





PATHWAYS MATTER

Policy Rating Rubric

Pathways Policy Rating Rubric

PURPOSE

This rubric includes a brief description of education-to-workforce policies that states can adopt and implement, as well as descriptors used to rate states on each of the policies.

 EXEMPLAR	State meets additional criteria
 FULL	State law addresses all policy elements
 LIMITED	State law addresses some of the policy elements (specific criteria in rubric below)
 NONE	No state law in existence to address policy elements



Foundational Policies



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Statewide Governance

Governance is the intentional and explicit alignment of state agencies, priorities and resources led by a cross-sector (K-12, postsecondary, workforce, employers) pathways structure working toward an aligned vision. Multiple state leaders and systems are needed to support high-quality pathways. Governance is based on empowered leadership, shared vision and priorities, aligned policies programs and funding, and common metrics.

- NOTE: ExcelinEd is conducting national research on state education-to-workforce governance models and will establish criteria for a FULL rating in the second half of 2026. State ratings will be updated once that research is complete.

- State efforts to coordinate education-to-workforce pathways take place on an ad-hoc basis, without ongoing and deliberate coordination or leadership.
- The state has a collective vision, but it is not developed in collaboration with employers.

- No codified governance structure or statewide vision exists and/or no statewide vision exists.

Return on Investment Analysis

A comprehensive return on investment (ROI) analysis of K-12 and postsecondary programs assesses program alignment to high-demand, high-skill and high-wage pathways and student outcomes. The analysis includes student access, enrollment and completion data as well as outcomes data such as enrollment, employment (including wage) and enlistment. The ROI occurs at least every three years, is published publicly and is used to develop and implement policy and program changes.

- ROI analysis is validated by a third party.
- ROI process/ methodology is validated by a third party (entity other than K-12, postsecondary or other participating state agency).

- State law requires a comprehensive, recurring ROI analysis of K-12 and postsecondary programs and publicly reports results and progress updates.
- State law requires a comprehensive analysis of the state's offered K-12 programs, postsecondary technical programs, and worker/adult (up)skills training programs at least every three years.
 - Analysis examines alignment of K-12 programs and postsecondary programs with statewide and regional industry and labor market demands.
 - Analysis includes student access, enrollment and completion data by education provider and student subgroup.
 - Analysis includes short- and long-term student outcomes data (i.e., employment, wages, government assistance).
- State law requires recurring analysis to include policy and program recommendations, and a progress update based on previous analyses.
- State law requires the analysis to be published publicly.

- State law requires a recurring analysis, but it is not comprehensive, fails to include recommendations, and / or it is not publicly accessible.
- State law codifies a recurring analysis, but does not require recommendations and actions based on findings.
- State law codifies a recurring analysis, but it does not require the inclusion of long-term student outcomes data (i.e., employment, wages, government assistance).
- State law codifies a recurring analysis of either K-12 or postsecondary—but does not require a comprehensive, aligned analysis across both systems.
- Comprehensive analysis is required through an executive order or a state agency rather than legislated.

- State law does not require a comprehensive, recurring ROI.
- Analysis and reporting of K-12 and postsecondary technical programs does not exceed Perkins requirements.



Foundational Policies



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Statewide Definitions

Statewide definitions are for terms such as high-wage, high-demand and high-skill (H3). Agencies leverage these terms uniformly across their agencies. The definition/methodology for “high-wage” results in a threshold that is above median wage (statewide and / or regionally).

- State law includes definitions of high-wage, high-demand, and high-skill jobs (and a requirement for periodic update if the definition is a static number).
- State law requires all relevant agencies (K-12 education, postsecondary education, workforce, economic development, human services, etc.) to use the statewide H3 definitions.
- The definition/methodology for ‘high-wage’ results in a threshold that is above median wage (statewide and/or regionally).

- State law includes only some required elements / definitions of H3 OR the wage threshold is below state median wage.

- The state has not codified a definition of high-wage, high-demand and high-skill jobs OR the wage threshold is substantially below state median wage.

Credentials of Value

A “**credential of value**” is a verification of a learner’s qualification or competence issued by a third party. Credentials of value carry currency with employers in the labor market. Credentials of value often stack into additional opportunities or levels of advanced knowledge and experience and can be directly tied to increased wage earnings and career advancement. For K-12 learners, credentials of value include or connect to postsecondary training and education.

- State law requires K-12 and postsecondary systems to create a single, unified, tiered list of “credentials of value” and update it at least every three years. (ideally includes industry certifications/licenses, postsecondary degrees/awards, workforce programs, and military training).
- State law requires the unified credentials of value list to be tiered based on job demand and wage potential.

- State law requires separate K-12 and postsecondary credentials of value list levels OR the unified list is not tiered based on job demand and wage potential.
- Unified credentials of value list is not required to be reviewed/updated at least every three years.

- No state list or definition for credentials of value for K-12 and postsecondary exists.



K-12 Education Policies



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Career Advising

Career exploration and advising includes student exploration, advising, access to data, and resources to support learners in planning for postsecondary and career goals. Career advising begins in middle school with a career interest inventory and the development of a comprehensive postsecondary college and career plan that is annually updated.

