



ACCELERATING ALL STUDENTS

*A Pathways Policy
Playbook for State Leaders*



Education
Strategy
Group

INTRODUCTION

- ▶ By 2031, more than 70 percent of jobs will require a postsecondary credential, according to the latest projections from the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce.

In response, states continue to expand students' access to postsecondary and workforce pathways beginning as early as middle school. These accelerated pathways help ensure more students leave high school on a path to economic mobility and security.

Most of today's students attend schools that offer programs allowing them to get a jump start on postsecondary pathways, including dual enrollment programs or early college high schools. Between 2011 and 2021, the number of students enrolled in dual enrollment programs alone doubled to more than 1.5 million, which means about one-third of high school students have participated in dual enrollment. Enabling state-level policies and federal policy changes have helped spur an expanded and sustained focus on Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming, as well as growth in work-based learning and various other career-connected learning opportunities aligned with postsecondary programs or specific career pathways that lead to high-demand, industry-recognized credentials.

When implemented effectively, these programs enable students to identify career opportunities, develop essential workforce skills, ease their path to college, save money, and reduce the time it takes to achieve their educational goals. Research shows that students who participate in college coursework in high school are more likely to complete college and earn a higher income after graduation than their peers who do not participate in these programs.

Unfortunately, access and participation in these programs are not accessible to all students. Investments in these programs often focus on the students most likely to attend college, leaving many populations behind. Students often engage in “random acts of dual enrollment” that fail to provide momentum toward a credential or career. In recent years, the field has aligned on several ways to strengthen the policy environment based on evidence. States should build systems that create more intentional pathways, providing students with the signals and structures they need to accelerate their path to economic opportunity.

Accelerated pathways should not be limited to students who are already advanced or pre-disposed to attend college. All students should have access to educational experiences that provide them with opportunities to gain knowledge, explore their interests, build skills, and gain on-the-job experience. These opportunities help students build networks and result in a quicker path to achieving their ultimate goal of landing a career that will enable them to live prosperous and fulfilling lives. High-quality accelerated pathway models integrate:

- Dual enrollment sequences in programs of study that enable students to earn 12 or more college credits by high school graduation toward a degree in a high-wage, high-demand field, at no cost to students
- Career-connected learning opportunities aligned to course curriculum to provide career awareness, exploration, preparation, and training
- Simplified student transitions between levels/institutions, supported by strong advising and navigation support that helps students understand college and career options and make better informed choices

State leaders play a crucial role in defining and scaling accelerated pathways, and they have a wide range of policy levers at their disposal. Depending on their state context, this could include legislation, state budget processes, executive orders, agency rules and guidance, as well as direct technical assistance and support. This policy playbook outlines a set of policy actions that state leaders can implement to prioritize and scale accelerated pathways, focusing on policies that support all students, regardless of their demographic characteristics, family income, or geographic location. The policy actions focus on setting a vision, building the system, and expanding student support.

Our policy recommendations in this playbook are based on years of insights and lessons learned working with state and local leadership to build the enabling conditions for accelerated pathways, including through cross-state initiatives such as Accelerate ED, Launch, and the New Skills Ready Network. The playbook highlights key distinctions of effective policy, as well as leading states that are already working to advocate and support accelerated pathways policies, allowing others to learn from their experiences and approaches.

STATE POLICY ACTIONS

► SET A VISION

- Collaborate to establish goals for student acceleration
- Align high school graduation requirements to recognize and support various pathways
- Prioritize acceleration in high school accountability
- Integrate incentive funding and alleviate cost barriers
- Publicly report on accelerated pathways and completion

► BUILD ACCELERATED SYSTEMS

- Adopt state-defined programs of study that embed credentials
- Designate accelerated school models
- Create pathway-specific postsecondary transfer blocks
- Invest in intermediary functions
- Support communities of practice and technical assistance

► EXPAND SUPPORT

- Increase quality middle school career exploration
- Define and scale purposeful work-based learning
- Grow advising capacity in and out of schools and institutions
- Expand access to qualified instructors



SET A VISION

- ▶ Establish expectations and align incentives for schools, districts, and other partners to expand access and success in accelerated pathways.

