

Narrative Change Goals



The Education Partnership of the Permian Basin (EPPB) is a nonprofit serving and improving the education and life outcomes of young people who live in the Permian Basin, a geographical region encompassing both western Texas and southeastern New Mexico. The region is known as the highest oil-producing field in the United States. As an intermediary organization, EPPB works with education, business, and other civic leaders to ensure that students in the Permian Basin have the best chances to succeed from cradle to career.

For the Pathways Narrative Project, EPPB conducted audience research with high school students to understand their mindset about post-secondary opportunities in the Permian Basin. EPPB's goal is to ensure every graduating high school student in the Permian Basin is prepared with a postsecondary plan for college, career, trade, or military. They hypothesized that they would need to counter the narrative in the Permian Basin that: "a postsecondary education is not necessary in our community to succeed."

Mapping the Narrative Landscape



First, EPPB conducted an analysis of local media outlets using key words such as "high school" and "college" and found that:

- Most news stories about high school or college focused on sports.
- Only a few stories highlighted the importance of educational achievement. Those that do focus on education put the emphasis on affordability, framing cost as the main barrier to a postsecondary education.

Understanding Audience Mindset



Next, they conducted research with high school students. Although EPPB's work is about improving student pathways with respect to education and career pathways, EPPB's relationships and networks are primarily with education and business leaders. EPPB believed it was essential to understand students' mindsets with respect to how they viewed their education and career options and share those insights with their partners. Some of the key takeaways from student Mindset research included:

- Students value education and career paths that offer opportunity and exploration
- High school students and young adults hold different beliefs about the value of a post-secondary education
- Students believe they have to leave the Permian Basin to achieve their dreams
- Some young adults who leave the Permian Basin return for family or job opportunities
- Negative perceptions of the Permian Basin affect young people's desire to live and work there



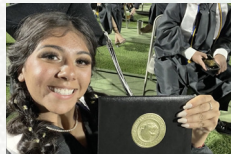
Testing Persuasive Insights



Next, EPPB developed and tested student stories with high school sophomores that highlighted young people's agency and their journeys pursuing a wide range of education and career pathways in the Permian Basin. Additionally they tested language that reframed advising around discovering opportunities, accessing choices, and gaining real-world experience.

In response to a video featuring a recent high school student from Odessa, Texas, which was produced by RoadTrip Nation, a nonprofit that specializes in student-centered storytelling, a high school student said:

That was helpful...because it does show that it is possible...Even if you have to start here, like in Odessa or Midland, you can always work your way up and transfer schools and really reach the career you wanna do.



Insights from Message Testing:

- Stories that center young people's agency and choice resonate for high school students
- Journey stories about leaving and then deciding to return to the Permian Basin help young people imagine living and working there
- Active and asset-based language and frames about the Permian Basin resonate positively for students
- Replace technical messages about "advising" with messages that emphasize the values and benefits of advising
- Students are inspired by education and career opportunities that help you pursue your dreams

Putting Messages into Action



When EPPB shared these student stories with education leaders in the Permian Basin, it helped to persuade them about the power of student stories to connect with and persuade students to consider career options in the Permian Basin.

- After a messaging training with Permian Basin education leaders, 100% strongly agreed

that storytelling is persuasive to students when communicating about postsecondary and career opportunities in the Permian Basin, compared to 70% before the training.

- 53% of education leaders reported that the most helpful part of the messaging training was seeing examples such as Brittney's video.

What's next for EPPB



EPPB plans on developing what they have learned from this project into a messaging guide to give to counselors/advisors, administrators, and teachers. They also plan to expand on the messaging guide and create a presentation/course to be used as professional development for local high school teachers and counselors. During this course, districts can bring their own materials to review and determine areas where language can better reflect what was learned from students.



The biggest learning from the Pathways Narrative Project has been that the manner in which adults in our community speak about educational/career pathways may not be resonating with students in our community....We can't use education jargon and expect students and their parents to understand.

—Adrian Vega

Education Partnership of the Permian Basin

About the Pathways Narrative Project

The Pathways Narrative Project is a two-year collaborative initiative, led by Wonder: Strategies for Good and supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Walton Family Foundation and others, that convened nine organizations working in five places (Colorado, Indiana, New York,

Texas, and Washington, DC) to improve education and career pathways for young people. Together the cohort explored how to leverage the power of narrative to advance programs and systems change in the pathways space.