- State provides funding for career coaches.

- State law defines career advising starting in middle school with a required career interest inventory and skills aptitude assessment and plan to be updated through high school.
- State policy requires LEAs to develop and implement a K-12 college/career advising and communications plan for students and their families that includes program quality metrics.

- State law defines career advising and supports as beginning in grade 9 with an optional interest inventory OR plan.
- State policy requires LEAs to develop and implement a K-12 college/career advising and communications plan, but it does not include program quality metrics.

- State does not have policy on K-12 college or career advising.

Career Scholarship Accounts

A Career Scholarship Account (CSA) is a state-funded program that pays for college and career preparation experiences covering costs such as tuition, exam fees, transportation and equipment. States can require an annual evaluation of CSA demand, participation, experiences, expenses and student outcomes to enhance these programs and right-size funding based on demand.

- State law provides recurring funding for a statewide career scholarship account (CSA) program
- Funding criteria allows students to use CSA funds for credit-bearing advanced-level WBL experiences and career-connected college acceleration courses and/or exams, as well as transportation and equipment costs.
- State law requires an annual evaluation of CSA demand, participation, experiences, expenses, and student outcomes.

- State funds are appropriated for a CSA program, but the program excludes some costs such as transportation and equipment OR funds are one time (such as a pilot).
- State funds are appropriated, but no review is required to examine program demand and the need for additional funding.

- State law does not include a statewide CSA program.

College Acceleration: Access and Funding

College Acceleration is coursework or an exam offered to high school students to earn college credit while still in high school. Examples include Advanced Placement (AP), Dual Credit / Dual Enrollment, International Baccalaureate (IB), Cambridge and College-Level Examination Program (CLEP). High schools should offer multiple options for college acceleration to students at no cost.

- State law requires high schools to offer multiple options for college acceleration at no cost to students.
- College acceleration credit opportunities are offered from a diverse portfolio such as Advanced Placement, Dual Credit / Dual Enrollment, International Baccalaureate, Cambridge, and College-Level Examination Program.

- State law does not require multiple college acceleration options AND / OR students must bear some of the cost.

- State law does not require college acceleration options OR students are required to pay the full cost.



K-12 Education Policies



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

College Acceleration: Early College

Early college is a high school or high school program that allows students to earn a high school diploma and up to an associate degree simultaneously. Early colleges can operate on a high school campus or at a partnering organization such as a local community or technical college.

- State law identifies, defines and incentivizes early college at no cost to students.

- State law defines early college and provides minimal guidance OR students must incur some cost.

- Policy barrier exists or state law prohibits early college high schools or programs.

College Acceleration: College Core Credential

A College Core Credential is a common set of college acceleration courses that are uniformly accepted at all postsecondary institutions toward general education requirements. Courses often are in subjects such as English, Science, Math and Social Studies.

- State law requires all high schools to offer an option to earn a college core credential uniformly accepted at public institutions in the state.

- State law encourages a college core credential AND /OR the core credentials are not accepted at all public institutions.

- State law does not define a college core credential bundle of courses.

CTE Programs: Adjunct Teacher Policy

Adjunct teacher licensure proves an alternate route for experienced professionals to teach full- or part-time without a traditional teacher license. Adjunct teacher licenses include a streamlined pathway for teachers to obtain a full teaching license.

- State law includes CTE teachers in adjunct teacher policy with the potential to obtain a long-term teaching license.

- State law on adjunct teachers is unclear, restricted to some subjects or requires co-teacher, enrollment in a prep program or a bachelor's degree.

- State law does not define adjunct CTE teachers.



K-12 Education Policies



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

CTE Programs: Quality

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs of study are developed, reviewed, and updated at least every three years at the state level using student outcomes. CTE programs include industry certifications, work-based learning and college acceleration opportunities.

- State law requires student outcomes to be used in determining CTE offerings, which must include industry certifications and work-based learning.
- State law defines CTE to include industry certifications, work-based learning and college acceleration options with program review every 3 years.
- CTE course standards are required to be created and approved at the state level and are developed in collaboration with employers.

- State law defines CTE but does not include WBL, college acceleration or industry certifications OR no state oversight including employer input OR no recurring review.

- State law does not require at least a three-year review for labor market alignment OR no codified employer collaboration OR no statewide course standards.

CTE Programs: Tiered Funding

CTE funding is tiered based on labor market alignment (wage, demand, skill) and course level (introductory vs. advanced) progression for CTE programs. CTE funding tiers are reviewed and updated at least every three years to ensure labor market demand and wage alignment.

- State law specifies that CTE courses/programs generate tiered funding to significantly prioritize student enrollment in programs aligned with priority labor market demand and wage thresholds.
- State law specifies that CTE courses/programs generate increasing funding based on student progression to more advanced courses within a program.
- CTE course/program funding tiers are reviewed and updated at least every three years for labor market demand and wage alignment.

