

Too Good To Be True?

The Implications of Workforce Pell for High School Students



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July 2026

All4Ed

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Introduction

The U.S. Congress created the Workforce Pell Grant program (Workforce Pell) with broad bipartisan support to expand access to short-term training programs. The goal of the program is to help learners and workers secure good jobs without the time and expense of pursuing longer, and often more costly, traditional higher education degrees and credentials. Most discussion of Workforce Pell focuses on its implications for postsecondary institutions and adult learners. Far less attention is paid toward its potentially significant effects on K–12 education.

The creation of a federally subsidized pathway into short-term workforce credentials could alter the decisions students, families, counselors, and state policymakers make about high school and postsecondary education, even though high school students are not eligible to receive Workforce Pell Grants. If short-term credentials can lead directly to jobs, students and families may question whether pursuing an associate or bachelor's degree is worth the time and cost. School districts, counselors, state policymakers, and employers may likewise reconsider how they advise students and design college and career pathways.

Evidence raises questions about whether the decision to take advantage of Workforce Pell would serve young people well. People who hold many of the most common short-term credentials frequently earn less than workers with only a high school diploma. Meanwhile, by 2031, **66 percent of good jobs will require a**

bachelor's degree.¹ Therefore, the decision to pursue a short-term credential instead of a bachelor's degree could reduce the economic prospects for many young people.

Two-thirds (62.8 percent) of 2024 high school graduates enrolled in higher education after they graduated from high school.² Among those high school graduates, 20.1 percent enrolled in a two-year college and 42.1 percent enrolled in a four-year college. The availability of Workforce Pell may prompt more young people to choose short-term workforce programs instead of pursuing an associate or bachelor's degree.

Yet it is true that subsidized short-term job training could open doors for some young people who would otherwise have gone directly into the workforce after high school. The reduced cost of a short-term credential compared to a traditional two- or four-year degree may incentivize young graduates who do not immediately enroll in a traditional college program to still pursue college-level education after high school. This includes a substantial number of young people. According to the **U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics**, by October following graduation, nearly one in five (19.6 percent) 2024 graduates were employed and not enrolled in postsecondary education, while one in eight (12.5 percent) were neither enrolled in education nor participating in the labor force. In addition, 5.3 percent of 16- to 24-year-olds had not earned a high school diploma or equivalent credential and were not enrolled in school. Workforce Pell has the potential to create valuable new opportunities for these young people, but this is only possible if the program is implemented in ways that encourage meaningful traction in the labor market with long-term economic mobility and on-ramps into further education, rather than short-term credential attainment alone.

This brief examines how Workforce Pell could affect high school course-taking and credentialing, counseling practices, and state education accountability policy. Building on All4Ed's previous **recommendations** to the U.S. Department of Education, it concludes with recommendations for state policymakers on ways to ensure that Workforce Pell expands educational opportunity while establishing guardrails that prevent students from being steered toward short-term credentials with limited long-term value.

1. The Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce defines a good job based solely on income, with rather low thresholds: (1) workers ages 25 to 44 years: minimum annual earnings of \$43,000; median annual earnings of \$74,000 and (2) workers ages 45 to 64 years: minimum annual earnings of \$55,000; median annual earnings of \$91,000.

2. This U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data reflects college enrollment and work activity young people ages 16 to 24 years who graduated from high school between January and October 2024.

What Is Workforce Pell?

The federal Pell Grant program is the U.S. Department of Education's largest funding stream. It is the primary source of federal funding for students from low-income families to pay for undergraduate programs. In fiscal year 2025, more than 7.5 million students received \$40 billion in support from the program. Historically, Pell Grants have only been available to students in programs that were at least 15 weeks and 600 hours long. Under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (PL 119-21), Congress expanded the Pell Grant program and created Workforce Pell Grants. These new Pell Grants follow the same income eligibility requirements as the traditional program;³ however, students can use the new grants to enroll in short-term workforce programs that meet several criteria.

