

Policy Principles Supporting the 13th Year Concept

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The economic value of a postsecondary credential has [never been greater](#). State leaders are clearly aware of this — in the past decade, statewide leadership groups in [41 states](#) have formally adopted meaningful postsecondary attainment goals. Further, students' college aspirations continue to be high: According to a [recent survey](#), 75% of high school students expect to go to college. Yet even as [high school graduation rates](#) have grown to nearly 90% nationwide, [postsecondary attainment rates](#) have lagged behind: In 2021, only 46% of American adults over 25 had completed a postsecondary credential at the associate level or beyond. In an environment where students want degrees, degrees have value, and state leaders aspire for a high-skilled workforce, why have states struggled to raise college attainment?

The unfortunate truth of the matter is that students — particularly those from low-income backgrounds, racial and ethnic groups historically underrepresented in postsecondary education, and/or first in their family to attend college — encounter [multiple barriers](#) on the path to an initial postsecondary credential. Many of these barriers are embedded in the complex process that students navigate to transition effectively from high school to postsecondary, often with little available guidance. While in high school, students must know how to take college readiness exams, investigate potential colleges, apply to

What is the 13th Year Concept?

The [13th year concept](#) is a model that allows students to continue public schooling for an extra year beyond 12th grade at no additional cost, and graduate with both a high school diploma and an industry-relevant, transfer-ready associate degree. The model is equity-driven, targeted to populations least likely to attend college, and supported by state funding, ensuring affordability. Collaboratively designed with state workforce leaders, programs support both increased individual employability as well as growth of the state's high-skilled labor force.

and enroll in college and apply for financial aid. To complete a college credential, students must know how to successfully identify a degree path, maintain progress, manage their financial aid packages, and identify and complete all degree requirements, all in an environment where mistakes can be [very costly](#).

A cohesively designed transition experience has the potential to reduce or eliminate these barriers. The 13th year concept is a state-level, scalable and equity-focused model where secondary and postsecondary experiences are intentionally combined to allow all students the opportunity to graduate high school with a postsecondary credential. While the model as described is not presently employed at scale in any state, certain existing state programs — such as [dual enrollment](#), early college high schools (early colleges), and Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) — reflect aspects of the model. This Policy Guide outlines four policy principles supporting the development of a permissive state policy landscape for the model, then uses case studies to highlight three states — **Colorado**, **Texas**, and **Washington** — where these principles are reflected in practice.

Policy Principles

A coherent, supportive state policy landscape is critical to sustainably develop the 13th year concept at scale. This guide identifies policy principles requisite to widescale implementation by analyzing state policies supportive of existing programs that ease high school to college transitions — specifically, dual enrollment, early colleges and P-TECH. There are four guiding principles of successful programs: equitable student access, high-quality programs, robust student supports and cross-sector program design.



Principle 1: Equitable Student Access

Strong postsecondary transition programs are equitably available to all students; further, statewide communication efforts ensure that students and parents are aware of the program, its benefits and eligibility requirements. All qualified students are eligible to participate and able to afford the cost of participation. Policies that support equitable access address program availability, eligibility, affordability and outreach. Such policies can include automatic student eligibility, development of statewide portals, communication training for school personnel, school-college partnership supports and/or dedicated funding streams with adequate appropriations.

State policy specific to equitable access often focuses on expanding the reach of existing programs to engage previously underserved student groups. **Montana's** [Guidelines for Dual Enrollment](#) specifically highlight equity of access through outreach and tuition assistance as a priority area for the state; in 2018, the Montana University System launched the 1-2-FREE program, which allows high school students to take up to six college credits for free. Other states have passed legislation to codify access pathways. In **California**, [A.B. 288](#) established the College and Career Access Pathways Partnerships program in 2015, supporting the development of formal school-college partnerships aiming to specifically expand dual enrollment for students not already college-bound. To ensure that no eligible student misses out on participation, **Washington** in 2019 passed [H.B. 1599](#), requiring school districts to develop automatic acceleration policies for all students meeting or exceeding competency requirements in math, English language arts or science.



Principle 2: High-Quality Programs

High-quality postsecondary transition programs include rigorous courses whose content has been reviewed by secondary, postsecondary and industry partners. One key indicator of program quality is the value of the credential obtained; accordingly, strong programs are aligned to state and regional workforce needs. Built with the understanding that postsecondary attainment is a continuous path, high-quality transition programs do not lead to terminal credentials. Instead, the credits students earn are guaranteed to transfer to all public postsecondary institutions in the state. Policies that support program quality may set quality standards for instructor preparation, establish procedures for course sequencing, codify credit transfer agreements statewide and/or establish structures for workforce alignment.

