

Aligning Postsecondary Education and Workforce Strategies to Drive Attainment

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In an effort to support community-based collaborations among key sectors—education, business, policy, and nonprofit and community organizations—the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) is providing a series of primers that will help communities increase postsecondary attainment. This primer explores the need to align postsecondary and employer strategies to meet the workforce needs of the 21st century, promote stronger communities, and enable our nation to compete in the global economy. Each primer in the series will be followed by a tactical guidebook that provides further detail.

The Workforce Alignment Challenge



Build **DATA SYSTEMS** to share real-time information on the labor market and graduates' outcomes among educators, workforce programs, employers, and government agencies.



Align **GRADUATES' SKILLS AND WORKFORCE NEEDS** to reduce unemployment and unfilled jobs in the local community through collaboration across postsecondary institutions, workforce training providers, and employers.



Integrate **LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM** into postsecondary curriculum and policies for awarding credit to improve both the transition from college to the workforce (e.g., internships and apprenticeships) and from the workforce to college (e.g., prior learning assessment).



Increase **CAREER ADVISING** by employers, colleges, and other community partners to help today's students understand connections between postsecondary options and career mobility.



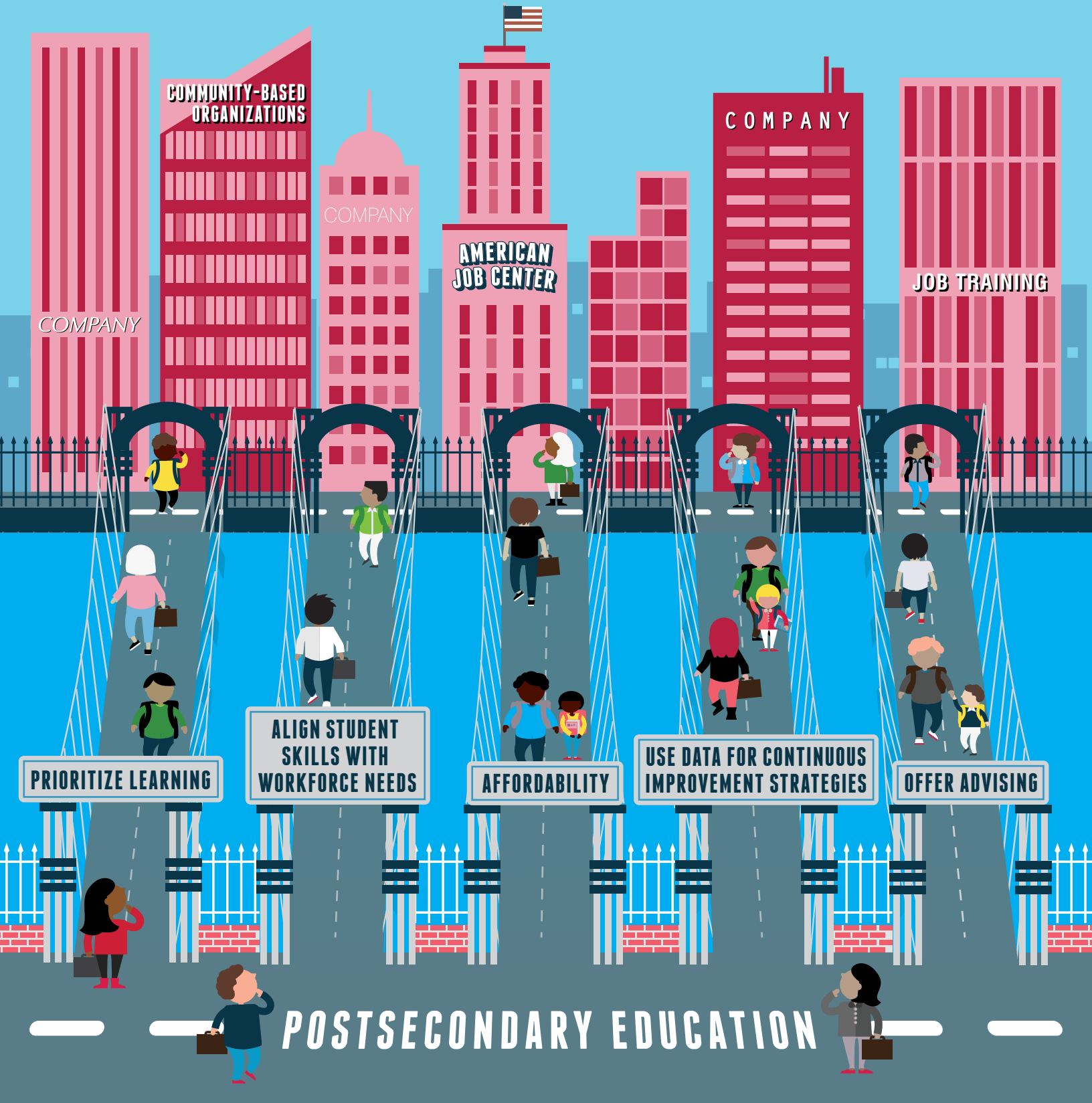
Provide **AFFORDABLE** postsecondary education options, calling for colleges and employers to offer financial assistance and flexible scheduling to reduce time to degree and debt burden.



