

Student Success and *Workforce Revitalization*



TASK FORCE REPORT

HB21-1330

To Our Fellow Coloradans:

We all know the challenges COVID-19 has created or exacerbated for our state, our nation, and the entire world. In this report, reflecting the vision and aspirations of statewide task force members who deliberated for nearly five months, we hope to show that the pandemic and our recovery efforts present a rare and unprecedented opportunity to transform postsecondary education in Colorado.

In the pages that follow we present fresh perspectives and specific policy changes to make this transformation a reality. This report provides a blueprint for key investments that will drive meaningful results for Coloradans. It shows how our state can effectively deploy a one-time infusion of federal funds, draw on lessons learned in the past, and emphasize collaboration and partnerships to focus on the needs of the state's learners and workforce.

Today, iteratively acquiring new skills to build successful careers in a fast-changing job market has become obligatory. Colorado must do more to expand learning and earning opportunities to meet this challenge, including reskilling and upskilling in a world in which lifelong learning is now the norm. This will require eliminating the silos that have too often divided K-12, traditional postsecondary institutions, and workforce and community development. It will also require advocacy for the viability and public value of a range of education and workforce pathways.

Many Coloradans are already familiar with the so-called "*Colorado paradox*" in which Colorado — credited as one of the most highly educated states in the nation — has one of the lowest percentages of high school students completing a college degree. Yet Colorado faces another vexing "*postsecondary paradox*." Many well-meaning people publicly promote non-degree pathways, yet are insistent that their own children attend a four-year college. Until we have multiple pathways - traditional and non-traditional - that better connect postsecondary education to career opportunity/attainment and spur economic advancement for learners and earners, that any parent would gladly choose for their student, we will unintentionally maintain a system of haves and have nots. In some cases, the best path to do this is via a well-rounded liberal arts education that unlocks in-demand critical thinking skills. In other cases, it may mean a learner pursues a certificate or a 2 or 4 year degree in a professional pathway discipline. In others, it may take the form of a series of just-in-time industry-valued credentials at key points of career inflection.

The bottom line: While a four-year degree is certainly not the only or best path for everyone, we believe every Coloradan should graduate high school with the necessary skills to have real choices. And those choices or pathways should yield improved opportunities in professional life and beyond. That means being able to pursue whatever meaningful pathway offers them access to high-quality education and training opportunities in pursuit of higher wages, more responsibility, and/or the opportunity to make a bigger impact in their own lives and communities. We believe that all pathways have value if they lead to stable, remunerative employment that enables individuals to care for themselves and their families while facilitating mobility within and across careers.

At the same time, we must avoid any suggestion that proponents of skills-based credentials or degrees are automatically opponents of well-rounded liberal arts education or degrees. That is a false dichotomy. In fact, most folks on this task force saw liberal arts pathways as highly valuable for fostering the capacity for lifelong learning. They just also believe that students deserve education pathways that prepare them for success in the rapidly evolving global workforce and economy.

We should also be clear about what this report isn't. We have no illusions that a top-down "silver bullet" approach will immediately eliminate Colorado's postsecondary institutional, structural funding, and workforce development challenges. But we believe wholeheartedly that the interconnected set of initiatives presented here can form the basis of a purposeful and promising approach to long-needed improvements.

We also recognize that this report is just the beginning. To make pervasive, sustainable change in our postsecondary education ecosystem will require active participation and sustained collaboration by legislators, institutional leaders, industry representatives, faculty, and other key stakeholders.

We are grateful to the lawmakers who created this task force, to the Governor for his support, to the bill sponsors, and to the education, business, and civic leaders who joined the task force and participated energetically and thoughtfully in its deliberations. We also thank the staff of the Colorado Department of Higher Education for their hard work and first-rate contributions to this effort.

Sincerely,

Berrick Abramson and Sarah Hughes, co-chairs

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is for Berrick Abramson, and the signature on the right is for Sarah Hughes. Both signatures are written in a cursive, flowing style.

While the focus of this report is primarily on degree-granting public colleges and universities, from community and local district colleges to comprehensive and research universities, our students and state are also served by other vital institutions. These include area technical colleges, private postsecondary institutions of all types (both degree-granting and occupational schools), and emerging providers of skills training and certifications in high-need, high-wage, high-opportunity jobs and industries. Any successful systemic approach must consider this broad ecosystem of postsecondary providers, as well as linkages to our rich diversity of comprehensive and technical high schools, academies, early colleges and P-TECH innovation centers.





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Why This Task Force?

The Challenges We Face

Across the nation, the economic disruption wrought by COVID — together with renewed demands for social justice and racial equity — has created much-needed soul searching about how to improve education and workforce opportunities. In fact, long before the pandemic the nature of work and required skills had been changing so rapidly that it has been difficult for learners, earners, and postsecondary providers to keep up.

The same is true in Colorado. The success of our state is closely entwined with the rich history of its colleges and universities. But despite the tremendous progress we've seen in student access and innovation at our state's extensive network of postsecondary institutions, the COVID-19 pandemic has been uniquely challenging for learners, including working adults, to navigate. At the same time, it has forced our colleges and universities to quickly make significant adjustments to their delivery models and disrupted the cultural and economic context in which our postsecondary ecosystem operates.

Economic dislocation of workers and supply chain disruptions add urgency to the search for more effective ways to serve students whose education was massively disrupted. Pandemic-driven dislocations have drawn attention to the longstanding imperative to address critical skills gaps and prepare all state residents for the jobs of the future. This challenge will grow still more pressing as student demographics continue to shift and working adult learners become more and more common.

Simply put, three core data points highlight Colorado's precarious position.

The Bell Policy Center notes that we rank 50th in the nation in the divide between the percentage of adult Hispanic Coloradans who have earned an associate or bachelor's degree and the much higher percentage of degree-holding non-Hispanic whites. We rank 47th in public investment for higher education. And demographic changes mean we have just 10 years to address critical talent issues as the state's over-65 population sees record growth, requiring more state spending on retirees, while the number of younger workers sustaining our tax base to fund education and other needs holds steady.

These statistics, alongside a range of worrying racial and gender-based income and wealth disparities, have strong implications for our approach to education and jobs. STEM jobs, which will disproportionately power Colorado's state economy over the next 20 years, require technical skills that often have a "half-life" of just 2.5 years. That means those skills will need to be refreshed on a regular basis. Meantime, thousands of good jobs with benefits remain open in fields like nursing, software development, aerospace and truck driving. In fact, in 2021, there were a total of 1,405 unique job postings for aerospace occupations in Colorado; an annual growth rate of 6.4% over 2020.

Yet among college graduates, there's too often a lack of clear connections between

the knowledge and skills acquired in a range of undergraduate programs and those needed by employers. Broad skills such as teamwork, leadership, communication, digital literacy, and collaboration are not readily transparent from undergraduate course or program descriptions, and are not always acquired in the courses themselves. But employers increasingly say those skills are essential. And although employers continue to value hiring graduates with credentials, they are also becoming more vocal about ensuring that new employees have the targeted skills that make them workforce-ready. Individual learners and earners, as well as employers, benefit when postsecondary education better matches the speed of change in the talent market.

Coloradans from different demographic groups continue to experience inequitable access to our colleges and universities, as well as far weaker persistence and graduation rates for students of color. Only one in four Colorado high school graduates enrolls immediately in postsecondary education and completes a credential six years later. Just one in five Latinos in Colorado has a credential beyond high school — and this is our fastest growing population. Similarly troubling gaps exist for low-income, Black, and indigenous Coloradans. It's vital for all groups to reach our statewide goal of at least 66% of adults holding a degree or other postsecondary credentials with workplace value.

