

Investing in Postsecondary Career Pathways



In an economy where more than 80 percent of all jobs require some form of postsecondary education or training, expanding access to high quality workforce programs at community and technical colleges is increasingly critical to our nation’s continued competitiveness.

For many of these jobs — particularly the roughly 53 percent of jobs in the U.S. labor market that require more than a high school diploma, but not a four-year degree — degrees or certificate programs offered at community or technical colleges can provide the right skills and credentials to help workers and businesses succeed. But it’s not just a question of ensuring that instruction is aligned with industry demand; to truly address the demands for skilled workers in today’s economy, we must ensure that the broadest possible range of students, including adults already in the labor market, are able to take advantage of these education and training options.

This focus on “non-traditional” students is increasingly important as the demographics of college attendance evolve to make non-traditional students the new norm. Today, more than 70 percent of all undergraduates are classified as non-traditional in some way, with more than half qualifying as financially independent, 43 percent attending school on a part-time basis, and more than a quarter working full-time.¹ These trends are even more pronounced at community and technical colleges: 62 percent of all community college students — or roughly 4.5 million individuals — attend on a part-time basis, and nearly three quarters of these individuals are working either full- or part-time.² Many of these students are also balancing family obligations in addition to work and school, with parents making up approximately 30 percent of total community college enrollment, and single parents making up as much as 17 percent of total enrollment.^{3,4} In addition, many of today’s community college students are older than “traditional” students, with an average age of 28 and nearly one in seven students over the age of 40.

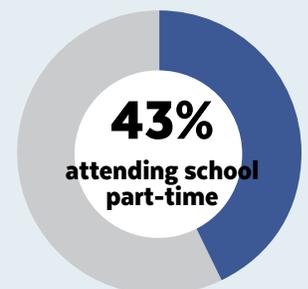
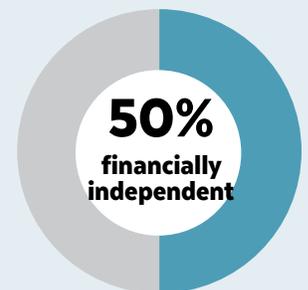
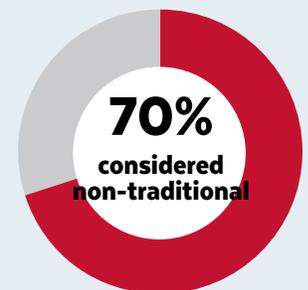
1 <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015025.pdf>

2 <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Documents/AACCFactSheetsR2.pdf>. 62 percent of full-time community college students work full- or part-time.

3 <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/college-students-raising-children.pdf>

4 <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Pages/fastfactsfactsheet.aspx>

TODAY'S UNDERGRADUATES





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WELL-DESIGNED CAREER PATHWAYS PROGRAMS MAY INCLUDE A RANGE OF STRATEGIES AND SUPPORT SERVICES:



Occupational skills instruction



Basic skills instruction



Career and financial aid counseling



Childcare assistance



Transportation assistance

Why career pathways?

One strategy for addressing the diverse needs of this student population is the development of career pathways models, which enable low-skilled adults to combine work and education while obtaining in-demand credentials that support career advancement. At the institutional level, career pathways generally include sequences of specific courses leading to “stackable” credentials that are articulated over time to allow workers to move up within targeted industries, and particularly focus on providing working students with multiple entry and exit points that allow for training at the pace and intensity that makes sense for the individual and their career progression.

Well-designed career pathways programs also include a range of strategies and support services that enable working adults and other students to persist and succeed in post-secondary education and training. For example, many career pathways models utilize integrated education and training opportunities that combine occupational skills instruction with basic skills instruction, allowing individuals with literacy or

numeracy barriers to obtain market-ready credentials without getting stuck in remedial or developmental classes that can often serve as significant – and costly – barriers for working students. Community colleges also often offer wraparound services such as career counseling to assist students with navigating course selection and financial aid options, or direct supports like childcare or transportation assistance to reduce the costs and increase ease of attendance.