- State law includes tiered funding not based on labor market demand and / or wage alignment.
- CTE courses/programs receive significantly tiered funding, but the thresholds are not based on labor market demand and/or wage alignment.

- State law does not include tiered funding OR CTE courses are funded based on program cost OR CTE courses are funded based on the career cluster.
- The state does not allocate state funds specifically for CTE.

Data Connections Across Systems

A state longitudinal data system is used to examine data from across agencies and offices – including K-12 and postsecondary education experiences as well as employment outcomes. The system can be used to better inform students about career pathways and to better allocate resources within the state.

- K-12 student outcomes data are presented publicly in a student-facing online dashboard alongside statewide/ regional labor market information.

- State law requires individual K-12 student data to be matched with postsecondary, employment, and wage data at least annually to understand student outcomes.

- The state connects and annually updates K-12 student-level data with postsecondary OR employment / wage data (but not both).

- The state does not systematically connect individual K-12 student data with state postsecondary and employment outcomes data systems.
- Note: self-reported outcomes data for certain programs or groups of students, such as required Perkins postsecondary placement and/or IDEA reporting, does not count.



K-12 Education Policies



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Industry Certifications: Data

The state collects K-12 data on industry certification attempts and attainment for all industry certifications at the district, school and student level. The state publicly reports industry certification attainment data and uses data to evaluate program quality and influence policy and program changes.

- State law requires the collection of industry certification attempt and attainment data for all industry certifications at the district, school, and student level.
- Industry certification attainment data are reported publicly on an annual basis.

- Industry certification attainment data are collected by the state, but this is not required by state law OR data is not student-level OR data is not reported publicly by the state.

- State law does not address the collection and use of industry certification attainment data.

Industry Certifications: Funding

An industry certification is a verification of a learner's qualification or competence issued by a third party. Industry certification funding covers the cost for high school students statewide to sit for and retake at least one approved industry certification at no cost.

- State law funds high school students statewide to sit for at least one approved industry certification.
- State law establishes recurring funding to cover student costs for qualifying industry certification exam fees.

- State funds only partially offset exam fees for students for state-approved industry certifications OR funding guidance is vague.

- State does not provide funds to cover exam fees for industry certifications OR no criteria on allowable industry certifications at the state level.

Industry Certifications: Tiered List

An industry certification is a verification of a learner's qualification or competence issued by a third party. A tiered industry certification list categorizes certifications based on their alignment to labor market information, wage thresholds, and skill levels. Lists are reviewed regularly to ensure program alignment. States should include one tier at or above 120% of state median individual income. Exemplar lists are part of a broader tiered list across K-12 and postsecondary.

- State law requires the K-12 industry certification list be a part of a unified credentials of value list OR includes employer-generated data.
- State law requires the creation and review of a tiered list of K-12 industry certifications based on labor market information and wages.
- State law requires review and update of the industry certification list based on state-approved process and criteria at least every three years.

- State law requires a tiered K-12 industry certifications list, but it is not based on wage and demand data OR no regular review process exists.

- State law does not require the creation of a list of K-12 industry certifications OR multiple K-12 lists exist.



K-12 Education Policies



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Pathways Accountability

Rigorous college and career readiness accountability indicators include all students in schools serving grades 9-12. The indicator is based on completion of a menu of multiple measures (e.g., student attainment of industry certification and college acceleration credit on an AP exam) and/or a cut score on the ACT/SAT for all students in the graduation cohort. Indicators are based on attainment – not enrollment only – and hold value beyond the high school diploma as part of a pathway experience.

- State uses the same rigorous indicator(s) for K-12 state and federal (ESSA) accountability and the K-12 Readiness Incentive policy.

- College and career readiness accountability indicators include successful completion of multiple indicators or a cut score on the SAT/ACT.

- College and career readiness accountability indicators use a single data element that is not ACT/SAT (e.g. completion of a CTE program of study).

- The state does not have a college and career readiness indicator in its accountability system.

Pathways Incentives: High School Experiences

Pathways incentive funding provides bonuses to schools based on student attainment of college and career readiness experiences (e.g., college credits or CTE program and credential of value). The incentive should be weighted to signal higher value opportunities to students and funded at a higher amount for higher-needs students.

- State law requires the incentive amounts to be substantially higher for higher-need students, including economically disadvantaged students, English learners and students with a disability. This can be applied to yellow and green.

- State law establishes one or more incentive programs that financially reward districts, schools or teachers based on individual experiences (e.g. courses or exams) that culminate in college credits and/or industry certifications.
- Funds are weighted to incentivize higher value industry certifications or a bundle of advanced placement courses or college acceleration courses aligned with a CTE program of study (for example).
- Additional funds are provided for higher-needed students.
- State law requires an annual appropriation of funds to be allocated for each incentive program.
- Advanced Placement, Dual Credit / Dual Enrollment, International Baccalaureate, Cambridge, prior learning experience, College-Level Examination Program, and industry certification exams.

- State law establishes one or more incentive program(s) that financially rewards districts, schools, or teachers based on student success in individual experiences (e.g., courses or exams) that culminate in college credits and/or industry certifications.
- Funds are appropriated as a one-time grant.

