

Governor Playbook

Future Ready Pathways

This playbook provides concrete actions Governors can take to strengthen how their states prepare all young people for good jobs and the careers of the future. Through aligning and integrating high school, postsecondary education, and careers, Governors play a significant role in setting a clear, shared vision and agenda for college and career readiness. By developing a cohesive education-to-workforce system, Governors ensure the holistic needs of students, employers, and the economy are met. This playbook is intended to provide options that Governors can fit to the specific policy context of their states as they build innovative policies and partnerships that advance career-connected learning that ensures each student can navigate to a future that meets their potential, provides students flexibility for life-long learning, and ultimately serves the needs of the state's unique economy and vision for growth.

All of the models/examples in this playbook are intended to serve as a companion to the [Let's Get Ready Roadmap](#) developed by Governor Jared Polis of Colorado while serving as Chairman of the National Governors Association.



Step 1

Establish a
Unified Vision

Step 2

Create a
Management
Structure

Step 3

Link Goals
to Performance

Step 4

Align Policy
and Practice

The Governor's vision can serve as an animating force to bring together multiple partners and distinct priorities to improve the lives of students and families. Several states have developed goals that link educators, employers, community-based organizations, and others as partners in achieving the Governor's vision. When establishing a unified vision for career-connected learning, consider how to:

- *Create a whole-of-government effort* by bringing together state leadership from P-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems, leveraging existing federal and state resources to create the foundation for both short- and long-term strategies that produce talent at scale and improve community and economic development.
- *Elevate employer engagement* by ensuring that education and training programs reflect employer needs, supporting employers and industry in scaling work-based learning programs, and including employers tied to high-skill, high-wage, in-demand careers in the development of pathway policies.
- *Commit to opportunity as a driving factor* by expanding access to and support for career-connected learning for individuals of all backgrounds, supporting student transitions across different types of education and training, and embedding student and community voice.

Establishing a unified vision for career-connected learning

Statewide Initiatives and Interagency Taskforces

- PrepareRI is a statewide initiative in Rhode Island that was created in response to Governor Dan McKee of Rhode Island's expectation that all students would be prepared for success in college and career. PrepareRI is run by an interagency taskforce that includes the Rhode Island Department of Education, the Governor's Workforce Board, and the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner.
- Governor Kevin Stitt of Oklahoma issued an executive order forming the Human Potential for Future Industries Task Force. Designed to unite statewide workforce and education efforts, the task force aims to drive major innovation in education that empowers Oklahoma students to discover their unique talents, develop essential skills, and deploy them effectively in a rapidly evolving, technologically driven world.

Postsecondary Attainment Goals

- Through Executive Order 61, Governor Jack Markell of Delaware committed to combine education and workforce efforts to prepare students for future careers. The EO established a joint agency steering committee to advance the Delaware Pathways Strategic Plan, which outlines the roles and responsibilities for state agencies and community partners in supporting Delaware Pathways. The strategic plan includes goals aimed at postsecondary degrees, as well as non-degree, industry-recognized credentials aligned with Delaware employers' workforce needs.

Combined WIOA State Plans that include Perkins V

- Multiple states and Governors have chosen to submit a combined Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) state plan that includes Perkins V. As Governors approve state plans for WIOA and Perkins, they hold the power to establish a unified vision, link education and workforce goals and data systems, and coordinate programs and/or braid resources through these federal programs.

Amplification and State of the State Addresses

- In 2025, 33 Governors mentioned career and technical education (CTE) and workforce development opportunities in their 2025 state of the state addresses. Governor Gavin Newsom of California also announced his Master Plan for Career Education in 2024.
- Governor Mike Kehoe of Missouri, in his 2025 state of the state address, announced the signing of Executive Order 25-16, establishing the Governor's Workforce of the Future Challenge, which instructs state education agencies to put a plan in place for better coordination among key stakeholders, including K-12 schools, local business and industry, and higher education, to improve the state's CTE programs and infrastructure.

Congress recently enacted legislation that allows federal Pell Grants to pay for short-term programs that lead to non-degree credentials (Workforce Pell). The law empowers Governors to determine parameters that ensure credentials align with the requirements of high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand industries in their state. This is critical, as the quality of industry-recognized credentials varies considerably. For example, a study of Florida's Career and Professional Education (CAPE) Act found that students who earned an industry-recognized credential were more likely than their peers to enroll in community college and attain an associate degree. However, an analysis of credential data from 30 states conducted by ExcelinEd and Burning Glass found that fewer than 20 percent of credentials earned by high school students aligned with those that were in demand by employers. When investing in industry-recognized credentials, Governors should ensure that programs are rigorous, portable, stackable, and lead to good jobs.

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Integrated college and career pathways programs often span P-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems, requiring coordination amongst state agencies and partnerships with community and technical colleges, four-year institutions, employers, and community-based organizations. Several states and Governors have developed strategic plans and cross-agency teams to manage implementation. When creating a management structure and plan, consider how to:

- *Link education and economic development* by understanding and preparing for both short- and long-term economic needs and developing college and career pathways that span P-12, registered apprenticeships, non-degree credentials, community and technical colleges, four-year institutions, and workforce systems.
- *Codify roles and responsibilities* that bring together different agencies and organizations as part of a cross-cutting management team, ensure that each partner is responsible for leading specific actions, and create individual and shared accountability to support the success of the initiative.
- *Leverage community partners*, including community-based organizations, non-profits, and other intermediary organizations to support system innovation, build and scale relationships with the community and employers, and support braided funding models that better connect private, philanthropic, and corporate funders.

Methods to create a management structure that supports the vision

Convene Councils

- Governors have the power to convene councils, and multiple states have launched K-16 or P-20 councils through executive orders to focus on pathways and state agency and partner coordination. This was done in Delaware, Maine, and with the Healthcare Workforce Development Advisory Council in American Samoa.