Creating accelerated models at scale requires aligning the entire system, including all the elements highlighted in this playbook. A district, regional, and ideally statewide vision can catalyze aligning government and industry leaders and K–12, postsecondary, and workforce learning providers to build intentional

pathways into the system's fabric and increase student outcomes. However, a vision alone cannot fully catalyze change; states must also align the various incentive structures and signals, particularly with districts, schools, families, postsecondary institutions, and workforce partners.

POLICY ACTIONS

Collaborate to establish goals for student acceleration.

Clear goals with broad buy-in are crucial for aligning and engaging stakeholders in collective action, thereby strengthening local implementation efforts. Creating a table where multiple stakeholders review existing outcomes and gaps and agree on common goals for increasing the number of students who have access to and complete accelerated pathways serves as a critical galvanizing force, leading to coordinated policy actions. Goals should also focus on industry alignment and pathways that lead to credentials of value.

Colorado's Secondary, Postsecondary, and Work-based Learning Integration Task Force (created by HB22-1215) has set a vision for all learners to graduate high school with access to in-demand industry-recognized credentials, 12 postsecondary credits as part of a defined postsecondary and workforce pathway, and/or high-quality work-based learning (WBL) opportunities. Now, partners across the state are coming together to advocate for policy change and local implementation to support these efforts.

DISTINCTIONS

- *Broad-based buy-in*
- *Leadership endorsement*
- *Clear goals and an action plan*

RESOURCES

- *Launch: Conditions for Sustainable and Equitable Pathways Systems* (Advance CTE, ESG, ExcelinEd, JFF, New America)
- *Pathways to Implementation: Vision* (Bellwether)

Align high school graduation requirements to recognize and support various pathways.

Graduation requirements and guidelines are essential tools to drive action toward state goals for acceleration. They also provide an important signal to students about postsecondary admissions and career-readiness requirements. Changing high school graduation requirements to enable accelerated pathways sets the expectation for districts and schools to expand opportunities. It also directly signals students and families about the importance of acceleration.

Indiana recently updated its high school graduation requirements, including creating a diploma seal recognizing students earning multiple college credits, completing work-based learning, attaining an industry-recognized credential, and demonstrating other competencies. The process engaged more than 8,000 stakeholders and will have far-reaching implications for the role of high schools in supporting students in accelerating and aligning their education.

DISTINCTIONS

- *Flexible and intentional credit accumulation*
- *Clear incentive for additional accomplishments*
- *Permeable academic and workforce pathways*

RESOURCES

- *Rethinking High School Graduation Requirements* (ESG)
- *50-State Comparison: High School Graduation Requirements* (ECS)

Prioritize acceleration in high school accountability.

School accountability systems play a critical role in how districts make decisions about the programming they offer students. Forty-one states and the District of Columbia include college and career readiness indicators in their accountability systems; however, most focus on a single activity or outcome rather than multiple actions as part of a system that accelerates students' progress toward a specific pathway. The best policies weigh all accelerated postsecondary opportunities (including General education dual enrollment, CTE dual enrollment, Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB) equally.

In July 2024, **Louisiana** became one of a growing number of states to restructure their school accountability metrics to include more meaningful pathway progress. Specifically, it awards additional points to schools for students who successfully complete at least six dual enrollment credits, earn a college Certificate of Technical Studies (16–33 credit hours), participate in high-quality work-based learning, and/or earn an advanced industry-recognized credential. **Tennessee** provides multiple options for students to meet the state's Ready Graduate indicator. One way to meet Ready Graduate is to complete four early postsecondary opportunities such as dual enrollment, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate courses. Another way is to complete two early postsecondary opportunities and earn an industry-recognized credential. **Rhode Island** awards bonus points in its accountability system based on the number of early postsecondary options completed.

