THE NEWDEAL FORUM WORKING GROUP

Policy Proposals for Aligning the Future of Education with Workforce Opportunities

Building High-Quality College & Career Pathways for All Students

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In partnership with the Alliance for Excellent Education

ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUCATION

A Message from our Co-Chairs

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In 2018, the NewDEAL Forum Future of Work Policy Group released recommendations addressing the issues related to preparing workers for the new American economy. Unsurprisingly, many of those recommendations focused on education and the need for schools to modernize and improve how they prepare students for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

The Education Policy Group grew directly out of those recommendations. When the group first met, in November 2019, the focus of the task force seemed clear: examine how schools, local and state governments, colleges and universities, workforce systems, and employers could work together to ensure that more students are prepared for highly skilled, good-paying jobs.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The state and local elected officials involved in this effort witnessed how the virus affected schools and communities – particularly our nation's most vulnerable students. Nationwide school closures spotlighted and exacerbated inequities that have existed for years.

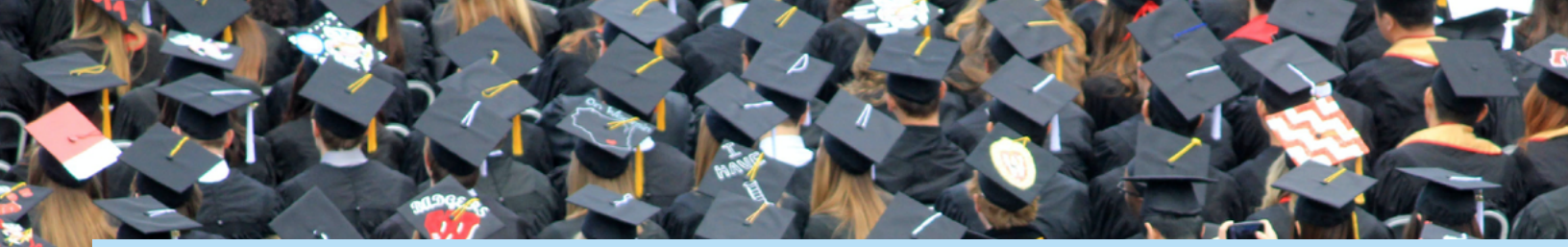
In addition, job losses that resulted from COVID-19 hit low-skilled workers particularly hard, further highlighting the need to develop strong pathways to college and careers.

So the mission of the Education Policy Group expanded to address the broader inequities affecting schools in the pandemic era. State and local leaders understand the links between strong schools and a strong economy. They know that addressing a wider range of educational issues will lead to the policies that promote broadly shared economic prosperity. The group addressed, and identified policy models for, the following topics:

- **Expanding access to high-quality college and career pathways.**
  State and local policymakers must build the case for expanding high quality college and career pathways and play a central role in helping schools prepare students for the jobs that are being created in today's economy.
- **Easing the transition between high school and higher education.**
  Today's good-paying jobs require postsecondary education, so the K-12 education system must work with higher education to promote college readiness and limit student debt.
- **Engaging employers.**
  The most successful college and career pathways programs promote meaningful involvement by employers. Students only benefit from career pathways and other programs if they are aligned to jobs that actually exist and pay good wages. Similarly, economies cannot grow if there are no local workers with the skills to meet employer needs.
- **COVID-19 – Crisis management and recovery planning.**
  COVID-19 presented new challenges for state education systems and highlighted long-standing inequities, particularly those related to the availability of technology and support systems for students outside of school buildings.

  Specifically, the group discussed ways to:

  - Expand access to high-speed broadband for all students and their families
  - Provide services to special populations, including students experiencing homelessness and students with disabilities
  - Ensure that the neediest families retain access to social services (including wrap-around integrated support services) during school closures
  - Evaluate and address unprecedented learning loss
  - Embrace the renewed urgency to prepare students for higher-skilled careers in light of the accelerating losses of low-skill jobs



Section 1:

Expanding Access to High Quality College and Career Pathways

The economy demands a higher level of education than ever before. Almost all good-paying jobs require postsecondary education, and many of them require a bachelor's degree or more. But today's students are woefully under-prepared for today's economy; there is a huge mismatch between the outcomes of our K-12 system and the opportunities in our workforce.

The lack of strong academic preparation, aligned to economic opportunity, creates enormous obstacles for our students, as well as a drag on our economy and our nation's future. We must do better by building meaningful pathways from high school to college that prioritize: rigorous academics, workplace experience, support services, and early access to college work and college credit so more students get the preparation they need to thrive in today's workforce.

Although workforce training issues are often seen as requiring high school reform, they cannot take place without strong alignment between the K-12 and higher education systems, as well as with government agencies, community organizations, and employers.

Sustainable, state-wide governance structures are critical to developing and operating pathways programs over the long haul, and ensuring programs survive leadership changes at the highest levels. State and local leaders have a critical role to play in (1) making the case for investment in high quality college and career pathways, (2) setting a common vision around which all sectors and constituencies can rally, and (3) establishing the policy framework necessary for pathways to grow and succeed.

There has never been a better time to enter the workplace with the right skills, and never a worse time to have the wrong skills. This is even more true in the time of COVID-19. Good-paying jobs require a level of education that many of America's students don't have, and the prospects for students with lower education levels are worsening. These data points are a call to action for state and local policymakers committed to ensuring that each and every student graduates from high school prepared for success:

- 80% of good-paying jobs ($35,000+) require postsecondary education, and 56% require a bachelor's degree or higher level of education.
- 85% of students graduate from high school, but only 37% can read and do math at a college-ready level.
- Workers with a postsecondary education are far less vulnerable to economic downturns. During the Great Recession, the unemployment rate for people with a bachelor's degree never exceeded 5%. During the COVID-19 crisis in spring 2020, the unemployment rate for people without a college degree was 17.3%, whereas the unemployment rate for people with a bachelor's degree was 8.4%.

Policy Recommendations: *Establishing state and local policy infrastructure*

Much of the success of college and career pathways is driven by alliances across government and non-government entities, which school leaders are not well-positioned to manage on their own. A clear vision with strong buy-in from all constituencies is also essential. Thus, state and local policy is necessary to establish the structures and incentives that will be required to launch and maintain strong initiatives at scale. Policy goals should include:

Create a cross-agency state governance structure to align state systems. State leaders should designate one individual or agency to coordinate work across silos and bring together key players (government agencies, K-12 education leaders, employers, and higher education representatives). In larger states, regional governance structures may also be necessary to tailor pathways to local employer needs and workforce opportunities. These cross-agency entities can set and track goals promoting equity in pathways participation and outcomes, design systems for quality assurance, and offer policy recommendations to ensure pathways are cost-effective and produce results.

Use state policies to establish regional approaches to integration/pathway design. Labor markets don't coincide perfectly with school districts, which also often lack the staff and expertise to engage employers effectively. Different schools and districts have different capacities to offer pathways; regionalizing programs helps ensure more students have access to more opportunities. States should thus help establish and support a regional approach to pathway development.

Invest in strong data systems on student outcomes. Information from K-12, postsecondary, and the workforce will enable policymakers to understand which pathways are yielding the desired outcomes and make adjustments as necessary. Ideally, data systems should link student choices and success in high school to postsecondary and labor market outcomes.

