

# Prioritizing Educator Supports for High-Quality Student Pathways

A Primer for State Policymakers





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High-quality career pathways play a valuable role in ensuring students are ready for “what comes next” after high school. When thoughtfully designed and implemented, pathways include general education and career and technical education coursework, college acceleration opportunities, industry-valued credentials, and work-based learning experiences, including paid internships. They provide a purpose for learning as well as the *aspirations, skills, and connections* needed to be college, career, and future ready.

However, too few students have access or receive exposure to these high-quality pathway experiences. Consider that just three states place 70% or more of their students in postsecondary education, military enlistment, or employment after high school graduation.<sup>1</sup> These numbers are even lower when it comes to students from historically under-invested in communities.

Educators play a critical role in preparing all students for success after high school. But they need high quality, career-connected resources, tools, and training to be most effective. Consider just a few challenges educators face in supporting high-quality career pathways for learners.

- Educators may not have opportunities to learn about changes to in-demand occupations or gain first-hand experience with the most up-to-date industry operations or technologies. Typical school or district professional learning programs rarely delve deeply into these topics.
- Partnerships with employers are critical to ensuring students can explore and experience career opportunities. Yet these partnerships are very difficult for educators to establish on their own, and coordinating work-based learning for students poses a host of logistical hurdles.<sup>2</sup>
- Finally, educators are often students’ primary resource for building the skills and connections needed for success in the workplace. However, developing a reliable range of high-quality learning opportunities for students in different occupational areas requires a multi-pronged approach developed by a team of stakeholders.<sup>3</sup>

Policymakers can help alleviate this burden by ensuring teachers have the resources and supports they need. What follows are three priorities policymakers can address to help educators prepare students for long-term success in college and career.

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<sup>1</sup> Coalition for Career Development Center, *Condition of Career Readiness in the United States*. (2022) <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://irp.cdn-website.com/81ac0dbc/files/uploaded/CCDC-Report-nopics-V2.pdf&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1676489159045308&usq=A0vVaw2EjGzVjY0IN5hQarXhA6kR>

<sup>2</sup> NAF: Career Readiness Skills Interest Survey. (2022)

<sup>3</sup> NAF: Career Readiness Skills Interest Survey. (2022)

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS

### Priority 1: Provide hands-on educator training through externships with employer partners

Externships are paid professional development opportunities for educators. These experiences allow educators to gain relevant, on-the-job training and embed what they've learned from these experiences directly into their instruction with students.

1. Fund paid teacher externships and establish a dedicated infrastructure to support these experiences
2. Develop guidance for educator externships and ensure the experiences count for continuing education credit
3. Provide incentives to employers who participate in or provide educator externships

### Priority 2: Increase employer engagement with K-12 schools through dedicated work-based learning coordinators

Work-based learning coordinators create connections with employers and ensure that students have access to work-based learning experiences. They organize core activities and handle important logistical issues related to student placement and transportation.

1. Dedicate funding for at least one work-based learning coordinator position in every high school
2. Create a network of state, local, and regional work-based learning coordinators to address common issues and achieve economies of scale
3. Collect data on work-based learning participation and outcomes to refine supports for schools and educators

### Priority 3: Provide high-quality work-based learning at scale

Work-based learning is designed to help students connect what they learn in the classroom with what is expected in the workplace. Ensuring that every student can succeed in the workplace requires access to a steady progression of skill-building experiences.

1. Develop a state framework of high-quality work-based learning that includes the full continuum of awareness, exploration, and preparation activities
2. Require all schools to offer work-based learning experiences to students
3. Provide access to innovative technology that can deliver these experiences to all students\*

*\*[KnoPro.org](https://kno.pro) [powered by NAF] is a 100% free web-based platform designed to make work-based learning more accessible by enabling any high school student, with support from their teachers and industry mentors, to develop the in-demand career skills, aspirations, and connections they need to #BeFutureReady in STEM and other growing industries. KnoPro.org supports educators in delivering high-quality work-based learning by offering activities and projects developed by industry professionals.*

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