



One in a series for Redesigning Education and Workforce Systems

## ▶ Accelerated and Efficient Pathways to Postsecondary Credentials With Labor Market Value

### Why it Matters

The pandemic-driven economic downturn has raised the stakes on the nation's college access and completion problem. Even though credential attainment rates have improved, many Americans are not making it into or through postsecondary education and training experiences—despite their best intentions and strong evidence that they need advanced skills and credentials to succeed economically.

With vast numbers of U.S. households currently experiencing unemployment and financial insecurity, students and workers need coherent lifelong learning pathways that offer affordable and quick options for attaining postsecondary credentials and skills. This is true not only for high school students, but also for the 4.4 million young adults who are disconnected from education and employment, millions of adults without a high school diploma, and people with some postsecondary studies but no degree.

Well-designed pathways include multiple entry points to ensure access for all learners, evidence-based approaches to accelerating completion, skills development and certificate programs that meet labor market demand, and counseling and wraparound supports. Because nearly 40 percent of postsecondary students transfer, we need coherent multiyear programs of study that

integrate K-12 education, adult learning programs, and postsecondary education, to help learners make informed decisions about which courses to take.

### Current Challenges

- College in high school programs are becoming increasingly common, but they can be challenging for students to understand which courses to take along a pathway and ensure equitable and affordable access for underserved populations.
- Most colleges place students deemed not college ready into remedial classes, despite extensive evidence that accelerated models, like those involving multiple measures of assessment and co-requisite remediation, yield higher student completion rates.
- A 2017 study estimated that a lack of alignment and coordination across institutions caused transfer students to lose 43 percent of their credits. And many students earn excess credits at a single institution, indicating that there's a lack of support and structure in the process of choosing courses.
- Barriers facing prospective adult students include self-doubt, work demands, inflexible course schedules, and limited access to technology—demonstrating the need for on-ramps, advising services, and acceleration opportunities into and through programs.

## What's Needed

Accelerated and efficient pathways that provide all learners, especially members of underserved and underrepresented populations, with opportunities to acquire skills and credentials that are valued in the labor market.

## What State Policymakers Can Do

### **Foundational Steps**

- ▶ Establish statewide goals for postsecondary credential attainment that include equity targets—broken down by credential type—paying close attention to student experiences at transition points between high school, community college, four-year institutions, and careers. Track and publicly report data on targets, including disaggregated data by student demographics, programs of study, early college experiences, time to degree, and labor market outcomes.

### **Advanced Steps**

- ▶ Provide technical assistance to state leaders in mapping pathways across K-12 systems, community colleges, four-year institutions, and the workforce to ensure that people can obtain the knowledge and skills they need to achieve their education and career goals. Ensure that pathways include work-relevant experiences and allow short-term certificates and degrees to be stacked into long-range degree pathways. Strategies that foster cross-system coordination include aligning secondary and postsecondary curricula and programs of study, articulation and transfer agreements across postsecondary institutions, and acceleration strategies such as dual enrollment.
- ▶ Establish incentives for the creation and expansion of on- and off-ramps that enable all learners—regardless of age and prior education and work experience—to access and persist along postsecondary pathways and obtain credentials. On- and off-ramps include integrated education and training models (such as IBEST in Washington) and co-requisite remediation opportunities. States should also create incentives for the use of success coaches to help young adults, incumbent workers, and adults without a high school or postsecondary degree persist in their educations and build skills for lifelong career success.

### **Transformational Steps**

- ▶ Pass state legislation establishing shared accountability and aligned incentives across youth programs, K-12 education, adult learning programs, and higher education to foster unified college and career readiness standards and co-development of pathways to and through institutions. The legislation should encourage programs for out-of-school youth, state education systems, and workforce agencies to coordinate with employers to develop college and career pathways, including models that include integrated learning and stackable credentials and offer multiple on-ramps to accelerated education or training, college, and careers.

## State Spotlights

### Florida

Legislation passed in 2013 reformed Florida's developmental education offerings. The law eliminated a rule requiring students to take college placement tests or enroll in developmental coursework, and instead permitted co-requisite alternatives that allow students to move on to college-level courses while still receiving academic supports in certain areas. It also enhanced advising services. Studies have found that these reforms helped close equity gaps and increase enrollment in college-level coursework among Black and Hispanic students.



### Illinois

With the 2016 passage of the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act, Illinois adopted a competency-based approach to helping students prepare for college and careers. That approach involves four strategies, including the adoption of the Postsecondary and Career Expectations framework, which provides students, families, and educators with guidelines about the types of experiences, knowledge, and information that students need to make informed decisions about college and careers, starting as early as the eighth grade.



### Minnesota

Minnesota ranks third in the nation for postsecondary degree attainment, but a closer look at the data reveals persistent and troubling racial disparities in degree completion rates. To close the gaps, in 2015 state lawmakers enacted legislation establishing the Educational Attainment Goal 2025, which calls for 70 percent of Minnesotans ages 25-44 in every racial group to hold a postsecondary certificate or degree by 2025. Minnesota's Office of Higher Education reports on progress toward the goal and disaggregates data by race and age.



## Featured JFF Resources

### Unlocking Potential: A State Policy Roadmap for Equity and Quality in College in High School Programs.

This report offers guidelines for designing state policies that improve the accessibility, equity, and quality of college in high school programs.

[Learn More Here](#) ▶

### How Adult Learners Can Accelerate a Path to Economic Advancement.

This blog discusses the success of Accelerating Opportunity, a national initiative to increase the number of adults with postsecondary credentials.

[Learn More Here](#) ▶

### Making College Work for Students and the Economy.

This report outlines JFF's comprehensive policy agenda for increasing attainment of in-demand postsecondary credentials and analyzes the extent to which our recommended policies have taken hold in a representative sample of states.

[Learn More Here](#) ▶

### **State Policy Road Map for an Equitable Economic Recovery**

*This resource is a part of a series that provides state policy solutions focused on people, places, and systems – with the goal of closing equity gaps and driving economic advancement for all.* [Read Full Series](#) ▶