We must set Colorado on a path where we have the most diverse, inclusive and robust middle class in the nation.

Compounding these challenges is the state's historically weak investment in education over the last two decades. Although Colorado's recent reinvestment in higher education in the past few years has helped restore funding levels to pre-Great Recession figures, we still have a long way to go to achieve parity with other states. Colorado, with the second highest wealth gap between its counties in the nation, is one of the country's weakest public talent investors. It spends less per student on postsecondary education than any other state except New Hampshire and Vermont. As students take on more of the burden of paying for their postsecondary education, public perceptions of higher education have soured, making increased state funding more challenging politically to secure. Too often, across the nation, public workforce, training and postsecondary funding is not sufficiently focused on the approaches with the strongest evidence of effectiveness for learners, especially on long-term outcomes such as employment and earnings. And from the student perspective, financial pressures have added to the importance of ensuring that their education delivers a strong return on investment.

Colorado will never have an equitable, resilient economy if it does not commit to reversing this unacceptable reality and becoming one of the strongest talent investors in the nation. We must set Colorado on a path where we have the most diverse, inclusive and robust middle class in the nation. If we don't act now, we risk becoming a state with ever-deepening divisions of every kind caused by income inequality.

What is the Colorado we want to see? Do we really want parts of southern Colorado, the Eastern Plains and the Western Slope to be educational deserts, with residents disconnected from good jobs, quality health and child care, and deeply disconnected from and angry with the state government in Denver? Do we want companies and middle class families moving out of the state? Talent and its multiple blessings, widely distributed, is our only real solution. We need to spend differently, and on the paths that lift up the lives of our residents, we need to spend more.

One glaring result of our investment shortcomings to date: 40.2% of Colorado high school students who enroll in a

Nursing Shortage Snapshot

In 2021, there were 73,187 unique job postings for registered nurses in Colorado; a 32% increase over 2020. The need for registered nurses is even more pronounced in varying regions in Colorado. In southeastern Colorado, there are 10,296 unique job postings for registered nurses; an increase of 50% percent over 2020. In the 2021 Talent Pipeline Report, registered nurses are showcased as one of Colorado's top five posted occupations. Ranking in second place, there were 92,656 unique job postings for RN's between March 2020 and August 2021.

Colorado postsecondary institutions do not earn a credential within six years, many as a result of mounting financial stresses. Too many students leave with debt and no degree. Student loan debt in Colorado is lower than the national average, but our state still struggles both with perceptions of unaffordability and the reality that total student debt levels have grown 176% since 2007. While college and university leaders have made efforts to address the affordability crisis through cost containment, and the state has helped with temporary infusions of funds, the deep structural challenges are much more difficult to resolve.

Fortunately, the return on investment for students who complete postsecondary education remains strong, as reflected by higher lifetime earning potential, annual wages, and participation in the workforce. This makes shoring up students' ability to navigate the system successfully even more vital to ensuring those benefits are more widely distributed.

Aggregate measures show that Colorado is one of the most well-educated states. Unfortunately, that's more a reflection of the disproportionate number of college-educated transplants from other states moving here for jobs than of the state's success at educating and graduating its own home-grown talent. We need to do more to ensure that there are smooth effective pathways from K-12 schools to a range of postsecondary options and career opportunities. Because we are asking higher education to evolve, we need to strengthen the systems feeding it and those "receiving" its graduates as well. Then we need to create alignment along the education-employment pipeline if we want lasting and meaningful change.

“I urge you to think big and boldly. Don't be encumbered by the status quo.”

-Governor Polis

Why This Report?

A Unique Opportunity *for Change*

As the state and the nation look to a post-pandemic future, we have a rare and unique opportunity to chart a new course. That's because COVID-19 is both an unprecedented challenge and also a chance to address long standing systemic problems in Colorado. We can lead the nation by aligning our collaborative efforts and public investment in education with our future workforce needs.

The demand for improved education-to-career pathways has long been clear. Now, higher education and workforce development are at the center of the recovery agenda for Colorado. This includes young people who aren't well served by the current system and growing numbers of working adults who need reskilling and upskilling that's affordable and fits into their busy work and family lives.

A one-time infusion of federal funds is available to help Colorado recover from the pandemic. And with unusual alignment of the executive and legislative branches, together with many other leaders committed to statewide transformation, the civic and political will has emerged to enable new approaches. The time to act is now. We cannot afford to lose this opportunity.

That's why Colorado lawmakers passed legislation in June of 2021 (HB21-1330) that created the Student Success and Workforce Revitalization Task Force. The law calls for the task force to submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Commission on Higher Education and the General Assembly's education committees by December 15. *(See page 32 for a list of task force members.)*

"We need to reimagine our approach to higher education and workforce development to foster an environment where our homegrown talent can thrive." -Governor Polis

The task force and working groups are composed of 67 members, including representatives from all of the higher education governing boards in the state, student organizations, private colleges, K-12 schools, members of the business community, higher education advocacy groups, and representatives from the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE). The three working groups focused on Student Success, Workforce Development and Revitalization, and Aligned Systems and Policies For Success.

The law's emphasis, and the task force's commitment, is to remain focused on the needs of learners and earners. Governor Polis underscored the need to keep these groups at the center of this conversation in his remarks to the task force: "I urge you to think big and boldly. Don't be encumbered by the status quo," he told participants. "The old way of doing things isn't working well enough for Colorado students, or workers, or private sector companies. We need to reimagine our approach to higher education and workforce development to foster an environment where our homegrown talent can thrive."

Our recommendations are intended to build on the many strengths Colorado's current higher education and workforce system already possesses.

Our recommendations build on the many strengths that the current higher education and workforce system already possess — including the adaptability displayed when classes had to be instantly moved online when the pandemic began or when businesses had to be innovative with offering services under new local health guidelines.

Our recommendations are also practical and tailored to the distinctive needs of learners and earners in a state with a changing workforce, changing demographics, and a changing economy. Our system of talent development has pockets of collaboration and rivers of innovation – but they don't work together to be force multipliers. Our western state does not need top down solutions but tools and supports to propel entrepreneurial, values-based leadership.

In the recommendations that follow, we take advantage of immediate opportunities to use one-time federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to address urgent, near-time needs while outlining a long-term vision for postsecondary success that stresses bottom-up, structural solutions.

Indeed, we are well aware that the broader goal of the legislators who created this task force was to use the group not simply to propose immediate uses for the federal funds but to support a broader vision of workforce alignment, affordability, and equity. Beyond addressing COVID challenges, we need to begin transforming Colorado postsecondary education to serve a renewed Colorado.



Photo credit: F4D Studio

"Our system of talent development has pockets of collaboration and rivers of innovation – but they don't work together to be force multipliers. Our western state does not need top down solutions but tools and supports to propel entrepreneurial, values-based leadership."

A New Vision

for Colorado's Higher Education and Workforce Ecosystem

Like the rest of the country, Colorado needs better alignment between secondary education, postsecondary education, and workforce needs. The lack of a single postsecondary system in Colorado has historically led to competition among institutions over limited resources and defensive posturing. But the real problem is not distributed governance in a diverse system. What we need is a strong state vision where postsecondary institutions, other education and training providers, governing bodies, policy makers, and philanthropic, business, and civic leaders all understand their unique place in the postsecondary ecosystem and work collaboratively to move the state's economic prosperity and equity goals forward.