Bipartisan support for career pathways

Career pathways strategies have gained significant bipartisan support on Capitol Hill. In 2014, Congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which for the first time codified a federal definition of career pathways and mandated that local workforce development boards work with secondary and postsecondary providers in their service areas to develop and implement career pathways, particularly for individuals with barriers to employment. In 2015, Congress adopted the WIOA definition of career pathways under the “ability to benefit” provisions of the Higher Education Act (HEA), allowing students without a high school diploma or equivalent to access federal financial aid if they are enrolled in an “eligible career pathway program.”⁵ In 2017, the House passed reauthorizing legislation for the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins) that would encourage secondary and postsecondary providers to use funds under that law to support career pathways strategies.⁶

Importantly, the career pathways definition under WIOA and other federal laws establishes clear requirements for qualifying programs, focusing on a set of elements that have proven critical to the success of working students. In addition to requiring that career pathways programs align with the skill needs of specific occupations or industries, federal law requires that programs:

- ◆ Include counseling to support individuals in reaching their educational and career goals;
- ◆ Include, as appropriate, concurrent and/or contextualized educational strategies that can help students with language, literacy or numeracy barriers take advantage of learning opportunities;

- ◆ Organize education, training, and other services (including support services) in ways that accelerate educational and career advancement; and
- ◆ Allow working students and others to obtain a secondary diploma or equivalent, as appropriate, and at least one postsecondary credential.

Federal investments aren’t keeping up

However, despite the strong interest in career pathways at the federal level, there is relatively limited funding to support these strategies. While WIOA mandates the adoption of pathways at the local level, it does not provide dedicated resources to local workforce boards or educational providers to address the costs of implementation. And while HEA does provide access to financial aid for eligible “ability-to-benefit” students in career pathways programs, it does not provide corresponding resources at the institutional level to help community colleges develop and sustain career pathways programs over time.

Over the years, Congress has provided some dedicated resources under HEA and other federal programs that could be used to support elements of career pathways programs. However, while these investments have been critical to expanding access for a range of at-risk student populations, many of these programs are severely underfunded or have been discontinued, and in most cases the authorizing language does not reflect the increasing importance of career pathways in federal education and workforce programs.

- ◆ The Federal TRIO Programs support a range of student outreach and support services, including funding for Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs) that provide academic and financial counseling to assist adult students in connecting to postsecondary education, as well as Student Support Services (SSS) grants that allow institutions to provide tutoring, counseling and other services to low-income, first-generation, and students with disabilities. However, the EOC program is relatively small – only 143 colleges and other institutions received funding in 2016⁷ – while the SSS program, while offered at more institutions, ultimately serves just over 100,000 community college students – including just over 50,000 over the age of 23 – a tiny fraction of the more than 12 million students at community colleges nationwide.⁸

5 Section 313 of the [Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016](#). It is worth noting that this definition replaced a different definition of career pathways adopted as part of the [FY 2015 omnibus](#), reflecting Congressional efforts to ensure consistency across federal programs.

6 https://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/strengthening_career_and_technical_education_act.pdf

7 <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioec/awards.html>

8 <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/triostudsupp/sss-fastfacts2016.pdf>



Despite the continued success of these investments — students enrolled in the more than 2,600 TAACCCT-funded programs have earned nearly 240,000 industry-recognized credentials since the program started— Congress has not allocated additional funds to continue the program.

- ◆ The Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program⁹ provides roughly \$15 million in federal funding to institutions of higher education to support on-campus childcare services for low-income students, but this funding supported programs at just 85 schools nationwide in FY 2015, (the most recent year for which data is available) with 21 states receiving no funding at any campus.
- ◆ The College Access Challenge Grant Program¹⁰ provided up to \$150 million in formula funding to states to support financial literacy, outreach, educational support, and other services targeted at helping low-income students achieve post-secondary credentials. However, Congress stopped funding the program in FY 2015 and has not renewed appropriations in subsequent fiscal years.

While not authorized under HEA, the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program was also an important investment in career pathways, providing nearly \$2 billion over a four-year period (FY 2011-2014) to support the development of industry-aligned programs. Though TAACCCT did not provide direct tuition assistance, it did support development of high-quality curricula and other services designed to help working students succeed. Despite the continued success of these investments — students enrolled in the more than 2,600 TAACCCT-funded programs have earned nearly 240,000 industry-recognized credentials since the program started¹¹ — Congress has not allocated additional funds to continue the program.

