



# **The Policy Leadership Trust for Student Success**

Overview of the State Policy Framework

# CALL TO ACTION: PRACTITIONER-INFORMED POLICY

After a decade of college completion reform, compelling evidence has emerged on what works to help more students persist and succeed. Leading community colleges, state systems, and policy, research, and advocacy organizations have shifted from piloting isolated interventions to designing and implementing unified, connected solutions. They have embraced guided pathways as a coherent approach to achieving institutional transformation. As one of the leading pathway initiatives nationally, the American Association of Community Colleges Pathways Project describes guided pathways in the following way:

The Pathways Model is an *integrated, institution-wide* approach to student success based on intentionally designed, clear, coherent and structured educational experiences, informed by available evidence, that guide each student effectively and efficiently from her/his point of entry through to attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials and careers with value in the labor market.

Policymakers are beginning to take notice, resulting in a flurry of legislative proposals to codify reform efforts. In this period of rapid innovation and transformation, the question remains, “how can policy *help* institutions and state systems in their efforts to scale guided pathways and improve student success?”

Convened by Jobs for the Future (JFF), the Policy Leadership Trust for Student Success (the Trust) culls institutional knowledge and evidence to inform federal and state policy solutions for improving college completion rates and accelerating the achievement and career advancement of community college students, especially those who are low-income or underserved.

Intentionally designed to bring together professional staff in system offices and higher education agencies with college leaders, The Trust seeks to insert the experiences of practitioners into state and federal policy discussions, where their perspectives are often missing.

The Trust develops state and federal policy recommendations and advocates for adoption of these recommendations through (1) strategic outreach to state and federal policymakers, (2) consultation with member states of JFF’s Postsecondary State Policy Network, (3) dialog with the field of practitioners, and (4) thought leadership through the media.

# EIGHT DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD POLICY

In 2017, JFF embarked on a listening tour to gather the perspectives of Trust members on how state policy can *help* support institutions scale guided pathways and improve student success. Several common themes emerged through the listening tour, reflected in the following set of policy design principles and major elements of the state policy framework.

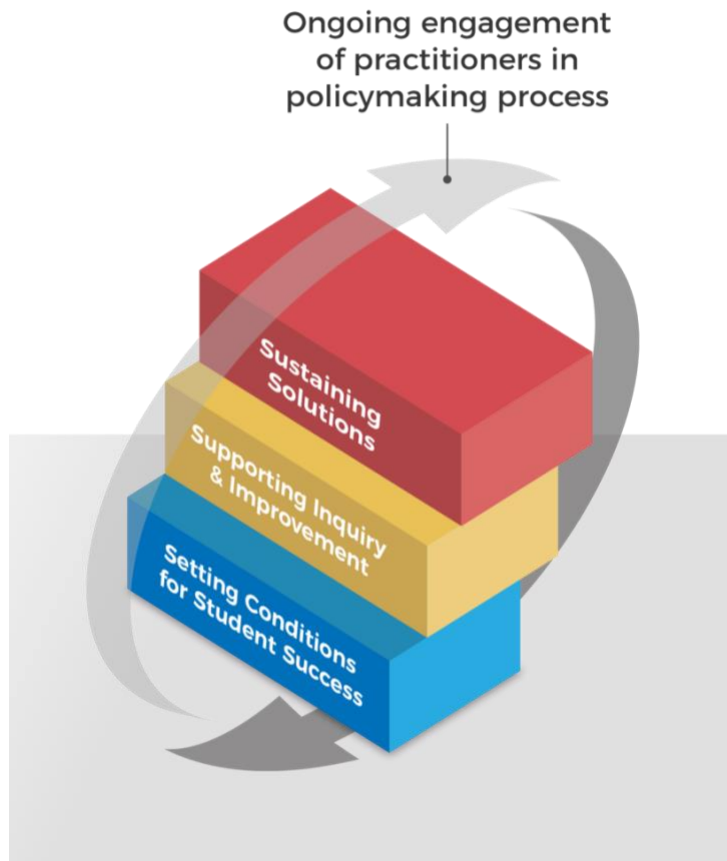
The following eight design principles underlie the Trust's thinking on the role of policy in supporting institutions and state systems in their efforts to scale guided pathways and improve student success.

