



Rethinking High School

A National Perspective

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Why Pathways Matter?

People of all ages—including high school and college graduates—are finding themselves unprepared for the reality of today's evolving job market.

- In many states only one or two areas of education to workforce pathway policies are addressed each year. Though this strategy has helped get the work off the ground, it's simply not enough.
- Pathways Matter establishes the first comprehensive learner-centered education to workforce continuum for state policies to address these challenges. ExcelinEd seeks to use it as a common framework for strengthening pathway opportunities for all learners.



What are the Core Principles?

- 1. Learners take different educational journeys.** While some learners seamlessly transition from K-12 to postsecondary to employment, others use on-ramps and off-ramps and stackable opportunities to complete their journey. Still others need critical supports to find a new occupation or to advance their careers.
- 2. Pathways require coordinated support from all stakeholders.** High-quality learner pathways do not operate in isolation, and neither should the agencies, policymakers, systems, intermediary organizations, employers and communities who support them. Stakeholders must work together to ensure that learners earn the right credentials to succeed, particularly in high-wage, high-skill occupations.
- 3. Policies must complement each other to maximize benefits for all learners.** Learners span age levels and systems of education and workforce. Policies that support them need to be integrated so that progress that is made at one level or system is not slowed or stopped at another.



What is a High Quality Pathway

For ExcelinEd, a high-quality pathway

- Allows learners to explore and pursue courses and experiences aligned with high-skill, high-demand, higher wage occupations
- Prepares learners with the academic, technical and employability skills needed to succeed in postsecondary programs and the workplace
- Provides opportunities for learners to earn valued credentials (both postsecondary and industry-recognized)
- Gives learners the opportunity to demonstrate skills and competencies through a range of work-based and applied learning experiences

For K-12 learners, high-quality pathways begin in middle school as career exploration and progress into high school as intentional coursework and experiences that expose students to the world of work and life after high school.



Why does high school need to be transformed?

Underlying the desire to rethink high school and develop high-quality pathways is a stubborn truth: **the structure of the high school experience has not changed for most learners in over 100 years.**

Consider several elements that currently define the where, when and how of high school:

- Courses tied to the Carnegie unit
- Schedules that are more about school buses and extracurriculars than what's best for learning
- Learning that takes place predominantly in the high school building
- Coursework that is taught in isolation
- School semesters/years/instruction that do not consider student mastery of content and skills
- Teachers as the main, if not sole, source of instruction
- **Too few connections to the world of work and life after high school**





State Efforts to Rethink High School

State Efforts

Indiana and other leading states have started chipping away at the traditional structure of high school. There is flexibility from seat time, off-site work-based or service-based learning, competency-based learning models, and greater flexibility in what counts as “credit.”

- **Texas** is a leader in promoting early college credit in high school and prioritizing CTE.
- **Louisiana’s** Jumpstart (CTE) program has clearly articulated pathways aligned with regional and statewide occupations.
- **Florida** prioritizes industry certifications as critical outcomes for learners and provides postsecondary credit for higher value certifications.
- **Utah** and **South Carolina** have strong frameworks and flexibility for competency-based learning.
- **Colorado** is piloting an alternative 12th grade experience for students who finish high school early.
- **Ohio** has a graduation pathway that promotes work-based learning.



Limitations of Current State Efforts

- While many states are innovating in specific program areas and prioritizing important student outcomes, these innovations are largely housed under the same traditional school structures, discrete programs, and schedules.
 - Career-connected learning is confined to CTE programs and select pathways
 - Schedules force students to make tradeoffs between course requirements and work-based learning
 - Credit for experiences outside schools count as electives or not at all
- What's more, **too few states are using data to understand whether their pathway offerings are providing the return on investment that students and families expect.** (And in many cases, the outcomes data are not reflective of efforts to improve high school.)



An Opportunity to Lead

- **Indiana** is already a policy leader in the both the K-12 and learner pathways spaces. Through its new graduation pathway, it has an opportunity to transform the high school experience so that is more flexible, relevant, personalized and aligned to stronger outcomes.
- Through its **Graduates Prepared to Succeed** dashboard, it also can understand what is and is not working for students along the way.

Too many innovators of learner pathways are working around burdensome state systems. Indiana has an opportunity to ensure that its K-12 system is working for learners.





Thank you!