9 20 U.S.C. 1070e

10 20 U.S.C. 1141

11 https://www.doleta.gov/taaccct/pdf/TAACCCT_Fact_Sheet_Program_Information_01.19.17.pdf

States are taking the lead

Because federal support for career pathways models has not kept up with the pace of innovation, a number of states have creatively patched together their own funding strategies for these activities. State programs are funded through a variety of federal and other sources, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grants, career and technical education funds under the Perkins Act, state adult literacy funds, and more. Examples from these states help to demonstrate successful approaches that could be scaled up for the federal level to relieve financial pressure on states and encourage implementation of these effective approaches nationwide.

Arkansas, Iowa, and North Carolina are examples of states that have robust programs in place to support working learners and encourage completion of a degree or certificate program.

CASE STUDY: The Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative (CPI)

is funded with TANF block grant funds. The CPI program combines basic skills instruction and postsecondary training with critical supports like case management, childcare and transportation assistance, and help with costs of tuition, books, supplies, and testing fees. These funds go directly to community and technical colleges in Arkansas. The program began with a pilot in 2005 and was expanded in 2006 to include all twenty-two of Arkansas' community colleges, as well as three technical centers. Funds are provided to each institution according to a performance-based formula that factors in enrollment levels of low-income students, completion rates, credential attainment, and employment outcomes.

Colleges can use funds for support services and to hire CPI-dedicated staff at each institution. Staff oversees and administers the program, in addition to providing intensive case management for each participant. These staff help students choose career pathways that fit with their goals and needs, determine the other financial supports they may need (such as childcare or transportation), keep up with student progress, work with instructors, and liaise with other departments and support services as necessary.

CPI outcomes have been very favorable in showing increased persistence and completion rates. According to the most recent data available, 72 percent of FY 2015 program completers entered employment, while 89 percent of FY 2014 completers who found employment had retained employment for 6 months after entry.¹² Between 2006 and 2013,

52 percent of CPI participants completed at least one post-secondary credential, compared to 24 percent of non-CPI community college students statewide. This number was especially stark for minorities, with African-American CPI students three times as likely and Hispanic students four times as likely as their non-CPI community college student counterparts to earn a postsecondary credential.

CASE STUDY: Iowa's Pathways for Academic Career and Employment (PACE)

program has served as a model for other programs across the country. Funding from the PACE program flows from the Iowa Department of Education and on to the state's community colleges to implement a streamlined and comprehensive process, coupled with support services, to enable students to acquire quality education and training to secure a job. Specifically, the funds can be used for integrated basic skills instruction and occupational training, counseling, and case management staff called Pathway Navigators. The program targets low-income, low-skilled individuals.

As part of the program, each community college receiving funding must create a pipeline system to recruit and retain eligible students, including those that are low-skilled, earning incomes at or below 250 percent of the federal poverty line, unemployed or underemployed persons, and dislocated workers. Funds are also used to support regional partnerships between community colleges and industries. This ensures the alignment of career pathways to in-demand careers and occupations representative of the region's industry clusters.

In FY 2016, PACE had an 80 percent completion rate, with an 89 percent employment rate after obtaining a credential.¹³

CASE STUDY: North Carolina's Basic Skills Plus

program was developed in 2010 to accelerate transition to in-demand employment for adults who lack a high school diploma or the equivalent. The program provides employability skills, job-specific occupational and technical skills, and basic skills instruction to students concurrently enrolled in a adult education programs leading to a high school diploma or equivalent certificate. Community colleges may use up to 20 percent of their State Literacy Funds to provide training and support services for students. Students who enroll in this program are also eligible for tuition waivers from their institution. Funds can also be used to subsidize transportation costs and a career counseling component is also included. While

¹² Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative Progress/Close Out Report of Activities and Outcomes (July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016).

¹³ <https://www.educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/PACE%202016%20Report.pdf>



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this program has been in existence for years, the increased focus under WIOA Title II Adult Education Programs on Career Pathways strategies is expected to expand the use of this existing platform.

In 2015, North Carolina also developed a NCWorks Certified Career Pathways program, in which regional groupings of local workforce development boards (working with employers, community colleges, public schools and the full span of other workforce-oriented programs in the regions) apply for grants from the state workforce development board (NCWorks Commission) to support the development and implementation of career pathways in one or two key regional sectors. The criteria for robust “career pathways” were developed by a group of interagency leaders, and there is a staff-level interagency review committee that reviews the applications.

