



POSITION PAPER

How to Make Career Readiness for All The First Priority of American Education

Coalition for Career Development Center
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¹ The CCD Center is an industry- and gubernatorial-led, non-partisan, 501(c)(3) think tank located at Suite 600, 901 N. Washington St., Alexandria VA 22314. Contributions are fully tax-deductible. While all CCD Center members support the vision and goals of the Coalition, they do not necessarily endorse every solution in this *Position Paper*.

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Vision and Goals

The vision of the Coalition for Career Development Center (CCD Center) is to make career readiness the **first priority of American education**. Our goal is to provide **ALL** students with high quality career development services and technology to help ensure personally satisfying and productive **employment in their chosen career pathway**. A solid career development program for each student will meet the needs of employers to build a highly skilled workforce, elevate the dignity of all work, and help young people achieve the American Dream.

This CCD Center *Position Paper* retains and updates the basic framework of practical, cost-effective solutions to implement this vision contained in the more detailed CCD White Paper, [Career Readiness for All](#), released with Congressional endorsements in April 2019. We underline “ALL,” because we advocate a much greater effort to promote equity, which is essential if we are to develop a workforce that reflects America’s rapidly changing demographics.

The CCD Center is dedicated to building a sustainable national consensus around our vision and goals, through a strong focus on career advisement, authoritative research, engagement of national and state experts, and effective communications to all relevant stakeholders. These include national student and counseling organizations, industry associations, career guidance counselors, parents and relevant federal and state agencies.²

The Challenge

The greatest obligation of our education and workforce development system is to prepare young people for successful lives. This includes developing the human, technical, and career management skills needed to secure satisfying careers, which leads to economic independence and makes their communities more economically competitive. To cite our Center’s first CEO, Jan Bray, “After all, **99%** of students need to find employment upon graduation.”

The CCD Center aims to identify and support federal and state policies and practices that ensure all students have access to those quality and career development services that enable them to establish career and life goals, and to develop the skills and acquire the credentials needed to enter and advance in high paying occupations immediately upon completion of their studies in their chosen career pathways.

Students also need to understand the value and relevance of two- and four-year postsecondary training and education programs to further support their future goals as well as their economic and personal well-being. By striving to make career readiness the number one priority in American education, the CCD

² The CCD Center is also preparing a signature state-by-state *Condition of Career Readiness Report*, for release in May 2022, in collaboration with the State Leaders Readiness Network. As stated in ExelinED’s *Pathways Matter to Families*, “State policies are fundamental to ensuring that all students have access to high-quality education in career pathways that meet their individual needs.”

Center is committed to engaging youth to become career ready. Taking into account the disruptions that COVID is creating for American education,³ we need to reinforce our obligation to millions of young people to successfully enter in-demand occupations that provide high wages and to equip them with sufficient skills to respond to accelerating technological change. The failure to do so creates a huge burden on the nation's youth, their families, companies, and the broader economy.

To meet this challenge and in the interest of equity, the education system, and its partners we must give priority to assisting students from lower-income families. About 50% of the income premium associated with university vs. high school degrees is due to the differences in family socio-economic backgrounds.⁴

Consider the career development realities listed below.

Access to career counseling services is limited

- Only 13% of the American workforce has worked with a school or private counselor, although a majority (58%) regret not having worked with one.⁵
- There is a shortage of professional career counselors and advisors. The national student-to-counselor ratio is 424:1 which is well above the 250:1 ratio recommended by the American School Counseling Association.⁶
- Many students do not have anyone in their life who has gone to college and thus do not follow that path until it is too late for students to make the curriculum adjustments in high school that will help them qualify for college entrance.⁷

Students want career skills classes and counseling

- Sixty-one percent of college graduates want classes designed to help build career skills.
- Fifty-eight percent of college graduates want more time focused on career preparation.
- Yet four in ten college graduates, including more than one-third of college seniors, have never visited their school career services office, or used online career resources.⁸

While college graduation remains the current priority of American education, benefits to large populations are limited:

- While over half of high school graduates enter two- or four-year colleges, only 35% receive a degree.⁹

³ For example, total undergraduate enrollment dropped 3.1 percent from the fall of 2020 to the fall of 2021, bringing the total decline since the fall of 2019 to 3.7 percent, or 1,205,600 students. National Student Clearinghouse, January 2022.

⁴ <https://research.stlouisfed.org/publications/pa/ge1-econ/2017/01/03education-income-and-wealth>.

⁵ 2021 Harris Poll commissioned by the National Career Development Association.

⁶ Ratio data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics for 2019-2020. Since 1965, the American School Counselors Association has recommended a ratio of 250:1.

⁷ Julie Bettie, *Women Without Class*, University of California Press 2014, pp. 79-80

⁸ Harris Poll, op. cit.

