



Higher Education Playbook



Unlocking Career Success

This playbook provides ways in which Higher Education Agencies (sometimes referred to as the State Higher Education Executive Officers) and teams can blur the lines between high school, postsecondary education, and the workforce. Higher Education Agencies (HEAs) play a significant role to Raise the Bar for student success by developing an *education-to-workforce system* that focuses on Unlocking Career Success.

Step 1

Create Unified Vision

Step 2

Connect Data Systems

Step 3

Strengthen Partnerships

Establish a unified vision

The HEA's vision can serve as an animating force to bring together multiple partners and distinct priorities to improve the lives of youth. Several states have developed education and attainment goals that link educators, employers, community-based organizations, and others as equal partners in attaining the state's vision. When establishing a unified vision across education and workforce systems, consider how to:



Develop and expand policies that promote the four keys to Unlocking Career Success through legislation, regulation, state plan development (e.g., ESEA, Perkins, WIOA), as well as policy and other procedural guidance to create a broad vision for career-connected learning and guidance for implementation.



Create programmatic, fiscal, and accountability policies and practices that incentivize institutions of higher education and others to implement career-connected learning alongside technical assistance, professional learning communities, and other supports to ensure that career-connected learning opportunities exist for every student.



Build from existing practice and infrastructure, like supporting high-quality career and technical education (CTE) programs to expand career-connected learning, supporting community and technical colleges to connect P-12 and higher education, or working through established groups like P20/P20W councils to support system innovation.

Tools to establish a unified vision across education and workforce systems:

Create Shared Governance Models

HEAs can develop or play an active role in shared governance boards that span P-12, higher education, and workforce to set and enforce policy that includes community and technical college systems. The Delaware Pathways Strategic plan positioned the community and technical colleges as critical partners to scale high-quality career pathways and facilitate implementation of a statewide work-based learning program.

The Higher Ed system was also a vital partner in Rhode Island's PrepareRI 2.0 plan, which is an inter-agency initiative connecting P-12, higher education, and workforce - including a formal role for the state's Office of Postsecondary Education.

Additionally, the Texas Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative is a collaboration among the state's Education Agency, Higher Education Coordinating Board, and Workforce Commission, to create aligned goals, data, and processes for student outcomes and to ensure that the education system meets employers' needs through common definitions and standards for work-based learning and a library of workforce credentials.



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Tools to establish a unified vision across education and workforce systems (continued):

Create Statewide Frameworks

Develop statewide frameworks for dual or concurrent enrollment that clarify governance models, articulation, and funding. The Illinois [Dual Credit Quality Act](#) was created to expand dual credit and to ensure that credit transferability, accountability, and partnerships were available to partnering local educational agencies through a state model partnership agreement between P-12 and postsecondary institutions.

Colorado developed an [Accelerating Students through Concurrent Enrollment](#) program to provide an opportunity for students to earn a postsecondary credential through a 5th-year high school program which allows students to earn college credit with no tuition cost. This legislation allowed HEAs to take a more active position to align dual enrollment programs across the P-12 and postsecondary systems

Braid Funding

HEAs should work to braid state and other federal funding sources to align with the state's career connected learning plan and vision. [Delaware](#) braided ESSER, GEER⁶ and philanthropic funds to launch a \$16 million expansion of its [Delaware Pathways](#) program.

Washington launched [Career Connect Washington](#), a network of employers, labor, government, education, and community leaders, to deliver academic and work-based learning experiences to more than 16,000 students since 2019. Career Connect Washington has used a combination of federal, state, and local funds to launch, expand, and maintain this program.



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The ability to connect students to credential and degree data and related employment outcomes has never been more important. These data systems are necessary to inform consumers of the costs associated with higher education and the likely return on their investment, as well as to provide information to policy makers and practitioners to better address employer needs. When creating data systems that support career pathways, consider how to:



Link student records across P-12, higher education, and workforce which includes the expansion of state longitudinal data systems and P20/P20W efforts, shared labor market information, linking credential and degree attainment with unemployment/wage data, identify equity gaps, and using common data tools like transcripts to signal students' prior learning records, consistent with applicable privacy laws including Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).



Support student transfer across higher education programs to better bridge workforce and industry credential programs, registered apprenticeship, and two- and four-year degrees through policies that support credit for prior learning, embedded and stackable credential models, and statewide articulation agreements.



Support research driven partnerships to identify and scale evidence-based practices that are replicable across institutions of higher education and to inform state policy development and iteration, make higher education data accessible, and to better link educators, policymakers, and researchers within the career-connected learning system.