Match pathways to workforce opportunities and regional employer needs. Invest in pathways that lead to careers with a "family sustaining wage" in growth industries. Make labor market data available to schools, colleges, and employers, and avoid creating "dead-end" pathways into declining or low-wage industries.

Maximize a variety of funding streams. Pathways programs may be able to take advantage of federal funds from multiple sources, including from: the Higher Education Act, Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. State policymakers are often the only entity that has jurisdiction over all of these sources of funding and can bring together the stakeholders necessary to achieve cross-sector goals.

Ensure state rules allow course credit for work-based learning. State and local policymakers should examine state graduation and college admission requirements to make sure that students can earn course credit for work-based learning. They should also work with higher education institutions to ensure that work-based learning counts toward postsecondary degree and major requirements.

Offer students the ability to earn voluntary credentials while in high school. As part of successful pathways programs, students should have the opportunity to earn industry-recognized credentials and valuable certificates that demonstrate employability skills. State and local leaders should partner with employers and community organizations to bring credentialing and certificate programs to high schools.

Address the course requirements that drive (or inhibit) integration of college-prep and vocational curriculum. State high school graduation and higher education admissions requirements must support integrated curriculum, so that all courses are rigorous and "count" for both graduation and college admission.

Embed indicators of postsecondary preparation, entrance, persistence, and completion into K-12 accountability systems. This will help promote system alignment and mutual accountability across K-12 and higher education.

Policy Recommendations: *Strengthening pathways in K-12 Schools*

The lack of alignment and difficulty of transition between high school and postsecondary is a big driver of the preparedness gap. Students leave high school unprepared for college and careers. They must re-learn high school material in non-credit-bearing remedial courses. The challenges are much greater for Black, Latino, low-income, and other historically underserved students who lack exposure to a broad range of careers and opportunities to earn college credit in high school. To help close these gaps and strengthen the equity and quality of college preparedness and career exposure in high school, state and local policymakers should consider the following recommendations:

Close racial gaps in earning early college credit. Students who take one or more dual enrollment courses are more likely to enroll in, and complete, college, but participation is not distributed equitably among students. White students are twice as likely to enroll in dual enrollment than their Black and Latino peers. State and local policymakers should provide support and funding for historically underserved students to expand access and completion rates for early college credit. A first step would be to conduct an audit of the availability of advanced coursework in high schools across the state, set goals for participation and success for each racial and ethnic group, and target resources to address gaps in access.

Offer high school courses that cover standards-based content in a real-world context. "Contextualized" classes are those that combine a college-preparatory subject matter (like geometry) with career and technical applications (like construction). These courses satisfy multiple college and career pathway requirements while at the same time giving students who struggle with traditional courses another option to master rigorous material. State and local leaders can support the development of these courses by ensuring that students can meet graduation and pathway requirements simultaneously across vocational and traditional subject areas. In addition, teachers must have access to the professional development and certification opportunities they need to teach in multiple areas.

Decrease college remediation rates by offering students "transition courses" in high school. Transition courses are classes taught in high school where a passing score automatically allows a student to enroll in the subsequent college-level course without taking a placement exam. They are powerful tools in reducing remediation rates. State and local policymakers should support the development of these courses, which K-12 and postsecondary institutions should design together.

Build career awareness and workplace experience starting in elementary and middle school. Students don't know what they cannot see, so schools should offer students early and sustained advising to a wide variety of careers, as well as access to workplace experiences. State and local leaders can help provide schools with data about careers (earning, availability, etc.) by coordinating among industry leaders and state agencies. They should also invest in strengthening counselor training and certification programs, and sponsor initiatives to ensure that all students develop individual career plans. Further, state and local leaders can help explore development of apprenticeship programs while students are still in high school.

Invest in college-in-high school programs. College-in-high school programs take different forms, but they all bring college-level coursework, and the ability to earn college-level credit, to students who are in high school. These programs are a powerful strategy to help students prepare for and succeed in college, as well as reduce the cost and other obstacles of higher education. State and local leaders should support the development of these programs in their jurisdictions.

Expand access to college and pathway advising. High school students are often required to select a graduation pathway and make choices about course enrollment without understanding the consequences of those decisions. State and local leaders should ensure students have access to navigational support throughout high school, including by providing funding for additional school counselors and establishing partnerships with non-profit organizations.

Tips on strengthening college-in-high school programs from the College in High School Alliance:

Twenty-eight states are starting or expanding college-in-high-school programs, but there is still significant work ahead. Maintaining quality and equity is essential for success at scale. To accomplish this, state and local governments need to advance policies in six areas:

Equity and Public Reporting

- Set clear goals for increasing the participation of historically underserved students
- Gather and report disaggregated information about participation and create accountability for closing gaps

Program Integrity & Credit Transfer

- Ensure that college means college, and that high school dual enrollment courses continue to be respected by higher education institutions as the equivalent of college classes
- Create statewide policy to facilitate credit articulation

Financing

- Remove financial barriers for low- and moderate-income students to earn college credits while in high school

Course Access and Availability

- Ensure that students can access courses regardless of geography
- Focus on courses that align with degree trajectories and career pathways

Instructor Capacity

- Adopt strategies to recruit, support, diversify, and credential instructors who can teach dual enrollment courses

Navigational Supports and Advising

- Help students access dual enrollment programs and make smart choices about the courses they take (i.e. those aligned to degree paths)

COLLEGE IN HIGH SCHOOL ALLIANCE

"Ensuring a smooth transition between secondary and postsecondary education is essential for students to find success in the 21st century economy. The Education Policy Group's equity-focused recommendations to support college in high school programs like dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high school will ensure more students have access to these important programs that significantly improve college access and success, particularly for underrepresented students in higher education."

Alex Perry
Coordinator of the College in High School Alliance

Policy Recommendations: *Engaging employers and higher education institutions*

Given the changing needs of the economy and the higher levels of education that are now required for middle-class jobs, strengthening college and career preparation can no longer be the job of high schools alone. Colleges and universities must work collaboratively with K-12 education systems to prepare tomorrow's workforce. Employer involvement is just as critical; employers know best about regional workforce needs and opportunities. They must be part of identifying and designing pathways that lead to good-paying jobs in growth industries, as well as providing students with meaningful workplace experiences. State and local policymakers should consider the following:

Involve postsecondary institutions and employers in pathway creation and implementation. Public institutions of higher education, particularly community colleges, are essential to this work. They should be included in designing everything from state governance structures to individual college-in-high-school courses. State and local leaders can help bring these higher education leaders to the table.

Encourage postsecondary institutions to build pathways that lead students from certificates to associate's degrees to bachelor's degrees. State and local leaders can incentivize – by setting state-wide goals and providing financial and technical support – schools and colleges to offer a range of pathways with multiple options and off-ramps. Students should be able to earn valuable certificates – like those in engineering, manufacturing, and construction trades – and college credits while still in high school, and go on to earn bachelor's degrees and beyond.

Engage employers to offer a continuum of high-quality work-based experiences. Workplace experiences should be informed by employer needs and available to all students, regardless of school or district. Experiences should also cover a continuum of involvement – both from employers and from students – to match individual needs. State and local leaders should recruit employers to participate and match employers with schools, districts, and regional partnerships that are coordinating pathways.

Prioritize the development of paid internships, especially for low-income students. Students should learn job skills for careers they want to pursue instead of working in low-skill jobs like food service or retail. State and local officials can help arrange the support that employers need to hire high school students, including working through issues of liability, transportation logistics, and human resource administration.

