

Focus in: Study up on important education policies.

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Targeted programs and career pathways within workforce development policies

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States are introducing and enacting an increasing number of bills targeted toward workforce development and career and technical education.¹ The increase in legislation illustrates a shift toward creating collaborations between higher education institutions and employers in the state as one strategy to enhance workforce development and postsecondary attainment success.

Internships and work-based learning are a growing trend in state policy focusing on workforce development.² Increasing the availability of internships and career curriculum can expose students to workforce needs in their state, multiple career pathways and the hard skills required for employment in high-demand occupations. States' monitoring of employer needs can help institutions create a comprehensive career education curriculum and expose students to the skills needed for jobs in their community.³

“Six states enacted workforce development policies regarding targeted programs and pathways.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

States are focusing on workforce needs in specified labor markets.

The programs created are targeted to specific populations or career fields the states found needing a more direct link to employment.

Targeted programs for specific occupations connect students with employers in the state.



Policy review and state examples

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) reviewed enacted legislation, from 2012-14, across the 50 U.S. states that addressed higher education and workforce development. The specific substance of bills identified and cataloged varied, including bills addressing the creation and funding of state longitudinal data systems, targeted programs and pathways connecting specific workforce needs with educational offerings, financial incentives to complete specified education programs leading to employment in high demand fields and the creation of working groups or commissioning of reports addressing education to workforce pathways.

This brief provides a deeper dive into the content of the specific policies that create targeted programs and pathways connecting specific workforce needs with educational offerings. The purpose of this brief is to assist state leaders in acquiring information about policies that can better align education programs and workforce needs.

Targeted programs

Targeted programs can include internships in general, programs aimed toward specific populations or programs meant to increase employment in workforce needs for the state.

Indiana: In 2014 Indiana enacted [S.B. 331](#), creating the Second Service for Veterans program that encourages military veteran students to enter the teaching profession. In order to increase the number of veterans entering this field, institutions are required to provide academic and career counseling specifically for veteran students in the school of education, offer in-state tuition to in-state and out-of-state veteran students, develop an initiative to attract and recruit veteran students to the school of education and coordinate the Second Service for Veterans program with the Combat to College program (which was established in 2013). Additionally, S.B. 331 requires institutions to award credit to students completing specific exams or for completed courses during military service. Credit awarded must apply to their current degree.

Minnesota: With a focus on connecting students with local employers, Minnesota enacted [H.F. 677](#) to create the Greater Minnesota Internship Program. This 2014 bill requires the Office of Higher Education to administer this internship program through eligible institutions to provide credit for internships and tax credits for employers who hire interns from this program. Components of the program include, but are not limited to, collaboration between institutions and employers, and interns must be eligible students in a major program related to the internship.

The Office of Higher Education and Department of Revenue must report to the legislature regarding the number and dollar amount of credits allowed, number of interns employed under the program and the cost of administering the program. The requirement to report the results of this program allows the state to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and track the number of students being linked to workforce opportunities during their educational training.

Tennessee: In 2014 Tennessee enacted [H.B. 1276](#), which created the Labor Education Alignment Program (LEAP). This program enables students in technology centers and community colleges to participate in employment training and earn industry-recognized postsecondary credentials. LEAP allows employers to employ students to provide occupational training that can then be applied to their program of study. It also allows transferability of the training and credit hours to other technology centers, community colleges and postsecondary institutions in Tennessee.

Subject to appropriation, the Department of Economic and Community Development can award a grant to any technology center or community college located in a region where advanced training or a highly skilled workforce is needed. The funds can be used to establish and implement a LEAP on the college campus. In addition the bill creates a Workforce Advanced Training Fund, which can cover the costs to establish a LEAP and any grants authorized. This portion of the bill sets it apart from others in this category as it provides an avenue for funding these programs.

Career pathways

Career pathways may include concerted efforts to increase coordination between higher education and the workforce and identifying areas of need in the workforce in each state.

Connecticut: In 2013 Connecticut enacted [S.B. 868](#), which requires the Office of Higher Education and the Board of Regents for Higher Education to develop a list of non-degree certificate programs and technical training courses offered by community and technical colleges that correlate with workforce needs in the state. These areas include, but are not limited to, health care, manufacturing, transportation and energy. The Office of Higher Education is required to report on the number and types of programs and courses offered by the colleges and how these offerings contribute to workforce shortages to the Joint Standing Committee of the General Assembly. The assessment of workforce needs and college course offerings provides insight into where forward progress can be made to better align the two entities.

New Mexico: Similar to Connecticut, New Mexico enacted [H.M. 45](#) in 2013. This memorial (also known as a resolution) calls for coordinated efforts to align the education and training students receive to the employment opportunities available in the state. It requests that the Economic Development Department, Workforce Solutions Department, Public Education Department, Bureau of Business and Economic Research at the University of New Mexico and Arrowhead Center at New Mexico State University coordinate efforts to align education and training to available employment and industries in New Mexico.

Oregon: In 2014, Oregon added language to existing policy regarding the State Workforce Investment Board. [Senate Bill 1566](#) calls for greater coordination between education, employment, economic development and job training. The Legislative assembly set forth goals that include developing a flexible, accountable, outcome-focused and data-driven workforce, meeting employer needs, ensuring equity in program access, supporting the economic health of the community and Oregon's 40-40-20 attainment goal.

In addition to these goals, S.B. 1566 requires each local Workforce Investment Board to create a local plan that must be developed by the board with local workforce partners. The plans are made to identify strategies and outcomes the board will implement in the area, making all parties in the plan accountable for the strategies, achieving outcomes and having the plan approved by the State Workforce Investment Board. This additional requirement puts onus on the local communities as well as the state to improve needed workforce areas.

Workforce overview

All of the policies outlined above work toward a greater goal of increasing workforce opportunities for students at multiple levels. The programs created are targeted to specific populations or career fields that states identified are in need of greater higher education to workforce alignment. These policies include specific language and direction to work toward employability for students as well as increase degree completion through awarding credit from prior experiences or internship experiences. All three policies creating targeted programs gave specifics as to what is required of institutions and who has authority over each program. The policies regarding career pathways tend to use more general language to improve workforce development. Each piece of legislation highlighted the importance of connecting education to the workforce and the specific needs of each state. Even though the language is fewer directives in these policies, the intent to better the economic workforce and create a stable employability environment is clear.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Jennifer Dounay Zinth, *Career and Technical Education: States Aligning Programs to Meet Workforce Needs* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 2013) 1, <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/12/13/11213.pdf>.
- 2 OECD, *Skills Beyond School Synthesis Report* (Paris: The Organization for Economic Co-operations and Development, 2014) 56-60, <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/Skills-Beyond-School-Synthesis-Report.pdf>.
- 3 Gateway Community & Technical College, *Gateway Community and Technical College's Role in Increasing the Advanced Manufacturing Talent Highway* (Florence: Gateway Community & Technical College, 2014) 4, <http://www.gateway.kctcs.edu/News%20and%20Events/newsItem?id=%7B358D57E7-3E46-4496-BF89-DD2BC1F6A36A%7D>.

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