- State does not financially incentivize performance based on college and career readiness experiences.



K-12 Education Policies



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Pathways Incentives: Post-High School Success

A pathways incentive for post-high school success is a recurring funding mechanism that provides bonuses to schools based on student outcomes (enrollment, enlistment, employment). Ideally, the incentive is at least 10% above base funding and at least 50% more for higher-need students including economically disadvantaged, English Learners and students with a disability.

- Performance funding must equal 10 percent or greater above base funding, which includes all revenue sources except facility related.
- At least 5 percent of base is linked to post-graduation success, which means six months after graduation a student is:
 - Enrolled in an institution of higher education and has succeeded during the first semester, i.e., earning at least 15 college credits with at least a 2.0 grade point average;
 - Employed in a job with a wage at least 70 percent of the state median; or
 - Enlisted in any branch of the United States armed services.
- 50 percent higher bonuses for post-graduation success of higher-need students, which includes students who are:
 - Low income, i.e., eligible for free or reduced-price meals;
 - English learners; or
 - Students with disabilities.

- Performance funding is less than 10 percent but at least 5 percent greater than base funding.
- Between 2.5 and 5 percent of base is linked to post-graduation success.
- Less than 50 percent but at least 25 percent higher bonuses for post-graduation success of higher-need students.

- Performance funding is less than 5 percent greater than base funding.
- Less than 2.5 percent of base is linked to post-graduation success measures.
- Less than 50 percent but at least 25 percent higher bonuses for post-graduation success of higher-need students.

Work-Based Learning: Capstone Course

Work-based learning (WBL) involves structured student interactions in real workplace settings to gain practical skills. A WBL capstone course is a credit bearing course aligned with a CTE program of study that can include an internship, youth apprenticeship, student-run enterprise, in-school co-op or similar experience. The state should set clear guidance and quality metrics for regular evaluation to drive change.

- The state sets clear expectations for and collects student-level data on capstone WBL experiences that go beyond participation and hours worked.
- State law defines work-based learning (WBL) as including a structured, credit-bearing capstone WBL experience that is aligned with the conclusion of a high school student's CTE program (e.g., internship, pre-apprenticeship, student-run enterprise, co-op, etc.).
- State law or program of study (POS) offerings require capstone WBL experiences to be included as course options in all CTE programs (WBL is one of several capstone course options within a POS – available but not required for every student).
- The state sets clear, rigorous expectations for capstone WBL experience quality and student performance.

- State policy allows for credit-bearing, capstone WBL experiences, but they are not required to be included in all K-12 CTE programs.
- The state sets basic expectations for capstone WBL program quality and student performance.
- The state collects minimal data on capstone WBL, which could include aggregate school-/district level data or basic student-level information such as participation/enrollment and hours worked.

- State law does not provide a definition of WBL capstone courses OR WBL is only available to CTE students OR no data is collected.



K-12 Education Policies



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Work-Based Learning: Continuum

Work-based learning (WBL) is a series of student engagements with work-placed learning. A continuum of experiences includes career awareness, career exploration and career preparation. The state should provide clear policy and guidance to districts and program quality metrics that are used to evaluate quality and drive change.

- State law defines K-12 work-based learning (WBL) as including a continuum of career awareness, career exploration, and career preparation and training experiences that all students progress through over time.
- WBL program quality metrics have been established and are utilized by the state and by LEAs.

- State promotes a continuum of WBL but without clear guidance or quality metrics.

- State does not provide a definition for WBL or a WBL continuum or provide program quality metrics.

Work-Based Learning: Youth Apprenticeships

A youth apprenticeship is paid on-the-job training with classroom learning culminating in college credit and/or industry certification. Youth apprenticeships are a type of work-based learning experience and can be aligned to high-demand, high-wage, high skill jobs (H3). States can encourage employer participation (with industry engagement incentives) and require uniform acceptance of credit across postsecondary institutions.

- State law defines youth apprenticeships, encourages opportunities in H3 jobs and requires statewide postsecondary credit for completion.
- State encourages active employer participation in the development of youth apprenticeships.

- State encourages districts to implement youth apprenticeship programs, but no consideration is given to program alignment with job demand or wage outcomes.
- State does not require public postsecondary institutions to accept apprenticeship experiences for college credit.

- State does not encourage use of youth apprenticeship programs.



College



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Corequisite Remediation

Corequisite remediation is when a student requiring remediation is enrolled into credit-bearing college-level courses with accompanying academic support, rather than in prerequisite non-credit courses. Exemplar states have corequisite remediation for high school students taking college acceleration courses such as dual enrollment. Ideally, corequisite remediation occurs at no cost to students with uniform acceptance across postsecondary institutions.

- Corequisite remediation (college-level courses plus support) is available at no cost to high school students for college acceleration courses.

- State law requires all two-year public institutions to provide corequisite remediation at no cost to students with uniform transfer acceptance.

- State law allows institutions to opt out of corequisite remediation or allows students to be charged fees.

- State law does not require corequisite remediation OR credit is not accepted by all public postsecondary institutions.