The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to promoting access to and success in higher education for all students. Based in Washington, D.C., IHEP develops innovative policy- and practice-oriented research to guide policymakers and education leaders, who develop high-impact policies that will address our nation's most pressing education challenges.

BRIDGING EDUCATION & WORKFORCE NEEDS

POSTSECONDARY AND WORKFORCE STRATEGIES TO HELP STUDENTS TRANSITION TO THE WORKFORCE
FROM COLLEGE AND SUPPORT ADULT LEARNERS IN ADVANCING THEIR EDUCATION



Leading Practices

Coachella Valley, California

The *Coachella Valley Economic Partnership* (CVEP) brings educators and business leaders together to support student transitions into key economic sectors, promoting regional job growth and a well-trained and educated workforce. CVEP partners with Health Career Connection to provide undergraduate students with paid internships at local health organizations to enhance their work experience. All CV interns also participate in the *Coachella Valley Healthcare Initiative* by conducting research, outreach, education, and advocacy, working to improve the health of underserved populations in the region.

Northwest Indiana

The Center of Workforce Innovations and the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board established the regional collaboration READY NWI in 2011 to develop a plan for aligning secondary schools, postsecondary institutions, businesses and political leaders. To raise awareness among students, parents, and educators about new jobs in the region and the necessary skills required, over a dozen employers have now partnered with READY NWI to produce *videos* of their workplaces. They explain how education leads to specific careers, assisting local schools in promoting job opportunities and associated educational pathways.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Graduate! Philadelphia operates direct advising services for adults returning to complete college. Adults can seek out advising services on their own, or employers can request onsite advising for employees they identify. Graduate! also partners with local colleges and universities, employers, One-Stops, and CBOs. The Graduate! model has been replicated in Connecticut, Chicago, Memphis, North Carolina, New Jersey, and elsewhere. Since 2008, Graduate! Philadelphia has provided information about college to over 3,000 city residents and individually advised more than 800. More than half of those who receive advising services re-enroll in college, with a *95% persistence rate*.

Transition from the Workforce to College

Colleges and employers must work together to support adults in their return to college, including those who began college but stopped out before earning a degree. Business and education sectors should collaborate on outreach campaigns that promote the benefits of higher education and opportunities to pursue high-quality degrees and credentials. Flexible scheduling in both colleges and workplaces will help adult students balance responsibilities, while financial assistance programs from both sectors will help students find **affordable options** for continuing education. In addition, when students enter college with competencies and learning attained through the workforce, military service, or other out-of-classroom, college-level learning experiences, colleges should **prioritize learning** by awarding credit through prior learning assessment (PLA) so students avoid spending time and money on familiar concepts in the classroom.

Transition from College to the Workforce

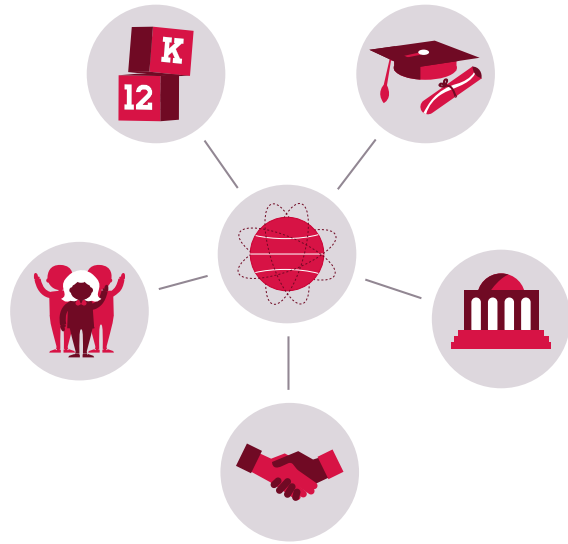
Colleges and employers must partner to better articulate student pathways to quality employment. Applied learning strategies help students effectively integrate formal academic learning and workplace learning. For instance, career pathway programs link a series of courses and work experiences through an employer partnership to help students advance in a particular industry, such as STEM, health care, or manufacturing. Employer-college partnerships also provide apprenticeship and internship opportunities to students still in school, accelerating the **alignment of students' skills with workforce needs**. These partnerships

must **share data to develop continuous improvement strategies** as they monitor students' outcomes in relation to the workforce. Curriculum redesign at colleges may further support the workforce transition by using a competency-based learning system, awarding credits to students based on their ability to apply key competencies rather than time spent on a course. Generally, instruction for all students should enhance problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, and other transferrable skills that will enable them to become valuable members of their communities.