The hallmarks of this ecosystem include a learner/earner focus with equity-centered design, implementation, and accountability at all levels. To that end, the task force suggests the following three principles as a policy framework to provide a clear directive for the work ahead. These principles are also central to all of the recommendations that follow in this report. Importantly, the task force asks that **all players** in the postsecondary talent development and workforce ecosystem challenge themselves to explore how their decisions and actions can contribute to this vision for all learners and earners.



Like the rest of the country, Colorado needs better alignment between secondary education, postsecondary education, and workforce needs.

1

Learner-centered talent ecosystem

Our postsecondary institutions, our workforce programs, and our community and employer collaborations must build education and training pathways designed for what diverse learners need today to be prepared for the jobs of tomorrow. Specifically, we need to ensure that we can leverage a system that:

- Embraces deep, cross-sector, regional collaboration, and partnership rooted in and informed by both local economic and learner/earner needs;
- Centers equity, inclusion, and belonging at the core of every learners' educational experience;
- Expands flexible pathways that allow students to enter, pause, and progress at their own pace through expanded competency-based and work-based learning throughout the learner's life and career, from grade school through an advanced degree, with navigation supports along the way;
- Boldly and intentionally blur the divisions between K12 and postsecondary education while driving deep partnerships between postsecondary institutions and the private sector to incorporate meaningful career-connected experiences into the academic experience;
- Values all learning, whether formal education, work-based, military service, or other experience, with widely-available assessments that link to postsecondary requirements; and
- Fully embraces the primary reason students pursue postsecondary education — to access enhanced professional opportunities. This is true regardless of whether a learner focuses on a high-need, high-value field such as teaching, nursing, STEM or social work; or a more traditional liberal arts education. Yet too often, our measures of success, and by extension, our focus, stops at graduation. To meet the needs of students, we need to extend the focus of our postsecondary ecosystem beyond credential attainment, and do more to help students access and secure professional opportunities, by investing in approaches proven to have long term results. This report can help catalyze that essential transition.

2

Better results from targeted increases in state education investments

We should provide more quality career and life-ready skills and credentials; more flexible options resulting in increased economic mobility for learners and earners; and accelerated job creation raising standards of living from Craig to Campo, from Sedgwick to Southern Ute and for everyone in between. To accomplish this, we must create a system that:

- Works with industry partners and employers to promote the full breadth of postsecondary options and career pathways available to Coloradans, while building and maintaining a quality postsecondary ecosystem that attracts and retains talented individuals and talent-focused organizations and industries;
- Uses a robust data system that drives bottom-up alignment, partnership, and decision making that benefits all learners/earners, rigorously measures impact and helps colleges and providers more easily manage performance, addresses state needs, strengthens local communities, and tells the story of the positive impact our postsecondary ecosystem has on our economy and our society — as well as the specific areas where improvement is needed. When this story is broadly shared and well understood, it enables and inspires Coloradans to support further public investments in postsecondary education; Expands, invests in and scales successful programs while investing in new, innovative approaches to ensure the State continues to have a nimble approach that is responsive to the changing global workforce; and
- Simultaneously pursues innovative financing options that leverage the long term impact and economic value of these effective programs, in order to stretch limited public resources further.

3

A flexible and adaptive talent development system

This requires blurring the lines between education and work, actively leveraging the leadership and resources of multiple stakeholders, and focusing on regional needs to ensure that the system:

- Allows all Coloradans are able to access postsecondary education pathways that develop domain-specific, industry-valued professional skills, as well as cross-domain skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, professional communication, problem solving, adaptability, planning and prioritization;
- Readily supports Colorado learners and earners in ways that seamlessly integrate into individual career journeys. The state fosters a responsive, nimble, and collaborative public postsecondary system that partners effectively with employers;
- Allows learners to access seamless pathways and clear roadmaps from high school into the workforce, service, or further education — with opportunities to move between education and work as needed; and
- Enables Coloradans to benefit from credentials created in deep partnership with industry that “stack” with minimal loss of credits or time when learners transition from one credential pathway to another.

Imagine a Colorado Where:

A college-bound high school graduate in Greeley is able to get sound guidance at her high school or at a regional center about her choice of postsecondary institution, how potential majors connect to opportunities in different sectors of the economy, what kinds of industry internships and summer jobs will provide useful exposure to potential career paths, and how the broad human, analytical and communications skills learned in college will help her navigate multiple job transitions throughout her working life.

A 40-year-old father of three in Denver who has lost his job in hospital administration and is able to seek career coaching services and enter an IT apprenticeship that pays him to train and upskill on the job with marketable database-management skills. Over the next two years, he earns a series of IT credentials that lead to an applied bachelor's degree required for a significant raise and career mobility.

A Montrose high school junior who isn't sure about college and needs to earn some money right away to help their family is guided to an employer who provides education benefits that allow them to take community college classes that lead to industry-aligned credentials and, if desired, licensure exams and possibly a certificate or an associate's degree.

Recommendations

To fulfill this vision, our task force reached agreement on the six recommendations, drawing from a longer list of policies reviewed by the three working groups. The appendix includes 10 additional recommendations considered by the task force but recognized as needing further study, greater stakeholder input, and/or not requiring legislative action to implement.

Finally, we wish to underscore three distinct but equally vital points:

The first is that a deep-seated commitment to educational equity — to purposefully removing structural barriers to success — drives each of our recommendations.

The second is that more funding will almost certainly be a necessary but not sufficient condition for the visionary transformation we seek. As in so many areas of public life, it is crucial to focus on how public institutions and employers spend their resources to create better education and workforce pathways, not simply how much they spend.

Last, it's important to view this framework and these recommendations as an interconnected set of initiatives. They will be most effective if no single initiative is viewed as a silver bullet but when all are implemented, together with appropriate funding and accountability mechanisms. That's why we need to prioritize a shared vision for the state in which different groups can each play their role, from college leaders and businesses to state policymakers and faculty members.

Indeed, our hope is that every stakeholder who sees our analysis and recommendations will understand that they have a personal role to play in advancing this work. Our agenda cannot and should not be viewed as something for legislators or the Commission on Higher Education to implement in isolation. The efforts of many key participants, from Fortune 500 employers to university deans and faculty members to community organizations, will be crucial to our success.

Summary of

FINAL TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Innovation and Scaling Partnership Grants:**

Multiple stakeholders, including regional leaders, lawmakers, and the governor, should leverage American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, additional anticipated federal funds, and matching local, private, and philanthropic dollars to create a competitive statewide and regional grant program to spark innovation and scale proven and promising, sustainable, approaches to postsecondary, workforce and community partnerships.
- 2 Enhance Transparency of Postsecondary and Workforce Data:**

Policymakers should invest in a Statewide Student Success Data Interface, with the initial focus providing higher education leaders and policy makers with easy access to actionable metrics of student success.
- 3 Develop New Statewide Success Measures:**

CCHE should develop policy that requires the development of new success measures, in collaboration with IHE's and other key stakeholders, which directly align with the primary reason more than 90% of students pursue postsecondary education — to earn access to enhanced professional opportunities.
- 4 Develop Stackable Credential/Work-Based Learning Pathways:**

Lawmakers should work with education and business leaders to develop legislation that creates credential pathways in high-need, high-value fields at large scale.
- 5 Eliminate Equity Gaps:**

Lawmakers should require postsecondary institutions to submit a multi-year plan, with a detailed budget, to eliminate racial, regional and socio-economic equity gaps in credential attainment and other measures of student success.
- 6 Create a Strategic Talent Finance Plan:**

CCHE should task state leaders from institutions of higher education and industry to identify options for additional, sustainable funding for postsecondary education, with the goal of making Colorado's postsecondary learning ecosystem the best in the nation by 2030.

Note: Numbered recommendations are not an indication of initiative prioritization.