⁹ U.S. Census, March 2020

- Eighty percent of college students enter college believing it will prepare them for work, but less than a third leave college feeling ready to find a job.¹⁰
- Only 29% of college graduates report that they had an internship or job that allowed them to use what they learned in the classroom.¹¹

Growing number of years spent in college

- Sixty percent of undergraduates are now taking six years instead of four to finish a bachelor's degree and 30% of students at a community college are taking three years instead of two to earn an associate degree.¹²
- By contrast, fifty-four percent of non-degree employer credentialing programs take one year or less to complete and have high job placement rates.
- About 34% of college graduates are in jobs that do not require degrees.¹³

Student debt is crippling

- Student loan debt has soared to \$1.5 trillion, almost triple the level in 2007.¹⁴
- Students with loans carry a crippling average balance of \$37,000.¹⁵
- The average U.S. household with student debt owes \$57,520.¹⁶
- Fifty-six percent of college students with loans drop out within six years, reducing the monetary value of a college degree.¹⁷

In recent years, this crisis has received growing attention and many initiatives have been launched to address it. While encouraging, these efforts are often fragmented and delivered through a confusing mix of programs.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS FRAMEWORK

The CCD Center has identified a set of strategies to address the career readiness challenge, guided by a set of overarching principles:

- Make a greater effort to provide opportunity for *ALL* Americans to be career ready by promoting equity in all the career readiness solutions proposed by the Center.
- Allow more time in the school day for career development activities.

¹⁰ College Student Survey, Strada/Gallup, 2018

¹¹ GallupNews.com.November 2017

¹² US. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates, May 2018

¹³ <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/02/18/41-recent-grads-work-jobs-not-requiring>

¹⁴ Federal Reserve Board, Consumer Credit Report, January 18, 2019

¹⁵ Zach Friedman, Forbes.com, Student Loan Debt Statistics, June 13, 2018

¹⁶ Nerd Wallet 2020

¹⁷ *EducationData.org. November 2021*

- Devote greater financial resources for career advisement.
- Engage the broader community in career development.
- Integrate social and emotional learning into career readiness preparation

Based on these principles, our framework is built around five strong pillars, each of which is a critical component in creating high-quality systems of career development.

- 1 Prioritizing Career Planning:** Efforts to increase career readiness throughout K-12 are critical to improving postsecondary career readiness. Students should start career awareness activities in elementary school, begin to consider specific career goals in middle school and, early in high school, develop and maintain a Personalized Career and Academic Plan (PCAP) that aligns career and life goals to academic, postsecondary, and career pathways.

Fortunately, these plans, aka Individual Learning Plans, are now growing in use in most states. Out of 50 states + DC: 34 states have a required/mandated PCAP process, 11 have some PCAP recommendations for adoption, and six do not yet have a PCAP process.¹⁸ Educators and Career advisors can increasingly use PCAPs to help students identify their interests and create their own career pathway using resources inside and outside of schools. PCAPs will motivate opportunity populations to succeed, since they will see a promising future more clearly in career pathways that they select themselves.

- 2 Providing Professional Career Advising:** To ensure that career development becomes a central priority, schools, and post-secondary institutions need to appoint trained professionals to oversee this work and monitor student progress.¹⁹ The nation needs to have high-quality career advisors and licensed counselors in every high school and college. These advisors must have specific career-development knowledge and competencies.²⁰ Their work will be especially important for students in lower income areas who need the most assistance in identifying and succeeding in their chosen career pathways.

To help meet this need, the Coalition has worked with National Career Development Association to create a new staff position, School Career Development advisors (SCDAs), who would be expected to involve the whole school, families, employers, and the broader community in this effort. SCDAs and other qualified counselors would play a direct role in working with students and in a coordinating role. They would help to integrate career development activities throughout the school experience, collaborating with employers to increase opportunities for work-based learning, and staying current with the changing nature of work.

- 3 Emphasizing Applied and Work-based Learning:** Applied and work-based learning should be an integral part of education in high school and college. Business, government, and educators must collaborate to scale up a continuum of options, such as job shadows, mentorships, employer-

¹⁸ Boston University, Wheelock College of Education and Human Development, January 2022 data

¹⁹ An essential requirement, according to “Investing in Student Success at Community Colleges,” Federal Policy Brief by Teachers College, Columbia University, April 2021

²⁰ An encouraging trend toward expanding the pool of career counselors is that the student: counselor ratio has improved markedly from 464:1 in 2014 to 250:1 today,

funded internships, apprenticeships, etc. States, school systems, and career counselors and advisors should set bold goals for increasing these opportunities, especially in under-served urban and rural areas. Students should be encouraged to get a first work-based learning opportunity before age 18 because it is important for employers to see a job on a resume.²¹

Educational institutions should also encourage students to earn high-quality industry-recognized certifications, which are growing in popularity in the U.S. To help ensure their greatest value for students and employers, the CCD Center published and disseminated nationwide an *industry-led* report on March 28, 2021, called [Quality Assurance Guidelines for National Industry Certification Bodies](#). It included a sample list of high-quality national industry certifications for each of the twenty industries in the North American Industrial Classification Codes used by the federal government.