Credit Articulation: Assessments (AP/IB etc.)

Credit Articulation is the process of transferring awarded postsecondary credits across high school and postsecondary institutions. Credit articulation for assessments awards postsecondary credit for college credit earned in high schools via assessments such as AP, IB or CLEP. Postsecondary institutions uniformly accept the credit with standardized cut scores. Credit articulation information can be made publicly available, and data on usage can be shared annually.

- State law requires uniform credit articulation for college credit earned in high school via assessments.

- Individual public postsecondary institutions promote and maintain a policy for high school assessments credit articulation.

- No credit articulation for assessments exists in the state.



College



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Credit Articulation: Common Course Numbering

Common course numbering is the assigning of the same course number across comparable courses in postsecondary institutions and college acceleration courses to streamline credit transfer across postsecondary institutions. Common course numbering can be applied at the high school level for courses such as dual enrollment to streamline articulation. Credit articulation information is made publicly available and data on usage is annually shared to enhance transparency.

- State law requires state higher education systems (or individual public postsecondary institutions through a collaborative body) establish and maintain common course numbering systems that fully transfer from two-year postsecondary institutions to four-year postsecondary institutions to accelerate credential attainment by students.
- Common course numbers are uniformly accepted by all public postsecondary institutions and reflect general education courses, as well as lower division courses associated with high-demand, high-wage program majors.

- State policy encourages common course numbering but institutions can opt-out OR only accept common course numbers as elective credits.

- State does not require a common course numbering system between two-year and four-year public postsecondary institutions OR awarding of transfer credit is determined solely by each individual public postsecondary institution.

Credit Articulation: Guaranteed Transfer Pathways

A guaranteed transfer pathway (GTP) is a block of postsecondary courses identified as transferring to fulfill general education and major requirements across two- and four-year institutions for specific majors. GTP courses are uniformly accepted by all public postsecondary institutions and reflect general education courses, as well as lower division courses associated with high-demand, high-wage program majors. GTP information is made publicly available and data on usage is annually shared.

- State law requires all public postsecondary institutions to develop and maintain guaranteed transfer pathways that are uniformly accepted.

- State policy encourages guarantee transfer pathways, but they are not required.

- State law does not require guarantee transfer pathways.
- Awarding of transfer credit is determined solely by each individual public postsecondary institution.



College



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Credit Articulation: Industry Certifications

Credit articulation is the process of transferring awarded postsecondary credits across high school and postsecondary institutions. State law requires uniform articulation policies for earned industry certifications by public postsecondary institutions. Credit articulation information is made publicly available and data on usage is annually shared to enhance transparency.

- State law requires uniform articulation policies for earned industry certifications by public postsecondary institutions.

- Individual public postsecondary institutions promote and maintain a policy for industry certification articulation, but this is not set in law.
- Articulation policies for awarded industry certifications credits are set at the higher education system level but are not codified through state law.

- State law does not require uniform articulation policies for industry certifications by public postsecondary institutions.

Credit Articulation: Military Service

Credit articulation is the process of transferring awarded postsecondary credits across high school and postsecondary institutions. State law requires state public postsecondary institutions to establish and maintain a policy on credit for prior military experience. Credit articulation information is made publicly available and data on usage is annually shared to enhance transparency.

- State law requires state public postsecondary institutions to establish and maintain a uniform policy on credit for relevant prior military experience that is publicly accessible.
- State law requires state higher education systems (or individual public postsecondary institutions if no system exists) to report publicly on all awarded credit for prior learning by program and student subgroup on an annual basis.

- Individual public postsecondary institutions promote and maintain a policy on credit for military service, but each policy is not uniform across all institutions OR not all public postsecondary institutions report publicly on awarded credit for military service on an annual basis.

- State law does not require uniform articulation policies for military experiences by public postsecondary institutions.

Credit Articulation: Reverse Transfer

Reverse transfer allows students to earn an associate degree while continuing to work towards a bachelor's degree, or it awards a degree to students who have earned enough credits and are no longer enrolled. Reverse transfer helps increase degree attainment across public postsecondary institutions. Reverse transfer should be automated and not require students to initiate the process.

- State law provides for the automatic awarding of an associate degree to all students who have earned the necessary credits to earn an associate degree, including those who have transferred to a 4-year institution and those who are no longer enrolled.

- Individual public postsecondary institutions have reverse transfer authority OR students must request a review.

- State law does not allow for a reverse transfer credential.



College



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

CTE Programs: Quality

Credentialed technical programs for postsecondary programs are developed and reviewed at the state level using student outcomes at least every three years with employer input for labor market alignment. Credentialed technical programs include industry certifications and work-based learning.

- State law requires student outcomes to be used in determining CTE offerings, which must include industry certifications and work-based learning.
- Employers are engaged to determine and affirm appropriate industry certifications for offered technical programs.
- Credentialed technical programs are reviewed at least every three years for labor market alignment.

- State law defines CTE but does not include WBL or industry certifications OR review does not include outcomes.