Conclusion

Reaching the vision our state needs, and implementing our ambitious recommendations, requires concerted collaboration. We need a range of new and improved approaches that build on the state's existing streams of innovations and create a sustainable framework of robust and cohesive policies that will enable these innovations to scale. Codifying these approaches into statewide policy and practice will dramatically accelerate Colorado's ability to drive toward the results we need to move the state forward.

Significant changes are needed to maximize opportunities for Coloradans and bridge the disconnect that too often exists between education and workforce, particularly for the state's most disadvantaged learners and earners.

Our goal in describing our vision for the future — and how to get there — is not to prescribe instant change in every single area. Instead, we aim to present a bold and clear framework for focusing on student outcomes and workforce success.

Policymakers, college leaders, employers, and citizens will need to identify initial priorities — and then take decisive action. Coloradans deserve nothing less.

Recommendation #1

Innovation and Scaling Partnership Grants

Leverage American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, additional anticipated federal funds, and matching local, private, and philanthropic dollars to create a competitive statewide and regional grant program to spark innovation and scale proven and promising, sustainable, approaches to postsecondary, workforce, and community partnerships. The program should prioritize regional, aligned partnerships that foster deep collaboration across Colorado's secondary, postsecondary, workforce and industry ecosystems to meet immediate and near-term needs and effect longer-term, transformative change. This includes efforts to help address high skilled/high need, in-demand and industry/sector staffing shortages, learners/earners who have suffered negative economic impacts from the pandemic, and equity gaps among traditionally disproportionately impacted communities.

Seeding Innovation While Scaling Proven Practice: A third of funding should be reserved for incubating (and evaluating) innovative approaches (in other words, "seeding" innovation). The remaining

funds should help scale outcome-based, proven, and highly promising practices.

Funding Regional Collaboratives and Advancing Universal Statewide Priorities:

The majority of dollars (roughly 80%) should be deployed regionally, with a share reserved for statewide initiatives that better align in-demand career pathways and help close equity gaps. While ensuring a high threshold of excellence, the regional allocations should be dispersed with an eye toward regional and geographic equity.

The grant process should allow for feasibility and planning grants to incent deep regional stakeholder collaboration to identify locally adapted solutions, based on regional demand and metrics, that increase likelihood of broad stakeholder partnership and investment. The grant should also incorporate technical assistance and feasibility funding to eligible applicants that lack the resources or capacity to participate in competitive grant application processes. Finally, the process should be professionally-managed, streamlined and user-friendly.

The program should prioritize regional, aligned partnerships that foster deep collaboration across Colorado's secondary, postsecondary, workforce and industry ecosystems to meet immediate and near-term needs and effect longer-term, transformative change.

Grants should prioritize the following outcomes:

- **Collaboration:** Approaches that provide incentives designed to enhance education, workforce, industry and community collaboration to build demand, high-quality, high-need, high-ROI and equity-oriented pathways.
- **Evidence based:** A request for proposals (RFP) should include meaningful definitions for “evidence-based approaches” such as those defined in SB 21-284, evidence tiers in Colorado’s combined state workforce plan under WIOA, or best practices in wraparound support models.
- **Aligned Pathways:** Initiatives that focus on credit transfer and application of work experience and earned credentials to postsecondary degree and certificate programs (e.g., through prior learning assessment, competency based education models, stackable credentials), which can smooth transitions, decrease credit loss, increase affordability, and support life-long learners to successfully transition between postsecondary pathways and the workforce.
- Pilots that use an **Upskilling/Reskilling Revolving Fund model**, refilled by employers hiring from the pool of those utilizing the fund through retention-driven payments.
- **Fund Distribution:** Grant funds should be distributed intentionally and equitably using criteria that consider not only the strength of proposals and the potential impact of promoted initiatives, but also rural vs. urban parts of the state, areas of demonstrated economic need, reach across subregions and congressional districts, and jurisdictions with and without public and private postsecondary institutions.

Promising Practices:

- [RISE Education Fund](#)
- [Sturm Collaboration Campus](#)
- [Cherry Creek Innovation Campus](#)
- [SyncUp Colorado Challenge](#)
- [New Profit](#)

Implementation Note

Committee members recommend that we learn important lessons from previous national and Colorado-based grant processes and consider the following factors in the design/implementation of this recommendation:

- Dedicate significant amount of time to the design phase before releasing RFP
 - Assess existing landscape in Colorado and recent RISE/SYNC Up Awards to better understand overall state need
 - Need to be as specific as possible in stating the “design question” to get high quality applicants and to be able to compare/assess submissions
- Build as outcome-based funding where government seeds initial investment, employers could access tax incentives to come to the table, and programs that meet outcomes get funded and are paired with policy changes create/amplify bigger theory of change
- Consider sequencing grants through multiple rounds or phase execution
 - Provide technical assistance to projects that have less capacity or fewer resources to strengthen round 1 submittals before submitting round 2
- Ensure assessment rubric minimizes subjectivity
 - State the criteria very specifically (e.g. partnership across stakeholders, equity etc.)
 - An RFP should include meaningful definitions for “evidence-based,” such as those defined in Senate Bill 21-284, or the evidence tiers in Colorado’s combined state workforce plan under WIOA.
- Having decision makers reflect a broad representation of those who would be impacted
- Include industry panel advisors to provide insight and weigh in on practicality of the projects
- For initiatives designed to effect longer-term, transformative change, evidence of likely sustainability beyond the term of the grant period should be considered.
- Finally, invite key state and national philanthropic partners to participate as grant partners in designing grant process, application, and technical assistance mechanisms to better leverage their and the state’s overall impact.



SHOWCASE EXAMPLE

The Power of Partnership

Southwest Colorado District Collaborative

The Southwest Colorado District Collaborative is a promising model of how postsecondary institutions can engage in resource-sharing and work with K-12 educators to create innovations that help students succeed in preparation for higher education. A partnership between Fort Lewis College, Pueblo Community College, and five southwest Colorado school districts, the Collaborative helps build strong postsecondary pathways for students in the building trades and environmental sciences by using site-based learning, peer mentorship, and project-based curriculum. For example, in the environmental pathway, students participate in a summer institute that demonstrates hands-on research methods in the San Juan Forest. Then they have the opportunity to take dual enrollment

courses at Fort Lewis College, earning college credit while they are still in high school. The Collaborative is focused on building partnerships with industry leaders across the region to strengthen students' work-based skills development.

The Collaborative was created in 2020 as one of the first awardees of Governor Polis' Response, Innovation, and Student Equity (RISE) Fund. The \$32.7 million fund uses federal CARES Act dollars to support high-needs school districts and public institutions of higher education as they address the economic, social, and health impacts of COVID-19. With its \$3.6 million RISE grant, the collaborative pools resources among participants to improve student learning and close equity gaps.

FINAL TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #2

Enhance Transparency of Postsecondary and Workforce Data

No meaningful change in education and workforce outcomes is possible without improved and publicly accessible data. Policymakers should invest in a Statewide Student Success Data Interface, with the initial focus providing higher education leaders and policy makers with easy access to actionable metrics of student success. The data system should better equip faculty, staff, and leadership at postsecondary institutions to improve practice, better support learner/earner success, and allow Colorado to identify, communicate, and showcase promising practices.

Over the long term, the same data should be easily accessible by the general public. The system should provide robust economic opportunity data (specifically linked to postsecondary pathway options) to empower learners/earners as they navigate all education and training credentials and options to make informed decisions regarding their

economic opportunity and tradeoffs. Ultimately it can provide a longitudinal framework to connect across K-12, postsecondary, and workforce data.