Existing state policies designed to ensure program quality often include requirements for instructor quality, credit transfer and workforce alignment. In terms of [instructor qualifications](#), 22 states require that dual enrollment instructors meet the same standards as postsecondary faculty; the Higher Learning Commission further [requires the 19 states](#) it accredits to ensure that dual enrollment instructors have both a master's degree and 18 relevant graduate credit hours. At least 30 states have [statewide credit transfer policies](#) guaranteeing transfer of core courses and associate degrees; some notable examples include **Kansas'** Systemwide Transfer (SWT), **Missouri's** Higher Education Core Transfer Curriculum (CORE 42), and **Ohio's** Articulation and Transfer Network (OATN). Finally, several states have established strong [workforce alignment policies](#) or partnerships linked to their postsecondary transition programs. These include **Colorado's** CareerWise system, **Kentucky's** Dual Enrollment Credit Policy for CTE and **Louisiana's** Extension Academy.



Principle 3: Robust Student Supports

Effective, equitable postsecondary transition programs include robust [academic](#) and [nonacademic](#) student supports. Academic supports — such as mentoring, guidance, tutoring and guided pathways — help students successfully navigate program content. Nonacademic (often known as wraparound) supports — such as financial aid, counseling, health and wellness, and transportation services — enable students to focus on their academic work. Students of color, students from low-income households and first-generation students have the [greatest potential to benefit](#) from well-supported pathways. State policies can include setting requirements for provision of student supports, expanding student eligibility, directing or increasing financial resources to programs, and enhancing local infrastructure.

Several states center their student support policies around requirements for academic and/or navigational guidance. **Florida**'s community colleges are required to [advise dual enrollment students](#) in choosing courses and developing a plan to complete a postsecondary credential, and are supported by a statewide [computer-assisted student advising system](#). In **Indiana**, high school counselors are required to have a [pre-enrollment meeting](#) with dual enrollment students to verify that they understand their available choices and associated requirements. To be eligible for state funding, **Michigan**'s Career and Technical Education early colleges are required to offer [integrated student supports](#), including advising, career planning, course selection support and progress monitoring. **North Carolina** (see [here](#)) and **Tennessee** (see [here](#)) both require their early colleges to provide consistent counseling and advising to support course selection, monitor student progress and ensure graduates are adequately prepared for future learning in workforce or postsecondary programs.



Principle 4: Cross-Sector Program Design

Strong postsecondary transition programs are built through the collective effort of multiple sectors. High school to college transition programs have traditionally involved a variety of secondary and postsecondary partners; the 13th year concept additionally requires the engagement of industry partners. Creating collaborative agreements across three separate systems with vastly different funding and governance structures is no easy feat. Sustainable funding, shared governance and collaborative leadership structures are necessary for implementing such programs at scale. States that have successfully forged these collaborative relationships have built programs into state goals, vision statements and accountability structures, including incentives for partner participation and data use for continuous improvement.

State policies supporting collaborative program design have sought to codify shared governance structures and establish sustainable — and equitable — funding models, ensuring all partners are equally invested in the success of the partnership. **Georgia, Indiana, Iowa** and **Utah** have [used legislation](#) to bring together a diverse range of stakeholders around common statewide workforce goals. **Louisiana's** 2019 Dual Enrollment Framework Task Force legislation brought together representatives of all major state stakeholders to develop recommendations for universal access to dual enrollment. In **Illinois**, both secondary and postsecondary partners are [fully reimbursed](#) for dual enrollment students: High schools offering dual enrollment courses earn funds based on attendance, while community colleges are allowed to count dual enrollment students toward full-time equivalency (FTE).

State Examples

Many states have started to erase the boundaries between high school and college by successfully implementing programs such as dual enrollment, early colleges and P-TECH. A smaller set of states have implemented policies in each of the areas highlighted by the four policy principles — equitable student access, high-quality programs, robust student supports and cross-sector program design — creating a permissive policy landscape for the implementation of 13th year concept programs. What follows are examples from three such states, based on findings from policy research and interviews with state leaders.



COLORADO

Colorado offers high school students three types of college credit pathways: concurrent (dual) enrollment, early colleges and P-TECH. By [state law](#), concurrent enrollment courses are free for students. This includes a state-funded 13th year program called Accelerating Students through Concurrent ENrollment (ASCENT).

