

# PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

## ILLINOIS ASSET MAPPING PROJECT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY NETWORK REPORT  
DECEMBER 2012

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF  
PREPARING YOUNG AMERICANS



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE



HARVARD  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

In 2011, the Pathways to Prosperity Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education released a report, *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*, challenging our excessive focus on the four-year college pathway. The report presented the need to create additional pathways that combine rigorous academics with strong technical education to equip the majority of young people with the skills and credentials to succeed in our increasingly challenging labor market. A group of committed Aurora leaders in business and education along with their State of Illinois partners have risen to that challenge and engaged Jobs for the Future and the Harvard Graduate School of Education to assess their readiness and help to pursue opportunities for collective action.

### STATE ASSETS AND CHALLENGES

Three years of state planning and investment in the Illinois Pathways to Prosperity initiative have led to a solid, thoughtfully designed foundation for launching partnerships for regional pathways. Backing up the state initiative are commitments from the governor and influential business leaders who have now attracted and aligned significant resources for implementation through elements of the state's \$42.8 million Race to the Top award.

A cornerstone of the state's strategy is public-private working groups designed to scale up P-20 programs of study and nine Learning Exchanges that will support high-demand industries in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) industry clusters. The working groups and Learning Exchanges serve as state-level organizing tools to better coordinate investments around industry and student needs, building out critical resources for STEM programs of study and model P-20 programs.

Applying the state's considerable assets locally will require clarifying state and local intermediary roles, coordinating state-level and regional employer relationships, and developing regional intermediary capacity with an eye toward replication in additional sites. Roles for direct interaction among employers, students, and school and postsecondary staff will need the most immediate clarification and coordination between the state and regional levels.

Long-term sustainability is also a challenge since the time-limited Race to the Top funding will be instrumental in supporting state and

local leaders as they begin to implement Pathways to Prosperity models. State and local leaders will need to identify sustainable funding to support local institutions and pathways initiatives that serve public and private ends.

### LABOR MARKET OVERVIEW: DUPAGE, KANE, KENDALL, AND WILL COUNTIES

While the larger Chicago regional economy deeply affects DuPage, Kane, Kendall, and Will counties, as a group they have their own mix of industry dynamics. In these four target counties, the largest industries are retail trade, government, health care and social assistance, and manufacturing, each employing over 100,000 people.

These industries are followed by administrative support; professional, scientific, and technical services; and finance and insurance, all of which the BLS predicts to have rapid growth over the next decade. Along with health care and social assistance, each of these relatively large industries is predicted to have over 20 percent employment growth by 2022. Notably, these growth industries share important cross-cutting IT functions that will likely make IT skills increasingly important across a variety of occupations. Also, some careers within rapidly growing categories offer low wages and only limited career paths, while others offer much better career prospects.

County Areas: DuPage, Illinois (17043), Kane, Illinois (17089), Kendall, Illinois (17093), Will, Illinois (17197)

## INDUSTRIES RANKED BY JOB POSTINGS, DUPAGE, KANE, KENDALL, AND WILL COUNTIES

DESCRIPTION	2012 JOBS	2022 JOBS	% CHANGE	2012 EARNINGS	2011 ESTABLISHMENTS	JOB POSTINGS 9/1/11-8/31/12
Health Care and Social Assistance	121,330	151,202	25%	\$53,848	5,266	15,168
Manufacturing	111,312	101,425	(9%)	\$74,804	3,876	9,780
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	99,758	120,781	21%	\$71,464	10,083	8,964
Retail Trade	128,212	132,712	4%	\$31,874	6,135	7,863
Finance and Insurance	87,733	110,247	26%	\$59,254	3,712	7,488
Admin Support, Waste Mgmt and Remediation	101,082	122,629	21%	\$36,586	4,184	4,726
Transportation and Warehousing	52,130	60,916	17%	\$54,085	3,057	4,233
Educational Services (Private)	30,683	36,418	19%	\$36,281	822	4,200
Accommodation and Food Services	76,792	88,713	16%	\$19,872	4,070	4,160
Information	19,886	20,696	4%	\$72,379	938	2,303

Source: EMS/, Burning Glass Labor Insight

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## TARGETING IT, HEALTH CARE, AND MANUFACTURING

This assessment highlights Aurora's career opportunities in health care and manufacturing as industries, and in IT as a set of occupations that are central to many industries. Based on job-postings data, IT occupations are in large demand for the area's professional, scientific, and technical services industry, but they are also in large demand in manufacturing, health care, and other sectors. Beyond this data, Aurora's public and private resources and momentum around IT careers also help make IT pathways a prominent candidate for development. It could add an important pathway option next to existing school initiatives in health care and manufacturing.

## AURORA'S OVERALL ASSETS AND CHALLENGES

The Aurora region benefits from a core group of leaders who are actively driving collaboration across the stakeholder groups critical to a comprehensive Pathways to Prosperity initiative. This group, originally convened by Aurora Mayor Tom Weisner to address student workforce readiness, includes the top leaders or designees of the West Aurora School District, Waubensee Community College, the Aurora Regional Chamber of Commerce, and other public agencies and school districts in the City of Aurora, as well as one of the region's state representatives, Linda Chapa LaVia, who plays a leadership role for education in the Illinois General Assembly. This team has built significant public will and high expectations for the Aurora Pathways to Prosperity initiative.

