

The Role of State Governance in Supporting Learner Pathways



October 2021



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than 18 months, members of Chiefs for Change, a bipartisan network of state and district education leaders, have worked to support and engage learners amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The virus is leading to new trends in what was an already changing labor market. Automation of low-skill occupations, a growing cadre of remote employees, and even workers' reevaluation of the jobs they want to pursue are clear indications that our understanding of "the workforce" has evolved and will continue to do so after the pandemic.

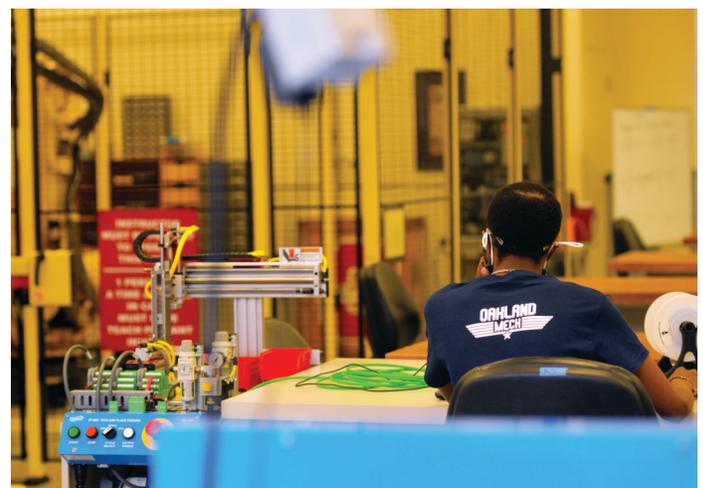
Given these changes, states must ensure that learners have opportunities to pursue high-quality, affordable pathways from K–12 to postsecondary education and career. Yet developing integrated, seamless pathways that serve all learners equally well is a complex endeavor—and is more than the sum of individual state policies or programs. While much of the work falls to local education providers, postsecondary institutions, and their industry partners, states must ensure that their systems, policies, and supports are aligned to a common goal: providing learners with high-quality academic and technical training that will prepare them for success in college and careers.

How states organize the various systems, funding streams, and sector leaders to ensure this alignment is a critical component of work. **In this brief, Chiefs for Change explains how strong state governance structures can support the development and success of high-quality pathways for all learners from K–12 to postsecondary education and career.** It describes what constitutes a

strong governance structure and how education departments led by Chiefs for Change members in three states—Indiana, Rhode Island, and Tennessee—are using such structures to create rich opportunities and experiences for students.

State and education system leaders should consider the following recommendations for establishing a strong state governance structure, or for reinvigorating existing ones, to support high-quality pathways across K–12, postsecondary education, and career.

- ➔ **Establish a north star or shared state goal for learner pathway outcomes.** This can be aligned to a broader educational attainment goal and/or broader economic priorities for now and the future. Regardless, this north



star should ideally connect learners of all ages, education, and workforce experience with in-demand occupations that offer family sustaining wages. The north star should reflect the need for inclusivity and attention to historically underserved learners.

- **Establish and codify a governance structure**—such as a cabinet, subcabinet, board, or commission—whose sole task is to convene cross-sector, cross-system partners to develop a strategic plan, determine success metrics, and integrate funding in support of the state’s goal for pathways. Governors can use executive orders to create such structures; however, it is recommended these structures be created in a way that supports multi-year, multi-administration efforts. For example, legislative action to codify the structure, authority, funding, and accountability can ensure that the work remains a visible state priority regardless of leadership transitions.
- **Ensure all relevant stakeholders are included** in the strategic planning and execution of work toward meeting the state’s shared pathways goal. While these stakeholders include relevant government agencies and offices for education and workforce, they should also include representation from state and regional employers. Intermediaries that serve as connectors between education

and employers should also be considered and can open doors to local public-private partnerships.

- **Engage in a comprehensive and transparent communications campaign** to ensure that learners, families, employers, community based organizations, and others clearly understand the opportunities available and how they can benefit from them. Individualized messaging for the differing audiences and stakeholders should be embedded in the campaign. Business and industry leaders often speak differently about pathway experiences, priorities, and outcomes. Consider and address the benefit for each group of stakeholders.
- **Track and regularly report progress and results toward the shared goal and underlying success metrics.** This is one of the most challenging pieces for many states to do in a manner that is both transparent and understandable to a range of audiences. As with communications and messaging, consider different ways to report results for various stakeholders. Adjust plans and actions accordingly based on results, and communicate what those changes mean for schools, employers, institutions of higher education, and other service providers.