To be eligible for Workforce Pell Grants, a workforce program must demonstrate the following:

- Run for a period of between eight and 15 weeks (150–599 hours)
- Provide education that is aligned with industry sectors or occupations that are high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand and lead to a recognized postsecondary credential
- Prepare students and provide transferable academic credit toward one or more certificate or degree program(s)
- Have an annual completion rate of at least 70 percent within 150 percent of the normal time to completion
- Have a verified job placement rate of at least 70 percent in relevant occupations during the second quarter after completing the program
- Cost less than the “value-added earnings” resulting from the program; these earnings are the difference between what a student earns after completing the program and 150 percent of the federal poverty level (**\$23,940** annually for a single-person household in 2026)
- Be approved by the state's governor (after consultation with the State Workforce Board) and U.S. Secretary of Education

What Is the Impact of Short-Term Workforce Programs?

The premise of Workforce Pell is that it will help students and workers secure employment without the time and expense of traditional higher education. This is an understandable goal, particularly considering the high cost of higher education and prevalence of student debt. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that in 2022–23, the **average annual cost** for someone seeking a bachelor's degree at a four-year private institution was \$40,700, an 8 percent increase from the average cost 10 years prior. According to College Board, nearly half of people who earned a bachelor's degree in 2023–24 graduated with **nearly \$30,000 of debt**.

If people can get a well-paying job in less time and at a lower cost through a short-term workforce program than a two- or four-year degree, policymakers would be wise to support learners and workers in doing so. But are these programs truly inexpensive? Do they actually lead to high wages and meaningful opportunities for career growth and lifelong economic mobility? Evidence suggests otherwise.

Short-Term Does Not Necessarily Mean Inexpensive

A 2024 analysis by EdTrust of nearly 19,000 credential programs finds the **median monthly cost** of attendance for certificate programs ranges between \$2,000 and \$3,000. In many states, the hourly cost of attendance for securing a short-term credential is higher than the minimum wage. Moreover, an analysis of the National Training, Education, and Workforce Survey published by The Pew Charitable Trusts finds that most people earning a short-term credential use their own money to pay for it, rather than securing support from an employer to cover the costs. Roughly one in five take out **private or government loans** to help cover costs.

3. Workforce Pell Grants are available to individuals with a bachelor's degree; however, traditional Pell Grants are only available to individuals without a bachelor's degree.

People With a Short-Term Workforce Certificate Typically Earn Less Than People With Just a High School Diploma

According to the [Community College Research Center](#), the median annual salary of people with the most prevalent short-term workforce certificates (i.e., industrial technology and trades; healthcare; business; computer/information science and technology; and public safety, corrections, and security) ranges from \$32,000 to \$42,000. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics states that the median annual salary of someone with [just a high school diploma](#) is \$48,000.

Other [research](#) confirms the [low value](#) of short-term workforce credentials:

- Urban Institute: A comprehensive literature review shows a [wide variation](#) in the earnings impact of short-term credentials across industries and credential types, raising questions about their overall labor market value.
- Post-enrollment earnings analysis: A study of 230 short-term certificate-granting institutions with federal data finds that students from low-income families at more than 70 percent of institutions had earnings [below the national median level of a high school graduate](#) six years after enrollment.
- U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (2024 Pell Experimental Sites Initiative): While expanding Pell to very short-term occupational training programs from 2012 to 2017 improved program completion, it [did not translate into higher employment or earnings](#) in the medium or long term.
- MDRC evaluation of Virginia's FastForward initiative: Over two-thirds of students completed short-term credentials, yet earning a credential increased the probability of being employed by [only 2.4 percentage points](#), and earnings gains were modest.

- Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas: In some fields, particularly education and sales, credentials produce [larger wage gains for people with a bachelor's degree](#) than for people with only a high school diploma.

This data calls into serious question whether and how policymakers and educators should encourage students to pursue a short-term workforce credential, even if Workforce Pell Grants can help cover the cost.

The Power of “Or” and the Importance of “And”

Education policy swings like a pendulum. In the 1990s and early 2000s, “college for all” was a driving theme of many education advocates. Efforts such as the [American Diploma Project](#) and [Common Core State Standards](#) promoted “college and career readiness”; however, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute finds that many feel they prioritized [college at the expense of career](#). [College and Career Pathways](#) emerged as a way to more effectively integrate high school, higher education, and employers to prepare students for both postsecondary education and the workforce. However, the pendulum appears to be swinging away from the idea of college *and* career readiness to college *or* career readiness.

This is evident in both [political rhetoric](#) and substantive policy promoted by Democrats and Republicans. For example, the presidential [policy platform](#) for Vice President Kamala Harris stated, “For too long, our nation has recognized only one path to success: a four-year college degree. Vice President Harris and Governor Walz believe that anyone with the skills to do a job should be able to get it regardless of their degree status.”

