



Transforming the High School Experience

Graduation is a monumental achievement for KCS students, but they must also be prepared for what comes next:

- **Enrolling** in college or trade schools;
- **Enlisting** in service to their country; or
- **Finding Employment** in a high-wage, high-skill, and in-demand profession, with an **Entrepreneurial** mindset.

The 865 Academies initiative has been crafted to empower students by bridging the gap between their classroom experiences and real-world opportunities, enabling them to make a meaningful impact on the world.

Freshman Academy

Freshman Academy is the first step in the 865 Academies initiative. Its main purpose is to ease the transition from middle school to high school by integrating students into a close-knit learning community.

The Freshman Academy assessments and career exploration experiences facilitate the selection of academy pathways for grades 10-12 and help students develop the skills, study habits, and character necessary to successfully reach graduation and make decisions about life after high school.

Eight schools launched Freshman Academy in 2022. Two more launched in 2023 and the final four will launch in 2024.

Career-Themed Academies

The 865 Academies are transforming the high school experience by introducing specialized academies, tailored career pathways, and real-world connections to support the curriculums of global and general education classes to ensure students are well-rounded and best prepared for their future academic and professional endeavors.

Academies serve as smaller, specialized communities within the larger high school setting. Their aim is to transform the high school experience with an engaging curriculum designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed for success in school and beyond.

Partners in High School Transformation

Knox County Schools

With more than 90 schools and 60,000 students, KCS is focused on four key priorities: Excellence in Foundational Skills, Great Educators in Every School, Career Empowerment and Preparation, and Success for Every Student. By putting students at the center of every decision, we believe the district will not only equip them for future success, but also support a thriving community for generations to come.

Knox Education Foundation

The mission of Knox Education Foundation is to be a catalyst for the transformation of public education by investing in and advocating for innovative programs, partnerships, and initiatives to achieve excellent outcomes for all students. As the funding and convening partner for The 865 Academies, KEF played a crucial role in catalyzing and championing the initiative, and currently works to facilitate ties between industry partners and KCS Academy Coaches through partner development and onboarding.

The Knoxville Chamber

As the economic development organization for Knox County and the City of Knoxville, the Knoxville Chamber is committed to driving regional economic prosperity. The Chamber actively engages the business community with the mission of the academies, ensuring that students are equipped to work in high-demand careers and support the region's future workforce needs.



Frequently Asked Questions

What is The 865 Academies initiative?

The 865 Academies initiative is Knox County Schools' way of implementing a forward-thinking approach to high school education, introducing specialized academies, tailored career pathways, and real-world connections to help Knox County students prepare for their future academic and professional endeavors.

Within this framework, academies serve as smaller, specialized communities within the larger high school setting. Their aim is to **transform the high school experience** with an engaging curriculum designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed for success in both college and career.

Why did the district launch this initiative?

Knox County Schools has a long history of providing students with a high-quality, comprehensive high school experience, but the district recognizes the need to shift the focus from "college access" to "future success." Toward this end, KCS is working to encourage students to explore college and career opportunities throughout high school.

How did we get here?

Knox County Schools partnered with Ford Next Generation Learning (Ford NGL) and Knox Education Foundation to start a community conversation about college and career preparedness, focusing on the skills and competencies a student might need to be considered ready for success beyond high school whether they are intent on **enrolling** in college or trade school, **enlisting** in service to their country, or gaining **employment** in a local high-wage, high-skill, and in-demand profession with an **entrepreneurial** mindset.

How far along is 865 Academies?

So far, Austin-East, Bearden, Carter, Central, Farragut, Fulton, Hardin Valley, Karns, L&N STEM, and South-Doyle are operating Freshman Academies for 9th-graders and school-specific Academies and pathways for sophomore, junior, and senior students. Gibbs, Halls, Powell, and West launched Freshman Academies in August 2024 and will enroll students in career-themed Academies and pathways in August 2025.

Who developed the master plan that is guiding this process?

A variety of stakeholders have worked together to create the master plan -- teachers, students, parents, district and high school leadership, business and community leaders, and representatives from colleges and trade schools.

How is this different than current registration for existing elective offerings?

While many of the elective classes offered at our high schools will remain the same, this initiative will significantly increase opportunities for students to connect their classroom learning with career interests. While job shadowing, college visit, career exploration, and internship opportunities were previously available to students, the 865 Academies is focused on building strong connections with industry partners to ensure that they are a consistent part of every student's high school experience.

Who will participate in the 865 Academies?

All rising 9th graders after Fall 2022 at Austin-East, Bearden, Central, Farragut, Fulton, Hardin Valley, Karns, and L&N STEM; after Fall 2023 at Carter and South-Doyle; and after Fall 2024 at Gibbs, Halls, Powell, and West will join the 865 Academies.

How will students be informed of their pathway options?

Pathway offerings are dependent on funding, staffing, and industry participation. Schools used a variety of data sources including student interest surveys, course request history, teacher certifications, available community resources, and labor market data to determine which pathways would serve their students best. Schools named their academies and sorted their pathways with the approval of a district-wide steering committee. The district is currently working with Knox Education Foundation to develop a comprehensive naming and branding system to be approved by the steering committee. Though some Academy names may change and some pathways may be reorganized, pathways offerings will not change.