Characteristics of Strong Governance Structures

North star	A hallmark of strong governance is a clear vision or goal for the state’s families, communities, and economies. New or reinvigorated statewide educational attainment goals serve as a north star in many states.
Credibility	Governors and legislative leaders play a critical role in ensuring governance structures have credibility. Business and industry leaders are other key stakeholders who can promote sound governance efforts.
Convening power	Leaders who create strong state governance structures mobilize K–12, postsecondary, workforce, and business and industry leaders to make connections across systems and communities in support of learner pathways.
Shared data, metrics, and accountability	The state’s north star serves as the core driver of this work, but strong governance structures feature layers of additional metrics, data points, and connections needed to deliver on the broader promise to learners and families.
Strategic, integrated funding	Aligning available federal and state funding to support high-quality learner pathways requires cross-agency collaboration around shared resources.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction 1
- Pathways Governance 2
- Governance Structure Challenges 3
- State Spotlights: Indiana, Rhode Island, and Tennessee 4
- Governance Structure Characteristics 7
- Recommendations for State Policymakers and System Leaders 9
- Federal Funding to Support Pathways 10

ABOUT CHIEFS FOR CHANGE

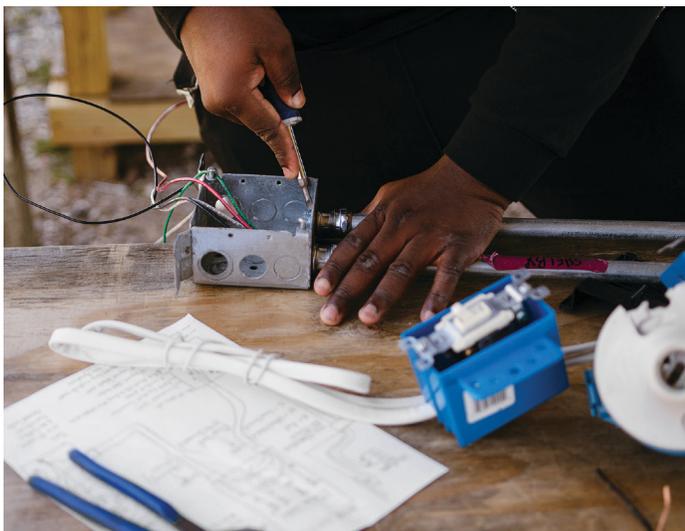
Chiefs for Change is a bipartisan network of diverse state and district education chiefs dedicated to preparing all students for today’s world and tomorrow’s through deeply committed leadership. Chiefs for Change advocates for policies and practices that are making a difference today for students, and builds a pipeline of talented, diverse Future Chiefs ready to lead major school systems.

INTRODUCTION

For more than 18 months, members of Chiefs for Change, a bipartisan network of state and district education leaders, have worked to support and engage learners amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The virus is leading to new trends in what was an already changing labor market. Automation of low-skill occupations, a growing cadre of remote employees, and even workers' reevaluation of the jobs they want to pursue are clear indications that our understanding of "the workforce" has evolved and will continue to do so after the pandemic.

Given these changes, states must ensure that learners have opportunities to pursue high-quality, affordable pathways from K–12 to postsecondary education and career. As we outlined in our [Blueprint for Postsecondary Success](#), this requires rethinking the traditional boundaries of education and workforce systems to create a more integrated set of experiences that can lead to a postsecondary credential and workplace readiness.¹ Strong state and system leaders are needed to determine how best to conduct and organize this work.

The ways that states align systems, funding streams, and sector leaders to create seamless pathways is both critical and complicated. It is made increasingly more difficult due to the various ways that education and workforce agencies and institutions are funded, overseen, and held accountable. Add to that the disconnects between what education providers prioritize as program offerings and the needs of regional and statewide employers, and the result is often a long legacy of siloed initiatives that can be difficult for learners to navigate or benefit from.