Tools to create data systems that support pathways:

Create Longitudinal Data Systems

Many HEAs have developed robust statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDS) that link P-12, postsecondary, and workforce data, like the Alabama Terminal on Linking Analyzing Statistics (ATLAS) that is used to regularly adjust career pathways programs based on economic needs or Maryland's Longitudinal Data System that collects and organizes student and workforce data from all levels of education and the state's workforce. The Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Education Commissioner collects and publicizes municipal level data that includes local postsecondary attainment rates, FAFSA completion rates, who goes to college, and the current workforce's level of education.

Share Labor Market Information

Through shared labor market information, HEAs can illustrate the alignment between postsecondary programs of study and in-demand jobs. The Kentucky Council of Postsecondary Education is required to compile annual data on in-demand jobs within the state and develop a delivery method that ensures access to postsecondary instruction in these in-demand job areas for prospective students. Colorado's Talent Pipeline Report provides an annual analysis of labor market information and highlights talent development strategies for the state. Indiana's Hoosiers by the Numbers provides a dashboard for labor market information that breaks data out by county and topic.



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Tools to create data systems that support pathways (continued):

Create Tools to Inform Students and Families

HEAs can also use data to empower students and create tools to guide students' postsecondary decisions. [My Colorado Journey](#) is a free user-friendly resource that centralizes the state's education and career pathways resources, enabling users to find and explore careers in Colorado and take steps to achieve their goals. The [University of Texas SeekUT](#) resource presents to students user-friendly data that maps out what real UT graduates earn based on campus, major, and the number of years post-graduation as well as loan outcomes. California's [Community College Salary Surfer](#) provides the aggregated earnings of graduates from a five-year period to provide an estimate of potential wages after receiving a certificate or degree in certain disciplines.



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Build and strengthen partnerships

Career pathway programs often span P-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems, requiring coordination among state government and partnerships with employers and community facing organizations. Through intermediary organizations or cross-agency teams, states can develop strategic partnerships to support youth career pathways. When building and strengthening partnerships across education and workforce systems, consider how to:



Engage the state and local workforce development boards to leverage and connect services offered through in-school and out-of-school youth providers and adult education providers to support postsecondary access and success and ways in which institutions of higher education can support the implementation of these programs.



Invest in intermediaries as industry-facing organizations are necessary to support employer and community engagement at scale, as well as to expand registered apprenticeship, residency, clinical, and internship programs offered by institutions of higher education.



Support higher education partnerships including partnerships with K12 and workforce partners, as well as partnerships across institutions of higher education, to support student admissions, facilitate student basic needs, support student transfer, and co-develop affordable educational programs for completion strategies and services that link to employer needs.

Tools to strengthen partnerships across the education and workforce systems:

Create Seamless Pathways

There are examples across the country of HEAs building strategic partnerships with education and workforce systems to support career connected pathways, including seamless pathways from high school to college, and between in-state colleges. Idaho's Direct Admissions Initiative proactively alerts all Idaho high school seniors that they qualify to attend the state college system, then asks students to fill out a free common application, Apply Idaho, which shares the application to up to 10 in-state public and private institutions. Similarly, Virginia created the Statewide Guaranteed Admissions Agreement.

In Ohio, Columbus State Community College brought on a full-time "superintendent in residence" to create and sustain partnerships between P-12, higher education, economic development organizations, and industry leaders.

In Illinois, the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act and the Articulation Initiative Act require cooperative policies across public two- and four-year institutions, as well as between P-12 and higher education.



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Tools to strengthen partnerships across the education and workforce systems (continued):

Support Intermediaries

Delaware Promise, established through [Executive Order 61](#) to ensure that 65% of the state's workforce earns a college degree or professional certificate by 2025. E61 also established a joint agency steering committee that was charged with developing the [Delaware Pathways Strategic Plan](#) which outlines the roles that multiple state agencies and community partners take on to support youth pathways.

Combined WIOA State Plans that Include Perkins V

Consider statewide strategies to support intermediaries to systematically engage business and industry leaders. [South Carolina](#) formalized an inter-agency memorandum of understanding across education and workforce agencies to advance industry engagement throughout the state. The agreement supports sector partnerships and regional coordinating bodies for education, workforce development, and economic development partners to align their programs and services with the needs of industry.

Develop Shared Accountability

Develop cross-agency, statewide frameworks that outline quality and accountability metrics for pathways-related work. [Indiana](#) subsidizes a pre-approved list of liberal arts and technical dual enrollment courses, caps student costs, and requires each high school to offer at least two dual credit courses. The Texas [Effective Advising Framework](#) was designed as a statewide effort to provide districts with a blueprint for a comprehensive school counseling system. Illinois provides guidance on its [Employability Skills Framework](#) and [Model Program of Study Guides](#) on specific career pathways to guide implementation and evaluation.

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