



## **Better Together** *Career and Guided Pathways*

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# CLASP

Policy solutions that work for low-income people

### ***Maximizing the Power of Career Pathways***

## **The Convening**

In July 2018, the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and Workforce Collaborative of the Greater Washington Community Foundation hosted a convening titled “Maximizing the Power of Pathways: Vital Career Pathway Conversations.” It brought together education and workforce development leaders from states, national organizations, advocates, funders, and federal agency staff to share perspectives on four career pathway issues:

- Guided pathways alignment;
- Increasing the use of Ability to Benefit;
- Leveraging career pathways to advance racial equity; and
- Measuring success through career pathway research.

This brief is part of a series highlighting lessons from our convening as well as new research. You’ll learn what’s working, what isn’t, and collaboration opportunities for states to provide better career pathways.

## The Issue

**Career pathway** program and system work developed during the early 2000s. The goal was to increase individual prosperity and regional economic competitiveness through aligned adult education, community college, human services, and workforce development efforts. "Career pathway" is now defined across three federal laws: the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Higher Education Act (HEA), and the Strengthening Career & Technical Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act (Perkins V). Additionally, state and local leaders are investing in career pathways for target populations.

*"Illinois' state-wide career pathway definition is connecting workforce readiness, apprenticeship, the P20 commission, and work across all state agencies."  
Jennifer Foster, ICCB*

In 2015, the Community College Research Center (CCRC) released *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*, opening a national dialogue about **guided pathway** reform in community college systems.<sup>1</sup> For over 15 years, CCRC researchers have been studying career pathway reforms and been disappointed by the lack of impact on overall student outcomes. They now call for a complete overhaul of the fundamental structure of community colleges. Currently, national philanthropic investments are supporting these intra-institutional redesign efforts in hundreds of community colleges.

*"'Career pathway' uses language that workforce and adult education understand, but 'guided pathway' uses language that academics feel more kinship with."  
Will Durden, SBCTC*

This brief will help policymakers and practitioners understand that career pathways and guided pathways are complementary, not duplicative. Aligning these efforts produces comprehensive, community-wide pathways that support educational and economic success.