Despite challenges, more states are making progress by collaborating and sharing resources and data to support learner pathways at all levels. To ensure this work is highly valued and sustained over time, states that are leading the way are establishing formal governance structures to identify, organize work around, and measure progress against a shared set of priorities and metrics for success.

In this brief, Chiefs for Change explains how strong state governance structures can support the development and success of high-quality pathways for all learners from K–12 to postsecondary education and career. It describes what constitutes a strong governance structure and how education departments led by members of Chiefs for Change in three states—Indiana, Rhode Island, and Tennessee—are using such structures to create rich opportunities and experiences for students.

What is a pathway?

A pathway is a structured sequence of academic courses, technical training, and related work experiences that help learners develop the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in the career of their choice.

What are the characteristics of high-quality pathways?

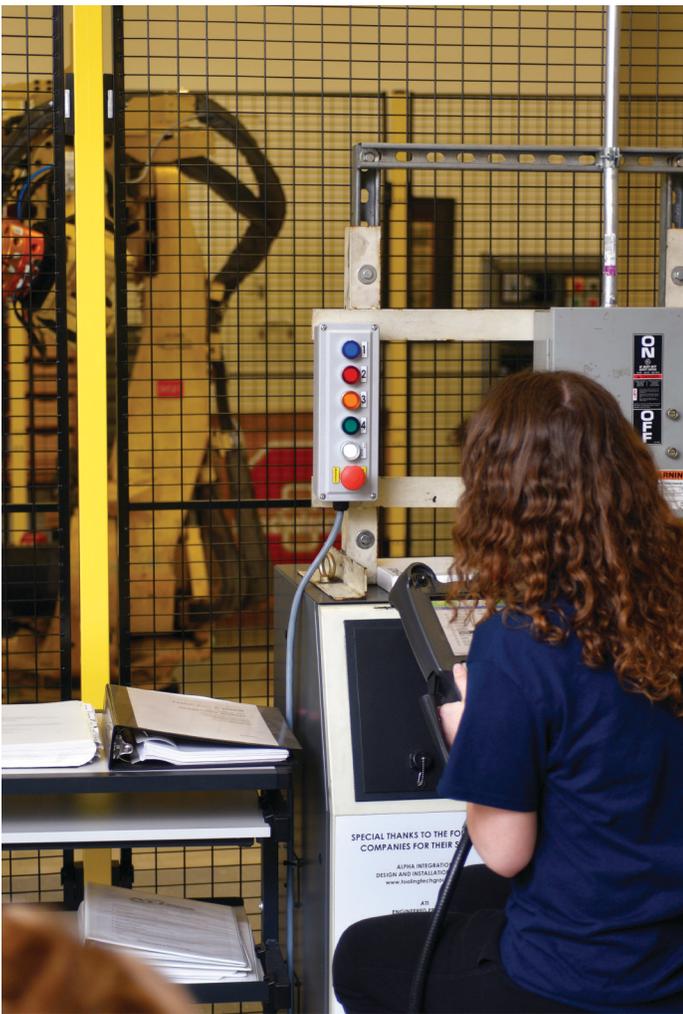
They:

- Begin in K–12 and continue in postsecondary and into employment.
- Align to high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand occupations in states and regions.
- Allow learners to earn postsecondary credit and industry credentials while in high school.
- Support learners in navigating transitions between K–12 and postsecondary.
- Feature supports and policies to promote equity.
- Support continued career advancement through additional credentialing and skills attainment.

¹ "Statement Outlining a New Blueprint for Postsecondary Success." Chiefs for Change. Jan 8, 2019. <https://chiefsforchange.org/2019/01/08/statement-outlining-a-new-blueprint-for-postsecondary-success/>

PATHWAYS GOVERNANCE

States can use governance structures to conduct cross-agency, cross-system work that leads to effective learner pathways from K–12 to college and careers. This work can be carried out in a variety of ways: by a task force, a commission, or a governor’s cabinet. These entities can be impaneled by ad hoc agreement, executive order, or even through legislative action. Regardless of their genesis and composition, state governance structures for learner pathways are becoming increasingly common ways of providing education-to-workforce experiences that are aligned to employer demand.



Supporting Pathways through Governance

Strong pathways begin in middle and high school with robust career and technical education (CTE) programs. That’s why Chiefs for Change members engage across agencies and systems to ensure these pathways lead to employer-valued skills attainment, postsecondary degrees and certificates, and industry recognized credentials.

