



STEPPING INSIDE THE BLUEPRINT

Students and Counselors Building Stronger Pathways Together

Mountainland Region K-16 Counselor Conference | Session Recap | S. Adams



Student panelists on stage during the session

A Room Full of Blueprints

On a Tuesday March 10th at Utah Valley University, six students climbed onto a stage in front of a room of counselors and advisors from across the Mountainland Region and did something braver than any lesson plan could ask of them: they told the truth about what it feels like to be in the middle of becoming who they're going to be and those that are helping them to get there.

They came from every point along the region's education pathway — Logan Williams and Jayna Sipos, still navigating high school as members of the Mountainland Region Youth Council; Mari Nielson and Rebecca Valladolid, MTECH student ambassadors already building technical skills for the workforce; and Alexa Herrera and Austin Bench, students further down the road at UVU. Different starting points, different destinations — but the same uncertain terrain in between.

As moderator, Stefanie Adams framed the conversation not as an interview, but as an invitation: to treat these students' stories not just as reflections, but as signals — markers of where the region's pathways run clear, and where they still leave students guessing.

Tracing the Journey

The conversation moved through five moments that anyone who has ever changed schools, changed plans, or changed their mind will recognize. It began with direction — the early sparks that told each student they were headed somewhere worthwhile. It moved into transition — the leap from high school into technical college or university, and what made that leap land safely instead of sending them stumbling. It opened into possibility — the paths and programs students often don't know exist until someone points them out. It settled, for a moment, on support — the people, programs, or single conversations that held students steady when things got hard. And it closed with a direct message, student to counselor: one thing every advisor in the room needed to hear.

What came back, in the students' own words, was honest and often vulnerable — the kind of testimony that doesn't get captured in enrollment data or program outcomes, but that explains why those numbers move the way they do.

Why It Mattered for Advisors and Counselors

For the counselors and advisors in the room — spanning both K-12 and postsecondary — the panel did something a keynote rarely can: it put a face and a voice on the systems they spend their careers building. It's one thing to know, abstractly, that transitions are hard on students. It's another to hear it directly from a student sitting a few feet away, describing the exact moment a conversation with an advisor either opened a door or let one quietly close.

The panelists' reflections pointed to a few clear, practical responsibilities that cut across every level of the pipeline:

- Build genuinely safe spaces — students need to feel it's safe to say "I don't know" without judgment before they'll ever say what they actually need.
- Ask deeper questions — go beyond "what's your plan?" to actually understand a student's situation, constraints, and what's already working or not.
- Expand possibilities in conversation — don't wait for students to ask about an option; name it for them, especially the pathways that aren't obvious from where they're standing.
- Stay present through the handoff — the moments students named as most successful were the ones where someone on one side of a transition (high school, tech college, university) stayed engaged long enough to make sure the next person picked up the thread.

What This Means Across the Pipeline

The panel's mix of high school, MTECH, and UVU voices made clear that this isn't one group's job — it's a relay, and the students felt every handoff.

- K-12 counselors are often the first to introduce a student to the idea that more than one path exists — the panel's message was to introduce those options earlier and more concretely, not just at graduation.
- Technical college advisors play a bridging role — MTECH panelists pointed to the value of advisors who translate between a student's high school experience and the technical, workforce-facing world ahead.
- University advisors inherit students mid-story — UVU panelists' reflections underscored how much smoother a transition feels when a postsecondary advisor already has context on where a student is coming from, rather than starting the relationship from zero.

Across all three, the throughline was continuity: students don't experience high school, technical college, and university as separate systems — they experience one long pathway, and they can feel exactly where the seams are.

The Impact Going Forward

The session's real legacy isn't the hour it took — it's the reflection it's likely to spark in counselors' and advisors' offices across the region in the weeks that follow: the extra question asked in an advising appointment, the pause before assuming a student already knows their options, the willingness to sit with a student's uncertainty instead of rushing past it.

That is the promise of "Stepping Inside the Blueprint": that when students are given the floor, and counselors and advisors — at every level, K-12 through postsecondary — are willing to really listen, the pathways connecting these systems get a little clearer, a little more connected, and a little more human for the next student who has to find their own way through.