Policy Recommendations: *Supporting and empowering teachers*

Good teachers are the backbone of every career preparation program. But it is not always easy to get the best teachers in front of the students who most need their help. Teachers who are skilled in a career may not meet all the certification requirements to get a teaching license. And currently certified teachers may lack the knowledge of the workplace that would bring real-world knowledge to their students. Dual enrollment classes can help students earn college credits while they are still in high school, but university faculty are not always certified to teach in high schools and high school teachers often lack the credentials to teach college-level courses.

Creating stronger pathways will require changing how teachers are certified, as well as the level and subjects they are assigned to teach. To address these issues, state and local policymakers should consider the following:

Involve teachers in program design; provide professional learning so teachers can adapt their instruction to the needs of pathways students. Teachers must understand the need for high quality pathways and learn how to teach in that context. That means that teachers must be involved in the development and implementation of pathways. State and local leaders can help by including teachers in state and regional governing structures and in feedback structures.

Modify teacher certification requirements to allow teachers to work across traditional subject silos. Teacher certification requirements are often aligned to outdated policies that put college preparation in tension with career preparation. But for pathways to succeed in preparing students for college and career, the opposite must be true. This means that teachers of traditional college preparatory requirements must coordinate with vocational instructors – or train across subject areas themselves – to align curriculum. State and local leaders must help clear policy obstacles to allow for greater flexibility in what and where teachers teach, including by updating teacher certification rules and graduation requirements.

Incentivize dual certification in K-12 and higher education. There are not enough college professors to offer college-level courses in high schools at the scale we need to satisfy growing demand from students. State officials should modify existing teacher certification rules to encourage K-12 teachers to get credentials to teach dual enrollment classes.

Establish teacher externships. Teachers can't teach what they don't know. Teacher externships – in the field in which they are teaching pathway courses – are essential to help teachers understand what skills the job requires and better educate students to meet workforce demands. State and local officials should help incentivize and support these externships, including by recruiting employers to participate and funding leave for participating teachers.

Section 1: State and Local Examples

Tennessee

In 2013, Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam launched the "Drive to 55" campaign. The goal was for 55 percent of Tennesseans to gain a college degree or postsecondary certificate by 2025. That goal, which was challenging but attainable, helped focus policy and program efforts across the state. Drive to 55 is coordinated by the Tennessee Department of Education, and the alliance includes a wide range of employer partners and institutions of higher education.

Tennessee has also facilitated the development of high quality career pathways for high school students. Tennessee assures the quality of pathways through a school-level certification requirement (administered by the state). Program requirements include the mandate that pathways lead to in-demand professions. The State Board of Education developed a comprehensive work-based learning toolbox.

The Tennessee Promise Scholarship legislation, provides Tennessee high school graduates the opportunity to attend a community or technical college free of tuition and mandatory fees. Tennessee Promise is both a scholarship and mentoring program.

It will provide students a last-dollar scholarship, meaning the scholarship will cover tuition and fees not covered by the Pell grant, the HOPE scholarship, or TSAA funds. Students may use the scholarship at any of the College System of Tennessee's 13 community colleges or 27 colleges of applied technology.

Texas

The Texas pathways program is a combination of different approaches, and a tri-agency state initiative has scaled regional efforts statewide.

Early College High Schools are open-enrollment high schools that allow students least likely to attend college an opportunity receive both a high school diploma and either an associate degree or at least 60 credit hours toward a baccalaureate degree.

The Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH) program established a specialized early college high school. Students who start P-TECH in Grade 9 will have six years to earn a high school diploma, and associate's degree, and an internship and mentoring for a job in science-, math-, technology-, or engineering-related industries.

In 2017, Texas House Bill 22 adopted indicators to measure and evaluate schools and districts on whether students were prepared to successfully enter the workforce, the military, or postsecondary education. Adopted in 2019, House Bill 3 provides extra resources for schools that meet pathway goals.

Illinois

The Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act (PWR Act) set up a cross-agency program to ensure that Illinois students are prepared for college and a career. Through this program, Illinois offers a "Postsecondary and Career Expectations" framework, which outlines what students should know and actions they should take from middle school through 12th grade to select the right postsecondary option, prepare for careers, and access financial aid opportunities.

The legislation also establishes a new system for school districts to award college and career pathways endorsements on high school diplomas, supports students to avoid remediation in college through targeted math instruction during the senior year, and pilots competency-based high school graduation requirements. Further, it creates a voluntary process for schools and districts to provide high schools students with college and career pathway endorsements.

The PWR Act is part of Illinois's initiative to achieve the state's goal of 60% of residents obtaining a postsecondary degree by 2025.

Delaware

Delaware's Challenge: In 2020, 65% of jobs – especially in high-demand STEM fields – will require postsecondary credentials, but less than half of students have them.

Delaware's Promise: By 2025, 65% of Delaware's workforce will earn a postsecondary degree, industry credential, or professional certificate.

Pathways Approach: To realize the Delaware Promise, the state has developed a portfolio of pathways that align classroom instruction and work-based learning experiences in high-demand professional fields. Students enroll concurrently in career-related high school courses and at an institution of higher education to earn certifications recognized by employers and credits towards a college degree.

A permanent statewide steering committee oversees program expansion and includes representation from all relevant cabinet agencies and the Governor's office, as well as from higher education, the business community, and non-profits/foundations. Delaware Technical Community College serves as the intermediary organization and oversees collaboration across sectors, including government agencies; private-sector employers; and non-profit and community organizations.

State legislation has established the purpose and governance of the pathways system. Regulations and governance structure shape day-to-day operations and sustains the work across leadership change.

West Sacramento, CA

West Sacramento Home Run, an initiative proposed by Mayor Christopher Cabaldon, is designed to improve the lives of West Sacramento's young people through civic engagement, college and career readiness and work-based learning. Funded by a voter-approved sales tax increase, it provides access for West Sacramento high school students to paid internships in a relevant industry sector or job-type if they are enrolled in an integrated college and career pathway and making satisfactory progress in school. It also includes two years of tuition-free enrollment in a local community college.

The initiative is implemented in partnership with the Washington Unified School District; FutureReady, a project of the West Sacramento Community Foundation; the West Sacramento Chamber of Commerce; and the Los Rios Community College District.

FutureReady will help place teachers in externships with local companies, where they can learn about industry trends and needs, design student internships that are aligned with Common Core standards, and create real-world applications to bring their classroom instruction to life.

West Sacramento has also partnered with Via, a ride-share company, to provide high school students (age 14 and older) with access to on-demand transportation to reach workplace experiences and internships, as well as dual enrollment courses offered at local colleges.

California

Linked Learning transforms student learning experiences by bringing meaning and motivation to the school day. It integrates college and career preparation by combining rigorous academic coursework, sequenced career and technical education, work-based learning experiences, and comprehensive support services. An independent evaluation conducted by SRI International shows that, compared to peers in traditional schools, students in Linked Learning pathways earn more course credits, have higher graduation rates, and build more of the skills aligned with the needs of a twenty-first-century workforce. The results are especially strong for Black students and youth who start high school behind academically.

The state of California has passed several pieces of legislation, including $500 million through the California Career Pathways Trust, to expand Linked Learning and college and career pathways. Today, Linked Learning is working in more than 100 California school districts, with more than 650 pathways.