- Credentialed technical programs are not defined in state law.
- State does not promote a higher education system- or institution-wide review process of offered credentialed technical programs to affirm relevance and alignment with labor market demand and required technical skills needs.

Direct Admission

Direct admission offers guaranteed admission to high school students across public postsecondary institutions before they apply, based on criteria such as GPA, course completion, work-based learning, community service and leadership.

- State automatically notifies all high school seniors in public schools in the state of their direct admission status and matched institutions.

- State law requires direct admission programs for public postsecondary institutions with consistent criteria across systems / institution types.

- Direct admission program policies are established by each institution, not at the state- and/or system-level.

- State does not require or promote a direct admission program with its state-funded postsecondary institutions.

Financial Aid: Finish Line

Finish line grants provide funding for emergency expenses which create a barrier to attending or completing a credential or degree. Examples of eligible emergencies include unforeseen transportation, housing, dependent care or medical expenses. Information on finish line grant is publicly accessible and reported.

- State law provides stable and recurring state funding for “finish line grants” that go toward emergency expenses incurred unexpectedly by a student and which have created an immediate barrier to attending and/or completing their credentialed program.
- State law requires a publicly reported annual evaluation of participation, amounts, types of expenses, and unmet need.

- A state-funded finish line grant is available to students at some public postsecondary institutions, but not all institutions.

- The state promotes use of discretionary funds for emergency expenses OR does not financially contribute toward finish-line grants.



College



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Financial Aid: Last-Dollar

Last-dollar financial aid provides grant funding for student tuition and fees once other state and federal grants have been applied. Last-dollar grants are offered at no cost to the student. States can provide clear guidance on qualifying student criteria and wraparound services for first generation college students. Student eligibility is for all high school students, and at least for students below 400% of the federal poverty level.

- Grant funds are available for four-year institutions.

- State law provides stable and recurring funding for last-dollar grants that cover gaps in tuition/fees (after all financial aid resources have been applied) for all qualifying students attending public two-year postsecondary institutions.
- State law provides clear guidance on all qualifying student criteria, and any income-related criteria should include students below 400% of the federal poverty level.

- State provides non-recurring funding for last-dollar grants OR the program is not codified in state law.
- Last-dollar aid is available only to students enrolled in specific in-demand majors as identified by the state – not for all students.
- Wraparound support services are not required to be provided to first generation college students.

- State does not have a last-dollar scholarship program.

Financial Aid: Last-Mile

Last-mile financial aid provides recurring grant funding for student tuition and fees for learners who have completed at least 75% of their program requirements. Last-mile grants are offered at no cost to the student. States can provide clear guidance on qualifying student criteria and wraparound services for first-generation college students receiving the grant.

- State law provides last-mile grants for tuition and fees and requires wraparound supports for first-generation students receiving the grant.

- Last-mile grants are available only to students enrolled in specific in-demand majors or another limiting factor.
- State provides non-recurring funding for last-mile grants; the program is not codified in state law

- State law does not have a last-mile grant program.

Industry Certifications: Data

Industry certification student-level data is collected and reported by all public postsecondary institutions. The data are reported publicly on industry certification earned by program and student subgroup on an annual basis. Exemplar states include wage outcomes and employment data for each industry certification.

- Reported data includes wage outcomes and employment for graduates earning each certification.

- State law requires all public postsecondary institutions to collect and report student-level industry certification attainment data.
- State law requires state higher education systems (or individual public postsecondary institutions if no system exists) to report publicly on all earned industry certifications at each postsecondary institution by program and student subgroup on an annual basis.

- State law requires public postsecondary institutions to collect data, but it is not publicly accessible.
- State law requires state higher education systems (or individual public postsecondary institutions if no system exists) to collect data on all earned industry certifications, but they are not required to make that information public.

- No statewide system of data collection exists.
- Postsecondary industry certification attainment data is collected at the institution level, but the information is not reported to the state.



College



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Industry Certifications: Tiered List

An industry certification is a verification of a learner’s qualification or competence issued by a third party. A tiered industry certification list categorizes certifications based on their alignment to labor market information (such as demand), wage thresholds, and skill levels (H3). Lists are reviewed, at least, every three years for maintenance and to ensure misaligned certifications are removed. Exemplar state lists are part of a broader tiered list across K-12 and postsecondary.

- State law requires the postsecondary industry certification list be part of unified credentials of value list OR includes employer-generated data.

- State law requires a tiered list of postsecondary industry certifications based on labor market information and wage, reviewed every three years.
- State law requires the list of industry certifications to be tiered by wage threshold from state labor market information, aligned with the state’s definition/ methodology for high-wage occupations.

- State law requires a tiered postsecondary industry certifications list, but not based on wage and demand data OR no regular review process exists.
- Wage thresholds do not include at least one threshold at or above 120% of the state median individual income.

- State law does not require the creation of a list of postsecondary industry certifications OR multiple postsecondary lists exist.

Money-Back Guarantee (Two-Year)

A money-back guarantee is when two-year postsecondary institutions offer a return of the cost of tuition and fees for students unable to secure employment within six months following attainment of a credential in eligible high-demand occupations. States can publicize which programs are eligible and cannot require unnecessary burdens on the student to reimburse all tuition and fees, less scholarship/grant funds received.