Colorado Commissioner of Education Katy Anthes

- Serves as K–12 lead on the Colorado Workforce Development Council
- Oversees the state’s industry credential program for high schools

Tennessee Commissioner of Education Penny Schwinn

- Prioritizes CTE as a key component for promoting higher postsecondary credential attainment
- Serves as K–12 lead for Governor Bill Lee’s effort to develop a strong, educated workforce in Tennessee

Rhode Island Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Angélica Infante-Green

- Represents the Rhode Island Department of Education in the multi-agency PrepareRI pathway initiative
- Provides dedicated staffing and funding for engaging with other agencies and system leaders

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE CHALLENGES

Creating a new office or governance structure can be done through executive order or legislation. That is the easiest part. Far more difficult is the work to create a single, coherent strategy and develop an integrated set of priorities and actions given the many agencies, leaders, and stakeholders involved. Specific challenges include:²

- **Siloed missions and funding streams.** Education agencies and workforce systems have differing missions tailored to meet state and federal priorities for various groups of learners. With these individualized missions come siloed funding, planning, and budgeting. While this siloed approach might make assigning responsibilities and allotting funding easier on paper, it ignores the fact that high-quality pathways must be vertically aligned across these entities. By their nature, successful pathways blur the lines between education and work, operate across sectors and industries, and serve as vital on- and off-ramps over the course of learners' lives. Alignment of missions and resources is imperative to ensure that pathways lead to long-term career success.
- **Fragmented oversight and impact.** While learner pathways encompass concurrent experiences that touch K–12, postsecondary, and workforce, the agencies involved only have influence, in terms of oversight and funding, over fragments of these experiences. Sharpen this point to include high-value economic sectors and the fragmentation becomes even more complicated. In 2018, the Government Accountability Office found that the funding for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics programs was spread across 163 programs and 13 agencies.³ And that does not even include state-level oversight or program dollars. Without a coordinated structure or approach to pathways, the impact on learners will be just as fragmented as the programs themselves.
- **Piecemeal data and accountability for results.** An additional challenge is data and accountability. If the work to develop and grow high-quality learner pathways is both siloed and fragmented, then who can measure and be held accountable for results? For pathways, the results are not confined to discrete areas like CTE or postsecondary degree programs. Instead, the results should help to answer a key

question: What happens to learners over time who pursue specific pathway options after they graduate from high school and enter postsecondary education or the workforce? How beneficial were these experiences in terms of ensuring learners are skilled, successful in employment, and able to support a family in their occupation?

Without a clear structure for identifying the needed pathway development and supports, the results are duplicative or fractured efforts that benefit some learners only part of the time.

Advocating for Outcomes Data

Chiefs for Change and the Data Quality Campaign have undertaken an effort to understand the obstacles preventing access to and usability of postsecondary and workforce outcomes data with the goal of advancing state and regional solutions. Specifically, the groups will use insights from conversations with state, district, and school leaders to highlight the importance of supporting K–12 leaders at all levels, so they have the data they need to ensure students are prepared for postsecondary and workforce success. Investing in state-level data linkages between education and the workforce, and packaging data in useful ways, can allow K–12 leaders to answer their most pressing questions about how their students are faring after high school.

² Loosely adapted from the following: Butler, Stuart, Timothy Higashi and Marcela Cabello. "Budgeting to Promote Social Objectives—A Primer on Braiding and Blending." Brookings Institution. April 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BraidingAndBlending20200403.pdf>

³ "2018 Annual Report: Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Other Financial Benefits," Government Accountability Office, April 26, 2018, <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-371SP>.

STATE SPOTLIGHTS: INDIANA, RHODE ISLAND, AND TENNESSEE

While many states are using governance structures to develop and support robust learner pathways, three have made substantial progress in their efforts. Indiana, Rhode

Island, and Tennessee are good examples of how states can leverage different approaches to governance to support education-to-workforce pathways.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: INDIANA

Governance structure and approach

In Indiana, building intentional and strategic student pathways for lifelong success is a top priority. It serves as a signature initiative for Governor Eric Holcomb and the state's legislative leadership.