- 4 Providing High-Quality Career Development Technology:** High-quality career development technologies should play a key role in helping all students develop their Personalized Career and Academic Plans. All students, teachers and career development advisors should be provided access to a defined baseline of technology that will ensure they can make effective use of these tools.

Fortunately, there is a growing number of career search applications from which students can choose to help define their interests and abilities, as well as their educational and career pathways, and secure wage information. The CCD Technology Committee is in the process of identifying examples of high-quality technologies that can be used for effective career planning.

- 5 Ensuring Accountability:** While most states have adopted measures of accountability that recognize the importance of career readiness, they now need to concentrate on rigorous implementation and regular data evaluation to ensure all students have access to quality career pathway programs and student supports to ensure success. States should base funding of secondary and post-secondary institutions on outcome measures, like job placement and graduation rates, rather than input measures such as enrollment.

This is a complex process. One important factor would be for states to increase the number and sophistication of career readiness indicators. States should require that high school students complete Personalized Career and Academic Plans before graduation, and assess whether students are pursuing those plans after graduation. These metrics could also be linked to ambitious attainment goals set by most states--and be more widely publicized.

BENEFITS

The CCD Center Solutions Framework is a roadmap to transform the culture of opportunity in American education, moving from a system that has been too content to fully serve the needs

²¹ National Retail Federation Foundation. January 2022.

for a fraction of students to one dedicated to fulfilling the promise of equal opportunity for all. Helping students prepare for employment in their chosen career pathway will enhance their pride and dignity in their work.

Benefits to Students and Educators

Successful implementation of these solutions would help all students. They could look forward to job satisfaction from their chosen career pathway, where they are more likely to find the people, values, and sense of accomplishment.²² Most young people imagine futures in which they are thriving and fulfill their personal version of a “good life.”²³ Consider some of the ways in which they would benefit:

Reduced college debt: One way students can take steps to control the cost of postsecondary education is to ensure their training and degree pathway is clearly aligned to future goals. This reduces time to graduation either because they find that a technical training or two-year program is more viable or because they are able to graduate with an undergraduate degree in four years or less. Access to quality career development helps them select the most cost and time efficient learning pathways that align to personal life and career goals.

Increased incentives to remain in school and not drop out: Helping youth in middle and early high school establish aspirations and future life goals results in higher motivation to succeed in school and complete more rigorous courses. As a result, students graduate from high school with the academic and career navigation skills needed to pursue their career and life goals

Increased engagement:

Research conducted independently by OECD and WestEd found that when youth have access to quality personalized career and academic plan lessons and activities, they find school more relevant and meaningful and are more engaged in seeking postsecondary training and education opportunities.

Earlier entrance into financial independence and economic productivity: Because many students would complete their studies much sooner, with far less debt, they could look forward to leaving their parents’ home, earning income, starting a family, and gaining financial independence and security at an earlier age.

Benefits to the Economy

Our economy will benefit by making career readiness the first priority of American education. The return on investment could total hundreds of billions of dollars. These benefits would include:

²² For data on job satisfaction, see Arthur C. Brooks, “How to Build a Better Life,” Arthur C. Brooks, *The Atlantic*, Sept. 2, 2021

²³ *Striving to Thriving*, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, October 2020

Increased economic growth: Sluggish growth in labor productivity has been a leading drag on the nation's economic growth. The focus on work-based learning advocated by the CCD Center would produce gains in the knowledge and technical skills of the workforce, in labor force motivation, reduced turnover, in labor force participation and in the number of students seeking in-demand degrees and certifications. These reforms would all help increase labor productivity and, with it, non-inflationary economic growth.

Increased consumer spending and public revenue: As noted above, if students complete their bachelors and associate degrees in fewer years, even starting in high school, they will join the economy sooner and carry less student debt-- which is now the second largest source of private debt, less than mortgage payments, but more than car loans and credit card debt. This would increase their ability to buy a home, a car, and other consumer items earlier. Receiving higher, in-demand, life-sustaining salaries earlier would also enable them to contribute to public revenue sooner.

Reduction in the skills gap: Over 90% of CEOs consider skills shortages a severe problem.²⁴ By connecting schools more closely with the rapidly changing needs of the economy, a larger number of students will be equipped with the skills needed by employers, thus sharply reducing the current skills gap, while improving employee productivity and performance. Companies are seeking higher-skilled workers, who can be flexible, learn new skills and technologies, and generalize their skills to work across different job categories.²⁵

Enhanced U.S. global competitiveness and investment: Creating a more efficient, effective, and equitable education and workforce development system would enhance America's competitive position in the world economy. It would also increase foreign direct investment in the U.S. The availability of a skilled workforce is now the most important site selection criteria used by those deciding to open a new business facility in the U.S.²⁶

²⁴ Business Roundtable, Change the Equation Survey, Dec. 2014

²⁵ *Designing and Delivering Career Pathways at Community Colleges*, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, March 2021

²⁶ *Site Selector Magazine Survey, 2019.*