Playbook Introduction

Career-connected learning is an educational strategy that combines high-quality academic instruction, skill-based learning, and real-world experiences to prepare students with the knowledge and skills that they need to pursue their career goals. Career-connected learning can be delivered in a variety of ways, including in core content classes, through career and technical education (CTE) programs, in partnership with community and technical colleges, and through work-based learning experiences like internships, pre-apprenticeships, and registered apprenticeship programs. Career-connected learning is especially important for an often-overlooked group of students including highly mobile youth. In K-12, school mobility refers to any planned or unplanned school or district change that occurs for reasons other than grade promotion during an academic year. A school change may be voluntary—such as a student switching to an online program to support their family—or involuntary, such as being expelled. Highly mobile students may experience homelessness, be in foster care, be part of military-connected or migratory agricultural families, or have recently immigrated to the United States.

A growing body of evidence indicates that participation in career-connected learning can promote strong attendance, engagement, and academic achievement for highly mobile students by helping students forge direct and durable linkages between what they are learning in school and their personal and professional interests and aspirations. For example:

- District of Columbia Public Schools' high school students enrolled in CTE courses during the 2022-23 school year attended nearly 13 more days of school than their peers who did not.
- New Hampshire's 2023 Gallup poll surveying over 9,600 students in grades five through 12 found that students who participated in career-connected learning were more likely to be involved in and enthusiastic about school, (i.e., engagement) and to have positive ideas and energy for the future (i.e., hope).
- Nationally, the average four-year graduation rate for the 2021-22 school year for CTE concentrators, (i.e., students who take multiple courses in one CTE program area) is 96% – 11 percentage points higher than the average rate for all students. Further, a national analysis found that completion of at least three CTE credits halved the likelihood of dropping out of high school for students in foster care.
- A study conducted by Casey Family Programs found students in foster care with employment experience while in high school, such as the work-based learning opportunities offered in CTE programs, were four times more likely to graduate, and half of these students continued their education into college.
- Students in Washington state experiencing homelessness who participated in three or more CTE courses had a four-year graduation rate of 78.9% and a four-year dropout rate of 10%, compared with a 61.3% graduation rate and 25% dropout rate for students experiencing homelessness who participated in fewer than three CTE courses.
- Similarly, students experiencing homelessness in Montana who participated in three or more CTE courses during the 2016-2017 school year, had a four-year dropout rate of 4.6%, compared with 8.9% for learners experiencing homelessness who participated in fewer than three CTE courses.

Career-connected learning supports students to safely envision their future and who they want to become; build social capital and deepen school and community engagement; and master a strong foundation of both technical skills and academic knowledge that expands their horizons and postsecondary options.

Unlocking Career Success

Unlocking Career Success is one of the priority initiatives within Secretary Cardona's Raise the Bar initiative, and it is an interagency program that reimagines how our nation's high schools prepare all students to thrive in their future education and careers. The initiative blurs the lines between high school, college, and career to provide students with accelerated and innovative opportunities to earn college credits and gain real-world career experiences. This joint effort across the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Commerce supports public and private sector leaders, government agencies, and other community-based organizations to help students earn postsecondary degrees and industry-recognized credentials that our employers need, and our economy demands. Unlocking Career Success seeks to strengthen systems of multiple pathways to success, fulfilling the promise of education as the key to economic and social mobility and providing our students with rewarding, joyful, and purposeful college and career pathways that lead them to reach their endless potential.

Actions

A variety of stakeholders, from state level leaders to classroom teachers can dismantle the persistent barriers that exclude highly mobile students from benefitting from career-connected learning and ensure that highly mobile students can be prioritized and supported as they navigate their educational journey between high school, postsecondary education, and the workforce. Stakeholders can increase career-connected pathways for highly mobile youth by taking steps to:

1. **Understand the various student subpopulations who are classified as "highly mobile".**

High rates of school mobility are often—but not always—a function of deep, historical disparities in our society and related public policies. Redlining and other discriminatory policies and practices systematically exclude historically marginalized communities, schools, and families from accessing the resources necessary to disrupt decades of public disinvestment. Data shows that students living in families with incomes below the federal poverty level are concentrated in under-resourced, low-performing schools; are three times more likely to change schools compared to their peers; and tend to transfer to other low-performing schools with similar characteristics.