North Carolina initially paved the way for its Certified Career Pathway program in 2014-15 and 2015-16 with twenty-four CTE Pathway Projects (grades 9-14) involving high

schools, community colleges, workforce development boards and NCWorks Career Centers. Funded with \$1.4 million of Perkins state leadership funds, the employer-engaged pathways included career advising, articulated programs of study, and work-based learning.

The path forward: a Federal Career Pathways Support Fund

Though some individual states and institutions have made significant strides in developing and implementing career pathways models, the lack of a comprehensive federal investment in career pathways means that millions of working adults and other students are unable to access these critical supports. With states struggling to maintain even current levels of spending on higher education (as of 2016, state per-student funding is roughly 18 percent below 2008 levels)¹⁴, it is

¹⁴ www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/funding-down-tuition-up

likely that states and institutions will face further challenges delivering comprehensive high-quality career pathways. With national unemployment at the lowest levels in more than a decade, and businesses across a range of industries facing increased difficulties finding skilled workers, strengthening support for career pathways at community and technical colleges will not only expand economic opportunities for working adults, but also help employers stay competitive in today's global economy.

The upcoming reauthorization of HEA offers an important opportunity for Congress to address this challenge. Congress should establish a federal Career Pathways Support Fund under the Department of Education, with funding made available to two-year colleges in partnership with other stakeholders, to ensure that low-income working adults have better access to services that can support persistence and completion.

Funding should be targeted to community and technical colleges that are offering career pathway programs aimed at moving working adults and other non-traditional students into family supporting jobs in locally in-demand industries. Grants could be used to cover a range of specific services, including:

- ◆ Development and expansion of new or existing programs that utilize integrated education and training strategies, and provide multiple entry and exit points for working learners. This could include dual enrollment approaches for secondary students seeking to transition directly into a community college career pathway program, as well as strategies that help unemployed, underemployed, and disconnected adults and youth gain skills and credentials. Priority should be given to schools that partner with adult education providers and other non-profit organizations to ensure that individuals are able to access the appropriate skills and credentials at various stages of their professional development.
- ◆ Provision of direct support services such as childcare, transportation, and assistance in accessing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), housing, and other benefits where appropriate. The majority of community college students live off-campus and many must balance family and work obligations with their studies. Access to these supports — whether provided directly by the institution or in partnership with community-based or similar organizations — would improve persistence by reducing barriers to completion.
- ◆ Offering career pathways navigation and case management services. Community and technical colleges across the country are offering pathway navigation and case

management services to facilitate student persistence and success. Pathway navigators work with students to identify the right mix of courses and academic support to meet career goals while continuing to work. They can also help identify the appropriate wraparound services that can keep students on track, and work to connect students with partner organizations on- and off-campus to ensure that individual needs are met.

The Career Pathways Support Fund should be funded at not less than \$500 million per year, consistent with the annual levels that were authorized for the TAACCCT grants, and should be matched with increased investments in federal financial assistance to ensure that working students are able to take full advantage of emerging economic opportunities. Grants should prioritize programs that have strong linkages with local or regional employers in target industries, and should also emphasize partnerships with workforce development boards, secondary school systems, and other stakeholders to ensure seamless transitions between systems for students. Institutions receiving funds should be evaluated on how well they are meeting the employment and academic needs of students, as well as the needs of local businesses in target industries, with continued funding dependent on meeting minimum performance targets.

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With U.S. businesses struggling to find skilled workers for current job openings — a recent Business Roundtable survey found that more than half of responding members were facing talent shortages¹⁵ — it is more important than ever for policymakers to identify effective strategies that match working adults with well-paying careers. A new Career Pathways Fund would stimulate the expansion of high-quality, industry-aligned programs that help a broad range of individuals advance in the labor market, including low-skilled adult workers and other “non-traditional” students. Congress should seize this opportunity to strengthen our economy and ensure that job growth leads to shared prosperity for all U.S. workers.

¹⁵ http://businessroundtable.org/sites/default/files/immigration_reports/2017.06.01%20BRT.Work%20in%20Progress.How%20CEOs%20Are%20Helping%20Close%20America%E2%80%99s%20Skills...pdf



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