Create Teams or Offices

- Governors can create teams or offices to manage the coordination of plans. In Indiana, the Office of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship was created to implement statewide policies for registered apprenticeship and work-based learning. Governor Josh Stein of North Carolina announced in his state of the state address the creation of a Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships to unite stakeholders around a shared goal of connecting students to high-wage jobs.
- In Maryland, the RAISE Act, which created the Maryland Office of Registered Apprenticeship Development, sets targets (5,000 new apprentices), and aligns high school and postsecondary credentialing.

Appointments

- In many states, the Governor has the power to appoint individuals to boards and commissions that have oversight of education and employment. Youth can and should be considered for these official appointments to provide critical insight into strategies that engage and support pathway development and employment. For example, Utah's Board of Higher Education, which oversees the state's higher education system, includes one student member. Illinois also includes two students—one a recent high school graduate, and the other an older student—as voting members on its state Board of Higher Education.

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Top-line outcomes and progress measurement can provide focus and create momentum. They can also help to celebrate accomplishments and ensure that partners remain committed to the overarching vision. Several states, in alignment with their Governors' priorities, have developed data models and performance routines that encourage collaboration and transparency. When linking public goals and performance management, consider how to:

- *Create cascading goals* that include top-line metrics to measure system performance, showcase accomplishments and gaps, and create opportunities for P-12, postsecondary, and workforce agencies to review and develop aligned goals.
- *Model individual and shared accountability* through annual, or more frequent, measurement of the state's top-line metrics, as well as through the measurement of progress via annual, or more frequent, performance routines that reflect the management structure and plan, as well as partner-specific roles and responsibilities.
- *Disaggregate data* on metrics that include race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English learner status, disability status, and geographic location.
- *Create public accountability* by ensuring agency roles, responsibilities, and disaggregated data are visible, aligned to the Governor's vision, and embedded within other governing documents—such as annual plans and reports, state education and workforce plans, or other public-facing materials—specific to that organization.

Strategies to link public-facing goals and performance management structures

Standardize Language

- Efforts should be made to link public-facing goals and performance management structures for state agencies and partners. One way this can happen is through the standardization of language. For example, in Illinois there is a [Career Pathways Dictionary](#) that includes common definitions for pathways terminology statewide, meaning that every state agency has shared language to discuss and implement the Governor's vision.

Data Visualization and Statewide Systems

- Another important aspect of performance management is consistent and transparent data, ideally through a statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) that connects at least two core education data domains with data visualizations, like [Connecticut's P20 WIN system](#) and [Indiana's Graduates Prepared to Succeed \(GPS\)](#) dashboard.
- The [Virginia Education and Workforce Alignment Dashboard](#) provides insights into how Virginia's higher education institutions align with labor-market demands across different geographic regions. The dashboard visualizes the correlation between programs of study and occupations, showcasing occupation demand data, projected job changes, incumbent workers' wages, and graduates' annual earnings indexed to county self-sufficiency standards.

For additional examples of policies aimed at data transparency and building collaborative data systems, including model legislation, see [All4Ed's State Policy Center](#).



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States can establish policy through executive order, legislation, regulation, and state plans that are required for federal programs, as well as through administrative policy and procedures that are used to manage implementation of programs. Several states, under gubernatorial direction, have developed model policies and infrastructure to manage implementation. When aligning policy and practice, consider how to:

- *Leverage federal programs*, particularly those that require state plans and gubernatorial approval, including the Every Student Succeeds Act, WIOA, and Perkins V, to align vision and goals, support data collection and accountability, and establish policies that improve career-connected learning (Note: updates to Perkins V and WIOA state plans were due in FY24).
- *Create a fiscal strategy and braid financial resources* to leverage existing federal and state funds across the P-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems to create and scale college and career pathways, provide wraparound and transition services to youth, and stage future budget requests and philanthropic and private-sector grant development.
- *Lead by example* through direct engagement of both private- and public-sector employers, including state agencies, which have hiring needs and can be leveraged to create innovative human resources policies, like skills-based hiring models, and develop paid work-based learning opportunities, including internships and registered apprenticeships for youth.

Opportunities to align statewide policies with day-to-day practice

Support Qualified Non-Degree Workers

- Multiple states participating in NGA's Skills in the States Initiative—including Alaska, Colorado, Maryland, Indiana, Washington, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota—have taken steps to reduce or eliminate degree requirements for public-sector jobs. Through executive orders, these states are advancing skills-based hiring practices that recognize skills gained through all pathways. This shift not only broadens access to state employment opportunities, but also helps connect more workers to careers in public service.

Leverage Enacted Budget Proposals

- To advance alignment between policy and practice California's Golden State Pathways Act promotes secondary-to-postsecondary pathways in high-wage, high-skill, high-growth areas, while Hawai'i's career development success program, which provides financial incentives to high schools for student attainment of industry-recognized credentials. Additionally, Indiana's Commission on Higher Education has been tasked with enacting multiple policies, from improving career-centered curriculum to additional funding for high schools where students complete dual enrollment and degree programs before graduation. For model legislation based on California's Golden State Pathways program, see All4Ed's State Policy Center.

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Conclusion

Governors have a unique opportunity to shape the future of their states by ensuring every student has access to future-focused pathways that ensure success in both college and career. By establishing a unified vision, building strong management structures, linking goals to measurable outcomes, and aligning policy with practice, Governors can lead efforts to create education-to-workforce systems that are inclusive, responsive, and supportive of economic prosperity for all. For additional resources regarding college and career readiness, visit All4Ed's [State Policy Center](#).



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