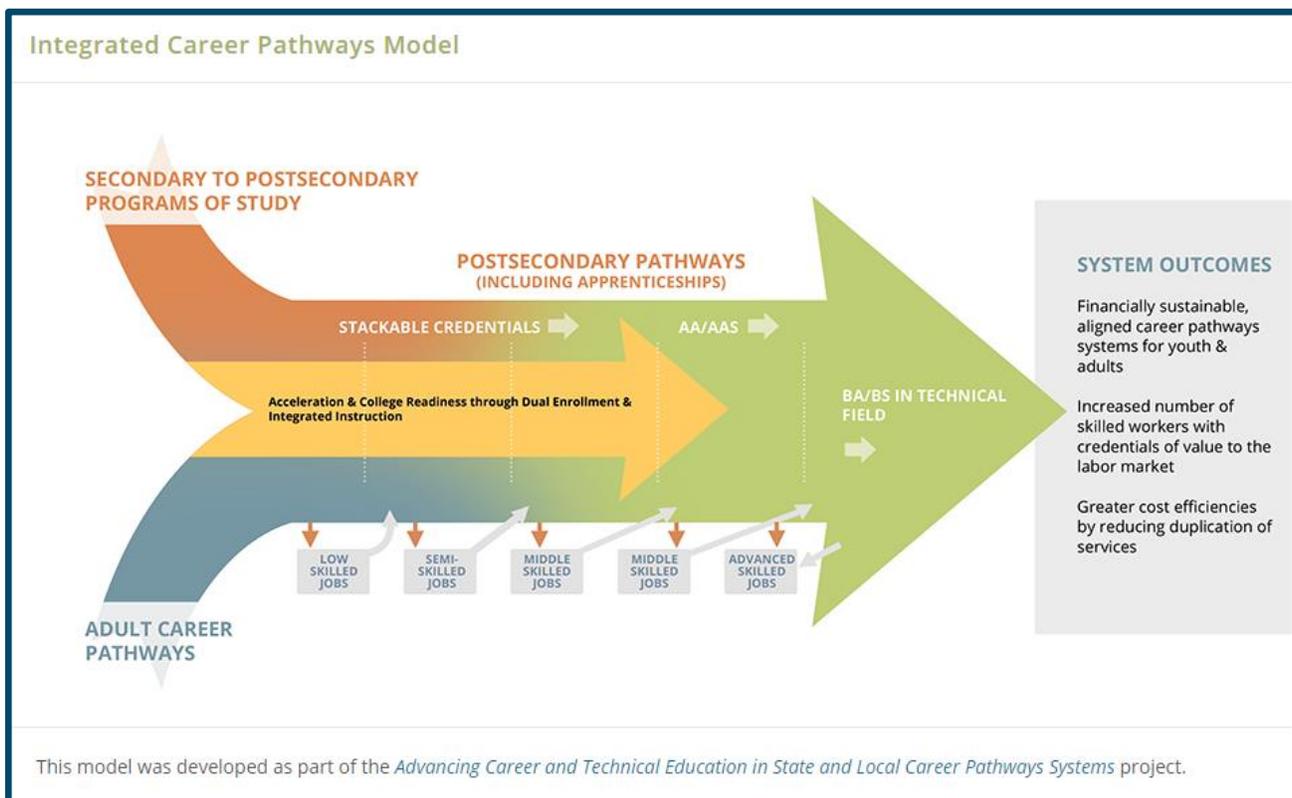
## Background: Career Pathways

Comprehensive career pathway systems help youth and adults to acquire the skills needed to secure employment and advance to higher levels of education. Career pathways connect public education, workforce development, and health and human service services at the state and program levels. Students can enter and exit the education and workforce pipelines on their own terms and on their own timelines.

*"Colleges need to be a better partner with workforce development."  
Javier Romero, CCCCCO*

In the early 2000s, career pathways were built on lessons from welfare reform's "work-first" philosophy. Welfare reform was somewhat successful in moving people off public subsidies and

into the workforce, but it failed to move people out of poverty.<sup>2</sup> This was due, in part, to a lack of ongoing education, training, and supports to help people improve their skills and advance in their careers after securing jobs. Philanthropists invested in national career-pathway projects like Bridges to Opportunity,<sup>3</sup> Shifting Gears,<sup>4</sup> and Accelerating Opportunity.<sup>5</sup> From 2011 - 2014, the \$2 billion federal Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant investment made community colleges the central player in providing training and expanding access to high-wage, high-demand jobs. Other key actors in the workforce development and human services systems were assigned supportive roles.

