



# TRANSITION POINTS

The Education Strategy Group Newsletter



## A Look Back at 2021

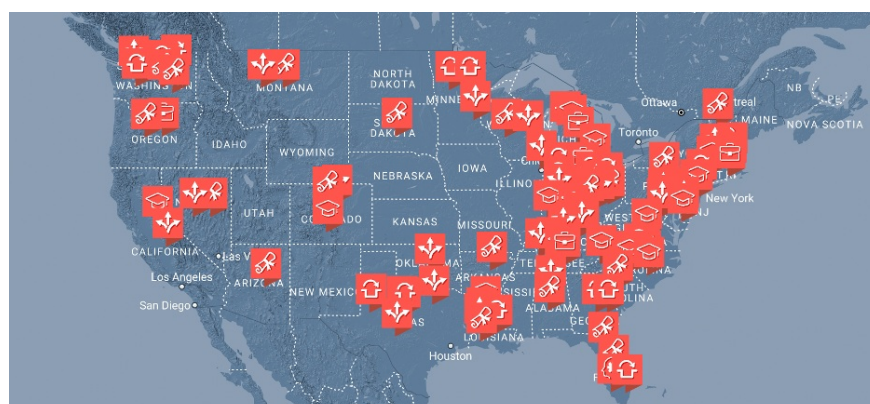
As we wrap up 2021 and round the corner into 2022, I am struck by the resilience our communities have shown in the face of tremendous and ongoing challenges. Through the ups and downs of this year, we have begun to rebuild a stronger nation and continued critical conversations about how to ensure a level playing field for all Americans—particularly people of color and from low-income backgrounds who are too often harmed by our systems and structures. Our work at ESG centers on building more equitable opportunities for economic mobility and prosperity through education; we are proud of the progress we have made during this past year, and our resolve to build on this work in 2022 is stronger than ever. Below, we reflect on our efforts during another uniquely challenging—and hopeful—year.

I wish each of you a restful and restorative holiday season, and look forward to connecting with and learning from one another in the new year.

**Matt Gandal**

*President and CEO, Education Strategy Group*

In 2021, the ESG team was proud to partner with states, districts, institutions, and philanthropic organizations from across the country in a diverse set of efforts to advance equitable economic mobility. Below are some highlights from the past year.



# Maximizing the potential of historic stimulus funding

With the passage of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) and the investment of \$123 billion in K-12 education, the federal government made one of the most dramatic attempts of our lifetimes to give communities the tools to rebuild. With the support of collaborators from leading educational organizations, ESG launched [Invest Forward](#), an effort to encourage district and state leaders to prioritize support for students' pathways to postsecondary and career success in their ARP spending plans and to arm them with shovel-ready investment ideas that have been proven to work. As states and localities roll out their spending plans, we are excited to see [the inclusion of innovative ideas](#)—including new advising models, near-peer tutoring initiatives, summer bridge programs, and more—that advance key strategies for successful student transitions.



In addition to continuing the Invest Forward work in the new year, ESG is also working to identify high-impact strategies for the use of HEERF funds by higher education leaders to support successful postsecondary attainment in this uniquely challenging time.

## Accelerating successful student transitions to higher education

*The ongoing impact of the pandemic made it even more challenging for students to successfully transition from high school to higher education and training opportunities—at a time when a postsecondary degree or credential is more essential than ever. We doubled down on our efforts to support students' postsecondary transitions, including the launch of two major new streams of work.*



In late summer, ESG launched [The Momentum Metrics Networks](#), year-long initiatives providing dedicated coaching and support to a cohort of districts each in Tennessee and Texas. Through the Networks, ESG is working with district leaders to identify data-driven strategies for improving the postsecondary preparation and success of high school students, with a focus on closing equity gaps for students of color and students

from low-income backgrounds. This work is also supported by partnerships with state and local intermediaries, including the Texas Impact Network, Education Equals Economics Alliance (E3), RGV Focus, Tarrant To & Through Partnership (T3), and Tennessee SCORE. The Momentum Metrics Networks build on ESG's 2020 [From Tails to Heads: Building Momentum for Postsecondary Success](#) report, which offered a new set of "momentum metrics" for states and communities to prioritize to help more students—particularly students of color and students from low-income backgrounds—successfully move to and through postsecondary education and training.

