

## Brandon Lane

Science Curriculum Director

UPrep Academy

As the UPrep Academy Science Curriculum Director, Brandon Lane is an educator who believes that his role is not only to help youth succeed academically, but to play the role of an ethnographer and marketer for manufacturing.

“Our students are looking for something that doesn’t waste their time,” said Lane. “Something that will be meaningful to their lives and their circumstances today.” Demonstrating how manufacturing can positively impact their situations, both professionally and personally, is Lane’s effective approach to getting youth interested in the industry.

But selling manufacturing as a career path for youth has its challenges. Over the years, Lane has had students that are involved in narcotics, and their willingness to change course all depends on their relationship with their family. Some students are raised in that life, while others are sheltered from it.

“For students raised in the game, their father might have a position in the neighborhood, and that ends up being their entire life. Even if they wanted to leave, they can’t,” explained Lane. “But then you have instances where you may have a kid whose family has decided, *although we’re doing this, you can never be a part of it.*” With delicate situations at home like that for youth, getting them focused on the right life trajectory requires more than a slick in-class presentation and a glossy trade publication.

“This is where you have to be an ethnographer,” Lane said. “You have to be willing to go into the community and speak with the parents, and have a very honest

conversation about outcomes, *what do you want for your kid’s life?* And then it’s important to have that conversation with the child as well.”



Speaking with the community is a step that Lane feels is often forgotten in the education system. What the community sometimes wants their kids to learn from school is more nuanced than most educators think. “With schools, our idea of what a child needs is education. We think that they need to have some level of literacy in particular content areas. Great. But sometimes you’ll ask parents, what do you think your kid needs, and they really want you to value their child’s personhood and to be willing to push them, rather than coddle them because of fear or deficit thinking because of the zip code they come from,” explained Lane.

According to him, this conversation with the community may start with finding out what the kids need to learn, but that is only the beginning. The whole education system, including programs like LIFT and their partners, need to be involved in an ongoing dialogue with the community.

“Company or school leaders need to go to churches and rec centers, and they need to go to corner stores. And they need to ask some of these people, even just regular residents, *what does the community need? What do you*

*feel is important to you, on this block?”* described Lane. *“Oh, you need a playground? We have this partner, and we’re going to meet you halfway. Are you willing to come to this? Let’s build the playground together. Go into the community, identify their needs, but don’t do it for them. Do it together.”*

Once a connection is formed between the education system and the community, Lane strongly believes in exposing the kids to life outside of that community. Lane grew up in Philadelphia, where he ran track in high school, and competed all over the East Coast. Seeing different places was eye opening for him, and gave him ideas for what he wanted to do with his life. Lane believes the same can work with youth today when guiding them towards manufacturing.

“We have a travel abroad program. We took our kids to Europe, and they saw something. That’s the tipping point,” Lane explained. “That’s that critical point where you could probably pour in something, and they’re changed forever.”