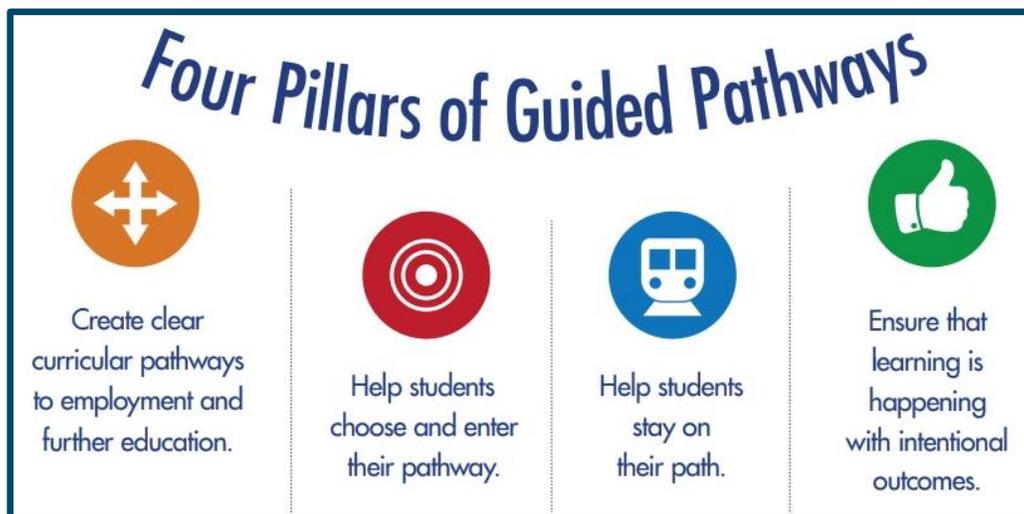


Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) influenced federal definitions of "career pathway" and "Integrated Education and Training (IET)" under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This work has strengthened collaboration between adult basic education and workforce development. WIOA requires state and local workforce development boards to collaborate with education partners to design and implement career pathways. However, WIOA serves a limited number of people who are eligible for the Title I Youth, Adult and Dislocated worker; Title II Adult Education; and or Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation programs. While nearly all state WIOA plans cite career pathways as a critical strategy, there is no process to track the scope of investment via federal reporting. That means there is also no specific mechanism to incentivize partnerships.

In 2014, Congress restored the Higher Education Act’s “Ability to Benefit” provision, allowing adults without a high school credential or equivalent to obtain federal financial aid. The legislation, which required students to be enrolled in a career pathway program, creates an opportunity for states to use federal financial aid funds to sustain a pipeline of adult learners into postsecondary career pathways. While some states have capitalized on ATB within specific career-pathway initiatives, the scale remains limited.

As career-pathway work expanded, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) supported efforts to align career pathway with “program of study,” a sequence of courses within an occupational cluster, under the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. The newly authorized Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) now contains both “program of study” and “career pathway” definitions along with other calls for alignment with adult education and workforce development.

## Background: Guided Pathways



Guided Pathways at California Community Colleges

For over a decade, we’ve known education beyond high school is key to individual prosperity and regional economic competitiveness.<sup>6</sup> Yet despite the growing value of college credentials, college leaders have faced disinvestment and greater public scrutiny. State funding for public two-year colleges has declined, while federal accountability has increased. Philanthropic initiatives like Achieving the Dream and Completion by Design attempted to shift focus from student access to completion. Success has been limited; studies find either a tiny percentage of individuals are engaged deeply, or a large percentage are provided light-touch services that have little impact.<sup>7</sup> Across the country, fewer than 40 percent of community-college students complete any credential within six years of enrollment.<sup>8</sup>

Community colleges provide access to a disproportionate number of low-income, immigrant, first-generation, and ethnic-minority students.<sup>9</sup> A quarter of community-college students are low income, over a third are more than a decade out of high school, and two-thirds are considered “not college ready.” Additionally, 80 percent are working an average of 32 hours per week, and one-third care for dependents.<sup>10</sup> With the critical mission to increase college attainment, CCRC has concluded that reforms can’t scale within an existing community college structure. Consequently, CCRC is calling for a fundamental restructuring of community colleges called **guided pathways**.

Guided pathways require community college programs, support services, and instructional approaches to be redesigned around four central tenets:

- Creating curricular pathways that eliminate extraneous course-taking and help students plan coursework that’s mapped to further education and career advancement (while still allowing structured exploration within meta-majors).
- Integrating foundational or remedial skill building into college-level courses. This will allow students to begin their academic pathways and avoid being derailed by developmental education or failure to complete college math and English requirements.
- Providing ongoing communication and interventions needed to ensure students’ progress along the pathway.
- Aligning discrete courses with the pathway’s learning objectives. Faculty should also reject the traditional “knowledge-transmission” teaching model, adopting a co-created, facilitated method of learning that builds meta-cognitive skills.

Guided pathways connect academia and workforce development at community colleges. The model acknowledges people’s need to build complex skillsets that prepare them to change careers and advance over time educationally and economically. It properly values the role of general education courses in career pathways.