Section 2:

Easing the Transition between High School & Higher Education

The difficulty students have in transitioning to higher education is a major obstacle to the education and training of a prepared workforce. Today's students are woefully under-prepared for today's economy, and the lack of alignment between high school and postsecondary – including the difficulty students have transitioning to higher education – is a big part of the problem. Once they enter postsecondary education, too many students must re-learn high school material in non-credit-bearing remedial courses, which increases their debt load and makes it less likely they will ultimately earn a degree. Many students who enroll in college don't finish and are left in the worst possible situation – college debt but no degree, and no corresponding earning power.

On the other hand, there are some students who are fully prepared for college before their senior year. One-quarter of students in high school meet all four of ACT's college-readiness benchmarks by the end of their 11th grade year. That means roughly 850,000 students could choose a different path — one that allows them to complete their postsecondary education earlier and faster, saving both students and the state money, and ensuring their entry into the workforce.

These challenges are most pressing for students of color, but they are pervasive for all students. State and local leaders must take decisive action to increase both college access and success.

- Far too many students leave high school unprepared for postsecondary success. About 70% of beginning students at public two-year colleges require remediation in college to master academic content they should have learned in high school, including nearly 80% of Black students, 75% of Latino students, and 64% of white students.
- Lack of preparation and high remediation rates contribute to the student debt crisis. Students who take remedial course work are 74% more likely to drop out. Two-thirds of borrowers who default didn't finish college or only have a certificate.
- 43% of all college credits are lost when students transfer colleges, including 37% of credits that students lose when transferring between public institutions of higher education.

Policy Recommendations:

Expanding access to quality dual enrollment

Dual enrollment programs are partnerships between local education agencies and institutions of higher education that allow students to enroll in college courses and earn transferable college credits while they are still in high school. The college courses students take are usually offered either free of charge or at a very low tuition rate.

When done well, dual enrollment programs are powerful tools to help jump-start postsecondary education. Students who take a dual enrollment class are much more likely to enroll in – and complete – a postsecondary degree or certificate program. However, the quality of dual enrollment offerings is inconsistent, and access to dual enrollment courses is inequitable. While the number of students participating has expanded significantly in many states, in too many places these gains have overlooked low-income students, first-generation college-goers, students of color, and rural students. To address these issues, state and local policymakers should consider the following:

Prioritize equity in access and completion. States should adopt an explicit goal to increase the participation and success of historically underserved students in dual enrollment, and should establish goals for individual student subgroups that have had low participation rates.

Report disaggregated information to highlight the equity goal. States should report disaggregated, user friendly data on dual enrollment access and success among groups of students (e.g., racial/ethnic groups). State and local leaders should create or modify accountability systems to incentivize closing equity gaps.

Ensure that dual enrollment programs provide college-level learning for high school students. Students who enroll in dual enrollment programs need to have confidence that the courses they take will move them closer to a degree or a credential. States must develop quality standards and regulations for all dual enrollment programs, including plans for sustainable professional development to raise the rigor of the high school experience. Those quality standards can include: (1) whether courses are offered on high school or college campuses; (2) instructor qualifications; (3) eligibility requirements for students; (4) whether dual enrollment programs must meet accreditation standards; and (5) whether there are limits on the types and quantity of credits students can earn.

Consider carefully which career courses to offer through dual enrollment programs. As state dollars are limited, dual enrollment classes should be used to move students into high-wage jobs that are in demand in the local labor market. State leaders should tie state funding and support to those dual enrollment courses that are offered as part of clear pathways to certificates and degrees, backed by articulation agreements with colleges and universities, and that include core coursework rather than elective credit.

Develop a statewide system to ensure that credits will transfer from one institution to another. The credits students earn must be transferable among two- and four-year colleges in the state; otherwise, students and taxpayers lose time and money. State leaders should establish statewide articulation agreements that ensure credits transfer between high schools and the state's public colleges and universities, as well as with any private institutions that take part in the dual enrollment program. Statewide articulation agreements may include common course numbering, a general education core curriculum, and management systems regarding course equivalency, transfer of credit, and articulation. Twenty-nine states have policies requiring public colleges and universities to accept dual enrollment credit.

Remove financial barriers for low- and moderate-income students. Dual enrollment courses should be provided at no cost to students from low- and moderate -income families. This will encourage more students to enroll in dual enrollment courses and earn college credits while in high school.

Set limits on the dual enrollment courses the state will pay for (for example, core academic courses or career courses that will lead to a degree or certificate in a career cluster or pathway identified by the state). Dual enrollment programs are very popular among students and higher education institutions. State resources should focus state dollars on the programs that will best advance goals of college enrollment, college completion, and workforce readiness.

Policy Recommendations: Reducing and reimagining remedial education

Millions of students each year are placed into remedial (or "developmental") education in math and English upon enrollment. These are noncredit courses that teach below-college-level skills in reading, writing, and math, designed to help students master academic content they should have learned in high school. For many of these students, remedial classes will be both their first and their last college experience.

The on-time completion rates of students who take remedial classes are consistently less than 10%. The problem is more acute for low-income students and students of color.

The remedial education crisis leads to another burdensome problem: student debt. Two-thirds of borrowers who default didn't finish college or have only a certificate.

It doesn't have to be this way. State and local governments should adopt policy changes based on the latest research to increase the likelihood that students who get to college will also get through college:

Consider placement factors beyond a single standardized test to assign students to remedial courses. The determination of whether a student should be placed in remedial education has traditionally relied on standardized placement tests such as the Accuplacer, which are not necessarily correlated with the ability of students to succeed in credit-bearing courses. State and local policymakers should push to move beyond test-only placement. State and local policymakers should also give colleges guidance about how to broaden their approach. For example, research suggests placement can be successful using multiple factors, including student high school GPA. Schools that follow this model place more students in the regular "gatekeeper" class in math or English – and more students pass that course in the first semester.

Change how developmental course content is taught. State and local leaders should encourage colleges to consider new models like summer bridge courses, compressing developmental courses into shorter periods, offering diverse math courses that align with students' career paths, offering co-requisite courses (i.e., embedding additional support into credit-bearing courses instead of requiring students to take separate courses), integrating developmental reading and writing instruction into one course, and ensuring that modified developmental courses offered at two-year colleges are transferable to four-year colleges in the state.

Policy Recommendations:

Aligning high school graduation requirements and college entrance requirements

Graduation rates have increased steadily in recent decades, but the ability of high school students to meet grade-level standards in reading and math has stagnated or declined. Millions of students are receiving high school diplomas – which should signal they are ready for postsecondary success – but are unprepared for college or a career.

The lack of alignment between high school graduation requirements and college entrance and course placement requirements, as well as the confusing web of diploma pathways in many states, are a big part of the problem. Students often lack clarity about what courses they need to complete in high school to prepare for different postsecondary opportunities. The result is that they may make choices that foreclose their ability to attend certain higher education institutions or start on the path to a good-paying career.

State and local leaders can help by aligning high school graduation requirements to college entrance requirements and establishing clear diploma pathways that lead to postsecondary opportunities.