As states tie funding and accountability systems to accelerated pathways programs and their outcomes, it is essential to monitor quality continuously. Without key quality measures, districts and schools may focus on easy-to-implement pathways and programs, rather than those that are industry-aligned and provide long-term value to students. Many states define both degree and non-degree credentials of value, specify expectations for high-quality work-based learning experiences, and review local programs against quality standards.



DISTINCTIONS

- *Acceleration through the successful completion of multiple credits*
- *Meaningful weights sufficient to drive action*
- *Allowances for workforce and academic alignment*



RESOURCES

- *Destination Known: Valuing College AND Career Readiness in State Accountability Systems (ESG)*
- *Accountability for Postsecondary Readiness (WestEd)*
- *Building Credential Currency (ESG)*
- *Developing High Quality State Work-Based Learning Programs (ExcelinEd)*

Integrate incentive funding and alleviate cost barriers.

To provide accelerated pathways, high schools must evolve their traditional roles to offer new curricula and experiences, including coordinating closely with postsecondary institutions and workforce partners. States can encourage this shift by moving away from funding individual programs to embedding pathway funding into K12 and postsecondary funding models, especially through outcomes-based incentives.

Texas connects both K12 and postsecondary funding to accelerated pathways through outcomes-based incentives. In 2019, [House Bill 3](#) established the College, Career, and Military Readiness Outcomes Bonus, which provides a bonus to districts for every student who meets specific readiness criteria and enrolls in college within one year of graduation, or earns an associate's degree, a Level 1 or 2 college certificate (15–30 credit hours), or Level 2 certificate (<30 credit hours), or an industry-recognized credential while in high school. It also includes incentives for the success of economically disadvantaged and special education students, encouraging districts to prioritize extra support to meet their needs. On the postsecondary side, in 2023, [House Bill 8](#) created an incentive for community colleges to provide funding for each high school student who completes 15 semester credit hours of dual enrollment through its postsecondary funding model. HB 8 also

introduced the Financial Aid for Swift Transfer (FAST) program, which covers tuition and fees for dual enrollment courses for eligible low-income high school students. Collectively, these policies alleviate the cost barriers for students and provide additional incentives for education providers.

DISTINCTIONS

- Outcomes-based (rather than programmatic) funding approaches
- Incentive-based funding models for acceleration
- Targeted incentives for high-needs industries and students

RESOURCES

- [Braiding Funding to Support Equitable Career Pathways](#) (New Skills Ready Network)
- [Industry Certifications Policy Brief](#) (ExcelinED)
- [State Financial Incentives For Work-Based Learning](#) (ECS)

Publicly report on accelerated pathways and completion.

Almost all states [publish stand-alone reports on career-connected learning programs](#), but [most still focus on participation and access rather than intentional pathway acceleration or outcomes](#). As a result, administrators, policymakers, and parents who seek to understand the most effective programs cannot access the necessary information. States should integrate momentum and completion metrics into their existing state-wide reporting to address this gap.

Maryland's Longitudinal Data System Center offers [robust reporting](#) on dual enrollment at the district level. It also reports on workforce outcomes for public high school graduates, including information about the sector that alumni work in five years after high school graduation. The center also provides detailed data files on the kinds of courses students take through dual enrollment. While there are opportunities to integrate more analysis of accelerated program outcomes, these reports provide a robust starting point for further exploration. **North Carolina** releases an [annual report](#)

with extensive data on its Career and College Promise programs and Cooperative Innovation High Schools, which includes comprehensive outcomes, such as the number of high school students completing an associate's degree. It also offers qualitative insights.

