows them to develop critical skills in areas that will help them to be well rounded, employable members of our society.

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