One-time federal funds should be used to create a user-friendly data system that includes tools such as dashboards and visualizations that viewers can use to explore data in depth. The focus should be on actionable metrics that provide the information needed to erase equity gaps and improve credentials and career attainment.

The data interface should ultimately and seamlessly compliment work already underway to deploy a longitudinal data system within state government that spans across the education to workforce ecosystem, building off of existing offerings like the Colorado Data Trust, the Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC), and efforts undertaken by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE).

Implementation Note

In terms of data visualization and metrics calculation platforms, the committee believes the state should leverage state funds and negotiate a statewide procurement process rather than each individual institution of higher education negotiating its own contract. This is a more cost effective approach. To reach the ultimate goal of a longitudinal framework to connect across K-12, postsecondary, and workforce data, the state should build on existing related initiatives as well as provide funding and staffing to ensure success. Institutions will be key partners with CDHE and other state agencies in determining and implementing new data flows to realize this goal. Additionally, different institutions have varying capabilities related to new data collection. Existing data flows, best practices, and collaborative initiatives should be leveraged as much as possible to reduce duplicative effort and/or burden on data staff.

Promising Practices:

- California Community Colleges [student success](#) metrics
- California State University System [Student Success Dashboard](#)
- Kentucky Center for Statistics ([KY STATS](#))
- Minnesota Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System ([SLEDS](#))
- National Student Clearinghouse's (NSC's) Postsecondary Data Partnership ([PDP](#))
- University of Texas System [dashboard](#)



SHOWCASE EXAMPLE

Creating Pathways to Healthcare Careers at Scale

SyncUp Colorado

Getting young people ready for the jobs of tomorrow requires coordination rather than different players staying siloed. That's the reform approach taken by SyncUp Colorado, which created a \$5 million prize pool for organizations to propose the best ways to foster more coordination between educators, businesses, and intermediary organizations that can serve as bridge builders. The goal is to create viable, affordable, alternative pathways to high-quality, in-demand careers. For these pathways to be viable, they need to do three things: be transparent about the outcomes and cost, help young people obtain job relevant skills, and ensure employers value, recognize, and hire from these pathways.

One of the winners, the Colorado Health Careers Academy Collaborative, is led by Arapahoe Community College and

the Community College of Denver and is designed to create innovative, responsive and inclusive educational opportunities for Colorado youth which provide pathways and employment opportunities to well-paying jobs while also addressing healthcare workforce gaps. It brings together rural and urban school districts, health employers, workforce partners and other stakeholders to serve 1,200 rural and urban students to accelerate careers in the 10 fastest growing health occupations in the state through career exploration, job shadowing and work based learning opportunities. This collaborative will establish a talent pipeline to Colorado's largest health systems and create a non-traditional approach and a catalytic solution for critical healthcare workforce shortages, especially in entry-level positions.

FINAL TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #3

Develop New Statewide Success Measures

CCHE should develop policy that requires development of new success measures, in collaboration with IHEs and other key stakeholders, that directly align with the primary reason over 90% of students pursue postsecondary education — to earn access to enhanced professional opportunities. These new success measures, drawing on the data system called for in Recommendation #2, must extend beyond credential attainment to examine the impact postsecondary pathways have on a student's career attainment and must shine light on progress toward addressing equity gaps in job placement and career attainment. A variety of specific success measures such as post-secondary value, placement rates, financial ROI, price-to-earnings premium, and postsecondary employment outcomes should be considered.

New success measures must extend beyond credential attainment to examine the impact postsecondary pathways have on a student's career attainment.

Implementation Note

While many connection points currently exist between education and workforce data, additional data and feedback will be needed from state agencies across the talent ecosystem, as well as business and industry partners, to accomplish this goal. CCHE and CDHE remain committed to collaborating with all stakeholders to ensure that any new metric(s) related to workforce success align with broader talent development initiatives as well as institutional considerations.

Promising Resources:

- [CDHE's annual ROI report](#)
- [New America: Deciding to Go to College](#)
- [Postsecondary Value Commission](#)
- [Postsecondary Employment Outcomes](#)
- [Price-to-Earnings Premium](#)

SHOWCASE EXAMPLE

Studying on One Campus for a Degree from Another

Colorado Western University Partnership

Fitting university offerings around students' busy lives has huge potential for expanding the match between supply, demand, and location. A case in point is Western Colorado University's partnership with the University of Colorado Boulder's College of Engineering and Applied Science. Under this collaboration, students are able to complete their first two years of study as Western students. Then they complete their education as CU Boulder students — but remain on the Western campus in Gunnison, taking classes from CU Boulder professors in residence. Graduates receive a bachelor of science degree and diploma from CU either in mechanical engineering or computer science. They can enjoy the benefits this program has to offer while simplifying their lives by staying in one location. At the same time, the partnership boosts economic development on the Western slope, building productive relationships between the two universities and the region's businesses and nonprofits.