Align the state's default high school diploma requirements to admission requirements at public colleges and universities. A high school diploma should signify preparation for postsecondary education. Evidence suggests that gaps between students of color and White students in earning a college- and career-ready diploma are reduced when the state's default diploma (that students must opt out of if they want to pursue another pathway) is aligned with college expectations. In addition, states can establish other pathways that students may opt into, including options that are more rigorous and align with entrance requirements for the state's flagship four-year university (e.g., an Honors diploma) or that prepare students for specialized postsecondary programs in different career fields (e.g., a STEM diploma seal for students intending to major in pre-engineering, computer science, etc.).

Establish clear diploma pathways that prepare students for college and careers. Students' interests vary; therefore, states may develop different diploma pathways to strengthen student engagement and increase college enrollment. It is critical for diploma pathways to promote, rather than undercut, preparation for postsecondary education by ensuring diploma pathways are aligned with postsecondary expectations. States with multiple diploma pathways should disaggregate outcome data by pathway and student demographics to ensure students of color, students from low-income families, and other historically underserved populations are not tracked into pathways with poor postsecondary outcomes.

Offer all high school graduates tuition-free admission to a local community college. Transitioning from high school to college should be opt-out, not opt-in. State and local leaders can remove barriers like applications, fees, and financial aid forms by arranging for all high school students to receive free admission to community college at the same time they receive diplomas. Efforts should be targeted at students who might not otherwise go to college, particularly students from historically underserved communities.

Ensure students have access to college and career advising throughout middle and high school. The bifurcation of high school and higher education is a major barrier to college enrollment and completion. The proliferation of diploma pathways in many states adds to the complexity facing students and families. It is critical for postsecondary advising to start early and continue throughout middle and high school so that students and families make informed decisions.

Policy Recommendations:

Accelerating 12th grade for college-ready students ("Fast Track")

The phenomenon known as "senioritis" – twelfth grade students who have essentially checked out – is real. That's the bad news. But the good news is that nearly one-quarter of students in high school are estimated to be ready for college prior to the end of the 11th grade, meeting all four of ACT's college-readiness benchmarks. That means roughly 850,000 students could choose a different path. A 2019 report, "Building a Fast Track to College," by the Alliance for Excellent Education and Education Reform Now, explored this issue in depth.

Nearly two-thirds of students who are academically ready for college before 12th grade come from low- income and middle-class families that have real affordability obstacles blocking their path to college. Of the third that come from low-income families, more than a quarter are students of color.

States should consider creating opportunities for prepared students to begin earning postsecondary credits while still in high school. Specifically, states should allow students to take, free of charge, a full-time load of college-level courses during their senior year of high school that would count as their freshman year of college. Although some states are working to allow more students to earn college-level credit before graduation, these programs do not always offer a comprehensive, transferable, series of courses that will substantially reduce the amount of time students will take to earn a college degree. State and local policymakers could help advance student learning, accelerate postsecondary attainment, and reduce student debt by providing students with a coordinated "fast track" to college.

Two Pathways for Accelerating College:

There are two possible pathways through which states can provide college-ready students with a full-time load of college courses in their senior year: First, students could enroll full-time in Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) classes, with all fees and exam costs covered by the state or local government. Second, students could graduate high school early and receive a scholarship (a portion of their state per-pupil K-12 aid) to attend college full time instead of completing an unnecessary twelfth-grade year.

Many of the policies that would achieve, or advance, "fast track" opportunities already exist, although states have not adopted a coordinated holistic approach. Policy recommendations for states and local governments follow on the next page:

Set goals for participation and success of low-income students and students of color and make Fast Track pathways available statewide to prevent gaps in access for historically underserves students.

Set clear policies about the transferability of IB, AP, and dual enrollment courses. Credit is not guaranteed for students who receive high scores on AP and IB exams. For example, only 20 states have policies requiring public colleges to accept AP exam scores for credit. State and local leaders should set consistent policies regarding credits conferred as a result of success in AP, IB, and dual enrollment to maximize the impact of these opportunities for students and taxpayers.

Develop at least one articulated course sequence for students participating in Fast Track via full-time dual enrollment. With such a sequence, students would enroll in a thoughtful series of courses that comprise the equivalent of the freshman year of college and lead to a recognized credential, including an associate's degree that would be accepted in transfer to the state's four-year colleges and universities. State and local policymakers can serve as conveners to help develop such programs and provide colleges with funds or other incentives.

Move away from strict "seat time" requirements for high school graduation. States might consider using existing assessments such as the SAT, the ACT, or state-developed exams like the New York Regents exam as an alternative path to graduation. Students who could demonstrate that they meet college-ready benchmarks would then be eligible for early graduation and could enroll in a fast track AP/IB or dual enrollment program or take advantage of an early high school graduation scholarship to attend college instead of remaining in high school for twelfth grade. Thirty-four states already have early high school graduation policies, but most states still rely, in part, on "seat time" and course credits to award early diplomas, rather than evidence of students' mastery of core academic subjects.

Section 2: State and Local Examples

Dual Enrollment

Georgia

Georgia has established a robust, state-wide system of dual enrollment. Georgia Code, §20-2-161.3, defines four goals for the state's program:

a. Promoting and increasing access to postsecondary opportunities for Georgia high school students
b. Increasing high school graduation rates
c. Preparing a skilled workforce
d. Decreasing time and cost to postsecondary credential completion.

Georgia allows students to take dual enrollment courses at any institution, public or private. The result is that state costs for the same course vary widely. The Georgia program also pays for tuition and books for every student, with the only student financial responsibilities being course-related fees and transportation.

With such compelling advantages, it is no surprise that enrollment in dual enrollment courses is increasing dramatically. That growth has led to skyrocketing costs – the budget appropriated $49 million for the program, but costs in 2020 approached $108 million with no upper limit in sight.

In response to growing costs, Georgia State Senator Elena Parent introduced Senate Bill 400, which would require better data reporting on program participation and outcomes and ensure that any cuts to program funding would not prevent the program from continuing to provide students with equitable access to dual enrollment courses, particularly those students who have been historically underserved.

Florida

The state created a statewide course numbering system for postsecondary and dual enrollment education in school districts, public postsecondary educational institutions, and participating nonpublic postsecondary educational institutions. This makes it easier for students to transfer credits from high school dual enrollment programs to community colleges or four-year universities. It also makes it easier for students to transfer among Florida colleges and universities. As part of a focus on the quality of the courses and the qualifications of instructors in dual enrollment classes, each faculty member teaching a course must meet the qualifications required to teach at the postsecondary institution.

Washington

H.B. 1973 created the Washington Dual Enrollment Scholarship Pilot Program. Eligible students must qualify for the free or reduced-price lunch program, be enrolled in one or more dual credit programs, and have at least a 2.0 GPA. The scholarship may be used for: mandatory fees; course fees or laboratory fees determined by the college or university policies; and a textbook voucher.

Washington has also developed an online data dashboard of participation in accelerated learning by school and district. Data on participation in college in high school programs is disaggregated in a number of ways, including by type of advanced coursework, gender, race, income status, English language learners, students with disabilities, and homeless students.

California

California has created a website to provide transparency for students wondering whether their DE course credits would transfer. The ASSIST (Articulation System Stimulating Interinstitutional Student Transfer) system generates reports that show how course credits earned at California colleges will be treated when and if they are transferred, including those earned through dual enrollment programs. ASSIST includes the University of California, California State University, and California Community College systems.