While Vice President Harris and President Donald Trump differ on nearly every area of policy, it appears they are close to agreement on the need to concentrate on skills over degrees. Just months after the Harris Campaign issued its policy platform, President Trump issued an [Executive Order](#) titled *Preparing Americans for High-Paying Skilled Trade Jobs of the Future*. This Executive Order calls for “strategies to identify alternative credentials and assessments to the four-year college degree that can be mapped to the specific skill needs of prospective employers.”

State education policy also is prioritizing career preparation. Under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, states are required to select and report on at least one of three secondary program [quality indicators](#): the percentage of career and technical education (CTE) concentrators who (1) earn a recognized postsecondary credential, (2) participate in work-based learning, or (3) earn postsecondary credit (i.e., credit that counts toward both a high school diploma and a postsecondary degree or credential). The number of states using work-based learning in their accountability system (26 states and the District of Columbia, Palau, and Puerto Rico) is more than twice that of the number of states using postsecondary credit. Ideally, states would utilize all three indicators.

States also use "college and career ready" (CCR) indicators in their accountability systems under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Still, no state actually requires a student to meet requirements for both college and career readiness. Of the 42 states (including DC) that use a CCR indicator, 41 measure college readiness and 40 measure career readiness. However, measuring both is not the same as requiring both.

Only one state, North Dakota, requires students to be prepared in multiple areas; however, even there, a student is not required to be college and career ready. Instead, under North Dakota's "Choice Ready"

framework, a student can demonstrate readiness in any combination of two paths: college and career, college and military, or career and military. In other words, even the single state with the most rigorous multi-area requirement still allows a student to satisfy it without ever demonstrating both college and career readiness simultaneously because military readiness can substitute for either one. This reflects a broader pattern across state accountability systems; while policymakers routinely invoke "college and career readiness" as a unified goal, the accountability structures meant to measure it treat the two as largely separable, and often optional, outcomes.

The quality bar behind these CCR indicators is questionable. Twenty-seven states rely on input measures, such as completing CTE coursework, instead of postsecondary outcomes like college enrollment. Only one state, Georgia, uses postsecondary enrollment in credit-bearing coursework without remediation. For career readiness, 12 states include the WorkKeys assessment among their measures, even though its math component tests high schoolers against skills more typical of a [middle school curriculum](#).

Increasingly, state education policy is moving away from solely prioritizing academic preparation associated with college readiness and toward experiences that build or measure skills associated with career readiness. The availability of funding for





short-term workforce postsecondary credentials is likely to accelerate this trend.⁴

Under ESSA, [industry-recognized credentials](#) already are the single most common career-readiness measure states use as a School Quality and Student Success CCR indicator for K–12 accountability, ahead of CTE pathway completion, work-based learning, and career-readiness assessments; 23 states currently incorporate the acquisition of an industry-recognized credential into a CCR indicator. [Indiana](#), [Ohio](#), and [Alabama](#) are examples of states that are utilizing the [Trump administration's ESSA waiver process](#) to more explicitly prioritize career readiness in their accountability systems. If Workforce Pell increases the supply and visibility of short-term credentials, states may have even greater incentive to fold them into high school accountability systems. This could move policy further away from the idea of “college and career ready” toward “college or career ready.”

More students could earn credentials, but will they be prepared?

Counseling is Key

Counseling is key to effective college and career pathways, especially for marginalized students who are underserved. High-quality pathways provide students with options aligned with their interests, including opportunities for advanced coursework and career-connected learning. Effective counseling helps students and their families to make informed decisions about what prerequisites are needed to succeed in future coursework or to be qualified for their aspirations. For example, an aspiring engineer is likely to need to take calculus before they graduate from high school. Counseling is necessary to inform students and their families of the course trajectory required for the student to be prepared for calculus before they graduate so they are competitive in college applications.