With interest and investment growing for this work, many states and institutions are actively engaged in guided-pathway redesign, working through a multi-year, complex process:<sup>11</sup>

*“Career Pathway is the WHY,  
WHO & WHAT.  
Guided Pathway is the HOW  
and HOW DO WE MEASURE.”  
Mark Johnson, WTCS*

As we rebuild the community college experience for millions of Americans, we must ensure any redesign supports full-time students seeking transfers degree to baccalaureate programs **and** nontraditional students balancing work, school, and family obligations.

## What We Learned

Leading states are promoting career-pathway strategies and guided-pathway reforms as complementary efforts. They have a shared focus on integrated education and training—linked with a sector strategy as well as support services for target populations.

In Washington State, home of the IBEST career pathway effort, education leaders are embracing guided pathway and clearly articulating that Washington is a Guided Pathway state and IBEST is a delivery model within that system.



When community colleges create clear postsecondary paths for all students, it's easier to create on-ramps for people with barriers. However, in many states, the two efforts are on separate tracks. More must be done to ensure they align. Career-pathway work may be relegated to colleges' workforce or adult education areas, while guided-pathway reform is driven by academia and student services. These

***"Washington is a guided pathway state, and I-BEST is a delivery model within that system."  
Will Durden, SBCTC***

divided efforts perpetuate the separate, unequal delivery of short-term education and training for lower-skilled and working adults. State leaders should link career pathways and guided-pathway reform to create authentic educational equity for all young adult and adult learners.

How can we invest in both career-pathway and guided-pathway work? In California, state investments in career, technical, and adult education career pathways are now followed by an intense focus on guided-pathway reform. State leaders are asking local partners to unlock their data. They need to know what works and for whom and invest accordingly. However, it's challenging for local partners to find time for that discussion when they're hard at work reforming internal systems. Stakeholders must encourage practitioners to leverage career-pathway and guided-pathway work together in order to create comprehensive, community-wide pathways.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Thomas Bailey, Shanna Smith Jagers and Davis Jenkins, *Redesigning America's Community College: A Clearer Path to Student Success*, Community College Research Center, April 2015, <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/redesigning-americas-community-colleges.html>.
- <sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Lower-Basch, *Testimony to Subcommittee on Human Resources, Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives on Ideas to Improve Welfare Programs to Help More Families Find Work and Escape Poverty*, Center for Law and Social Policy, April 2015, <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/20150420HR-SFRs.pdf>.
- <sup>3</sup> *Bridges to Opportunity for Underprepared Adults: A State Policy Guide for Community College Leaders*, 2008, [https://www.fordfoundation.org/media/1752/2008-bridges\\_to\\_opportunity\\_for\\_underprepared\\_adults.pdf](https://www.fordfoundation.org/media/1752/2008-bridges_to_opportunity_for_underprepared_adults.pdf).
- <sup>4</sup> *Shifting Gears: Building New Pathways for Low-Skilled Workers to Succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economy*, 2013, <http://www.joycefdn.org/assets/images/ShiftingGearsEvaluationSynopsis.pdf>.
- <sup>5</sup> *Implementation of Accelerating Opportunity: Lessons for the Field*, 2016, <https://www.jff.org/resources/implementation-accelerating-opportunity-lessons-field/>.
- <sup>6</sup> Anthony Carnevale, Nicole Smith and Jeff Strohl, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018*, Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, June 2010, <https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/HelpWanted.ExecutiveSummary.pdf>.
- <sup>7</sup> Thomas Bailey, "Guided Pathways at Community Colleges: From Theory to Practice," Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2017, <https://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/2017/fall/bailey>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html>.
- <sup>9</sup> National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2011
- <sup>10</sup> "College Students Aren't Who You Think They Are," Center for Law and Social Policy, August 2017, [https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2017/08/2017June\\_CollegeStudentsArentWhoYouThinkTheyAre.pdf](https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2017/08/2017June_CollegeStudentsArentWhoYouThinkTheyAre.pdf)
- <sup>11</sup> *What We are Learning About Guided Pathways*, Community College Research Center, April 2018. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/guided-pathways-part-3-timeline-tips.pdf>