In addition to the core Pathways to Prosperity team, there are several precedents for collaboration between K-12 and postsecondary institutions in the region. Waubensee Community College, Aurora University, the College of DuPage, and Northern Illinois University also have strong programs that currently do, or could support pathways. Aurora University's partnership with four school districts in a planned John C. Dunham STEM Partnership School is an example of an innovative design with a strong bipartisan commitment to overcoming K-12/postsecondary divides.

The region faces a challenge in setting priorities for and sequencing initiatives in the IT, health care and manufacturing industry sectors under consideration. Aurora will need to weigh the region's capacity to implement new, high-quality initiatives on tight timeframes against the advantages of immediately enlisting business partners across multiple sectors and offering more choices to students. An additional overall challenge will be designing initiatives that match needs and resources across four different school districts and counties.

## INTERMEDIARIES

Several institutions could perform intermediary functions in Aurora, but roles would have to be defined and distributed and capacity built. As one foundation interviewee noted, "Someone has to make this their day job" in order to execute the complex Pathways to Prosperity functions, which require a variety of skills and relationships. There will also be a need for focus to make a high level of coordination possible. The foundation's recognition of need and its interest in considering support of a dedicated intermediary leader is an important asset, giving Aurora the ability to consider a variety of strategies. In addition, the state can provide support and the mayor of Aurora has lent important leadership.

The next ingredient needed is a clear commitment from and coordination among employers. This is likely to come in the form of sectoral partnerships for specific regional career pathways and a thoughtful strategy for implementation. Because Aurora's interests are in IT, advanced manufacturing, and health care, the region will need to consider strategies for developing intermediary capacity to serve those markets.

Incongruous school, county, and city borders set up special challenges for the Aurora region. The fact that the city and its school districts, including the community colleges, cut across multiple counties, and that regional education boundaries and technical centers are not centered in the city, make it more difficult to identify intermediaries that can serve (and be supported by) the

various jurisdictions. Given the jurisdictional challenges, it could be beneficial to establish a new Aurora regional intermediary in order to facilitate the buy-in of multiple stakeholders across jurisdictions. A new organization could be modeled after groups, such as the Boston Compact for schools or the Alignment Nashville framework that Aurora leaders have been reviewing.

For the intermediary design, it is also critical that regional employers have some “skin in the game”: this means not only contributing financially but also being ready and willing to train young people for their labor needs. Finding the right mix of public dollars and employer contribution supporting career pathways is a challenge, but employers say they are motivated to work with young people for two reasons: They need trained and skilled workers and they want to help build a healthy regional economy.

## EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Overall, employers in the region demonstrate a combination of interests in Pathways efforts: an altruistic interest in supporting local youth and a self-interest in filling urgent workforce needs in manufacturing and other industries. At the same time, some employers are skeptical about whether young people want hands-on skills and also about whether schools are providing their graduates with the strong leadership qualities required by employers.

The Valley Industrial Association, one of the region's associations primarily representing northeastern Illinois manufacturers, understands the challenges inherent in building student interest in manufacturing and starting appropriate skills training early enough.

VIA has experience and a vested interest in playing intermediary roles in connection with employer convening and work-based learning. It also has the support of the statewide Illinois Manufacturers' Association, which is the lead entity for the Manufacturing STEM Learning Exchange.

Like the Illinois Manufacturers' Association in manufacturing, CompTIA, the lead entity for the IT STEM Learning Exchange at the state level, will be an important asset at the Aurora regional level. Yet Aurora will need to organize local employers for this sector. The city and the Aurora Chamber have helped convene IT sector employers and IT employers. The IT employer group is new and concerned with issues beyond workforce and education. As such, Aurora will need to explore how that group might support IT career pathway development.

In health care, West Aurora High School, Waubensee Community College, and several other institutions have developed programs to prepare students for health care careers. More dialogue with health care employers is needed to improve and coordinate among those programs and develop efficient systems for work-based learning.

Aurora's mayor has organized a Business Roundtable that is convening leadership across sectors around several economic development priorities, including workforce development. The leadership of the Workforce Development Team includes the Aurora Chamber, with representation from the City of Aurora, Waubensee Community College, VIA, and others. Currently the team's work

centers on three priorities: inventory existing regional/local programs available through postsecondary education institutions; initiate Aurora Regional Pathways to Prosperity with the completion of the research; and increase parent and counselor participation in the Manufacturing Career Awareness Fair.

Another working group of the Mayor's Business Roundtable is the Technology Task Force, which consists of public and private partners with expertise in a variety of technology areas, including software, networks, data, and strategy. This group has recently launched a new independent, not-for-profit organization to provide non-municipal access to Aurora's robust fiber optic network. This effort will give educational institutions the opportunity to collaborate and gain high-speed access to Internet resources and technology solutions that are now limited by bandwidth cost.