Contextualized Advising

Colleges, employers, K-12 schools, community-based organizations, and government actors all have roles to play in **offering more contextualized and intrusive advising** to students on college and career options. Key information should be targeted to certain populations and direct college and career advising must be contextualized to students' personal needs, goals, and work experiences; veteran students, for instance, need advising on the GI Bill and other military and federal aid benefits prior to enrolling in college. Advising should also be based on real-time labor market data so students can make informed decisions about pursuing credentials that will likely lead to gainful employment. American Job Centers—one-stop career centers—should provide support and information on educational and career options, including public benefits programs that may enable them to return to college and increase their earnings in the future.

Stakeholder Resources



transparency of degree programs at a variety of institutions. It provides detailed examples of how competencies are developed and used in course design and instruction; how and when competencies are assessed; and how faculty, staff, and employers can work together to use competency frameworks. Samples of institutions' competency descriptions and competency-based curricula are included in the appendices. To read about how prior learning assessment at colleges benefits adult students, see *Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success: A 48-Institution Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes* by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (2010).



For Local Government:

Workforce Development for Economic Competitiveness (2010: National League of Cities)

This brief describes how city leaders can strengthen local workforce development by partnering with workforce investment boards, community colleges, community-based organizations, economic development organizations, and businesses. Leaders can play a role by assessing local needs, convening stakeholders, raising public awareness, and sharing information. The brief highlights New York City's Workforce1 Career Centers, which serve both businesses and job seekers.



For Business Sector:

Education Benefit Toolkit (2012: Council for Adult and Experiential Learning)

This guide offers clear steps for employers on offering education as part of employees' benefits packages. It also explains how prior learning assessment (PLA)—the process of awarding college credit for college-level learning from work and life experience—can save employers and students money and time. Some helpful tools include sample language on PLA for tuition assistance policies, a sample survey to assess employees' interest in and awareness of education benefits, suggestions for developing a go-to education advocate to support employees through the process of going back to school, and resources to help develop an internal communications strategy.



For Community-Based Organizations:

Promoting Postsecondary Success of Court-Involved Youth: Lessons from the NYEC Postsecondary Success Pilot (2013: National Youth Employment Coalition)

This report discusses promising practices from community-based organizations that serve disconnected youth and young people who have been involved in the justice system, particularly African-American and Latino youth. These organizations combine education, workforce development, and youth development by offering intensive case management, hands-on learning and work experiences, and peer mentoring and by creating an organization-wide college-going culture. The report highlights efforts to combine academic and work experiences, such as Massachusetts's GED Plus, a career pathways program for students earning a GED; a "high school plus" program in Dayton, Ohio that offers hands-on training, high school coursework and industry certifications; and New York City's GED-to-college transition support program that includes college prep courses, college visits, and financial assistance.



For Any Sector:

Business at the Table: The Employer Drive for Higher Education Attainment (2012: American Chamber of Commerce Executives)

This report contains tools and tactics for the business community's role in increasing educational attainment. Through eleven profiles of successful community partnerships, the report highlights goals, challenges, key lessons, and resources. Standouts include Louisville's 55,000 Degrees initiative, which focuses on multi-sector relationships; Graduate! Philadelphia, which emphasizes coordination across student services; and Cincinnati's data-driven Strive Partnership.



For K-12 Institutions:

The Pathways to Prosperity Network: A State Progress Report, 2012-2014 (2014: Jobs for the Future)

The Pathways to Prosperity Network examines how states and schools can engage employers in work-based learning programs and develop career-readiness curricula for middle and high school students. This report explores efforts to help students find careers in STEM fields, agriculture, mechanics, manufacturing, health care, and IT primarily through certificates, licenses, and two-year postsecondary degrees. Highlighted initiatives include comprehensive advising systems, partnerships with employers to develop curricula, strong intermediary organizations between employers and schools, and opportunities for students who would not traditionally be college-bound to earn college credits in high school. The report contains profiles of state-level, regional, and school-level efforts in California, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, Ohio, and Tennessee.



For Postsecondary Institutions:

Competency-Based Degree Programs in the U.S.: Postsecondary Credentials for Measurable Student Learning and Performance (2012: Council for Adult and Experiential Learning)

This report demonstrates how the model of competency-based education—in which an institution clearly defines the specific aptitudes expected of its students—can be used to improve the quality and