Indiana

Each high school in Indiana is required to offer two dual credit courses and two AP courses. Most dual credit courses are offered at no cost to low-income students and $25 per credit for other students. The state also has established a core set of transferable courses that provide one-year of credit across the state's public colleges and universities called the Statewide Transfer General Education Core. Dual credit has the potential to save Indiana over $62 million annually according to the Indiana Commission for Higher Education.

Remedial Education

Washington

Higher education policies have been revised to focus on barriers to educational attainment. The Council on Higher Education, in fact, was renamed the "Student Achievement Council." State policies encourage "the use of multiple measures to determine whether a student must enroll in a precollege course, such as placement tests, the SAT, high school transcripts, college transcripts, or initial class performance."

Connecticut

If the Connecticut State University System or a community technical college determines a student is likely to succeed in college level work with supplemental support, a state statute requires that the institution must offer developmental education support that is embedded in the college level course. Connecticut Public Act 12-40 reconfigured how developmental education is provided, in a three-tier approach: (1) College-level; (2) College-level with embedded support – "just in time" assistance provided to students needing additional help with the content while they are taking the college-level course, effectively turning remedial content into a co-requisite rather than a pre-requisite; and (3) Intensive College Readiness Programs that prepare students to be ready to take a college-level course with embedded support within one semester. The same statute requires that school districts align their curriculum to ensure that graduates are ready for college-level work.

Minnesota

A 2019 statute requires the Commissioner of the Office of Higher Education to report annually on: the number of students placed in supplemental or developmental education; the number of students who complete supplemental or developmental education within one academic year; and the number of students that complete gateway courses in one academic year. Data must be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, free or reduced-price lunch eligibility, and age.

California

In 2017, California passed AB 705 to require the use of multiple measures for placement of students in English and mathematics. The legislation also prohibits community colleges from requiring students to enroll in remedial English or mathematics that lengthens their time to complete a degree unless placement research shows the students are highly unlikely to succeed in transfer-level coursework (i.e., courses that transfer to four-year colleges). Evidence shows the law has led to an increase in the availability of transfer-level coursework and corequisite courses.

Accelerating College

Texas

Texas requires school districts to notify the parent of each student enrolled in ninth grade or above of the availability of programs in the district under which a student may earn college credit.

Oregon

Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission annually approves AP exam scores for which public 2- and 4-year institutions must award minimum postsecondary credit.

Illinois

Illinois requires all public colleges and universities to accept scores of 3 or above on AP exams for credit to satisfy degree requirements. Institutions of higher education may determine whether the credit will be granted for electives, general education requirements, or major requirements.

North Carolina

North Carolina prohibits students in "early college" programs from being charged tuition.

Arizona

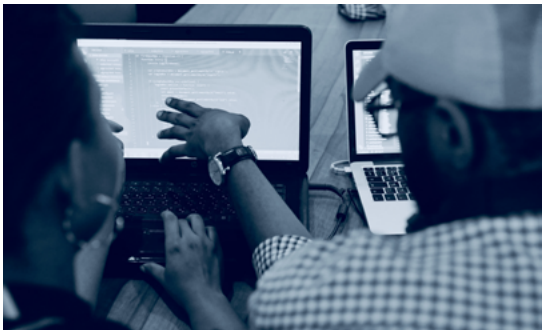
Arizona passed "Move on When Ready" legislation in 2010 allowing students to advance based on mastery, not seat time. Students may earn the Grand Canyon High School Diploma by demonstrating preparation for college-level courses without remediation through curriculum-based exams in core subject areas and demonstrating skills in writing, analysis, and problem solving.

Kentucky

Kentucky has early graduation policies that award high school diplomas based strictly on an assessment of mastery. More specifically, Kentucky provides students a pathway to graduation that relies on a demonstration of their proficiency as opposed to completed courses or credit hours. The state permits students to graduate early if they meet the qualifying readiness benchmark on four end-of-course exams in key subject areas and state-defined readiness benchmarks on the ACT.

Section 3:

Engaging Employers in Work-Based Education And Training



Successful college and career pathways programs promote meaningful involvement by local employers. The local economy does not benefit if students have been prepared for jobs that do not exist. Similarly, economies cannot thrive if there are no local workers with the skills to fill business needs.

Engaging employers has always been a challenge for education systems. Skills required in the workplace often evolve faster than school systems can keep up. There are gaps between what students are learning and what employees need to succeed. At the same time, the nature of the workforce that students will enter is changing dramatically. Today's economy demands workers who have strong career knowledge and skills, are adaptable to change, and are prepared for lifelong learning.

The disconnect between schools and employers is not something either entity can solve on its own. Leadership of state and local policymakers is necessary to achieve greater engagement with employers in preparing students for the high-wage jobs that will benefit both them and the economy.

- In 2020, the Manpower Group's Talent Shortage Survey found that 69% of employers in the U.S. are having difficulty filling available jobs due to the lack of a strong talent pipeline.
- Work-based learning opportunities is uneven, with women and students of color the least likely to participate.
- Work-based experience often leads to permanent jobs. A 2019 survey from the National Association of Colleges & Employers found students with paid internships received nearly 50% more job offers than those who did not.

Engaging small businesses

One of the greatest opportunities for increasing employment is via small businesses. These enterprises are the largest drivers of job growth in this country. A Small Business Majority presentation to the Education Policy Group noted that most small businesses – 67% – offer some training to their employees, so they also represent one of the best potential sources of work-based experiences for students.

However, these are the businesses that lack the time, capacity, and resources to engage with school systems. They have been most vulnerable in the COVID recession. They do not have preferential access to capital, nor do they have their own equity. Many of these businesses are in the service industry – and as white-collar employment moves to a greater reliance on telework, the small businesses that have sprung up near offices (e.g. coffee shops and restaurants) will have lower revenue.

It is important to meet the needs of these small enterprises, since they offer great potential to be a source for a more diverse workforce. The more diverse the business ownership, the more diverse the workforce..

Identify and meet the needs of small businesses. State and local policymakers should convene local small businesses to understand their workforce needs that students might meet, as well as any existing training programs and opportunities. Leaders should then address the obstacles to small business engagement with students – including by providing cross-district transportation for students and access to human resource infrastructure. State and local leaders can also support third-party intermediaries to do this work.

Provide training to develop "soft skills." Surveys of employers show that schools do not teach the skills that industry needs, including so-called "soft skills". Small businesses are least likely to be able to train students in these skills themselves. State and local leaders should help schools and intermediaries provide students with "soft skills" training so that they can add value to employers on day one.

Policy Recommendations:

Providing equitable access to work-based learning opportunities

Work-based learning opportunities should be available to all students, regardless of school or district. And in the most diverse school districts, there are often fewer employers that are well-positioned to offer meaningful experiences for young people.

But diverse school districts, and regions, often have diverse employers. Diverse employers, in turn, are the most likely to hire a diverse workforce, so they represent a powerful way to engage young people of color and from other historically underserved communities. Yet these businesses are often small, and therefore often lack the time, resources, and administrative capacity to offer meaningful engagement with students. They need support.

Include work-based learning participation in state accountability systems. States should measure what matters, and (1) provide students with course credit for high quality work-based learning aligned with state academic standards and (2) include completion of work-based learning as a measure of school quality. This will encourage schools to provide high-quality work-based learning opportunities to the widest range of students possible.