In 2018, Indiana established the Governor's Workforce Cabinet (GWC) to identify the workforce needs in the state and recommend ways to meet those needs. Building on prior efforts, the GWC has worked across state agencies and the state's business community to develop an integrated plan and set of strategies to support learners in K–12, postsecondary, and the workforce.

The GWC also oversees the state's CTE program, administers the state's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) plan, and directs the state's Office of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship.

We spoke to the Indiana Department of Education to learn more.

What sets Indiana apart?

Indiana's approach to governance allows it to bring together a wide variety of stakeholders so they can act in unison and nimbly address state priorities aligned with families' and employers' needs.

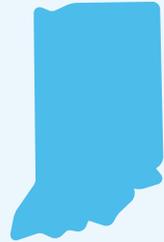
What are highlights of this work?

An integrated strategic workforce plan serves as the state's combined Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) and WIOA plan. It also incorporates Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), 21st Century Talent Regions, and state grant program funds.⁴

Next Level CTE Programs of Study vertically align pathways between K–12 and postsecondary and feature opportunities for learners to earn college credit, industry credentials, and workplace experience.⁵

What lessons has Indiana learned in the process of collaborating to support learner pathways?

1. Breaking down silos is difficult. It's critical that everyone involved link arms around a shared mission: doing everything we can for learners to be ready and successful.
2. Focus on being inclusive and collaborative with communities and support what's working at the local level. When a community is activated to do this work, it creates an energy of its own.
3. Connect data across agencies to see the real picture of how programs are working in K–12 and postsecondary. Commit to putting the puzzle pieces together.



4 "State of Indiana Releases Draft of Strategic Workforce Plan." Indiana Governor's Workforce Cabinet. February 6, 2020. <https://www.in.gov/gwc/announcements/>

5 Next Level Programs of Study. Governor's Workforce Cabinet. <https://www.in.gov/gwc/cte/career-pathways-programs-of-study/>

STATE SPOTLIGHT: RHODE ISLAND

Governance structure and approach

Rhode Island’s approach to pathways governance has been an interagency effort to address state employers’ needs for an educated, skilled workforce.

The main cross-sector group is the Governor’s Workforce Board (GWB). However, to prioritize pathways work, in 2016, the state and then-Governor Gina Raimondo launched PrepareRI as part of a New Skills for Youth Grant from J.P. Morgan Chase and the Council of Chief State School Officers. PrepareRI is a multi-year, interagency structure that includes the governor’s office and Rhode Island’s K–12, postsecondary, and commerce departments. Its four main focus areas are: career exploration, career education, college credit, and jobs and internships.⁶

PrepareRI spearheaded the effort to align the state’s employer-led CTE Board of Trustees with the GWB’s Career Pathways Advisory Committee, which oversees a mixed-delivery youth career pathways system. PrepareRI’s structure ensures representation across agencies and both groups. It also ensures strong alignment with the CTE Board of Trustees on the implementation of CTE pathways and programming.

We spoke to the Rhode Island Department of Education to learn more.

What sets Rhode Island apart?

PrepareRI was explicitly developed, in part, to build bridges across the state’s business community and government agencies. Its novel CTE Board of Trustees ensures that the state’s CTE pathways are meeting the needs of employers.

What are highlights of this work?

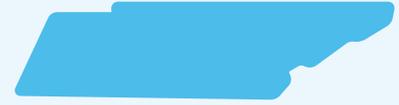
Rhode Island allows students to enroll in any CTE program in the state for free—even if a student’s desired program is in another school district. The Advanced Course Network allows learners to access 120 rigorous academic and technical courses (65 of which are dual or concurrent enrollment courses) at no cost, regardless of what a student’s home school can offer.⁷



6 PrepareRI. <https://www.prepare-ri.org/about>

7 “Students Can Access 120 New Courses through Advanced Coursework Network.” Rhode Island Department of Education. <https://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/AdditionalInformation/News/ViewArticle/tabid/408/ArticleId/317/Students-can-access-120-new-courses-through-Advanced-Coursework-Network.aspx>

STATE SPOTLIGHT: TENNESSEE



Governance structure and approach

Tennessee’s approach to governance relies on its strong, years-long tradition of collaboration across agencies and administrations.