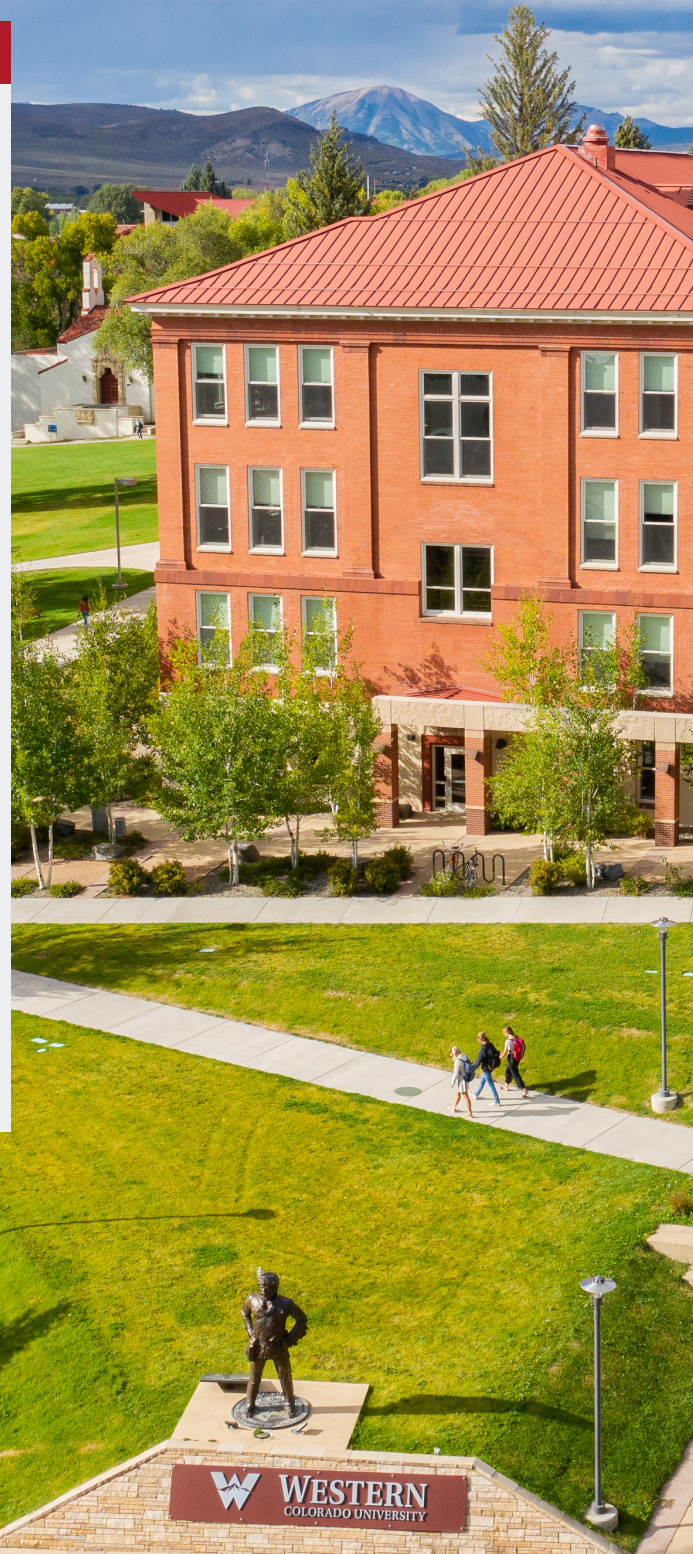


Photo credit: Western Colorado University

FINAL TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #4

Develop Stackable Credential/Work-Based Learning Pathways

Lawmakers should work with education and industry leaders to develop legislation that requires the development of stackable credential pathways in high-need, high-demand, high-value fields at large scale, such as nursing and healthcare, aerospace, technology, programming, and teaching. Industry needs and consumer demand would be identified annually through the Talent Pipeline Report — an annual summary and projection of employment trends produced collaboratively by the Department of Higher Education and the Colorado Workforce Development Council. These new, improved pathways would help guide Coloradans from high school into the workforce or further education. And they would provide vital flexibility with the opportunity to move between education and work in response to a changing economy as well as evolving personal and family needs. The legislation would create incentives for the creation and publication of clear information about the outcomes, opportunities, and return on investment of each pathway. To the extent possible, stackable credential pathways should use open, linked, and

interoperable language/ outcomes so that there is applicability across state lines.

For each high-need, high-value field identified through the Talent Pipeline Report, state agencies would be required to work with industry representatives on assessments that allow students to demonstrate their mastery of skills that are valued by employers hiring in the field. Postsecondary faculty will work with other stakeholders to design educational pathways that enable students to gain those skills and pass the corresponding assessments. Pathways should be regularly reviewed and aligned with needs of the state, and sunsetted when no longer relevant.

Short-term credentials may be combined into degrees, but they should be constructed to provide value to learners and employers on their own. In addition, policymakers and education leaders should avoid creating disparate pathways for low income and underserved learners but rather should enhance all pathways to benefit all learners and close economic opportunity and equity gaps.

Implementation Note

The committee believes that aligned work from K12 through higher ed and the workforce is essential. Additionally, incentive funding should be provided to education providers (like the Colorado Community College System, and four-year institutional partners where applicable) to map a comprehensive system. Funding should be tied to direct employer engagement to identify needs and co-create pathways. A third-party convener could help coordinate efforts, provide technical assistance, and drive accountability.

Promising Practices:

- [CSU Global Campus](#)
- [Ohio Department of Higher Education](#)



SHOWCASE EXAMPLE

A Lesson in Stackable Credentials

Mi Casa Resource Center

Mi Casa's stackable credential program provides an on-ramp for underserved and Latinx populations to start both their career and higher education journey through pathway work. This pathway is designed to support the financial services industry and provide participants with jobs that sustain their families and give them access to higher education. Mi Casa partners with Community College of Aurora, MSU Denver and more than 30 financial institutions in the Denver Metro area. These partnerships are crucial in the design, implementation, and evolution of this pathway. In sustaining strong partnerships, Mi Casa is the catalyst to merge industry needs with workforce training and align that training to higher education credentials.

Students can earn certificates in banking or supervision, an associates degree

in business, or a bachelor of science in banking through existing pathways — and can work along the way. In this model, credentials are truly stackable. A certificate can stack into an associate's degree, and later into a bachelor's degree, through dozens of potential pathways in and among the institutional partners — or students may choose to enter the workforce at any point in pathway options. However, Mi Casa is conscious of student preferences and student services coaches support students through their higher education journey. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) opportunities exist within each pathway allowing students to gain credentials in less time and save more money than a traditional higher education path.

FINAL TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #5

Eliminate Equity Gaps

Require postsecondary institutions to submit multi-year plans, with a detailed budget, to eliminate racial, regional and socio-economic equity gaps in credential attainment and other measures of student success. Rigorously evaluate existing and proposed initiatives to assess their impact on closing equity gaps and then resource those efforts with one-time funds (amplified via the Innovation and Scaling Partnership Grant proposed in Recommendation #1), with intensive wrap-around supports that reflect proven practices that substantially increase degree and credential attainment for learners (in particular learners of color, learners in poverty, and first-generation students) This should include aligned professional development for all members of the faculty, staff, and

administration, and commensurate investments in staff.

The CCHE, institutional chief financial officers (CFO) and other stakeholders should continue to enhance the existing funding formula with the goal of incentivizing/improving completion rates and reducing equity gaps in credential completion, time to degree, and number of attempted credits for historically underrepresented students (i.e., students of color, first-generation, low-income, etc.). Coupled with revenues from increased retention, new student enrollments, and possible further federal investments to advance student success, these resources should be structured to make investments in equity and student support both self-sustaining and scalable.

Implementation Note

The committee recognizes that addressing equity is both a recommendation in this specific case, but is also the end state that we are addressing through all other recommendations. In this recommendation, the onus is on institutions to clearly identify how institutions are moving forward with a holistic and actionable talent equity agenda for the student and campus level.

To best identify and define equity gaps, the CCHE should exercise its authority to ensure coordination among all institutions of higher education. Definitions and efforts should build on the work of CDHE's Office of Educational Equity and Equity Champions Coalition and complement related work done by other state agencies. This work should be used in conversations with institutional CFOs and other stakeholders to further enhance the funding formula and ensure alignment in all work and directives undertaken by CCHE around the topic of equity. Additionally, this should be included in the CCHE/CDHE updated strategic plan/dashboard.

Promising Practices:

- CDHE's [Office of Educational Equity](#), Equity Champions Coalition, and [Equity Toolkit](#)
- CWDC's [Talent Equity Agenda](#)
- [Center for Law and Social Policy](#)

Recommendation #6

Create a Strategic Talent Finance Plan

Task state leaders from institutions of higher education, business and industry to identify options for additional, sustainable funding for postsecondary education, with the goal of making Colorado's postsecondary learning ecosystem the best in the nation by 2030. This work would explicitly address systemic funding inequities by identifying additional resources through innovative approaches and partnerships between postsecondary education and business. Specifically, the Commission should utilize the statutory mandated five-year review process of the higher education funding formula

to address base inequities and work with stakeholders to explore alternative funding mechanisms, which may include consideration of an Upskilling/Reskilling fund (see recommendation #1). The state would develop a strategic talent finance plan to ensure the system can address the economic needs of the state and those highlighted in the Colorado Commission on Higher Education's strategic plan. This work would be most successful with a statewide, collaborative information-campaign and strategy.

Sustainable funding for postsecondary education, with the goal of making Colorado's postsecondary learning ecosystem the best in the nation by 2030.

Implementation Note

The committee recognizes that many, if not all, of the initiatives recommended through this process will require sustained financial support to ensure long-term success. The committee also recognizes that the state already places a heavy burden on students and their families for the financing of their education, and thus, any financial strategy should avoid increasing tuition and fees. The process of creating a strategic finance plan should be inclusive of leaders in higher education and the business community as well as policy makers and students. It will be critical to secure support from all stakeholders as they will be central to the success of any statewide campaign. The economic vitality of our higher education institutions not only positively impacts the students we serve but it also better positions Colorado to compete successfully in an increasingly competitive global economy. The Commission and those designated to strategize on a finance plan should take this opportunity of enthusiasm around the task force vision and the availability of one-time funds to foster momentum and build public positivity for sustainable postsecondary funding.