Given the data on returns to credentials as compared to degrees, a federally subsidized credential pathway runs the risk of creating a new tracking mechanism

4. [Indiana](#) was approved by the U.S. Department of Education to utilize an accountability system that gives students credit for participating in work-based learning and earning credentials of value. However, their waiver allows for proficiency in math and reading only to count for 2.5 percent each of a high school's letter grade. [Alabama](#) proposes to incorporate the WorkKeys assessment that measures career readiness into its measure of academic proficiency. [Advocates expressed concerns](#) that this approach “lowers standards and misleads both students and the public by signaling that students are ready for postsecondary opportunities despite not mastering grade-level content.” [Ohio](#) proposes to incorporate a college, career, workforce, and military readiness component into its accountability system. Under this proposal, students will be deemed ready based on meeting one out of 11 possible criteria, ranging from performance on the ACT or SAT to participating in work-based learning.

that exacerbates existing inequities. According to the National Education Policy Center, [that risk is not new](#), nor is it simply a part of America's history. The Community College Research Center states that students of color are still [under-represented](#) in dual enrollment courses compared to their enrollment in high school. For example, Black students comprise 14.8 percent of high school students but only 8.1 percent of dual enrollment students. Similarly, Latino students comprise 29.6 percent of high school students, but only 20.7 percent of dual enrollment students.

The same pattern is present within CTE. A 2020 [Hechinger Report/Associated Press](#) analysis of CTE enrollment data from 40 states finds that Black and Latino students were consistently less likely than White students to enroll in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and information technology courses, and more likely to be steered toward lower-wage fields like hospitality and human services. For example, in South Carolina, Black and Latino students made up 43 percent of the student body but “nearly 60% of students specializing in hospitality and human services, which include classes such as ‘parenting education’ and ‘family life education’ that have no clear link to the job market.” Effective counseling is an important lever to close this gap, as it can connect historically underserved students to coursework they may not otherwise know to request.

Workforce Pell may also be viewed as an important opportunity for young people facing substantial challenges, such as those experiencing [homelessness or in foster care](#). However, the challenges these young people face in accessing and succeeding in higher education remain and could worsen if they use Workforce Pell to pursue a short-term credential. While there has been [growth](#) in the percentage of youth experiencing homelessness or in foster care who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), barriers remain, as these young people often lack access to technology and support from adults in their daily lives. Moreover, when they enroll in higher education, they need housing and other wraparound support services that are more likely available to students if they pursue a two- or four-year degree than a short-term credential.

The combination of Workforce Pell and accountability systems prioritizing career readiness may have the unintended consequence of encouraging school counselors to steer students toward credentials with little value. Many state accountability systems now reward schools for career-readiness measures without also requiring students to be college ready. A counselor working under such a system can now guide students toward a federally subsidized short-term credential that is publicly lauded as improving one's income prospects despite evidence to the contrary. This creates pressure to steer students toward Workforce Pell-eligible programs even when a student would otherwise be a strong candidate for an associate or bachelor's degree. The school benefits in the short term; a credential earned counts toward the accountability metric. But in the long-term, a counselor's well-intentioned push toward a credential could lower a student's lifetime earnings. According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, the median lifetime earnings of someone with a bachelor's degree is \$2.8 million, nearly [\\$1 million more](#) than someone with just some college.

The potential effects of Workforce Pell on counseling run the risk of undermining the efficacy of high-quality counseling as a mechanism for increasing rates of postsecondary enrollment in degree programs that offer a [significant wage premium](#). Two recent studies show what happens when advising capacity increases. The National Bureau of Economic Research published results from a [randomized trial](#) of an intensive college-advising program finding that when advisors encouraged students to apply to schools more selective than the ones they initially had in mind, and students followed that advice, bachelor's degree completion rose. The research finds that this gain was due to students enrolling in colleges with higher graduation rates, not to anything that happened after they enrolled. Another study evaluated a California program that added counselors and cut the student-to-counselor ratio by more than 150 students per school. The Annenberg Institute at Brown University reports that [college enrollment rose](#) 3 percentage points at high-poverty schools and 8 percentage points at rural schools.

Good advising clearly moves students toward stronger outcomes. However, the same lever that increases college enrollment could also push students toward short-term credentials, and as a result, lower lifetime earnings.

Recommendations

Public education serves many purposes; it is more than job training. Education holds inherent value as personal enrichment. It is also a public good and has societal value, as an educated public is necessary for a healthy democracy. Public education also has economic value for the individual and for society, as it leads to economic mobility and a strong national economy. It is important for policymakers to keep in mind the totality of what public education contributes to individuals and our communities. Students are future workers, but they are not simply cogs in a wheel. As we seek to support students and prepare them for the future, public education should open horizons of opportunities for students and help them achieve their full potential, filled with choice and purpose.