Expand access to high-quality work-based learning opportunities. State and local leaders can support these opportunities by recruiting employers to participate and providing funding (e.g. tax-incentives) to employers that provide high-quality, paid experiences to students.

Focus on closing opportunity gaps using data to drive the allocation of more resources. Education systems did not do a good job providing high quality work-based experiences to students before the pandemic, particularly those who have been historically underserved. To understand the gaps, state and local policymakers should require schools to report publicly which students are participating in these experiences, including by race, income, and gender. They should set ambitious goals to close gaps and provide support and funding for historically underserved students to complete work-based learning.

Link students with case management and counseling services. Many of the obstacles to successful completion of work-based learning are not job-specific. Students lack transportation, childcare, or emergency assistance. They may require a flexible schedule so they can meet family needs. These services can be provided by educational institutions, community-based organizations, or navigators as well as by employers. State and local policymakers can provide the financial assistance to these providers.

Section 3: State and Local Examples

Illinois

In 2019, Illinois enacted HB 2868, which defines work-based learning as "an educational strategy that provides students with real-life work experiences in which they can apply academic and technical skills and develop their employability." Having a clear and consistent definition of work-based learning facilitates a collaborative approach across systems. The bill also requires the state board of education to develop a work-based learning database to help facilitate relationships between school districts.

Tennessee

Created in 2016, Tennessee's Labor Education Alignment Program (LEAP) is designed to eliminate skills gaps across the state. A collaboration of educational institutions and employers, using regional workforce data, supports programs in the state's applied technology or community colleges. Students can combine occupational training in a high-skill or high-tech field with academic credit, which they then can apply towards earning a postsecondary credential.

Tennessee's "Complete College" agenda is described on page 9 of this report.

A $10 million Skills Grant Gap competition supported local "Drive to 55" groups to advance the Complete College agenda. One example of a funded project is the Hamblen Work Ethic Diploma Distinction. The diploma focuses on the employer-identified need to hire workers with "soft skills." Applicants earn 20 points from meeting a combination of 14 workplace standards, which include both soft skills and worker ethics.

Virginia

In 2020, Virginia amended its high school graduation requirements, which are governed by statute, in Senate Bill 112. All students are now required to complete one of the following prior to graduating:

- An Advanced Placement, honors, or International Baccalaureate course;
- A dual enrollment course;
- A high-quality work-based learning experience, as defined by the State Board of Education; or
- A career and technical education credential that has been approved by the Board.

Virginia already requires local school boards to notify students and their parents of the availability of these college- and career-oriented learning opportunities.

Indianapolis

Many communities use Job Training Partnership Act funds to support local workforce activities. In Indianapolis, EmployIndy has focused on areas in the city with the highest levels of crime, unemployment, and poverty. EmployIndy acts as a bridge between education institutions, employers, and the workforce, ensuring the local workforce can meet the current and future needs of the local economy.

Working with employers and educators, EmployIndy has developed a Resource Tool Kit. It outlines specific ways that employers and schools can work together to provide meaningful work-based learning opportunities for students as young as Grade 5.

Los Angeles

Career Excellence Academy is a partnership between the mayor's office, community college, training organizations, and large employers in construction trades. It offers a free eight-week seminar bridge class to individuals who want to start a career in construction, infrastructure, or transportation. CEA partners with LA Trade Tech College and involves subject matter experts from major contractors to teach students the skills they need. The program, which is free to the community, offers 4 college credits.

Section 4:

Adapting to COVID-19 Realities & Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting disruptions have threatened the academic and overall well-being of students, families, and communities, while presenting a host of new challenges for state and local education systems.

While we do not yet know the full extent of the damage, the data we have present a bleak picture. School closures have resulted in millions of children without access to instruction – including many who don't have access to broadband, internet-connected devices, or both – and there are early signs of growing achievement gaps. Attendance is down, and many of the most vulnerable students have become completely disconnected from their school communities. Without connection to schools, these students also lose access to wrap-around services and support networks, including meals and medical help.

The scope and scale of these challenges are vast. While significantly more federal funding is needed to support state and local governments and education systems, and schools are the entities working directly with students, state and local leaders have a critical role to play in the pandemic response. The response from policymakers must be robust and swift enough to address the ongoing crisis and support recovery.

- According to a study by the Alliance for Excellent Education, 50 million students nationwide lack computers, home internet service, or both. That includes 16.9 million children – including one of three Black, Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native households – who do not have high-speed home internet access.
- In April 2020, NWEA estimated that students would lose 30% of their learning gains in reading and 50% in math from the spring COVID-related school closures alone. States are starting to confirm, and worsen, those projections: Tennessee reported that early data from fall 2020 suggests a 50% decrease in reading proficiency and 65% decrease in math for third grade students. These gaps will continue to worsen.
- In the spring of 2020, a majority of teachers surveyed said that fewer than half of their students were attending virtual classes regularly. Participation was worse in high-poverty communities, and the problem has persisted into the 2020-21 school year. In Detroit, in the first week of school in fall 2020, only 78% of students showed up for online or virtual class (compared to 90% in 2019).

Policy Recommendations:

Expanding broadband access & adoption

The closure of school buildings in the spring of 2020 disrupted education systems nationwide, and effectively ended instruction for the millions of students who lack broadband or devices. This is not just a crisis for young people; when students lack access to broadband and computers, so do their parents. Offline families cannot participate in the telework economy, lifelong learning and credentialing programs, and telehealth appointments necessary to support their physical and mental well-being. They are disproportionally people of color, older Americans, people with disabilities, the foreign-born, and people who live in rural areas.

Without action by policymakers at all levels, the access gap will have a calamitous effect on the most vulnerable communities. Adults will remain unable to access work and needed social services. Children, many of whom already face significant achievement gaps, will see those learning losses compounded.

While the federal government plays a leading role in funding expanded access to broadband, state and local policymakers have opportunities to address this challenge, such as:

Provide students with the tools for distance learning. Just as schools ensure that students have textbooks, they must also be sure students can learn virtually. State and local policymakers can urge districts to ensure all students have access to a "digital backpack", which should include a device and broadband internet (through a wireless hotspot or fixed connection at home). Schools can also look at creative deployment of Wi-Fi-equipped school buses (e.g. in parking lots of housing developments).

"Crowdsource" data on broadband availability. The FCC currently considers an entire census block to have broadband access even if only a single home or business actually has service. So, while the agency estimates that roughly 18 million people lack access to broadband, the true number is likely significantly higher. State and local leaders can create maps for their jurisdictions that have a much more accurate representation of where broadband is, and is not, available.

Establish a student right to broadband access, devices, and technical support. State and local leaders can create a student entitlement to internet access and devices necessary to participate in virtual instruction – for example, though a "digital student bill of rights" – and provide school districts with the support and funding necessary for implementation. Policymakers can also require tracking of which students and families have internet access – and how they get online – so resources are targeted better.

Ensure that state funding supports both "last-mile" and "middle-mile" deployment, prioritizing unserved areas. Most states have some funding for broadband expansion. But "middle-mile" deployment installations (which brings broadband to the community) must be combined with "last-mile" deployment (bringing broadband to individual homes and businesses). State and local policymakers should oversee effective use of existing funds and allocate additional funds to the highest need areas.

Educate families on the benefits of internet access to increase adoption. In addition to providing broadband, states and localities should offer training on the benefits of connectivity. This will encourage families who might never have had Internet access, or have only had access via a cellphone, to take advantage of low-cost programs that will get them online.