## 9-14 (AND 6-20) PATHWAYS

While all seven of the public and private postsecondary institutions in Aurora provide some career-oriented degrees and certifications, three appear to be the most engaged with the school districts to create career pathways: Waubensee Community College, the College of DuPage, and Aurora University. All four of Aurora's school districts also have valuable assets that could contribute to the region's Pathways to Prosperity project. Dual enrollment programs are in place between all of the region's schools and Waubensee Community College or College of DuPage.

Waubensee Community College's geography and partnerships with the districts in three of the counties, as well as its strategic links to other Aurora community leaders, make it central to planning a Pathways to Prosperity effort. Waubensee has played a convening role with the school districts in other ways and has long-term relationships with the region's Chambers of Commerce, economic developers, the local Workforce Investment Board, and the Valley Industrial Association.

In the eastern part of the region, the College of DuPage, the state's largest community college, has valuable expertise and resources, as demonstrated through its partnerships and dual-credit programs with the Indian Prairie School District 204. IT industry partners report that the College of DuPage also has an outstanding IT department and that it emphasizes industry credentials and builds its curriculum around many of the IT credentials most desired by employers.

Aurora University has 2+2 programs that connect community college students to four year degrees, and 40 percent of its 1,000 students come from Waubensee Community College. At the K-12 level, the university's partnership with the four school districts in a planned STEM partnership school sets a precedent for collaboration, while also highlighting a need for sequencing programs for 9-12 graders.

Some CTE teachers and counselors participate in employer-based externships through the VALEES program. Teachers and counselors become familiar with modern workplaces and the knowledge and skills students need in order to succeed in them. The chamber, employers, and foundations are interested in supporting a greater array of teacher externships.

A key challenge, common across the country, is that CTE has been largely dismantled over the last decade in comprehensive high schools that have focused on teaching to and raising scores on standardized tests. CTE offerings in comprehensive high schools appear to be uneven. There are excellent programs—health care at West Aurora, for example—but other programs at the same school are outdated, and the CTE director reports that the IT curriculum must be more comprehensive. While CTE courses are available in the region, Aurora’s regional CTE centers—Fox Valley and Indian Valley—are a long commute from schools.

## CAREER ADVISING

The Aurora region has several pockets of strength when it comes to exposing young people to the world of work. Some schools offer very popular career days, and employers, high schools, and postsecondary institutions collaborate to organize job fairs. Others schools highlight and assess workforce readiness skills or use prepackaged software for guidance. And the State makes guidance tools available through the STEM Pathways Learning Exchanges and counseling websites.

At the same time, it is not clear that there are systemic commitments to a sequence of advising activities and scaffolding to connect career information to experiences in the workplace. And despite increasing outreach to parents, many of them know little about the options and careers for their children’s futures, and tend to think that white-collar jobs are the only route to success. Many parents do not know about opportunities for or the conditions of careers in manufacturing, for example, while others do not regard postsecondary credentials as necessary or as a possible option for their children.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND KEY QUESTIONS FOR PLANNING

Planning for and investing in Pathways to Prosperity in Illinois, the energetic leadership of Aurora’s core Pathways team, and the wide community and employer support for the initiative indicate strong potential for implementing an exemplary model in the region. The Aurora team is positioned to address important community challenges and create a model with lessons for replication across the state. That team has begun intermediary structure design, regional employer research, audits of high school and postsecondary pathway course offerings, public relations planning, evaluation frameworks, policy reviews, and next steps to develop IT, health care, and advanced manufacturing career pathways. With this

extensive activity planned or underway, the asset-mapping team identified four types of key question to address.

## INTERMEDIARY LEADERSHIP

- > What organizations or individuals could lead regional implementation of the initiative? What capacity and support would they have to coordinate the four elements of the Pathways model?
- > How should the regional intermediary and state-level Learning Exchanges define and coordinate their roles, particularly for employer engagement?

## SCALE

- > What scale of initiative is the Aurora region prepared to create? How many industries, schools, and young people should it prepare and for what jobs?
- > How should the team define the region for its initial planning? How should employers who are outside or not beholden to the participating jurisdictions be included in planning and in offering opportunities for students?

## INDUSTRY TARGETS AND ORGANIZING

- > How should the community leadership prioritize implementation steps among its targeted IT, health care and manufacturing pathways? How should their employer leadership be organized?
- > What employer leadership could be organized for the IT pathway? How should pathway planning extend beyond IT industry firms themselves to incorporate and address the many opportunities in other industries?
- > Could the city’s proposed Tech Center act as an incubator, linking community and youth IT training with existing and hoped for IT business and job growth?

## PUBLIC RELATIONS AND POLICY

- > How might the region use its widely engaged community leadership in a campaign to change public perceptions of regional career opportunities?
- > How could legislative support and public sector leadership help the region create employer incentives and encourage secondary-postsecondary collaboration?
- > What performance measures will be used to monitor progress and give institutions valuable feedback to improve educational and career outcomes?

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**Jobs for the Future** works with our partners to design and drive adoption of education and career pathways leading from college readiness to career advancement for those struggling to succeed in today’s economy.



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