DISTINCTIONS

- Accessible data and reports
- Clear and meaningful information
- Impactful and acceleration-focused metrics

RESOURCES

- [Measurement For Mobility: How States Can Use Data to Incentivize Postsecondary and Workforce Success in Public Education](#) (ESG)



SAMPLE METRICS

The following are data that may be useful for states to report and disaggregate across student characteristics:

%

Students in grade 11 enrolled in career pathways that have the option to earn 12+ college credits in high school

%

Employed and annual earnings 10 years post-high school for students that completed an accelerated pathway

%

High school graduates that have completed a CTE program of study, work-based learning experience, and 6+ college credits

%

High school graduates that completed an accelerated pathway that attained a postsecondary credential within 100% of program time

%

High school graduates that completed an accelerated pathway that enrolled in postsecondary education or training

%

Districts offering 1 and 3+ accelerated pathways options for in-demand career fields

%

High school graduates that have earned 6, 9, 12, and 15+ college credits

BUILD ACCELERATED SYSTEMS

- ▶ Create structures to support the implementation of consistent, high-quality accelerated pathways in regions throughout the state.

America's education systems were not designed to support the permeable pathways necessary to support today's students and economy. Once the vision and incentives are aligned, state and local leaders still have significant work to do in transforming the system.

This transformation requires aligning partners across education and industry, exploring new school models, and training instructors. Policy provides an essential lever for helping facilitate coordinated local efforts to implement accelerated pathways.

POLICY ACTIONS

Adopt state-defined programs of study that embed credentials.

For district-established accelerated pathways to succeed, students and families need clarity on how to navigate these pathways most effectively. State and regional efforts to define pathways or programs of study provide a roadmap for education partners, helping to ensure industry alignment. Students and families can better understand the benefits of accelerated pathways and how to navigate a new system when course and pathway maps are available.

Illinois Pathways is a public-private partnership that provides detailed information about career options in different career pathways based on the National Career Clusters Framework and Programs of Study. Similarly, **Louisiana's** Fast Forward initiative publishes maps leading to Associates Degrees and intermediate college certificates and industry-recognized credentials in specific fields. Schools are provided a financial incentive to encourage students to complete these sequences, since courses listed on the maps provide added weight in the state's Career Development Fund formula.

DISTINCTIONS

- Focus on high-needs, high-wage pathways
- Stackable credential maps
- Cost and wage information

RESOURCES

- *Unlocking Potential: A State Policy Roadmap for Equity and Quality in College in High School Programs* (ESG, College in High School Alliance)
- *Intentional Acts of Dual Enrollment: State Strategies for Scaling Early Postsecondary Options in Career Pathways* (Advance CTE)

Designate accelerated school models.

Several states have successfully scaled innovative college and career readiness high school models, such as early college high schools, P-TECH, and career academies to catalyze accelerated pathways across the system. Recognizing and funding these models helps local communities to reimagine traditional, comprehensive high schools. They focus on college and career readiness, incorporating in-depth collaboration with colleges and universities, while also addressing workforce needs and promoting a college-going culture.

Massachusetts has established clear criteria and a designation process for Early College schools that combine high school and college education, as well as Innovative Career Pathways programs that collaborate with employers to provide students with exposure, knowledge, and skills in high-demand pathways. Both programs focus on equitable access, guided academic pathways, structured student support, and deep partnerships. The state provides financial and technical assistance to launch and grow these models across the state. North Carolina has 134 Cooperative Innovation

High Schools, partnerships between local school districts and community colleges that offer students early college models or other innovative high school designs.

DISTINCTIONS

- Strong design elements that center equity and industry alignment
- Oversight by a state or local entity
- Start-up and sustained comprehensive public funding

RESOURCES

- *Designing an Early College Program: Practical Guidance and Resources from One High School's Planning Year* (MA4EC)
- *Catalyzing Innovation: Transforming High Schools Statewide by Scaling up College and Career Readiness High School Models* (Accelerate ED)

Create pathway-specific postsecondary transfer blocks.

States can ensure that students can fully leverage their high school experiences to accelerate progress on a pathway by clearly defining and articulating how credits and experiences will apply toward higher-level credentials. This is particularly important for underserved students, as they are more likely to begin their education at a community college. To accomplish this, states or university systems can bundle blocks of credit that will apply toward a specific amount of progress toward a specific credential at all or a set of institutions. These blocks should go beyond a transferable core and include credential-specific coursework. Additionally, many states use Credit for Prior Learning policies to create opportunities for students to get credit for industry-recognized credentials or work-based experiences.