Promising Practices:

- [American Progress](#)
- [CARA Collective](#)
- [QUESTA Foundation](#)
- [Urban Wire/ JP Morgan Chase](#)

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Appendix

Task Force Role & Mission and Service Region Discussion

On December 10, 2021 the Aligned Systems and Policies for Success working group—together with the broader 1330 formal task force—met to discuss the requirement, from HB21-1330, to examine current institutional role and mission and service area policies, along with relevant statutory requirements and policies of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE). In addition to working group and task force members, the meeting was expanded to include institutional leadership to ensure broader perspectives. This meeting was scheduled toward the end of the 1330 process to focus the task force energy first on big picture transformational change, and then on role/mission and service areas through the critical lens of the emergent task force recommendations.

During the meeting, participants explored the history, tensions, and efficacy of service areas and institutional role and mission, which are summarized in detail below.

Background Discussion on the History of Service Areas

CCHE Service Area Policy was created in 1985 to provide guardrails for institutions of higher education offering two-year degree and/or career and technical education (CTE) programs regarding the availability of educational programming and focused marketing and communication strategies in a given geographic region, and ensuring that local municipalities are able to respond to the needs of their residents. Over time, the service area policy has become primarily a tool for ensuring that concurrent enrollment programs are closely connected to public school districts located within the area of the local community college, or a public university that offers two-year programs. While CCHE is responsible for maintaining the service area policy, the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) maintains rules from its state board that provide additional guidance for community colleges that are within the system, including processes for waiving service area policies when there is a program that is desired, but not offered, by the local institution.

It is important to note that service area policies were constructed when the emphasis of higher education was on 'brick and mortar' delivery of programming — with very limited availability for distance education — and certainly no options for the online expansion that has occurred over the past 35 years. Since that time, the state's population has doubled and online learning is available from institutions both within and beyond Colorado. This reflects new challenges to meeting Coloradans' changing needs with quality programs offered at reasonable expense.

During the meeting the following broad themes and tensions were identified:

- There should be recognition that some institutions and systems are much better equipped than others (due to size, funding structure, infrastructure, etc.) for any potential competition.
- The marketplace has changed dramatically over the past 30 years, and the current service area policy has not kept up with those changes.
- Communities, and community needs, have dramatically expanded far beyond the physical boundaries drawn around institutions of higher education.
- Concurrent enrollment programs are a key stakeholder in this conversation, and that program has evolved as well. There is a need to more closely examine the relationship between CCCS and the state in this conversation.
- Online programs have dramatically impacted the fundamental role/function of service areas.

Next Steps: It is recommended that the Colorado Commission on Higher Education will include the service area policy update in its 2022 agenda, with a commitment to convene stakeholders to further address the current service area policy and make recommendations for change by July 1, 2022.

Background on Role & Mission

The role and mission of each institution of higher education is codified in statute. Its original intent was to ensure that both the state's needs were being met and to maximize efficient utilization of resources and avoid duplication in facilities and programs. Statutory institutional roles and missions are inclusive of type of activity (research, teaching, other unique programming), level of activity (graduate, undergraduate, certificate, etc.), scope of activities (number of programs, research dollars), and scale or reach of activity (local, regional, statewide, national). Similar to service areas, institutional roles and missions have dramatically shifted over time, with traditional two-year and four-year degree options being offered at nearly all institutions, regardless of type or classification, and a recognition of regional needs competing with the availability of institutional programs to meet those needs.

The following tensions and themes were identified regarding role and mission:

- Accreditation organizations and governing boards are key stakeholders in ensuring that the quality of institutional programs is maintained.
- The state's ability to adequately fund institutions of higher education, the institution's internal capacity to build and maintain programs, and the evolving marketplace will continue to dictate which programs are offered and in what region.
- The state should consider who the "winners and losers" are, or potentially could be, if flexibility in role and mission is expanded.
- Out of state and global institutions are very quickly becoming a major stakeholder in program competition. If Colorado-based institutions are not able to build programs that are needed in the state, out of state institutions (and students) will.

Next Steps:

The efficacy of role and mission distinctions among institutions of higher education is likely to require a much longer term process, including a broader examination of state needs, institutional structure, and program availability. Additionally, participants recognized that the implementation of the 1330 recommendations and vision was more immediately pressing than continuing conversations around role and mission at this time.

Conclusion:

At its core, however, participants agreed that any further examination of either role and mission or services areas should ensure that the following principles are considered:

- A student focused approach to service and institutional program delivery
- A critical lens to workforce and regional demands
- A data informed approach to examining statewide needs
- Consideration of the intended and unintended consequences of adjustments to the constructs of both service areas and role and mission
- A reframing of the state's expectations vs. institutional ability to be nimble and innovative in a competitive marketplace
- An anticipation of continued disruption in the higher education ecosystem with a critical lens toward choice, opportunity, speed and return on investment.
- Urgency in ensuring that both policies and associated statutory requirements are relevant to today's economic context and state needs.

Tier 2 and Tier 3 Recommendations

The recommendations in Tier 2 and Tier 3 are included in this report and had varying degrees of support by committee and subcommittee members throughout the process. While they were not included in the primary set of recommendations, we believe that there is value in continuing to engage stakeholders in an ongoing examination, analysis, and consideration for the future.

Note: Numbered recommendations are not an indication of initiative prioritization.

TIER 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Align State Organizational Structures

Eliminate state silos, increase efficiency/effectiveness, and significantly enhance coordinated strategic focus on developing economic opportunity. Create a newly organized Talent Office of Department of Postsecondary Learning and Workforce Success that includes CDHE, and workforce-related pathway components of CDE and Colorado Department of Labor & Employment (CDLE) that focus on the P-20 spectrum. This would be a newly combined/consolidated agency that is net-neutral in terms of overall departments within state government.

Promising Practices:

- [Virginia's Report on Higher Education and Workforce Alignment](#)
- [Missouri Governor's Executive Order on Aligning Higher Education and Workforce Development Functions](#)
- [Does the United States Need a Department of Talent?](#) (by Jamie Merisotis, CEO of Lumina Foundation and author, "America Needs Talent")

Create Credential Clearinghouse

Legislation and funding to create a Colorado clearinghouse to evaluate and endorse credential programs that can become eligible for state and federal funding and can be built into education/workforce pathways. Regularly evaluate credentials for efficacy, cost effectiveness, return on investment, and potential duplication. This could be built into existing offerings like Colorado's Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and national best practices highlighted by Credential Engine. Funds should be made available to support faculty course review and administrative support at institutions of higher education so that transfer review can be completed in compliance with accreditation and institutional policy.

Promising Practices:

- [Colorado's ETPL](#)
- [Credential Engine Registry](#)
- [Credential Engine's policy brief](#)
- [National Skills Coalition's work](#) around quality non-degree credentials
- [Education Quality Outcome Standards \(EQOS\)](#)

Create Postsecondary Intermediary

The task force supports the creation of an independent Colorado-based statewide intermediary funded by philanthropic/corporate funds that fosters (at scale) education to workforce collaboration to facilitate academic/career alignment and ensure clear applicability/transferability to high-value/quality credential completion and family living-wage employment. To be clear, this effort would not exist within an existing state agency/department requiring state general fund or state staffing. Intermediary organizations can forge connections between disparate systems and organizations to advance a comprehensive systems-change vision and action, serving as neutral conveners and facilitators. The intermediary would help drive statewide prior learning assessment strategy utilizing competency mapping, deep business and industry collaboration, and aligned K-12 and postsecondary pathway development, utilizing shared data to evaluate progress, continuous improvement, systemic advocacy, and marketing/communications strategies to drive collaborative action.

