

# STATE STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINING AND SCALING GRADES 9-14 CAREER PATHWAYS

## POLICY BRIEF



The Pathways to Prosperity Network has identified key policy actions that can facilitate the expansion and success of state initiatives to increase career and postsecondary options for young people. These policy actions, organized around the five key levers for implementation of the Pathways to Prosperity framework, are applicable to any state:

- 1. Enabling state policies** (e.g., dual enrollment policies, sustainable funding, and financial incentives) and a high-visibility, state-level stakeholder group whose members support the regional work as public spokespeople and champions
- 2. Grades 9-14 career pathways with clear structures, timelines, costs, and requirements** linking and integrating high school and community college curricula and aligning both with labor market needs
- 3. An early and sustained career information and advising system** strong enough to help students and families make informed choices about education and careers
- 4. Employer engagement leading to work-based learning** and support for the transition of young people into the labor market
- 5. Regional intermediary organizations** linking educational institutions and employers and serving as conveners, brokers, and providers of services needed to build pathways

## SUPPORTIVE STATE POLICIES

### > Organize a cross-agency state leadership team that will guide and implement the vision for the Pathways work.

The K-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems were not set up to partner in the ways necessary to support work-based learning and the development of grades 9-14 pathways, so a leadership team that cuts across sectors is needed to lead the collaborative efforts necessary for success.

State-level teams should include representatives from state agencies responsible for economic development, commerce, workforce and labor, and K-12 and higher education, along with nonprofit and industry sector leaders.

- ### > Jumpstart regional initiatives by providing initial investments in 9-14 career pathways and encouraging better coordination of resources across state agencies to provide funding for scale up of pathways.
- Because funding streams across labor and education are not compatible, local communities need permission to use state funding flexibly to build programs and fund the infrastructure required for scale up. Some pathways initiatives have worked around these problems by appropriating a pool of state resources and requiring schools, colleges, and workforce development agencies to apply collectively for these funds. A competitive regional pathways initiative can require agencies to braid funds. A waiver process can also be used to provide resources. Funding the planning and start up for pathways efforts is an investment that can catalyze a cross-sectoral approach to pathways.

## 9-14 CAREER PATHWAYS

- > **Build pathways to careers through policies that connect and align high schools with community and technical colleges and industry certification programs in growing sectors of the economy.** Pathways states are generally concentrating on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields such as information technology, health care, and advanced manufacturing. MOUs between secondary and postsecondary partners are essential to ensuring that there are spaces reserved and supports accessible for younger students at technical and community colleges. Policies must enable the movement of students, funding, and credits across secondary and postsecondary institutions and systems.
- > **Support acceleration of learning through dual enrollment/dual credit so that more high school students, particularly disadvantaged students, can graduate from high school while making progress toward postsecondary degrees.** States should allow high school students to take college courses free of tuition and other charges, and allow both districts and postsecondary institutions to claim per-pupil funding allocations to support the cost of offering dual credit. State policies should encourage high schools and colleges to offer college courses that count for both high school graduation and postsecondary requirements in technical programs of study and general education. States also should broaden eligibility requirements to permit students to participate in credit-bearing, college-level courses based on proficiency in those subjects even if they are not proficient in others. Student eligibility should also be determined by a combination of tests, end-of-course grades, teacher recommendations, and students' work portfolios.
- > **Better integrate academic and career and technical education (CTE) programs, and elevate the profile of these programs as a means to develop crucial STEM skills.** To bolster career readiness for all students and counteract the stigma associated with CTE programs, states have created dynamic clusters of courses in growth fields, such as IT, advanced manufacturing, biotech, and other STEM areas. These efforts should be complemented by policies that provide endorsements and honors options that make CTE attainment equal to earning AP or IB credit. To further leverage the value and importance of CTE, states must ensure integration of technical and college preparatory courses, enabling all students to meet college preparatory-

level high school graduation requirements. Articulation agreements should form the basis for a connected, non-duplicative sequence of courses from high school through technical and community college. Some states have leveraged federal Perkins funds to design and require programs of study linking academic and career education across grades 9-14.

## CAREER INFORMATION AND ADVISING SYSTEMS

- > **Establish more robust career information and advising systems linking online resources and appropriate counseling from teachers, mentors, and others.** States should support and provide funding and resources for counseling and career preparation activities in all schools. All students, no matter their goals for postsecondary education, need opportunities to develop career awareness and acquire information about the world of work. States and districts are increasingly buying and building online career information platforms; results are best when such electronic resources supplement the work done by counselors and teachers in-person, both in classrooms and through activities, such as field trips and other community opportunities, outside of school.
- > **Utilize student learning plans to stretch students' aspirations, taking into account their academic pursuits and the development of metacognitive qualities that promote confidence.** Student learning plans can serve as building blocks for career preparation, but should not be mandated without adequate state and local resources. Student learning plans can be used to help individual students to articulate their goals for college and career and to construct meaningful life plans if students have opportunities to update the plans regularly and to discuss their evolving interests with knowledgeable adults.

## WORK-BASED LEARNING AND EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

- > **Develop policies that incentivize employer engagement and work-based learning.** States should explore incentives that encourage businesses to get involved in pathways efforts and provide all students enrolled in a career pathway an opportunity to participate in work-based learning, including job shadowing, paid or unpaid internships, virtual

and group experiences, and paid part-time and/or summer employment. There are several available avenues through which states can incentivize employer engagement, including direct subsidies, tax credits, and training levies. Incentives could also include targeted federal work-study funding, including paid internships as a business requirement in vendor contracts, and providing low- or no-cost training to current employees in return for opening up student internships.

- > **Develop policies that embed work-based learning in the curriculum.** Current policies around work-based learning generally make it an option, rather than a requirement, but several policies and structures could be put in place that would expand the number of young people who participate in work-based learning. These include expanded learning time, credit for work-based learning, inclusion of work-based learning in well-designed systems of career development education, teacher externship opportunities, and the provision of endorsements, honors, or “seals” for technical education courses that incorporate work-based learning.

## INTERMEDIARIES

- > **Provide state support to build or strengthen intermediary organizations needed to carry out pathways development.** While the structure of intermediaries may vary considerably based on regional needs, the work of intermediaries in carrying out career education includes two broad sets of functions. First, intermediaries guide and sustain the vision for pathways work in a region and they convene key stakeholders. Second, intermediaries support the development and implementation of career education and work-based learning opportunities. State-level support for intermediaries is a necessary component of sustainable models of career pathways. States can provide this support through several possible avenues, including directing additional resources to Workforce Investment Boards that are carrying out intermediary functions or making use of federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Perkins funds to support intermediaries focused on work-based learning. Discretionary grants can also take into account the role of funded interm.

The **Pathways to Prosperity Network**, a collaboration of states, Jobs for the Future, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education, seeks to ensure that many more youth complete high school and attain a postsecondary credential with currency in the labor market. Each participating state is engaging educators and employers in building a system of grades 9-14 career pathways, combining high school and community college. Such pathways are intended to launch young people into initial careers, while leaving open the prospect of further education.

State and regional stakeholders together lead the work in each Pathways to Prosperity state, focusing initially on two or three regional labor markets. The long-term goal is to create statewide systems of career pathways that serve most students. Key sectors of the economy identified for pathways building across the states include information technology, health care, and advanced manufacturing.

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

For the full report, go to <http://www.jff.org/publications/state-strategies-sustaining-and-scaling-grades-9-14-career-pathways-toward-policy-set>



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