Highly mobile students experience multiple school moves during their education (often within the same school year) and may experience one or more of the following:

- **Foster care.** Although students in foster care have a right to remain in their schools of origin, removal from the family home or changes in foster care placement often results in students changing schools and sometimes districts. A statewide study found that students in Colorado's foster care system change public schools an average of 3.46 times during their first four years of high school.

- **Homelessness.** Students experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied youth not living in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian, have the right to remain in their school of origin. Despite federal policy provisions to ensure stability, the risk of school mobility nearly doubles while a student experiences homelessness.

- **Being part of a migratory family that works in the agricultural and/or fisheries industries.** Children of migratory families that move frequently due to seasonal agricultural work often move across districts and State lines several times following the various crops by season. Students of migratory families experience a host of factors that can challenge their educational stability and success, including the need to learn English to work during the school year, and to continuously familiarize themselves with their new school system and develop new relationships.

- **Immigration to the United States within the last three years.** Newcomer youth—a term encompassing immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and unaccompanied students and/or students with undocumented status—face tremendous adversity when immigrating to the United States, including housing instability and homelessness which can precipitate the need to change schools. Under Federal law, states and local educational agencies are obligated to provide all children—regardless of immigration status—with equal access to public education at the elementary and secondary level. Newcomer youth often have the additional challenge of needing to learn a new language while adjusting to a new country. Review the Department of Education's English Learner Playbook for more information.

2. Leverage Federal funds and legislation to support highly mobile youth and CTE.

- *The McKinney-Vento Act -* Signed into law in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act. McKinney-Vento local educational agency subgrant funds can be used to remove barriers to CTE, including the provision of expedited evaluation and transportation costs. This law requires that each child or youth experiencing homelessness must be provided services comparable to those offered to other students in the school, including CTE programming.

- *Title IV-E of the Social Security Act - C*hild welfare agencies and caseworkers are required to begin working with foster youth at age 14 to develop plans for the transition support services needed, including providing them with a written description of the programs and services available to help them prepare for a successful adulthood. A key strategy for improving CTE access and performance for foster youth is ensuring that they and their caregivers are regularly provided information on opportunities to engage in career-connected learning, including CTE, throughout the secondary and postsecondary years. A second, and related, key strategy is to ensure that caseworkers, judges, and other professionals who are responsible for facilitating a supportive transition into adulthood are informed about available career-connected learning opportunities and proactive in promoting these opportunities to foster youth and their care-givers. It is also important for these professionals to consider the implication of placement changes that would require the foster youth to change school and how best to support their educational continuity.

- *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins V)* **-** Perkins V supports states in their implementation of CTE programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels, which includes strategies that promote equity in CTE through data analysis, targeted funding for special populations, in which highly mobile youth are named, as well as technical assistance which could include professional development and the engagement of stakeholders that rep-resent students who are members of special populations.
    - Perkins V also requires secondary and postsecondary institutions to conduct a compre-hensive local needs assessment (CLNA) to identify and address underlying issues that pose barriers to students who are members of special populations to access and be successful in CTE. The CLNA can be used to direct local funds and help to make the benefits of CTE more visible to students and families who are members of special pop-ulations including highly mobile youth.

Action Items for Students and Caregivers:

- *Partner with school officials to understand the variety of opportunities* available in high school, CTE and dual enrollment. In New Mexico, administrators at Las Cruces Public Schools hired Student and Family Advisors to work in the International Welcome Centers at each of the dis-trict's four comprehensive high schools. These advisors help newcomer students and families learn about school and community resources, including career-connected learning.

