

# Elements of Effective Career Pathways

Relevant career pathways are driven by labor market demand and build bridges from high school to postsecondary education and the workplace. Here are the essential elements of such pathways.

## **1. Combine a college-ready academic core with challenging technical studies and require students to complete real-world assignments.**

Require all students to complete a college-ready academic core and a concentration – for example, a four-course career pathway or a set of Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses – that provide the foundational learning skills they need to earn credentials and secure good jobs.

## **2. Align three stages of learning – secondary, postsecondary and the workplace – through strategies like dual enrollment and work-based learning.**

Leverage state and federal funds to incentivize school districts, community and technical colleges, and employers to develop career pathways that align with identified workforce needs in key state and regional industry sectors.

Promote structured dual enrollment programs for career pathways and establish uniform statewide policies so students can earn credits toward high school graduation that are automatically added to students' transcripts at community and technical colleges.

Incentivize industry partners to expand ongoing, structured, progressively intensive work-based learning that engages students in authentic applications of academic, technical and workplace skills.

Develop policies with insurers, workforce commissions and other agencies to protect students and their employers in work-based learning experiences.

## **3. Create guidance systems that include career information, exploration and advisement and engage students in ongoing career and college counseling beginning in the middle grades.**

Mandate career exploration courses and activities in the middle grades and high school and adopt distributed, curriculum-based career guidance systems that make career and college counseling the shared responsibility of every adult in the school.

## **4. Allow students to choose accelerated learning options in settings that provide the extended time needed to earn advanced industry credentials.**

Incentivize districts, technology centers and community and technical colleges to partner to create early advanced credential programs modeled after early college high schools. Early advanced credential programs allow students to graduate with a diploma plus an advanced industry certification, postsecondary credential or significant credits toward an associate degree.

## **5. Lead to further education and training and high-skill, high-wage jobs in high-demand industries.**

Prioritize the investment of state and federal funds to develop rigorous, relevant career pathways that lead to employment in state and regional industry sectors with a shortage of skilled workers.

*From the report of the Southern Regional Education Board Commission on Career and Technical Education, Credentials for All: An Imperative for SREB States, 2015.*