In recognition of the critical role that advising plays in supporting students' educational journeys, ESG launched [Making the Connection: Aligned Advising to Improve Postsecondary Access and Success](#). This microsite makes the case for prioritizing alignment of advising across K-12 and higher education, offers a



vision for achieving that alignment, and lays out concrete action steps and resources for the many stakeholders who have a role to play.

## Reimagining postsecondary systems for broader student success

*Getting students enrolled in higher education and training is essential, but not sufficient; there is much work to be done in redesigning postsecondary education systems and structures to better serve the needs of all students, including learners of color, post-traditional learners, individuals from low-income backgrounds, and more. ESG launched several major efforts and released new resources in pursuit of more equitable higher education attainment in 2021.*

With the support of Lumina Foundation, ESG and the Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) at the University of Illinois partnered to launch the **Racial Equity for Adult Credentials in Higher Education (REACH) Collaborative**, a new national initiative focused on creating equitable credential to associate degree pathways for adult students of color. The REACH Collaborative brings together a network of community college leaders from state system offices and more than 160 institutions from six states, along with coaches, equity champions, and a host of intermediary partners to strengthen credential pathways with the supports and curricular alignment that post-traditional adult learners need to reskill and recover from the pandemic.



With the publication of two major resources under our **Accelerating Recovery through Credentials (ARC) initiative**, ESG focused on helping systems and institutions better meet the needs of adult (or post-traditional) learners this year. The ARC **Rapid Response Toolkit** (which helps leaders plan for and execute on strategic actions to quickly support pandemic-displaced workers looking to reskill) and

**Adult-Ready Playbook** (a comprehensive framework that fundamentally re-envision education for post-traditional learners) are concrete tools that empower higher education leaders to better serve an ever-growing student population.

In partnership with the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), ESG also launched the **Non-credit and Credit Alignment Lab (NCAL)**, a two-year initiative to support 14 community colleges' efforts to develop new or improved pathways between non-credit and credit programs. Building on the work begun last year with ESG's publication of **A More Unified Community College**, NCAL will provide spaces for community college leaders to develop new or improve current pathways between non-credit and credit functions that address critical barriers to alignment.

## Transforming career pathways to keep pace with a new economy

*The pandemic has transformed the American economy, necessitating an increased urgency to build career pathways that equip students with the knowledge, skills, and networks needed to successfully enter high-wage, in-demand jobs.*



As part of ESG's ongoing support of the [New Skills ready network](#), part of JPMorgan Chase's global career readiness initiative, we worked with the six participating sites (Boston, Columbus, Dallas, Denver, Indianapolis, and Nashville) to prioritize systems alignment, evaluate high-quality career pathways, and

obtain data to track students through K-12 into postsecondary education and the workforce. The network will now move into school-based implementation, focusing on expanding access to capstone work-based learning experiences in health care and IT and ensuring that all students have access to aligned advising with career exploration, college and career planning, and seamless transitions into higher education.

Recognizing that [non-degree credentials](#) can offer a path to economic mobility, ESG joined forces with the National Skills Coalition to offer the [Quality Postsecondary Credential Policy Academy](#) to six states. Participating states are working to develop a cross-sector consensus definition of high-value non-degree credentials along with a corresponding policy agenda to increase the number of learners who earn those credentials. Importantly, the work centers racial equity to ensure that adult workers of color have access to and can successfully earn these credentials that lead to good jobs. ESG is providing technical assistance to each state, focusing especially on helping them develop and implement a data-driven approach to identifying non-degree credentials that meet rigorous quality and value thresholds.

## Supporting states and communities

In addition to our broader national work, ESG also provided direct support to numerous states and local communities throughout the year. From work to identify credentials of value in Florida and Detroit; to efforts to increase dual enrollment opportunities in Washington State and [Los Angeles County](#); to strategic support for ensuring successful postsecondary transitions and ultimately increased postsecondary attainment in [Minnesota](#) and Kentucky—our team partnered with on-the-ground leaders to improve systems and open doors to opportunity for more students.

## Join our team

If you want to be a part of ESG's work in 2022, check out our open positions and apply to join our team. We are currently seeking:

[Associates](#)

[Senior Associates](#)

[Director of Finance](#)



*Education Strategy Group (ESG) works with America's education, business, and civic leaders to expand economic opportunity and mobility by increasing educational attainment. We are driven by the conviction that a robust education system aligned with workforce demands leads to a stronger, more equitable society.*

[Contact us](#) to learn more and work together