Florida has adopted a suite of policies to facilitate credit transfer, including common course numbering, a 36-credit transfer block that applies to general education at any institution, and statewide articulation agreements for career and technical education certificates and industry-recognized certifications. As a result, Florida students transfer to bachelor's degrees with an award at the highest rate nationwide. Ohio's

Guaranteed Transfer Pathways (guarantee the transfer and applicability of two years of coursework in three dozen of the state's most common majors toward both associate and bachelor's degree completion in a related major, and include guides specifically for students taking dual enrollment).

DISTINCTIONS

- Clear blocks of courses that will apply toward a credential
- Inclusion of general education and technical coursework
- Credit for credentials and work-based learning experiences

RESOURCES

- *From Patchwork to Pathways: State Approaches to Improving Transfer* (ESG)
- *The Transfer Playbook* (CCRC)

Invest in intermediary functions.

State-wide and regional intermediaries can help manage the considerable coordination across K12, postsecondary, and workforce partners that accelerated pathway strategies require. Many intermediaries also support advocacy efforts, data collection, and use. These organizations need official recognition and stable funding to support sustainability pathway efforts.

Iowa's legislature established the work-based learning intermediary network in 2013 to collaborate with industry and support districts in providing work-based learning opportunities for students. Since then, stable state funding has enabled the network to coordinate with more than 2,000 businesses across 13 different regions, impacting over 70,000 students annually. **In Delaware**, state leaders have partnered closely with the Rodel Foundation to enhance government capacity and facilitate public-private partnerships that develop and implement pathways impacting over 30,000 students.

DISTINCTIONS

- Recognized entity with strong community connections in education and industry
- Long-standing stable funding
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities

RESOURCES

- *Keys to Scale: How to Grow the Impact of Education-to-Career Pathway Intermediaries* (ESG)
- *Mending the Path: The Central Role of Intermediaries in Building Equitable Pathways from Education to Work* (Equal Measure)

Support communities of practice and technical assistance.

As partners work to transform their traditional education systems, communities of practice and technical assistance can provide the critical support they need to succeed. Policy is only as good as the implementation it spurs, which is why implementation support is so essential. When states invest in outcomes without providing organizations with the necessary support to shift their practices, it can lead to geographic inequities, as resourced districts are more likely to have the capacity to capitalize on incentives.

California's Golden State Pathways Program is a competitive grant program that invests \$500M to help improve college and career readiness in California high schools. The program provides resources for planning and implementing grants for programs that promote accelerated pathways in high-wage, high-skill, and high-growth areas. Additionally, it funded a statewide technical assistance center and eight regional assistance centers largely based at county offices of education, which can leverage a robust network of existing pathways support organizations in California.

DISTINCTIONS

- *Financial investments to support clear goals*
- *State and regional technical assistance centers*
- *Planning and implementation support*

RESOURCES

- *Dual Enrollment Pathways Implementation Roadmap* (Career Ladders Project and Los Angeles Regional Consortium)
- *DEEP Insights: Redesigning Dual Enrollment as a Purposeful Pathway to College and Career Opportunity* (CCRC)

EXPAND SUPPORTS

- ▶ Invest in the expansion of experiences that comprise high-quality accelerated pathways and support to help students succeed in them.

Districts, schools, and partnerships need support in implementing the various elements of a high-quality accelerated pathway. Among the many changes districts need to adapt to implement accelerated pathways include: providing early access for parents and students to

information about choosing a pathway, creating structures to support work-based learning, and providing high-quality advising. Policymakers should invest in high-quality implementation to ensure equitable access in communities across their state.

POLICY ACTIONS

Increase quality middle school career exploration.

State leaders recognize that career exposure and exploration are essential for helping students access accelerated pathways. Middle school career exposure helps provide relevance and support students in selecting and planning a pathway earlier, enabling them to take advantage of accelerated pathways. States can also use the middle school years to begin to familiarize students and families with the regional pathway options available to them and their program outcomes.

