

Career Pathways and Industry Certification Programs

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College-ready and career-ready, terms often used synonymously, require distinctly different modes to achieve postsecondary success. While four-year-college-bound students will need to focus on advanced academic course work, students not enrolling in college must acquire different skills and knowledge to achieve career and industry readiness. Students planning to attend community college or enter the workforce directly from high school will need technical instruction and work experience that result in industry designed and recognized credentials along with a high school diploma. Regardless of the path they choose, all students should master essential deeper learning skills, such as the abilities to collaborate, communicate effectively, think critically, and solve complex problems, and meet a high school exit standard that is sufficiently high to enable future success.

Delaware Pathways

Delaware Pathways is a private-public partnership linking education and workforce development opportunities. Supported by the Pathways for Prosperity¹ network, the program integrates the state's labor market needs into academic instruction. The initiative, available to roughly 5,800 students in thirty-eight out of forty-four Delaware high schools, centers on five core priorities:²

- 1. Create a comprehensive system of career preparation aligned with state and regional economies.** Delaware Pathways focuses on establishing a community of schools and postsecondary institutions that incorporate academic and technical education with demonstrated workplace skills. The program engages employers to provide students with career guidance, mentoring, and work-based learning opportunities related to their education and career goals.
- 2. Scale and sustain meaningful work-based learning experiences.** Delaware Pathways acts as a statewide workforce intermediary that connects employers and schools, prepares students for and places them in meaningful work experiences, and supports employers in recruiting and onboarding student talent, as well as evaluating workplace learning.

- 3. Integrate education, workforce development efforts, and data systems.** Delaware Pathways creates a connected service model, expands apprenticeships, and implements a workforce data quality campaign that applies common performance measures to the evaluation of education and workforce development efforts.
- 4. Coordinate financial support for Delaware Pathways.** The program hopes to create a diversified funding model for youth-focused workforce development efforts that includes public, private, and philanthropic support.
- 5. Engage employers, educators, and service providers to support Delaware Pathways.** The program coordinates services and activities across public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

Students choose from a variety of pathways,³ including engineering, culinary arts and hospitality management, manufacturing, and biomedical sciences, each offering an industry-recognized credential, early college credit, and relevant work experience, in addition to a high school diploma.⁴ Private-sector partners such as the Delaware Manufacturing Association vet the Delaware Pathways' curricula to ensure that the target skills meet the industries' needs.⁵ Additionally, any early college credits are transferable to all four-year institutions within the state.⁶

Impact on Student Outcomes

Similarly-styled interventions show promise in increasing high school graduation rates⁷ and keeping academically at-risk students on track for high school graduation and successful postsecondary outcomes.⁸ Since being fully implemented in 2015, the Delaware Pathways program has not yet been subject to a research evaluation and thus has not definitively demonstrated efficacy. However, early self-reported student outcome data shows promise. Delaware Pathways' 2016 Prosperity Network Outcomes Report shows 60 percent of Pathways students reach college- and career-readiness benchmarks, and 93 percent of students successfully complete work-based learning courses.⁹ Additionally, the initiative recently received a \$1.95 million grant from JPMorgan Chase & Co.'s New Skills for Youth initiative to

expand the program. The funds will be used to enhance work-based learning opportunities, with a specific focus on at-risk students and students with disabilities.¹⁰

Guiding Questions

A lack of industry pathways exacerbates wage and employability gaps, particularly for young persons interested in immediate workforce entry. "There is, however, no earnings payoff for attending [postsecondary institutions] but leaving without a credential."¹¹ Investing in interventions such as Delaware Pathways can remedy the aptitude-education mismatch as it relates to career- and industry-readiness training. Policymakers, district and school leaders, and various stakeholder groups must determine how interventions would meet local needs and identify potential challenges to implementation.

Questions to ask include the following:

- How should the program be marketed?
- Do political will and critical mass exist for academic public-private partnerships?
- What are the implementation costs, if any, to state and local school districts?
- Will prospective industries and businesses accept traditionally underserved students?
- How will the state ensure quality control over a potentially wide variety of programs?

Endnotes

- ¹ Pathways to Prosperity is a partnership between states, Jobs for the Future, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The initiative seeks to increase opportunities for youth to attain skills and credentials necessary to competitively enter the labor market. Jobs for the Future, "Resources for Pathways to Prosperity Network Members," <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/pathways-prosperity-network/resources-pathways-prosperity-network-states> (accessed July 14, 2017).
- ² Delaware Pathways, *Learning to Work: Delaware Pathways Strategic Plan* (Delaware: Author, 2017), <http://delawarepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Delaware-Pathways-Strategic-Plan-March-2017-1.pdf>.
- ³ The full list of pathway options is available at <http://delawarepathways.org/>.
- ⁴ Delaware Pathways, *Learning to Work*.
- ⁵ M. T. Brainard, "How Delaware Is Creating a Pipeline of Skilled Workers in Manufacturing," Brown Center Chalkboard (blog), Brookings Institution, November 6, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2015/11/06/how-delaware-is-creating-a-pipeline-of-skilled-workers-in-manufacturing/>.
- ⁶ Delaware Pathways, *Learning to Work*.
- ⁷ R. I. Lerman and A. Packer, "Youth Apprenticeship: A Hopeful Approach for Improving Outcomes for Baltimore Youth," *The Abell Report*, Volume 28, No. 2. (Baltimore, MD: Abell Foundation, 2015), <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED570918>.
- ⁸ J. J. Kemple and C. J. Willner, *Career Academies: Long-Term Impacts on Labor Market Outcomes, Educational Attainment, and Transitions to Adulthood* (New York, NY: MDRC, 2008).
- ⁹ Pathways to Prosperity Network, "Delaware Pathways Outcome Report," 2016, https://ptopnetwork.jff.org/sites/default/files/DE-PATHWAYS-OUTCOMES-REPORT-V9%203_0.pdf (accessed July 14, 2017).
- ¹⁰ S. Goss, "Delaware's Career Pathways Program Lands \$2M Grant," *Delaware News Journal*, January 11, 2017, <http://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/education/2017/01/11/delawares-career-pathways-program-lands-2m-grant/96445078/>.
- ¹¹ J. E. Rosenbaum and C. Ahearn, "Florida's College and Career Readiness Reforms: Are They Helping?" *Commentary* (blog), Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, June 10, 2016, <http://edpolicy.education.jhu.edu/?p=60>.

Photo by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for **American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action**

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