The Tennessee Pathways initiative began almost a decade ago as part of a broader effort to overhaul the work of the state’s department of education (TDOE). In close collaboration with the Tennessee Colleges for Applied Technologies, the TDOE developed a comprehensive set of vertically aligned CTE pathways. In 2016, it was incorporated into then-Governor Bill Haslam’s Drive to 55 attainment goal.⁸ This spawned additional collaboration across the Tennessee Board of Regents, Tennessee Business Roundtable, Department of Economic and Community Development, Higher Education Commission, and Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

In 2019, Governor Bill Lee gave all state agencies the directive to ensure that they were supporting a strong workforce across the state. Tennessee’s Workforce Development System, led by the State Workforce Development Board, serves as a consortium of state agencies including the TDOE; Board of Regents; Higher Education Commission, Department of Economic and Community Development; Department of Corrections; Department of Human Services; and Department of Labor and Workforce Development; among others.

We spoke to the Tennessee Department of Education to learn more.

What sets Tennessee apart?

Tennessee has been a leader in developing and supporting high-quality pathways across multiple gubernatorial administrations and subsequent leadership transitions at its major state agencies.

At the TDOE, this work has been successfully championed by three commissioners, all of whom are members or alumni of Chiefs for Change: Kevin Huffman, Candice McQueen, and Penny Schwinn.

What are highlights of this work?

The Tennessee Pathways certification process sets clear expectations for alignment, advisement, and partnerships that define strong education-to-career pathways.⁹

ApprenticeshipTN leveraged cross-agency collaboration to develop an integrated framework for youth apprenticeships and apprenticeships.¹⁰

What has helped to ensure that Tennessee’s pathways from K–12 to college and careers remain relevant over time?

“Tennessee has aligned our education and workforce priorities—not just in the last couple of years, but over the last decade—because we know how critical it is for our students and business community,” Commissioner Schwinn explained. “It has brought all stakeholders to the table and has allowed us to be very targeted in identifying the jobs and industries that need skilled workers, what student academic and advising supports need to be in place, and which work-based learning skills and opportunities need to be developed to best support our students.”

8 Drive to 55 Alliance. <https://driveto55.org/>

9 “Tennessee Pathways Certification.” Tennessee Pathways. Tennessee Board of Regents. <https://www.tbr.edu/tennessee-pathways/certification>

10 ApprenticeshipTN. <https://www.tn.gov/apprenticeshiptn.html>

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE CHARACTERISTICS

The mere existence of a governance structure for a pathway does not guarantee that pathway is creating better opportunities for learners, families, and communities. Below are five common attributes of strong state governance structures in support of pathways. While they may not all be present in existing state initiatives, together they can serve as a powerful amplifier and sustainer of pathways work.

1. A north star: A hallmark of strong governance is a clear vision or goal for the state’s families, communities, and economies. Statewide attainment goals can act as this shared objective in many instances—and for good reason. The talent gap is growing across the country, and states will need a more educated population to address it. The Lumina Foundation—long a promoter of quality credential attainment—set a nationwide goal that “by 2025, 60 percent of Americans hold a credential beyond high school—a quality credential that prepares people for informed citizenship and economic success.”¹¹ The vast majority of states have followed with some form of their own goal, and those that are making strong progress are leveraging it as a north star for collaboration and action.

Attainment goals are not the only means of establishing a reason for collective action to develop pathways. But without a north star, the competing priorities of different agencies and systems can quickly distract from the greater effort to develop pathways that meet learners where they are and provide opportunities for economic mobility and career advancement and success.

2. Credibility: Governors and legislative leaders can play a critical role by leveraging not just their bully pulpit to make pathways a priority, but to parlay their relationships and influence into a comprehensive education-to-workforce agenda informed by and in partnership with key business and industry sector leaders. In legislative terms, this can include establishing mandated structures or additional offices and entities whose primary mission is to develop opportunities for learners at all levels of their journeys from education to workforce. Legislatively created offices or structures, often in concert with gubernatorial leadership, can signal to all relevant stakeholders this work will live beyond a press release or a leader’s term in office.