New Jersey used Perkins V state leadership funds to establish the Middle Grades Career Awareness and Exploration Grant, cultivating the development of innovative career awareness and exploration programs that focus on engaging career-focused instruction and unique experiences for middle-grade students. The three-year grant program allows middle schools to offer hands-on career exploration opportunities that students would like to incorporate into their career planning journey. Delaware also includes guidance for middle

grades in their career pathways maps, including standards for career exploration in middle grades and a portrait of a high school-ready student.

DISTINCTIONS

- Broad opportunities for exploration
- Direct connection to employers
- Support for students to develop academic and career plans

RESOURCES

- Extending the Runway: A National Analysis of Middle School Career Exploration (ESG)
- The State of Career Exploration in Middle School (ECS)

Define and scale purposeful work-based learning.

Work-based learning, ranging from career exposure to job shadowing, internships, and apprenticeships, provides context and relevance to classroom learning. Research indicates that students who participate in work-based learning are more likely to achieve academic success and experience positive workforce outcomes. States can support efforts to scale work-based learning by defining quality experiences and helping to create networks of employers willing to offer work-based learning opportunities.

Alabama's Work-Based Learning Handbook defines a continuum with concrete examples and best practices. Additionally, it uses WIOA to fund work-based learning opportunities for qualifying students and provides implementation support for employers, including apprenticeships. Finally, Alabama Talent Triad provides a highlighting work-based learning opportunities throughout the state. **Virginia** defines 12 types of high-quality work-based learning; graduates must complete one of three options that could include a high-quality work-based learning experience. **Nevada** requires the Governor's Office of Workforce Innovation to establish a program for work-based learning for students in grades 7–12 in

coordination with the Department of Education, develop criteria for program quality, and collaborate with the Department of Education and Board of Regents to enable students to earn up to 12 units of dual enrollment for approved work-based learning.

DISTINCTIONS

- Clear definitions
- Relevance to classroom learning and pathways
- Industry capacity and partnership

RESOURCES

- Connecting Every Learner: A Framework for States to Increase Access to and Success in Work-Based Learning (Advance CTE)
- Developing High Quality State Work-Based Learning Policy: A Playbook For State Policymakers (ExcelinED)

Grow advising capacity in and out of schools and institutions.

Aligned advising between the K-12 and higher education sectors is essential for supporting accelerated pathways, as students and their families need guidance in understanding the purpose of these pathways and how to utilize them effectively. Advisors play a critical role in helping students understand their career interests and identifying appropriate pathways that lead to industry-recognized credentials and college certificates and degrees. School counselors, teachers, and other providers each have a role in supporting students with accelerated pathways and how to assist students and their families in navigating them. Pathways programs also need to support students in navigating work environments.

The College and Career Coach Program, administered by the **Arkansas** Division of Career and Technical Education, helps motivate and support Arkansas students in achieving their college and career planning goals by providing intensive hands-on programs and services. More than 120 College and Career Coaches partner with district counselors and work with over

60,000 7th—to 12th—grade students statewide to assist with developing and revising their students' success plans. In Tennessee, the TN Transfer Pathway tool enables advisors to assist students in making informed decisions about their educational path.

DISTINCTIONS

- *Equipped counselors, teachers, and support teams*
- *Simple, easy-to-understand information*
- *Navigation Support*

RESOURCES

- *Making the Connection: State Policy Recommendations for Aligned Advising (ESG)*
- *The Dual Enrollment Playbook (Aspen, CCRC)*

Expand access to qualified instructors.

For many districts and schools, the availability of credentialed instructors largely determines course and pathway offerings. To teach dual enrollment courses, instructors typically need relevant postsecondary coursework (often 18 master's-level credit hours in the subject area an instructor teaches) and/or career experience. Clear, consistent credentialing requirements and instructor capacity support are essential for districts to proactively plan for pathways offerings. States should remove unnecessary barriers to help districts utilize a broader pool of instructors, including industry professionals, and encourage colleges on alternative credentialing and instructional delivery approaches.

Minnesota has invested significantly in creating master's-level courses for dual enrollment instructors and subsidizing their education through a program currently called Pathway to 18. The program also provides teachers with credit for prior learning.

Indiana's STEM Teach program covers tuition costs and offers a bonus to teachers who pursue graduate credentials to teach STEM dual enrollment courses.

A similar program is available for communications, speech, economics, English, history, political science, government, and world languages.

DISTINCTIONS

- *Simple requirements that ensure instructor quality*
- *Course availability*
- *Financial support and incentives*

RESOURCES

- *Increasing the Supply of High-Quality Instructors for Dual Enrollment Programs (ECS)*
- *Addressing a Major Barrier for Dual Enrollment: Strategies to Staff Up and Scale Up (JFF)*

BRINGING THE PIECES **TOGETHER**

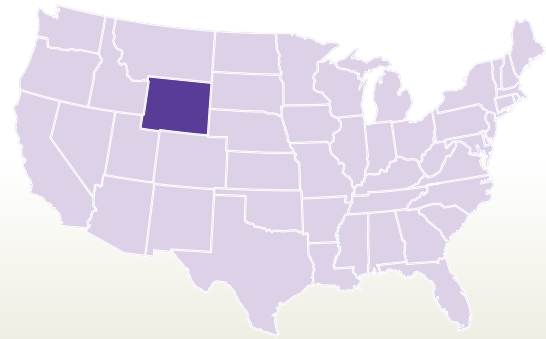
- ▶ Individually, the policies outlined in this playbook can have an impact; together, their impact is multiplied. Colorado and Texas, for example, have created comprehensive strategies for prioritizing and implementing policy actions within their state contexts.

Vision as a catalyst for scale in Colorado

Public education in Colorado is highly decentralized, and local districts and colleges have significant control over local decisions. In 2020, Colorado had strong programs in place that supported accelerated pathways for students, including P-TECH and Early College High Schools, robust dual enrollment (known as Concurrent Enrollment in Colorado), industry-recognized credential incentives, and extensive articulation agreements. Infrastructure included support for work-based learning, a career counseling grant, and funding to credential concurrent enrollment faculty. Since 2016, Colorado has awarded more than 50,000 industry-recognized credentials to high school students. More than 40 percent of high school graduates participate in dual enrollment, and more than 3 percent graduate with a postsecondary credential. Still, these efforts were siloed and reliant on individual leaders, resulting in inequitable access.

To address this, HB22-1215 established the Secondary, Postsecondary, and Work-Based Learning Integration Task Force in 2022. Over 18 months, the diverse task force **developed a unified vision and policy roadmap to align incentives, transition individual programs into a coordinated system, and expand support** through the use of public and private resources.

In 2024, Colorado passed HB24-1364, which requires the state to develop a statewide longitudinal data system to measure impact and study program costs, as well as HB24-164, which will improve credit transfer and applicability. Current proposals aim to align accountability systems and streamline funding for accelerated programs. Colorado's roadmap aligns with many of the policy elements outlined in this playbook and takes into account the state's decentralized governance structure. The newly launched Homegrown Talent Coalition will collaborate to support the implementation and sustainability of these initiatives at both the state and local levels.



COLORADO BY-THE-NUMBERS

50,000 | Industry-recognized credentials awarded to high school students

40%+ | High school graduates participate in dual enrollment

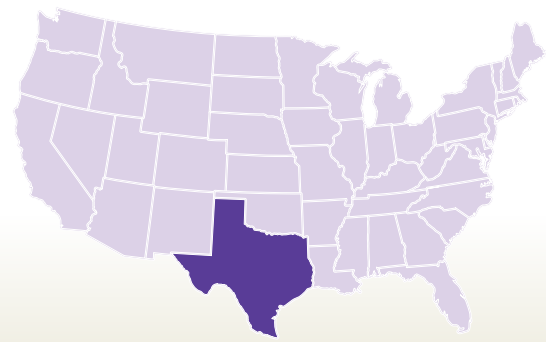
3%+ | High school graduates with a postsecondary credential