- *Learn from the experiences of youth.* Youth are well-positioned to inform policymakers and practitioners about the challenges that they face in accessing career-connected learning, and the supports that they need to be successful. In California, students at Oakland High Law and

Social Justice Academy surveyed their peers and teachers to address identification and support barriers for students experiencing homelessness. In Washington state, youth with lived experience successfully advocated to expand college and career supports for students experiencing homelessness and foster care in the tribal welfare system, the federal foster care system, and in the state under the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children. Their advocacy also led to the creation of an apprenticeship support program.

Action Items for Practitioners (Teachers, Counselors, CTE Directors, Community Based Organizations)

- *Center highly mobile youth in efforts to expand and deepen career-connected learning*. While not yet common practice, school mobility data and other indicators can assist districts and schools to develop strategic collaborations that facilitate smooth and supportive transitions between schools, alignment of curricular and instructional approaches, and shared or aligned arrangements with postsecondary and workforce development partners to allow for continuity of career-connect learning.

- *Consider cost-sharing* for personnel, including school counselors, social workers, and college and career counselors, or leveraging funding streams across agencies, organizations, and programs. In Illinois, the Departments of Commerce and Children and Family Services are developing an initiative to expand career pathway services to support transition-age foster youth. Successful models for braiding and blending WIOA and Chafee Foster Care Funds are under consideration as a basis for the effort. Additionally, Danville School District 118 braided multiple public funding streams, including American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) funds, to provide after-school tutoring and extended-year academic opportunities to students experiencing homelessness.

- *Pay careful attention to policies and practices* related to accountability, assessment and course placement, graduation requirements, credit accrual, CTE, work-based learning, dual enrollment, and college admissions requirements. Collectively, these policies and practices shape the educational experiences and trajectories of highly mobile students—and are the change levers for accelerating access and success. For example, California allows highly mobile students to graduate without completing local graduation requirements that go beyond statewide course requirements and grants eligible students the option to complete a fifth year of high school in order to complete credits necessary to graduate or complete exempted courses to maximize college and career opportunities.

- *Conduct an asset mapping process* to identify available resources to be leveraged, mutually agreed upon opportunities for growth, and aligned goals to meet student and regional economic needs. In Ohio, Building Bridges to Careers or BB2C, takes a relationship-centered approach to asset mapping, supporting districts and community partners to identify existing resources, community needs, and work-based learning experiences for students to engage within their communities.

- In Maine, Androscoggin County uses a grassroots approach to asset-mapping that is responsive to both population level data as well as the voices of youth experiencing foster care, homelessness, and juvenile justice. In addition to income and employment data, the county reviews measures of well-being, including social belonging—defined as having access to full participation in community life, being respected at a basic human level, and feeling "part of" the community such that one can co-create that community and rely on the community for support—made available through the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey.

Action Items for Local Leaders, e.g., principals, superintendents, mayors, and county executives:

- *Partner across systems.* In Texas, Dallas Independent School District partners with the City of Dallas, the Dallas Chamber of Commerce, and others to offer virtual and hybrid internship programs, supporting educational continuity during school changes. Texas OnCourse, a statewide initiative to improve college and career readiness, offers a set of advising resources to support highly mobile students.

- *Identify key data sources* to develop a comprehensive understanding of the educational trajectories of highly mobile students, including attendance, behavior, and enrollment and performance data for academic and CTE courses. For example, the State of Colorado collects and reports data on multiple measures of school mobility disaggregated for students experiencing homelessness, foster care, migrant students, and immigrant students.

- In Massachusetts, Chelsea Public Schools, Everett Public Schools, Revere Public Schools and Winthrop Public Schools developed an inter-district partnership to support the stability and success of highly mobile students who move in and out of schools across the districts, while local educational agencies in Ohio conducts "equity labs" to analyze data on special populations, identify the largest and most pressing gaps, and conduct a root cause analysis.

- *Build a shared understanding of key federal and state laws*, and district and school policies and practices, that impact highly mobile students. Federal and state laws target funding, support, and/or accountability provisions for highly mobile students, including students experiencing foster care and homelessness and students of military, migrant, and immigrant families. It is also important to understand key provisions within federal and State laws regarding special education, Perkins V, and WIOA.