Promising Practices:

- [Alabama Possible \(Higher Ed Focus\)](#)
- [Colorado Education Initiative \(K12 focus\)](#)
- [Colorado Intermediary Study \(AMC Consulting\)](#)
- [Denver Education Attainment Network](#)
- [Education Forward Arizona \(K16 focus\)](#)
- [MyFUTURENC \(Higher Ed-Workforce Focus\)](#)

Blur the Boundaries Between High School, Postsecondary and Workforce

Create a flexible legislative structure, a package of policy waivers, and/or other incentives to expand innovative high school, postsecondary and workforce options and pathways (CTE, Concurrent/Dual Enrollment, AP/IB, work-based learning, credential completion, apprenticeships, co-ops and related experiences, etc.) with a focus on high need, in-demand, high value, business and industry focused pathways and to better understand what programs are demonstrating success in terms of access and outcomes. Consider consolidating disparate funding streams for programs such as PTECH, Concurrent Enrollment, ASCENT, etc. Include a framework for statewide counselor/navigator corps to provide robust student supports that are necessary for expansion. Expand the Career Development Incentive Fund (currently administered by CDE), which provides school districts with financial incentives for industry credentials and high quality work-based learning experiences completed by students in grades 10-14. Ensure that K12 outcomes include options for workforce aligned postsecondary pathways in each district's menu of options.

Promising Practices:

- [Colorado Career & Technical Education](#)
- [Colorado Graduation Guidelines](#)
- [Texas Early College High School Blueprint](#)

Grow Competency-Based Education

Craft legislation and policy initiatives that remove barriers to enable consistent, validated competency-based education models to support skills-based demonstration of learning as opposed to seat time through assessment and validation of learning through formal coursework, work experience, apprenticeship, co-ops, internship, externships, self study, etc. Competency based approaches should be aligned to both academic/credit-bearing activities and vocational/workforce/employment outcomes and applied skills. This recommendation must allow for statewide transfer within the general education core (GT Pathways) and/or applicability to statewide transfer agreements. CBE frameworks should also align with K12 graduation competencies. Additionally, K12 should consider expansion of the Innovative Learning Opportunities Pilot from SB 19-216, which allows competency-based approaches to learning in K12 that align with a higher ed model.

Although this recommendation did not rise to the Tier 1 recommendations, Alignment Committee members recognize that in order to achieve broad adoption of stackable/seamless pathways and better alignment between secondary and postsecondary ecosystems where work-based learning is valued, we need to build upon Colorado's competency-based framework for graduation requirements, which have not been fully implemented.

Promising Practices:

- [Competency-Based Education Network](#)
- [Proficiency-Based Models in Massachusetts Schools](#)
- [University of Wisconsin Flexible Option](#)
- [Western Governors University](#)

TIER 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Fund Implementation Oversight and Reporting For Task Force Recommendations

Fund Colorado Department of Higher Education staff to evaluate and report on the implementation of recommendations from the task force to key stakeholders, state agencies and the broader public. This oversight would ensure implementation of each proposal has the right metrics for success, sustainability and ability to scale.

Promising Practices:

- [Illinois- \\$10 million to implement college bridge programs \(ARPA\)](#)
- [Colorado- \\$1.5 million for implementation of Student Aid Applications Completion Grant Program \(ARPA\)](#)
- [Wisconsin- \\$100 million for broadband expansion grant program](#)
- [National Council of State Legislators state ARPA allocation tracker](#)

Empower Individual Ownership of Learner/Earner Educational and Skills-Based Records

Develop an ecosystem to empower learners/earners to have agency and ownership of their data on their education and employment journeys. The data in this ecosystem are owned by the learner and validated by various stakeholders across education, training, workforce, and industry to demonstrate proof of learning and skills development over the course of an individual's education and career. This could be built on top of existing offerings like myColorado, My Colorado Journey, and blockchain-related efforts supported by the Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) and the Office of Information Technology (OIT). This effort should integrate the K12 Individual Career & Academic Planning (ICAP) framework.

Promising Practices:

- Insights from CDHE's work on [blockchain applicability in education settings](#)
- Insights from the [Governor's Blockchain Council](#)
- Build off efforts at OIT (via [myColorado](#) as a digital wallet) and/or CWDC (via [My Colorado Journey](#) and the Colorado Data Trust)
- [GreenLight](#) and [their work in Texas](#) to instantly and securely share academic credentials and records with educational institutions, employers, and others
- [Maryville University \(Pistis\)](#) and [ODEM platform](#) to establish Blockchain learning credentials
- [Unlocking Education and Workforce Opportunity through Blockchain](#)

Reimagine Higher Education Governance & Funding Formula

Legislation that creates an evaluation process that studies the complexity of postsecondary governance and explores how to create efficiencies and economies of scale in service and program delivery. This study should examine approaches such as consolidation of institutions and/or governing boards, efficiency in delivery of academic resources, as well as other options that strengthen Colorado's overall postsecondary ecosystem. This strategy could consider providing some institutions with significant one-time funds to proactively unify campuses/systems in ways that streamline services to Colorado communities. Additionally, legislation should require the study of the existing funding formula through a lens that focuses more intently on successful students outcomes, and equity metrics.

Promising Practices:

- [An Overview of State Higher Education Funding Approaches](#)
- [Tennessee's Outcomes-Based Funding Formula](#)
- [Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education Redesign](#)
- [Shared Services: Finding the Right Fit for Higher Ed](#)

Licensure Exam Alignment and Support

Legislation that requires IHEs to identify those programs, or areas of concentration within programs (such as accounting, finance, health professions, or education), that lead directly to licensure, and to publicize the elements of the program that are connected directly to the knowledge and competencies assessed in licensure exams, including curricular and co-curricular support strategies designed to promote student success on exams. Work with the Department of Regulatory Affairs (DORA) and CDE, and other relevant entities to streamline and modernize licensure, clinical and education requirements, including cross-state licensure. Degree programs that are aligned to licensure exams will articulate to students how the program prepares them for licensure, including alignment of courses to licensure and curricular and co-curricular support strategies designed to promote student success.

Promising Practices:

- National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC SARA)- [professional licensure directory](#)
- WCET State Authorization Network- [Professional Licensure Resources](#)
- [TEACH Colorado](#)
- [State Efforts to Promote Occupational Licensing Mobility](#)

Create Wrap Around Services Portal

Adequately support a statewide portal that helps students solve their food, transportation, housing and financial insecurity challenges. The portal will require one-time and recurring expenditures to create a web portal and hire staff (professional and outreach) that can assist students in addressing the social determinants of student success in tandem with their education to workforce pathways. Require evaluation of return on investment and student success outcomes of wrap-around services portal. This could be built on top of existing offerings like [Colorado's 2-1-1 System](#), [My Colorado Journey](#), connections between education, workforce, and human services.

Promising Practices:

- Colorado's 2-1-1 System
- Tools provided through [My Colorado Journey](#)
- [Single Stop](#), and unique Single Stop work at [MSU Denver](#), [CU Denver](#), [Community College of Aurora](#), and other campuses.

HB21-1330: Higher Education Student Success

Authorizes federal American Rescue Plan dollars for students, postsecondary institutions, and others with a focus on re-engaging students to earn the degrees they started — to improve their earning power. [View the law.](#)

Thank you to the HB21-1330 bill sponsors senators Barbara Kirkmeyer and Rachel Zenzinger and representatives Julie McCluskie and Naquetta Ricks.

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