Students will participate in activities inside the Freshman Academy that will provide ample information about the career-themed academies and pathways available to them beginning their sophomore year. In the spring, a ceremony will be held so students can formally announce their pathway declarations. Each school will share details about the timing of its event.

The visual / performing arts or world languages and literature aren't part of the course progression in my student's pathway. Will they still be able to study those subjects?

Elective classes in the arts, literature, social studies, and world languages will still be offered to all students regardless of their academy or choice even if no career pathway is focused on those areas.

What should my student do if they are not interested in the career pathways offered by their school?

It is important to understand that the academy initiative is meant to expose students to various career options so they can make informed choices about their future. In most cases, students should find at least one career pathway at their school that can be connected to their interests.

The opportunity to meet industry professionals and try job shadowing is also an important aspect of this model, which can introduce students to new career fields. For example, a student who wants to become a lawyer who goes to a school that doesn't offer a pre-law pathway, can -- with the help of counselors and teachers -- choose a related pathway and still gain exposure to legal careers within academy-focused industries.

Can students change their Academy or pathway choice?

After making an initial selection, students will have the opportunity to change their pathway one time before graduation.

Will my school's course offerings be changed?

Students will continue to have access to a variety of electives within and outside their academy through global electives available to all students.

How will this initiative impact the teachers, counselors, and other employees at my school?

Each school's leadership team has used the community-created master plan as a guide to make decisions that prioritize their students' needs, enhance opportunities within the school community, and better align school programs with relevant postsecondary pathways.

Within each academy, there will be a designated administrator, counselor, and a team of teachers representing various academic and elective areas.

The academy structure is based on creating smaller learning communities (SLC) within the larger school environment, which may result in some adjustments to how staff are organized to work with students, and given the importance of proximity to the academy model, some changes in classroom and course assignments may be necessary. These decisions will be made at the school level as needed, but should help foster familiarity and the development of trusting, long-term relationships within the SLC.

How are teachers and staff trained to effectively implement the academy model in our schools?

Specific training programs and professional development opportunities will vary depending on the school and the academies it offers, but the overall goal is to equip teachers and staff with the knowledge and tools they need to deliver a well-rounded education that supports career exposure and/or college preparation.

How can my company partner with KCS or a specific school and academy?

An interest form is available on our [website](#).



Frequently Asked Freshman Academy Questions

What is The 865 Academies initiative?

The 865 Academies initiative is Knox County Schools' way of implementing a forward-thinking approach to high school education, introducing specialized academies, tailored career pathways, and real-world connections to help Knox County students prepare for their future academic and professional endeavors.

Within this framework, academies serve as smaller, specialized communities within the larger high school setting. Their aim is to **transform the high school experience** with an engaging curriculum designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed for success in both college and career opportunities.

What is Freshman Academy?

Freshman Academy is the first step in the 865 Academies initiative -- its main purpose is to create a close-knit community for students to ease the transition from middle school to high school. Within Freshman Academy, students develop essential skills, study habits, and character needed for success in both school and life.

In addition to their regular classes, students get the chance to participate in job fairs, and engage in career exploration activities. They also use the Freshman Seminar program to assess their skills, interests, and abilities, which helps prepare them for advanced classes, industry certifications, and college courses. All of these experiences paired with the Freshman Seminar assessment to identify their skills, abilities, and interests support their academy and pathway decisions for their 10th, 11th, and 12th grade.

Who participates in Freshman Academy?

All rising 9th graders after Fall 2022 at Austin-East, Bearden, Central, Farragut, Fulton, Hardin Valley, Karns, and L&N STEM; after Fall 2023 at Carter and South-Doyle; and after Fall 2024 at Gibbs, Halls, Powell, and West will join the 865 Academies.

When will students pick their academy pathway?

Students will pick their academy pathway during the second semester of their freshman year. The decision will be made with the support of school and college / career counselors.

What comes after Freshman Academy?

Students will join their selected academy and pathway, embarking on coursework that involves taking at least three elective classes over their 10th, 11th, and 12th grade years.

The goal is to strike a balance between the specialized career-focused education offered by the academies and the broader global and general education that ensures students are well-rounded. So alongside standard academic courses, students will engage in practical learning experiences that involve collaboration with business, community, and college partners and have the opportunity to visit college campuses and job sites to gain hands-on exposure and apply what they're learning in a real-world context.

Can students change their Academy or pathway choice?

After making an initial selection, students will have the opportunity to change their pathway one time before graduation.

For more information, please contact your school's Academy Coach or Principal or visit knoxschools.org/academies. An interest form is available on our [website](#) for those interested in partnering with KCS or a specific school and academy.

Portrait of a Graduate

Lifelong Learner

- Demonstrates mastery of academic skills
- Self-motivated to learn and acquire knowledge
- Explores personal interests and abilities
- Exhibits tenacity and strong work ethic

Effective Communicator

- Articulates thoughts and ideas clearly in verbal, written, visual and digital forms
- Models professionalism and proper communication etiquette
- Practices active listening skills

Collaborative Teammate

- Works effectively in teams
- Gives and receives feedback
- Fosters a sense of shared responsibility
- Displays flexibility and a willingness to adapt

Creative Problem Solver

- Evaluates and analyzes information critically and with competency
- Uses creativity to develop innovative solutions
- Nurtures curiosity and asks questions

Community-minded Citizen

- Exemplifies cultural awareness and responsiveness
- Acts with integrity and empathy
- Values relationships and makes connections
- Engages in service activities