3. Convening power: Leaders who create strong state governance structures bring multiple agencies and entities to the same table. Typically, at a minimum, governance structures establish lines of communication across state K–12 education agencies, post-secondary agencies (including two- and four-year institutions), and the state’s workforce development agency. Depending on the state and scope of the work, these governance structures can also include state departments of labor; commerce; health and human services; and corrections—as well as key legislators, governor’s office staff, and business and industry representatives. While the array of stakeholders can seem numerous, all of these organizations and representatives play a role in the continuum of education-to-workforce training, supporting learners of all ages and at all levels.

Example: The Governor’s Office of Workforce Transformation (OWT) in Ohio serves as the lead convening group for all state agencies and entities to align initiatives, programs, and funding for workforce development and pathways. Part of its convening power stems from deep support from Governor Mike DeWine and direct leadership by Lieutenant Governor Jon Husted. Chiefs for Change member and former Ohio Superintendent of Public Instruction Paolo DeMaria served on the board of the OWT.

4. Shared data, metrics, and accountability: As many educators have noted, what gets measured gets done. The same goes for state governance structures and learner pathways. A state’s north star serves as the core driver of this work, but strong governance structures feature layers of additional metrics, data points, and connections needed to deliver on the broader promise to learners and families. Beyond identification of additional metrics and needed data, there can also be memoranda of understanding among agencies that must be executed to track learner progress across transition points from K–12 to college and careers—and back again for additional credentialing. In the best cases, information can be connected through privacy-protected longitudinal data systems that track learners across multiple levels, systems, and programs. Though comprehensive systems should be the ultimate long-term goal, they

11 “A Stronger Nation: Learning beyond high school builds American talent.” Lumina Foundation. 2021. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/2021/#nation>

are not the only option. Even if not housed in one system, the data exists or can be collected. Agency leaders must come together to clearly monitor shared progress toward mutually agreed-upon goals and data aligned with the state's north star.

Example: The Colorado Workforce Development Council, in concert with business representatives and other agencies—including the Colorado Department of Education led by Chiefs for Change member and state Commissioner Katy Anthes—publishes an annual Talent Pipeline Report. In addition to identifying key areas of demand and employment opportunity, the report highlights the state's progress in educating and training a skilled workforce. The resource is a valuable tool for aligning pathway programs and desired outcomes to the state's economic needs.¹²

In well-designed governance structures, shared accountability for progress goes hand-in-hand with shared data and metrics. That accountability is typically a function of transparency. States can demonstrate accountability by publishing annual progress reports, publicly releasing updated data, and issuing frequent and consistent communications around goals and outcomes.

Pathways to high-skill, high-wage, high-growth occupations are more important than ever.

Covid-19 has resulted in both increased automation and huge job losses in low-skill jobs. Due to the pandemic's impact on low-wage jobs, economists at the McKinsey Global Institute estimate that the most growth in labor demand will be for high-wage jobs. Consider that "...more than half of displaced low-wage workers may need to shift to occupations in higher wage brackets [that require] different skills to remain employed."¹³ For learners in the education-to-workforce training pipeline, states must ensure that pathway programs prepare learners for continued change and advancement.

- 5. Strategic, integrated funding:** Aligning available federal and state funding to support high-quality learner pathways is arguably one of the more difficult tasks of any state initiative. Doing so requires cross-agency collaboration to ensure the range of program funds are, where appropriate, leveraged in combination to support the various educational needs of learners and adults. Many states rightly target state and federal CTE, most notably Perkins V and WIOA, for integrated funding. Many programs, however, can play an integral part in supporting learners. It is up to each state to identify and direct relevant funding beyond the most common streams. Information and detailed metrics serve to break down the common perception that developing strong student pathways and supports always requires "more money" (or money the state does not have). In fact, the pathways can result in notable savings to the state, as funding is optimized and streamlined.

Relevant Funding Programs for Pathways

Federal Program Funding

- Perkins V
- Every Student Succeeds Act
- TANF
- WIOA
- Apprenticeship grants from the Department of Labor
- Certain employment and training provisions in SNAP

Common State Funding

- State CTE funds
- Allotments for early postsecondary opportunities
- Higher education outcomes-based funding
- Incentives and grant programs for employers supporting work-based learning

12 "Colorado Talent Pipeline Report." Colorado Workforce Development Council. <https://cwdc.colorado.gov/resources/colorado-talent-pipeline-report>
13 "The Future of Work after COVID-19." McKinsey Global Institute. February 18, 2021. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-after-covid-19>

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS AND SYSTEM LEADERS

State and system leaders should consider the following recommendations for establishing strong governance structures, or for reinvigorating existing ones, in support of high-quality pathways across K–12, postsecondary education, and career.