We offer two categories of recommendations to help Workforce Pell live up to its promise of helping students and workers increase their earning potential. The first category focuses on K–12 education systems specifically, while the second category addresses the quality of Workforce Pell programs more generally.

For K–12 Education Systems

Refine Accountability Systems⁵

Incentives matter, and accountability systems are one of the most important ways in which policy can incentivize behavior. The fact that most states incorporate at least one CCR measure into their accountability systems demonstrates important improvement over the No Child Left Behind era where test scores played an outsized role in education. However, CCR indicators need improvement. States should adopt policy that rewards districts and schools for preparing students for both college *and* a career. Students should be prepared for the full array of postsecondary education opportunities available, from short-term certificates to four-year bachelor's

5. Additional recommendations for strengthening college and career indicators are available in other All4Ed publications, including [Let's Measure Ready](#) and [Undermeasuring: College and Career Readiness Indicators May Not Reflect College and Career Outcomes](#).



degrees. If a student chooses to pursue a short-term credential, it should be a true choice, not an option of last resort due to inadequate preparation for an associate or bachelor's degree.

In addition, states that choose to include industry-recognized credentials in their accountability systems should do so cautiously. According to an analysis by American Enterprise Institute and the Burning Glass Institute, there are more than 1.1 million credentials available; however, **only the top decile** lead to significant wage gains (i.e., approximately \$5,000 annually). *Credentials Matter* finds that **only 18 percent of credentials earned by K–12 students were in demand by employers**. States should only incorporate industry-recognized credentials in accountability systems that are (1) in-demand, (2) stackable toward other credentials of value, and (3) lead to meaningful wage gains.

Increase School Counseling Capacity

The American School Counselor Association recommends a student-to-school-counselor ratio of 250:1. The national average is 372:1, with state averages as high as **570:1**. Policymakers should not only increase the number of school counselors, but they should also create **systems for more effective college and career navigation**. While technology can be a helpful tool, artificial intelligence is **not a substitute** for human support. An important element of such systems is timely labor-market information. School counselors should be equipped with information regarding the expected earnings of the full range of industry sectors and occupations, along with the educational requirements associated with them. Effective systems should empower students and families to make informed choices about students' educational trajectories. This is especially important for students experiencing homelessness or in foster care, who often lack access to the technology and adult support needed to complete the FAFSA and pursue postsecondary applications. Counseling systems should include training and resources specific to homeless youth and youth with foster care experience, given their heightened need for consistent, informed guidance.

Monitor Data Carefully

Especially considering the nation's history of tracking, policymakers should closely monitor Workforce Pell implementation to ensure it opens doors rather than widens gaps. For example, policymakers should collect data to ensure that students of color and students from low-income families are not encouraged to secure short-term credentials while White and affluent students matriculate to four-year colleges after high school. In addition, policymakers should monitor high school graduation rates to ensure students who are over-aged and under-credited are not encouraged to drop out of high school, earn a general equivalency degree, and then secure a Workforce Pell Grant and short-term credential. Finally, policymakers should investigate the earnings resulting from short-term credentials supported by Workforce Pell Grants to ensure this program truly supports economic mobility.

For Workforce Pell Implementation

The U.S. Department of Education conducted negotiated rulemaking and issued regulations governing Workforce Pell; however, states have wide latitude to strengthen implementation standards above the federal floor. Below are key opportunities to enhance the quality of Workforce Pell.

Raise the Bar on Credential Quality

To qualify for Workforce Pell, federal law requires that a short-term credential align with one of three standards for labor market alignment: high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand. This is a low bar. Demand alone says nothing about job quality. For example, a commercial driver's license or certified nursing assistant credential leads to "in-demand" jobs because these jobs have high turnover, not because they pay well or offer room for advancement. States should require that eligible credentials meet at least two of the three standards, and ideally all three. This will ensure that a program's alignment with employer demand is paired with evidence that completers earn a living wage.

In addition, states should treat the federal value-added earnings test as a floor, not a ceiling. The federal standard compares program completers'

earnings to 150 percent of the poverty line (\$23,940 annually for a single-person household in 2026). Again, this is a low standard that could allow Workforce Pell Grant recipients to earn less than someone with only a high school diploma. States should adopt more rigorous wage standards and publish contextual benchmarks such as the state median wage for high school graduates alongside any value-added earnings figure.

Adopt Policies That Ensure Credentials Do Not Lead to Dead Ends

Most short-term credentials are currently offered through noncredit programs that rarely connect to accredited postsecondary degree and credential programs. According to Community College Research Center, **only 5 percent** of noncredit completers go on to enroll in credit-bearing postsecondary programs, and under 5 percent of the U.S. workforce holds a stackable credential. Left unaddressed, this risks trapping Workforce Pell recipients in a single low-wage credential with no upward mobility, particularly considering that Pell's six-year lifetime limit means time spent on a short-term program can foreclose the financial aid a student would need later to complete a degree.

States should require that eligible programs stack toward credit at more than one institution, with at least one public institution of higher education, so that credit mobility does not depend on a single provider's internal pathway. States should also strengthen statewide transfer and articulation agreements, adopt credit-for-prior-learning policies, and streamline program approval processes so that stacking is administratively realistic.

Incentivize Continued Education Within the Bounds of the Federal Rule

In its comments on the proposed rule, All4Ed recommended that students who continue their education be excluded from a program's job placement rate calculation so that institutions are not penalized for outcomes Congress itself intended by requiring credentials to be stackable. The U.S. Department of Education declined this recommendation, choosing instead to keep continuing students in the placement rate calculation out of concern that excluding them would encourage institutions to design programs that route students into further education rather than the workforce. This policy, however, does not prevent states from building their own incentives to encourage Workforce Pell recipients to seek further education after





securing their short-term credential. States should ensure Workforce Pell completers receive targeted counseling on how to apply their credential toward additional education. In addition, they should create supplemental funding or scholarships for Workforce Pell completers who enroll in an associate or bachelor's degree program.

Support for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and Youth in Foster Care: Align Financial Aid Timelines With Program Timelines

Unaccompanied homeless youth and students who are or were in foster care must have their independent student status determined before they can receive federal aid, and the Higher Education Act allows financial aid administrators up to 60 days after enrollment to make that determination. These young people have no family resources to fall back on and no way to cover tuition while a determination is pending. Without confirmed aid, they cannot begin a program at all. A 60-day window designed around a semester calendar becomes a barrier to entry when the program itself may run only eight weeks. Moreover, the 60-day time period runs from the date of enrollment, offering no assurance to a student who cannot enroll until aid is confirmed. States should direct institutions to make these determinations no later than 30 days after a student applies for aid, rather than after enrollment, and to prioritize students seeking to enroll in Workforce Pell-eligible programs

so that a pending determination does not prevent participation.

Strengthen Longitudinal Data Systems To Drive Quality and Progress

States cannot enforce guardrails using data that does not exist. [Research](#) finds that only about three-quarters of states collect data on their noncredit programming, and even among states that do, [data collection is often inconsistent](#). Definitions vary from state to state, and basic details like instructional time and format can be missing or unclear.

States should develop the [data infrastructure](#) needed to track wage and employment outcomes years after program completion, as well as data on whether Workforce Pell Grant recipients stack credentials or finish a degree. In addition, states should adopt outcome indicators aligned with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, including employment rates, median earnings, credential attainment, and measurable skill gains, and should disaggregate this data by race and income to guard against the tracking dynamics that historically shape who ends up in short-term programs versus degree programs.



Conclusion

The promise of Workforce Pell could turn into a pitfall without a concerted focus on quality and opportunity. While the program has the potential to expand opportunity for students and workers who cannot afford, or do not want, a two- or four-year degree, Workforce Pell and the short-term credentials it supports are not a substitute for the degree pathways that still lead to the strongest outcomes for most students. The recommendations in this brief offer a starting point for ensuring Workforce Pell does not convert high school education into a job training program. Absent additional guardrails and mindful implementation, the aspiration of Workforce Pell to expand opportunity for young people will prove too good to be true.

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About All4Ed

Founded in 2001, All4Ed is a national nonprofit that drives transformation in education-to-career systems to ensure that every young person thrives in learning, work, and life. We work with federal and state policymakers, K-12 and higher education leaders, and cross-sector partners to advance equitable, learner-centered pathways organized around four domains of thriving: knowledge and capability, economic security and mobility, connection and belonging, and purpose and agency. Through policy advocacy and activation, technical assistance, and thought leadership, we move ideas from legislation to implementation, strengthen state and regional pathways ecosystems, and challenge assumptions about what pathways are for. www.all4ed.org

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