- State law requires two-year public postsecondary institutions that offer one or more credentialed technical programs to offer a “money-back guarantee” incentive to students who complete eligible high-demand programs but are unable to secure employment in a related occupation within six months following credential attainment without unnecessary barriers.
- State law requires each two-year public postsecondary institution to identify and publicize which programs are eligible for a money-back guarantee, specifying that each institution identify at least one-third of all offered programs.
- State law requires reimbursement of all tuition and program fees, less scholarship/grant funds, incurred by the graduate while enrolled in a qualifying credentialed technical program.
- State law requires career placement services be offered to all enrolled students in eligible programs and at least 6 months following program completion.

- Institutional funding to support the money-back guarantee incentive is discretionary and not recurring OR is not required statewide.
- Annual reporting by the state on the program is publicly available but information is minimal.

- State does not promote a “money-back guarantee” policy for its two-year state-funded postsecondary institutions.



College



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Outcomes-Based Funding: Associate Degrees

Outcomes-based funding is when a meaningful portion of funding for students enrolled in associate degree programs depends on post-graduation student success. Effective funding focuses on success within six months of graduation: employment that pays at least 80% of state’s median wage; enrollment in postsecondary institution with a successful first semester; and military enlistment. Bonuses for each outcome can provide a meaningful amount to incentivize improvement and should be substantially higher for higher-need students.

- Performance funding must equal 10 percent or greater above base funding, which includes all revenue sources except facility related.
- At least 5 percent of base is linked to post-graduation success, which means six months after graduation a student is:
 - Employed in a job with a wage at least 80 percent of the state median;
 - Enlisted in any branch of the United States armed services; or
 - Enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program and has succeeded during the first semester, i.e., earned at least 15 college credits with at least a 2.0 grade point average.
- 50 percent higher bonuses for post-graduation success of higher-need students, which includes students who are:
 - Low income, i.e., eligible for a federal Pell grant;
 - Adult learners, i.e., 25 years or older; or
 - Starting behind academically.

- Performance funding is less than 10 percent but at least 5 percent greater than base funding.
- Between 2.5 and 5 percent of base is linked to post-graduation success.
- Less than 50 percent but at least 25 percent higher bonuses for post-graduation success of higher-need students.

- Performance funding is less than 5 percent greater than base funding.
- Less than 2.5 percent of base is linked to post-graduation success measures.
- Less than 50 percent but at least 25 percent higher bonuses for post-graduation success of higher-need students.



College



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Outcomes-Based Funding: Bachelor's and Beyond

Outcomes-based funding is when a meaningful portion of funding for students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs depends on post-graduation student success. Effective funding focuses on success within six months of graduation: employment that pays at least 90% of state's median wage; enrollment in graduate institution with a successful first semester; and military enlistment. Bonuses for each outcome can provide a meaningful amount to incentivize improvement and should be substantially higher for higher-need students.

- Programs leading to high-wage, high-demand, and high-skill careers are prioritized.

- Performance funding must equal 10 percent or greater above base funding, which includes all revenue sources except facility related.
- At least 5 percent of base is linked to post-graduation success, which means six months after graduation a student is:
 - Employed in a job with a wage at least 90 percent of the state median;
 - Enlisted in any branch of the United States armed services;
 - Enrolled in graduate program at an institution of higher education.
- 50 percent higher bonuses for post-graduation success of higher-need students, which includes students who are:
 - Low income, i.e., eligible for a federal Pell grant;
 - Adult learners, i.e., 25 years or older; or
 - Starting behind academically.

- Performance funding is less than 10 percent but at least 5 percent greater than base funding.
- Between 2.5 and 5 percent of base is linked to post-graduation success.
- Less than 50 percent but at least 25 percent higher bonuses for post-graduation success of higher-need students.

- Performance funding is less than 5 percent greater than base funding.
- Less than 2.5 percent of base is linked to post-graduation success measures.
- Less than 50 percent but at least 25 percent higher bonuses for post-graduation success of higher-need students.



College



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Outcomes-Based Funding: Sub-Associate and Technical

Outcomes-based funding is when a meaningful portion of funding for students enrolled in a postsecondary sub-associate or technical program depends on post-graduation success: employment with wage thresholds; enlistment; or further enrollment. Funding is uniform across institution type for sub-associate or technical credentials (e.g., the same degree earns the same funding at technical college or community college). Bonuses for each outcome can incentivize improvement and should be substantially higher for higher-need students.

- State law allows students to begin apprenticeship programs in high school and can begin registered apprenticeship programs before age 18.

- Performance funding must equal 10 percent or greater above base funding, which includes all revenue sources except facility related.
- At least 5 percent of base is linked to post-graduation success, which means within six months of graduation a student is:
 - Employed in a job with a wage at least 80 percent of the state median;
 - Enlisted in any branch of the United States armed services; or
 - Enrolled in an associate or bachelor's degree program and has succeeded during the first semester, i.e., earned at least 15 college credits with at least a 2.0 grade point average.
- 50 percent higher bonuses for post-graduation success of higher-need students, which includes students who are:
 - Low income, i.e., eligible for a federal Pell grant;
 - Adult learners, i.e., 25 years or older; or
 - Starting behind academically.
- There is substantial consistency across type of institution.

- Performance funding is less than 10 percent but at least 5 percent greater than base funding.
- Between 2.5 and 5 percent of base is linked to post-graduation success.
- Less than 50 percent but at least 25 percent higher bonuses for post-graduation success of higher-need students.
- There is not substantial inconsistency across type of institution.

- Performance funding is less than 5 percent greater than base funding.
- Less than 2.5 percent of base is linked to post-graduation success measures.
- Less than 50 percent but at least 25 percent higher bonuses for post-graduation success of higher-need students.



Employer Engagement



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships (state or federal) are paid, on-the-job training programs with classroom learning culminating in a degree and / or industry certification. States define both state and federal apprenticeships and appropriate funding for costs not covered. States can define and publicly report quality metrics and collect data for program evaluation and improvements.

- State law allows students to begin apprenticeship programs in high school and can begin registered apprenticeship programs before age 18.

- State law defines registered apprenticeship programs and covers remaining costs. Student-level data is collected and used to evaluate programs at least every 3 years on approved short-term and long-term metrics.
- State law requires registered apprenticeship information to be collected at the student-level and publicly reported at least annually – including information about participation, progress/completion, industry certification attainment, and post-completion employment and wages.

- State law defines federal and state registered apprenticeship programs, but it does not provide state funding to offset program costs.
- Registered apprenticeship programs are evaluated, but not regularly.

- State does not define what qualifies as a registered apprenticeship program in the state.
- State does not use program quality metrics to assess short-/long-term success of apprenticeship programs in state.

Enhanced UI Wage Data

Enhanced unemployment insurance (UI) wage data includes information from employers in the state such as occupational job title, hours worked, and job-site location. This information supports states in being able to understand long-term outcomes for students in various career fields.

- State collects enhanced UI wage data from all employers in the state.
- Enhanced UI wage data includes occupational job title, hours worked, and job site location.

- State collects enhanced UI wage data, but only from employers of a certain size OR data is optional OR all three components are not required.

- The state does not collect enhanced UI/wage data.



Employer Engagement



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Industry Engagement

An industry engagement incentive promotes business engagement with the education system. Examples include tax credits, tax rebates and / or grant funds. Industry engagement incentives support engagement with work-based learning experiences, especially capstone courses. States can define and publicly report quality metrics and collect data for program evaluation and improvements. States can provide technical assistance to intermediaries to support development of programs.

- State law incentivizes industry engagement and technical assistance and collects student- and employer-level data on fund usage and effectiveness.
- State possesses a multiprong approach through state laws and policies to incentivize employers across industry sectors to engage with education providers on WBL experiences for students, particularly capstone WBL experiences.
- State funding in support of employer incentives is provided and recurring.
- State law requires a review of offered employer incentives and their outcomes using identified success metrics at least every three years.
- State law requires the collection of student- and employer-level data related to the use of employer incentive funds.
- State law promotes the offering of state agency technical assistance to employers engaged in WBL experiences with education providers.

- State funding in support of industry incentives is: (1) discretionary, (2) only available for postsecondary programs, OR (3) unmonitored.
- State law only requires the collection of participation information needed to process incentives (rather than measure incentive effectiveness/experience quality).
- State evaluates the quality of employer incentives associated with student WBL experiences, but it is not conducted in a systematic, routine manner.

- State law does not include industry engagement incentives.

Intermediary Funding

An intermediary is an organization or dedicated person whose role is to connect state / regional / local employers, K-12 education leaders and postsecondary institutions. States can support intermediaries by defining an intermediary framework, providing funding to support local and / or regional intermediaries and collecting and analyzing program quality metrics to drive decision making.

- State law defines intermediaries and provides funding and associated program quality metrics to support local and / or regional intermediaries.
- State appropriates competitive funds to support and offset operational costs to implement local and/ or regional education to workforce intermediary frameworks statewide.

- State funding for intermediary operational costs is limited and does not provide statewide support OR guidance.

- State does not define intermediaries OR provide funding.



Employer Engagement



EXEMPLAR



FULL



LIMITED



NONE

Legal Barriers: Work-Based Learning

Worksite restrictions for students under 18 are legal barriers that hinder participation in work-based learning. State solutions to address these barriers can include revised policies or providing worker compensation or liability insurance support to incentivize employers to participate.

- State law has removed or revised worksite restrictions for students under the age of 18 who are enrolled in formal state identified capstone WBL experiences across all industry sectors.
- State law identifies one or more approaches and/or entities that can provide workers compensation and liability insurance coverage for students participating in capstone WBL experiences on behalf of companies that cannot provide coverage.

- State law removes worksite restrictions for some industry sectors OR liability insurance or workers compensation support is vague.

- State law does not provide statewide support for removing legal barriers.