- **Establish a north star or shared state goal for learner pathway outcomes.** This can be aligned to a broader educational attainment goal and/or broader economic priorities for now and the future. Regardless, this north star should ideally connect learners of all ages, education, and workforce experience with in-demand occupations that offer family sustaining wages. The north star should reflect the need for inclusivity and attention to historically underserved learners.
- **Establish and codify a governance structure**—such as a cabinet, subcabinet, board, or commission—whose sole task is to convene cross-sector, cross-system partners to develop a strategic plan, determine success metrics, and integrate funding in support of the state’s goal for pathways. Governors can use executive orders to create such structures; however, it is recommended these structures be created in a way that supports multi-year, multi-administration efforts. For example, legislative action to codify the structure, authority, funding, and accountability can ensure that the work remains a visible state priority regardless of leadership transitions.
- **Ensure all relevant stakeholders are included** in the strategic planning and execution of work toward meeting the state’s shared pathways goal. While these stakeholders include relevant government agencies and offices for education and workforce, they should also include representation from state and regional employers. Intermediaries that serve as connectors between education and employers should also be considered and can open doors to local public-private partnerships.
- **Engage in a comprehensive and transparent communications campaign** to ensure that learners, families, employers, community based organizations, and others clearly understand the opportunities available and how they can benefit from them. Individualized messaging for the differing audiences and stakeholders should be embedded in the campaign. Business and industry leaders often speak differently about pathway experiences, priorities, and outcomes. Consider and address the benefit for each group of stakeholders.
- **Track and regularly report progress and results toward the shared goal and underlying success metrics.** This is one of the most challenging pieces for many states to do in a manner that is both transparent and understandable to a range of audiences. As with communications and messaging, consider different ways to report results for various stakeholders. Adjust plans and actions accordingly based on results, and communicate what those changes mean for schools, employers, institutions of higher education, and other service providers.



FEDERAL FUNDING TO SUPPORT PATHWAYS

Now more than ever, states must ensure that their systems, policies, and supports are aligned to a common goal: providing students with high-quality academic and technical training that will prepare them for success in college and careers.

Systems have an opportunity to use federal dollars allocated for education in response to the Covid-19 pandemic to support this work. The American Rescue Plan provides nearly \$122 billion in emergency Covid relief aid for K–12 schools.¹⁴ This comes on the heels of earlier relief funding¹⁵ to help states, districts, and schools respond to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

States are not the only ones that can make the most of federal funds to support pathways. Districts and schools receive the bulk of relief funds to offset the adverse effects of Covid-19 on learners and communities. For more information, see the Chiefs for Change memo, [How Schools Should Use Funding from the American Rescue Plan to Support Students](#).

Funding for K–12 Education from Federal Covid Relief Packages

		FUNDING			
		Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act	Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act	American Rescue Plan	Combined
ENTITY	State education agencies	\$1.3 billion	\$5.4 billion	\$12.2 billion	\$18.9 billion
	Local education agencies	\$11.9 billion	\$48.9 billion	\$109.8 billion	\$170.6 billion
	Total	\$13.2 billion	\$54.3 billion	\$121.9 billion	\$189.5 billion

At the state level, these funds are extremely flexible and can be used for a variety of pathway initiatives, including:

- Equipment, program, and facilities grants to help local CTE programs expand pathways aligned to high-demand, high-skill, and high-wage occupations.
- Upgrades to existing data systems to ensure they can track and report on learner outcomes across systems and levels of education and training.
- Partnerships with community and technical colleges to accelerate learner transitions to postsecondary programs.
- Professional learning for CTE teachers in high-growth fields of study.
- Grants to support public-private partnerships for work-based learning and workplace training.

Regardless of the strategy, state and system leaders have a unique opportunity to leverage both long-term and short-term investments to grow and sustain learner pathways.



¹⁴ “U.S. Department of Education Announces American Rescue Plan Funds for All 50 States, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia to Help Schools Reopen.” United States Department of Education. <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USED/bulletins/2c79d18>

¹⁵ The 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) and the 2021 Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA)