

# The East Baton Rouge Parish School System Prepares Students to Make More Informed Choices About College and Careers



## East Baton Rouge Parish School System, La.

Across the country, many parents and students have been influenced by a decades long narrative that the only way to achieve success after high school is to graduate from a traditional four-year university. The East Baton Rouge Parish School System (EBR Schools) in Louisiana is working to change that narrative by introducing students to a wider range of options as they prepare for their futures. According to Ben Necaise, associate superintendent of Workforce Development for EBR Schools, "The hope is that we create opportunities for students where all the doors are still open."

In its commitment to foster future readiness and prepare students to join the local workforce, EBR Schools has implemented many innovative programs and partnerships to support career exploration and readiness. One of its most recent is with [Defined Careers](#), a K-12 college and career readiness platform that provides students with project-based learning (PBL) experiences across more than 500 careers.

## EBR Schools at a Glance

### Mission:

The East Baton Rouge Parish School System will be the cornerstone of the community as a premier educational institution by inspiring, cultivating and producing a modern workforce prepared to create a robust and thriving economy.

40,034 Students

2nd Largest School District in La.



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## Making Informed Decisions to Better Support Students' Futures

EBR Schools began its partnership with Defined Careers in the summer of 2022 after a five-month search by a team of educators and the Talent Action Collaborative (TAC), a partnership between EBR Schools and the Baton Rouge Area Chamber that aims to steer education toward specific industry needs of the region. They chose Defined Careers because it was the only platform they evaluated that comprehensively supports grades K–12 using PBL. The collaborative review committee was also impressed by the breadth of content and how simple it was to map to the district's scope and sequence. Necaise also noted that the insightful data the platform offers is hugely beneficial.

EBR Schools began a soft rollout of Defined Careers in the spring semester of SY 2022–23 for selected schools serving grades 4–12 with the goal of implementing it district wide at the start of SY 2023–24.

With the Defined Careers platform, students create a portfolio that showcases which career-based courses they've taken and highlights their skills and interests. This portfolio provides evidence that will help the teaching team, parents and students hone in on where a student's strengths and interests lie.

"If I'm a parent, teacher, student or anyone who has access to that portfolio, I can now see that the student was given time to explore on their own and they keep coming back to a certain career field," Necaise explained. "Now you have evidence. You're not just guessing where to put a kid or how to best encourage them down a certain pathway. [Using Defined Careers] there's an actual defined progression or curriculum that gives us real data points on what kids want to do. And that's where we're going. We really want to help kids make informed decisions about their futures."

Necaise believes that exploring careers early has the potential to save students thousands of dollars. If students graduate from high school unsure of what career path they want to pursue, they could end up in higher education or training programs that they ultimately drop out of when they discover it's not what they're really interested in. "Many students will have a one-or-two-year stall after they decide on a career. After taking the college classes, they decide, 'Yeah, I can't do this.' Now, they've wasted a year or two in college and a lot of money and have to change majors. Those are decisions that need to happen earlier."



*"There's not a heavy lift when it comes to training teachers to use it. It's very structured, prescribed and easy for teachers to implement in the classrooms."*





## Introducing EBR Students to the Careers of Tomorrow

To help students prepare early for their next steps after graduation, EBR Schools has decided that every student will have two to four hours of career-connected, PBL content each month using Defined Careers. Elementary schools will use Defined Careers a couple of hours a month in whatever way teachers choose to integrate it into their lessons. In middle schools, time in PE may be used to explore careers. And at the high school level, students may be exposed to Defined Careers by a career tech teacher.



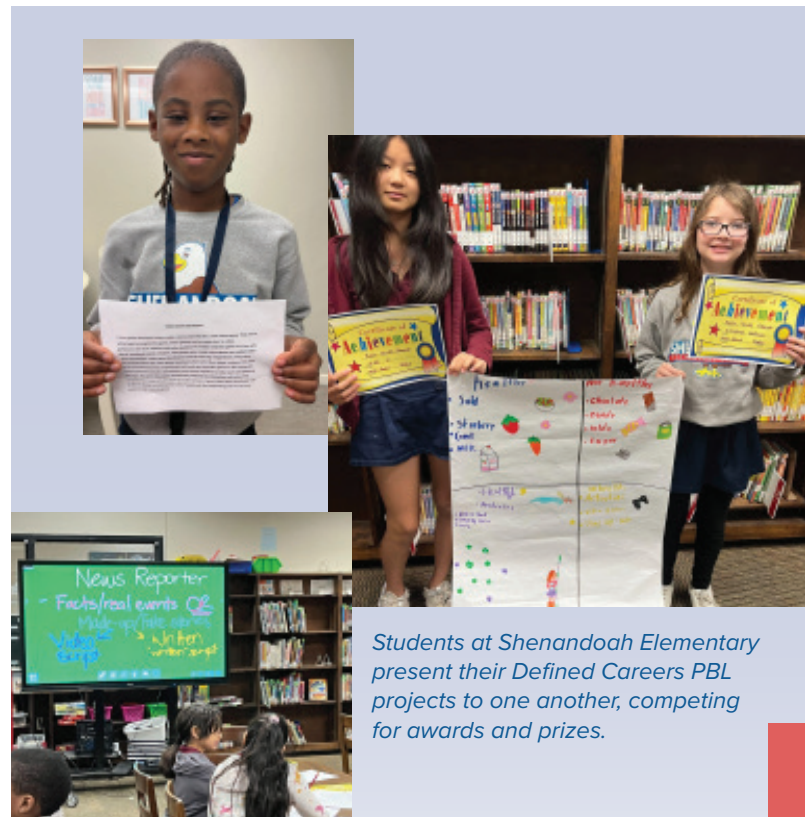
Defined Careers introduces EBR students to the type of industries and careers that are in their region as well as new industries they may not be aware of, such as precision agriculture. Emerging industries like these show students the ins and outs of the job, and it's often not what they think. "You're not a farmer out in the field with a shovel getting dirty," Necaie chuckled. "You're actually monitoring drones and analyzing plants." Think IT, not hard labor.

"Defined Careers gives parents and kids a better understanding of what is real and that connects to salaries and career opportunities and the realization that I can do that work with a credential. I don't need to spend four years in college."

## The Future-Ready Program Educators Have Been Waiting for

Though piloting and implementing a new program district wide is a daunting lift, especially in a district like EBR Schools that also launched new curricula and social-emotional learning (SEL) programs the same year, the first impressions of Defined Careers have been generating excitement.

Teachers who were part of the initial rollout of Defined Careers in spring 2023 were up and running quickly. "There's not a heavy lift when it comes to training teachers to use it. It's very structured, prescribed and easy for teachers to implement in the classrooms." And, according to Necaie, the teachers who have implemented it and are using it, have a lot of buy-in already. "Participating teachers really like it because it allows kids to explore what they're interested in. "They were like, 'Wow! We've been waiting for something like this for a while.'"



*Students at Shenandoah Elementary present their Defined Careers PBL projects to one another, competing for awards and prizes.*