Supporting students in crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic forced nationwide school closures in the spring of 2020. The result of those closures – and the patchwork of virtual, hybrid, and in-person learning that has marked the 2020-2021 school year– will be unprecedented learning loss and widening achievement gaps.

In addition to academic consequences, the closures have threatened overall student well-being. Schools are often the best places to address students' basic needs like food and shelter. In partnership with government and community agencies, schools provide vital links between families in need and organizations that help. Schools also have the best insight into student needs – for example, up to 80 percent of homeless students are not housed in shelters, but their teachers often know who they are.

Despite being in the closest contact with students, schools are not always well-positioned to address the full spectrum of student needs. With nearly 14,000 school districts across the country, educational leadership is highly decentralized. District capacity to respond effectively to the pandemic varies widely. State and local leaders have a critical role to play in (1) providing support and urgency around measuring and addressing learning loss, (2) identifying and highlighting the needs of the most vulnerable students, and (3) bringing together social service providers and schools to address student needs in a holistic way. More specifically, state and local leaders should:

Facilitate an integrated approach to student support. Schools are often the best places to ensure that students are receiving wraparound services, but this has been complicated by the pandemic. In the short term, state and local leaders should support overwhelmed service providers and connect providers with capacity to local schools. In the longer term – to assist with the recovery in the years to come – they should create policy structures to coordinate work of government entities that serve children (e.g. by creating a "Children's Cabinet," an example of which can be found in the State and Local Examples section of this chapter).

Ensure districts serve the most vulnerable children, including homeless students and English learners. While schools are on the front lines with students, state and local leaders have an important role to play in ensuring that district are providing support to students most affected by the pandemic. Leaders should check that districts have a strategy, including by maintaining dedicated staff (e.g. McKinney-Vento liaisons for homeless students) and using federal funding streams (including any new stimulus dollars) to reach the most vulnerable kids.

Measure and address student learning loss. The scope and scale of learning loss resulting from the pandemic will be unprecedented, but we do not have good data to show which students have suffered disproportionately and need extra support. State and local leaders should provide funding (and direct additional federal funds for COVID-19 response) to help districts and schools measure student attendance, participation, and outcomes in ways that can be disaggregated by school and student group. Leaders should also insist that the data be used to target resources (local, state, and federal) to students most impacted by school disruptions.

Advocate for additional federal funding and continued flexibility in implementation of federal programs. Schools need more funding, and increased flexibility, to meet student needs through the ongoing pandemic and recovery. State and local leaders should continue to advocate for additional federal funds dedicated to education – including for addressing learning loss and child well-being – as well as flexibility in how federal programs are administered. For example, USDA's waivers of requirements around the Childhood Nutrition Programs have allowed schools to serve meals to millions of families. State advocacy was essential in preserving those waivers after they were set to expire in the summer 2020.

Section 4: State and Local Examples

Broadband Access

Colorado

While there has been extensive discussion of "last-mile" broadband development (access to individual homes and businesses), the state of Colorado has had greater success by combining both middle-mile deployment (bringing broadband to rural communities) with last-mile access. In 2014, the Colorado General Assembly created the Broadband Fund to extend broadband service to unserved areas of the state. Since 2016, the Board has awarded $34.1 million in grants to 43 projects, serving more than 17,000 households. The fund repurposed money from an assessment placed on all telecommunications service providers operating in Colorado.

Tennessee

State investments in digital infrastructure access are only part of the picture. There must also be an investment in programs that encourage adoption. To supplement the state's broadband funding, the legislature created a program administered by the Tennessee State Library and Archives to administer a Training Opportunities for the Public program. Local libraries can receive up to $20,000 to improve digital literacy through training and access to technology.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

A public-private partnership called "PHLConnectED" connects up to 35,000 students and their families with two years of high-speed internet access at not charge. The program includes three components: (1) providing the households of K-12 students with wired, high-speed internet from Comcast's Internet Essentials program (or a wireless hotspot for families who are housing insecure); (2) ensuring that K-12 public students have access to the devices they need to participate in virtual instruction (such as laptops and tablets); and (3) offering outreach, digital navigation, and digital skills training to students and families with the greatest need. Comcast, along with other business and civic leaders, have partnered with the Philadelphia School District to make this program possible.

Similar programs are in other cities across America. For example, "Chicago Connected" is providing free high-speed internet to about 100,000 Chicago Public School students by leveraging philanthropic and federal COVID-19 relief funds.

West Virginia

The West Virginia legislature established the West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council in 2016. The goal of the council is to expand access to broadband throughout the state, with a special emphasis on underserved areas. This has required mapping at the sub-census-block level. A state-level mapping and data collection program has enabled the state to make more targeted investments of where to invest in broadband deployment.

Supporting Students in Crisis

Salem, Massachusetts

Before the COVID-19 crisis, Mayor Kim Driscoll had created a Children's Cabinet to address student needs. Partnering with the Harvard Education Redesign Lab and City Connects from Boston College, this initiative enabled coordinators and teachers to develop a personalized plan for students when they enter Pre-K. Plans might include healthcare, after-school or enrichment programs, or other family-specific interventions.

In 2020, this model allowed the city to respond more quickly to families with specific, pandemic-related needs. They were able to immediately identify and focus on the highest-need students. The effort focused on the district's large population of homeless students specifically, while developing a tiered outreach plan for every student in the district. The program also kept track of the nonprofit providers that were still operating during the crisis. This meant that families could get the resources they needed in a timely fashion.

About the Education Policy Group

The NewDEAL Forum Education Policy Group, co-chaired by Georgia Senator Elena Parent and West Sacramento Mayor Christopher Cabaldon, was founded in response to significant evidence showing too many students falling behind and graduating unprepared for post-secondary education and the workplace. The Group's mission is to leverage the expertise of public and non-profit thought leaders, along with state and local policymakers from across the country, to identify the most effective, actionable solutions to graduate more students on track for success in the workplace.

Support for the Group is provided by the Alliance for Excellent Education, a national nonprofit policy and advocacy organization based in Washington, DC whose mission is to ensure that every young person graduates from high school prepared for success in careers and in life.

Education Policy Group Co-Chairs

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THE NEWDEAL FORUM
WORKING GROUP

WWW.NEWDEALFORUM.ORG

About the NewDEAL Forum

The NewDEAL Forum is a Washington DC-based non-profit organization that identifies and promotes innovative, future-oriented state and local pro-growth progressive policies that can improve the lives of all Americans. By facilitating the identification and spread of policy ideas, the NewDEAL Forum seeks to foster economic growth, reduce barriers to opportunity and promote good government in communities, cities and states throughout the country.

The NewDEAL Forum advances its mission by researching, identifying and sharing state and local pro-growth progressive policy ideas and bringing together public, private and nonprofit sector policy experts to exchange ideas and discuss the country's biggest challenges. In addition, the Forum encourages the exchange, sharing and dissemination of ideas via conferences and virtual convenings.

The NewDEAL Forum has created policy groups around the future of work, climate change, education, and a special group, the Renewing America Task Force, focused on economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic and achieving a new, better normal.

If you would like to speak with someone about making a contribution, please contact Brittany Wise at brittany@newdealleaders.org or by phone at (202) 660-1340 x4.