



Preparing High School Students for Careers State Policies to Promote and Measure Career Readiness

With a rapidly globalizing and automating economy, there never has been a better time to have the right skills—or a worse time to have the wrong ones. The right skills include a combination of the academic, technical, and social-emotional preparation necessary to succeed in the workplace. Some students may begin careers right after high school, but the vast majority of good-paying jobs require college or postsecondary career training. Thus, school leaders, policymakers, and families are recognizing that students need to leave high school prepared for their next steps, including participating in further career preparation through certificate programs, apprenticeships, and other kinds of vocational or career and technical education training.

In response, many states have begun to adopt and revise their policies to promote and measure both college and career readiness among high school students. However, in these efforts, initiatives to improve students' career readiness often have lagged those to improve their college readiness. In this analysis, the Alliance for Excellent Education (All4Ed) examines three policy areas in which states have sought to advance career readiness for high school students:

1. **High school graduation pathways** designed to prepare students for careers through a combination of coursework, assessments, projects, and/or workplace experiences.
2. **Competency-based education policies** that allow students to earn course credit and demonstrate competency in nontraditional ways (e.g., by using innovative assessments that measure knowledge and skills students acquire through workplace learning or project-based experiences and not merely through seat-time requirements).

3. **Statewide accountability systems** that include measures of career readiness and encourage student participation and success in career pathways and/or workplace experiences during high school.

The data shows that **while some states are taking positive steps to advance career readiness, particularly by offering career-focused graduation pathways, not all states have found effective ways to measure whether these pathways successfully prepare students for careers.** Similarly, while the vast majority of states include an indicator of college and career readiness in their statewide accountability systems, most of the measures of career readiness used in these indicators are interchangeable with measures of college readiness. In other words, a student only needs to meet one measure of college or career readiness to be deemed "ready" by the state. Further, these indicators do not capture which students are deemed ready based on each potential measure—an omission that could obscure inequities in student access to high-quality opportunities for college and career preparation in high school.

It is clear from the policy landscape that efforts to promote career readiness in high school are gaining momentum, and there is ample opportunity to advance this important work. However, indicators that measure the quality of all students' career preparation during high school largely are absent, limiting the ability of states to ensure strong student outcomes, replicate success, and advance equity for historically underserved students. The fact sheets in this collection examine the three policy areas listed previously in greater detail and offer examples of ways individual states promote career readiness among their high school students.

State Policies Recognizing Career Readiness in High School

KEY POLICY AREA	CAREER-READY GRADUATION PATHWAYS			COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION		CAREER READINESS IN ACCOUNTABILITY		
State	Career-Ready Pathway	Demonstration of Competency in Pathway	Work-Based Learning in Pathway	Flexibility in Graduation Credit-Hour Requirements	Flexibility in Graduation Assessment Requirements	College- and Career-Ready Indicator(s)	Career-Ready Measures in Indicator(s)	Avoids Menu of Readiness Measures
Alabama				✓		✓	✓	
Alaska				✓				
Arizona				✓				
Arkansas				✓		✓		✓ ³
California						✓	✓	
Colorado	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Connecticut				✓	✓	✓		
Delaware						✓	✓	
District of Columbia				✓		✓		✓ ⁴
Florida	✓	✓	✓	✓ ¹		✓	✓	
Georgia	✓	✓	✓	✓ ²		✓	✓	
Hawaii	✓			✓				
Idaho				✓		✓	✓	
Illinois	✓	✓		✓ ¹		✓	✓	
Indiana	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Iowa				✓				
Kansas								
Kentucky				✓		✓	✓	
Louisiana	✓	✓	✓	✓ ²		✓	✓	✓ ³
Maine				✓				
Maryland				✓		✓	✓	
Massachusetts				✓ ²		✓		
Michigan				✓		✓	✓	
Minnesota								
Mississippi	✓	✓				✓	✓	
Missouri	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Montana				✓		✓	✓	
Nebraska								
Nevada	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
New Hampshire				✓		✓	✓	

(continued)

State Policies Recognizing Career Readiness in High School (continued)

KEY POLICY AREA	CAREER-READY GRADUATION PATHWAYS			COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION		CAREER READINESS IN ACCOUNTABILITY		
	State	Career-Ready Pathway	Demonstration of Competency in Pathway	Work-Based Learning in Pathway	Flexibility in Graduation Credit-Hour Requirements	Flexibility in Graduation Assessment Requirements	College- and Career-Ready Indicator(s)	Career-Ready Measures in Indicator(s)
New Jersey				✓				
New Mexico				✓	✓	✓	✓	
New York	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓ ³
North Carolina	✓	✓		✓ ²		✓	✓	
North Dakota						✓	✓	
Ohio	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Oklahoma				✓		✓	✓	
Oregon				✓	✓			
Pennsylvania				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ⁴
Rhode Island	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
South Carolina	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
South Dakota	✓	✓		✓ ¹		✓	✓	✓ ³
Tennessee						✓	✓	
Texas	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Utah				✓ ¹		✓	✓	
Vermont				✓		✓	✓	
Virginia				✓				
Washington	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
West Virginia	✓					✓	✓	
Wisconsin				✓				
Wyoming						✓	✓	
TOTAL	19 / 51	17 / 19	8 / 19	41 / 51	8 / 18	36 / 51	31 / 36	6 / 36

NOTES: A ✓ indicates the policy supporting career-ready pathways exists in the state. Shaded boxes represent states in which the policy in question does not apply.

¹ In these states, only certain students (e.g., students with disabilities or students attending schools participating in a pilot program) may meet graduation credit-hour requirements in more flexible ways beyond seat time.

² In these states, the only flexibility students have to bypass seat time–based credit-hour requirements for graduation is to take an exam in lieu of the full course.

³ These states have a college- and career-ready indicator using an index to value certain measures of readiness more highly than others.

⁴ These states have a college- and career-ready indicator that includes only one measure of postsecondary readiness.



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