1. There are **no silver bullets**. No single policy intervention will move the needle.
2. State **context matters** when designing policy
  - Political landscape
  - Priorities
  - Governance
  - Capacity
  - Collaboration
  - Current and past reforms
3. Policy should **flow from practice**. Not the inverse.
4. Policy is most likely to be implemented with fidelity when practitioners have informed the policy process and have a **sense of ownership**.
5. Good policy creates **incentives** and structures to catalyze change within institutions and among systems.
6. Good policy **respects the autonomy** of institutions over academic and student affairs.
7. Good policy **does not prescribe rigid implementation** of practices and models.
8. **High-level directives can be useful** at times in steering the direction of reform, deepening commitment, overcoming resistance, and creating leverage.

# STATE POLICY FRAMEWORK

Building upon these policy design principles, the Trust has crafted a framework for how state policy can catalyze systems change, improve student success, and build a postsecondary-trained workforce. The framework emphasizes the role of state policymakers in creating the conditions, incentives, and structures needed to foster clear pathways to credentials and careers for students and to ensure their financial stability to achieve their goals. This suggests that, first and foremost, policymakers should focus on policy issues related to metrics, money, and systems integration, rather than on prescribing specific academic and student affair practices.

Moreover, the framework suggests a strong role for policymakers in enhancing state and institutional capacity to identify key barriers to student success and to implement key solutions related to guided pathways. And, the framework recognizes that codifying practice into policy may ultimately be useful after institutions and state systems have sufficiently scaled reforms and proven their impact. Doing so would help to sustain and scale momentum.



Below is an outline of the major levers of the state policy framework.

## Setting Conditions For Student Success

- **Establish meaningful metrics** for increasing attainment rates of credentials of value, for ensuring equity and economic mobility of low-income and under-served students, and for building a skilled workforce.
- **Provide adequate resources and appropriate incentives** for institutions and systems to transform practices and help more students achieve their education and career goals.
- **Forge alignment across secondary and postsecondary systems** to make seamless and affordable guided pathways to credentials and high-demand careers for all students. Streamline paths from high school and adult education through associate and baccalaureate degree completion in students' desired program of study.
- **Foster collaboration between postsecondary and human services systems** to maximize access and coordination of wrap-around services, financial supports, and public benefits to bolster the financial stability of students and alleviate their financial hurdles to completion and career success.
- **Deepen responsiveness to business and industry needs** through meaningful engagement of employers in curricular decisions and in widening access to work-based learning opportunities to ensure students have the skills and experiences for work.

## Supporting Inquiry And Improvement

- **Enhance data systems** to encourage a culture of inquiry in which institutions and systems apply data to identify barriers to student success and drive their decision-making on implementation of sound practices. Establish/enhance state-level longitudinal data systems to track student progress across K-12, workforce, and higher education systems and institutions.
- **Invest in institutional capacity** to implement evidence-based reforms by defraying upfront costs of implementing guided pathway practices, enhancing professional development of faculty and staff in support of student success efforts, and strengthening institutional capacity for data analysis and use of technology.
- **Build statewide infrastructure for scale** by developing state-level capacity to convene institutions to facilitate peer exchange and deliver expert consultation regarding evidence-based student success practices, and to inform practitioners about the implications and opportunities of adopted policies.
- **Remove policy barriers** to implementing guided pathway practices by providing institutions with flexibility to experiment with implementing evidence-based practices.

## Sustaining Solutions

- **Evaluate** efficacy and viability of scaling reforms before codifying into policy.
- **Provide formal opportunities** for practitioners to inform policy design and rule making.

# CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE TRUST

## Co-Chairs

- Scott Ralls, Northern Virginia Community College
- Marcia Ballinger, Lorain County Community College

## Members

- Julie Alexander, Miami Dade College
- Michael Baston, Rockland Community College
- Lisa Chapman, North Carolina Community College System
- Tamara Clunis, Amarillo College
- Tristan Denley, University System of Georgia
- Johanna Duncan-Poitier, State University of New York
- Leigh Goodson, Tulsa Community College
- Maria Harper-Marinick, Maricopa Community Colleges
- David Harrison, Columbus State Community College
- Maria Hesse, Arizona State University
- Jack Hershey, Ohio Association of Community Colleges
- Jon Kerr, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
- Kenneth Klucznik, Connecticut State Colleges & Universities
- Michel Leach, Arkansas Community Colleges
- Sharon Morrissey, Virginia Community College System
- Camille Preus, Blue Mountain Community College
- Peter Quigley, University of Hawai'i Community Colleges
- Richard Rhodes, Austin Community College District
- Mary Rittling, Davidson County Community College
- Karen Stout, Achieving the Dream

- Randy VanWagoner, Mohawk Valley Community College
- Tonjua Williams, St. Petersburg College
- Jan Yoshiwara, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges



# FOR MORE INFORMATION

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