Action Items for State Leaders (State Education Agencies, Higher Education, Labor and Workforce Development Boards, Governors)

- *Formalize an interdisciplinary structure within your organization* (e.g., working group) *and an external cross-sector structure* (e.g., regional K-16 collaborative) to take collective responsibility for increasing highly mobile students' access to, and success in, career-connected learning. Participants should have decision-making authority and represent a range of programs and organizations with diverse expertise, resources, and responsibilities. The Arizona Department of Education has built an interdisciplinary team that includes the CTE office and offices serving students with disabilities, students experiencing foster care and homelessness, and migrant students to engage in cross-training. The Delaware Department of Education assigns CTE staff to identify opportunities for interagency collaboration and engage partner agencies in coordinating funding, resources, and services to target their respective special populations. Washington State established Project Education Impact, a cross-sector partnership working to achieve educational parity for students experiencing foster care and/or homelessness from pre-K through post-secondary education.

- *Remove barriers to enrollment, participation, and completion*. In California, San Andreas Continuation High School provides an authorized "continuation" high school for students over the age of 16 who are behind in the credits needed to graduate on time. Each pathway has its own specific CTE staff and share core academic, special education, student services, and counseling staff. Using a flexible master schedule and competency-based assessment and advancement, students can earn up to 20 credits every six weeks. In Arkansas, Virtual Arkansas and the Arkansas Department of Education offer a flexible blended learning platform that allows

students to complete either full or partial core academic, CTE, Advanced Placement, and/or dual credit courses. This type of platform may support learning continuity during school changes as it provides an avenue for students to fulfill their remaining course and/or certification requirements. School districts in Colorado offer opportunities for students to access broadband and the equipment they need to be successful in their CTE programs, including offering Wi-Fi buses to provide broadband access in under-served areas and mobile labs to provide hands-on learning experiences. In Minnesota, several of Minneapolis Public Schools' alternative high schools are designed to support highly mobile students, providing meaningful education and employment opportunities and support with basic needs like housing.

- *Standardize structures statewide*. For example, the state of New Hampshire requires districts that host CTE programs to align their calendars to help standardize the programs to support smoother transitions for highly mobile students, while the state of Rhode Island provides in-state open access to all CTE programs approved by the State educational agency. If a student enrolls in a CTE program outside of their resident district, the district administering the program shall be reimbursed by the resident district, which can support educational continuity during school changes.

- *Link data sets for a more informed picture whenever possible*. The Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) in Washington State links education and workforce data to provide actionable information, including disaggregated data on highly mobile students. Additionally, the Road Map Project in King County provides an online data dashboard with mobility data by school, district, and student demographics.

Additional Resources

- The National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity created this two-page overview of key points on special populations in Perkins V, including how funds can be used to support increased access and support.

- Advance CTE developed this overview of federal funding streams that can be blended or braided to develop and sustain a more integrated career-connected learning ecosystem.

- The Perkins State Plans and Data Explorer is designed to provide information on state Perkins V plans, including annual CTE enrollment and performance data disaggregated by special population status. This tool can help States better understand the CTE experiences of highly mobile students, including which special populations are accessing CTE. This information can help inform recruitment and support strategies to be included in the state plan.

- *With Learners, Not for Learners: A Toolkit for Elevating Learner Voice in CTE,* was developed by Advance CTE to assist professionals in establishing feedback loops to identify and reverse the systemic barriers that prevent special populations from accessing career-connected learning.

- *Elevating Youth Worker Voice: A Practical Guide for Organizations Supporting Young People in Their Transition to the Workplace*, was published by the Urban Institute to provide government agencies and nonprofits with a framework and practical strategies for supporting youth in developing their power and voice.

- *¡Adelante! A Community Asset Mapping Approach to Increase College and Career Readiness for Rural Latinx High School Students* describes an asset mapping process that reinforces students' and families' connections to their culture, school, and community while collecting data on community assets and needs. This two-generation approach targeting highly mobile students could be used to complement asset mapping processes more focused on the education and the workforce development system—helping to ensure that systems' efforts reflect the assets, needs, and aspirations of students and families.

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