Maximizing support to ensure impact in Texas

Texas is a more centralized state, and since 2015, the state has benefited from a relatively clear vision among the state agencies that span K12 through workforce, which is supported by the Tri-Agency Workforce initiative. The state has a long history of implementing accelerated programs, it has more than 234 Early College High Schools (ECHS), more than 276 Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH), and Texas Science, and used to operate more than 90 Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (T-STEM) academies, all of which offer acceleration opportunities for students. Due to these and other programs at the high school level, 24 percent of high school graduates participated in dual enrollment (known as dual credit in Texas), 2.4 percent of graduates completed an associate's degree, and 8.6% completed an industry-recognized credential or qualifying certificate.

Texas was among the first states to align both its accountability and funding systems to encourage accelerated pathways at the K-12 level. HB8 also created funding mechanisms for all low-income students to access postsecondary credit through the FAST Program, as well as a state-wide effort to define and identify credentials of value. All this was made possible thanks to strong central oversight and relatively robust, transparent data.

In recent years, **Texas has shifted its focus to support districts and partnerships in making the systemic changes outlined in the vision.** In 2023, Texas passed a suite of legislation that will support stronger rural partnerships and invest in community colleges and workforce programs. Additionally, they made it easier for students to access return-on-investment data on different pathways and to transfer into a four-year institution. This support is complemented by ongoing action and partnership from the Tri-Agency Workforce initiative, as well as oversight and collaboration with various education advocacy and intermediary partners.



TEXAS BY-THE-NUMBERS

234+	Early College High Schools (ECHS)
276+	Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH)
90+	Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (T-STEM)
24+	High School Graduates Participated in Dual Enrollment
2.4%	Graduates completed an Associate's Degree
8.6%	Graduates completed an industry-recognized credential or qualifying certificate

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAYBOOK

- ▶ So, where do you start? While this playbook presents policies in a general sequence—starting with a shared vision and moving toward system alignment and support—they don't have to be tackled in a rigid order.

In some cases, initiating programmatic changes can be the spark that builds momentum for broader systemic transformation. You know your state best;

start with what makes the most sense for your context. The following page outlines examples of specific policy levers that may serve as a useful starting point.



Set a Vision

- Pursue an executive order that sets a vision or creates a formal body tasked with setting a vision.
- Realign state governance structure or goals across K12 education, postsecondary education, and workforce.
- Create reporting requirements to share progress with the general assembly.
- Change state laws or board rules that govern K-12 public education accountability and graduation guidelines.
- Adapt state funding models or create outcomes-based funding incentives.



Build Accelerated Systems

- Create new laws or adapt existing regulations to define and accommodate accelerated pathways models such as early-college high school and P-TECH.
- Embed more intentional pathways into existing programs, such as CTE, dual enrollment, or financial aid programs.
- Leverage the state's Federal CTE quality indicators in the Perkins Plan or other federal or state planning processes to integrate accelerated pathways goals.
- Review and adapt laws that govern postsecondary transfer, or utilize existing structures to assess the effectiveness of current policies.
- Ensure that grant and program requirements allow for the eligibility of intermediaries and minimize bureaucratic barriers in government contracts.



Expand Supports

- Define advising and career exploration in the state code for high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools.
- Adopt state advising frameworks and standards in state board policy, or require local education agencies or institutions to adopt frameworks and standards.
- Set student requirements to complete activities in the state board rules.
- Include preparation requirements in counseling preparation program approval and licensure requirements.
- Dedicate state funding or personnel to career coach programs.

The policy solutions outlined in this playbook aim to create conditions that enable more students to access and pursue accelerated pathways. However, policy is only the starting point. Implementing these policies and ensuring they have their intended impact is essential; state and local leaders will need to collaborate to identify the optimal mix of policies that address local conditions and accelerate the completion of credentials leading to economic security for more students. Leaders need to continue sharing information, monitoring progress, and being willing to make ongoing adjustments as we learn what will best serve our students and our economy.

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