EQUITABLE STUDENT ACCESS

In 2019, Colorado leaders passed the [Expanding Concurrent Enrollment Opportunities Act](#). The act requires each school district to offer concurrent enrollment and provide information to students and parents about course availability, credit transfer and associated costs. It directs community colleges to coordinate efforts to maximize concurrent enrollment participation, and mandates that all programs in the state be tuition-free for students and families. The act also creates the Concurrent Enrollment Expansion and Innovation Grant Program, targeting funds to districts with low participation rates to assist students with nontuition expenses, such as books, fees, supplies and transportation.

HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS

Colorado maintains a cross-sector postsecondary and workforce readiness coordinator to align education programs with labor market needs. The position, co-located in the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Workforce Development Council, has supported [sector partnerships](#) that bring together business, education, workforce and economic development leaders in overseeing industry-led career pathways. The state's Guaranteed Transfer program links concurrent enrollment courses to a state transfer library, supporting career pathways through postsecondary. The state has also created a Career Development Incentive Program that provides districts a financial incentive for students who complete an industry credential, internship, residency, apprenticeship or advanced placement course.

ROBUST STUDENT SUPPORTS

Colorado was one of the first states to require high school students to design and manage postsecondary and career options through an Individual Career and Academic Plan. To support informed student engagement, the state created a public [concurrent enrollment website](#) with information on the various types of postsecondary credit programs available to high school students. Launched in July 2020, the website provides students and parents an opportunity to explore different programs and find answers to common questions. In addition, the state funds the School Counselor Corps Grant Program, which aims to increase the number of school-based counselors able to support postsecondary participation in high-need schools.

CROSS-SECTOR PROGRAM DESIGN

Established through a [state law](#) seeking to increase postsecondary attainment and supported by a cross-sector, state level advisory board, the ASCENT program allows students to remain enrolled in high school for an additional year beyond 12th grade as they pursue a postsecondary credential. While not statewide, the program has been a successful collaboration between local education providers, postsecondary institutions and the state. The high school receives program-specific, per-pupil state funding to pay the student's tuition at the resident community college rate. The program received a \$3.8 million appropriation for 2021-22, funding about 550 participants.



Texas has a strong focus on [college, career and military preparation](#) and offers high school students a variety of programs where they can earn college credit: early colleges, P-TECH, Texas Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Initiative and dual credit. The state also emphasizes industry-driven pathways in [career and technical education](#). These programs are notable for their scalability and affordability.

EQUITABLE STUDENT ACCESS

At Texas' early colleges, students receive a high school diploma and either an associate degree or 60 credit hours toward a baccalaureate degree at no cost to the student, including tuition, fees and required textbooks. Early colleges are designed to recruit and enroll students at risk of dropping out of school ([as defined in statute](#)), students with limited English proficiency and students experiencing homelessness. The program is made possible in part by an annual state appropriation of \$3 million. More than 182 early colleges were operating in Texas in the 2019-20 school year, serving more than 65,000 students.

HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS

Texas' Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative is a state-level partnership of the Texas Education Association, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Workforce Commission. The tri-agency aligns secondary and postsecondary pathways to state workforce needs. As part of this initiative, the state created the Texas Regional Pathways Network. Supported through a grant program, the network is made up of regional teams that include the local school district, higher education institutions, workforce boards, industry representatives and a regional convener that develop academic pathways, including work-based learning opportunities, for students. Employing the state's longitudinal data system, connecting data across sectors, the partnership has [used workforce data](#) in combination with education data to identify labor shortages and inform the ways education programs can better meet state needs.

ROBUST STUDENT SUPPORTS

Texas is proactive in its outreach to families. The state [requires](#) school districts to notify parents of ninth graders of available programs where their children may earn college credit, including dual credit. Texas also has supports for students after they are enrolled. For instance, every early college in the state is required to offer a [mentoring program](#) to all students. Texas also recognizes that supportive

partnerships can facilitate smooth and successful postsecondary transitions for students. Educate Texas, a public-private partnership created by the Communities Foundation of Texas, aligns stakeholders in K-12 and higher education systems and builds capacity to support student transitions in local districts through leadership training and technical assistance. For instance, Educate Texas has [partnered](#) with the state's early colleges to deliver leadership and instructional coaching to school staff to better support students engaged in those programs.

CROSS-SECTOR PROGRAM DESIGN

In addition to establishing the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative, which coordinates efforts across education sectors and employers, the state has also allocated funds to incentivize school participation in transition programs. In 2019, Texas created the College, Career, and Military Readiness outcome bonus. These incentive funds reward high schools for preparing graduates for college, a career or the military through participation in Texas' early college programs. High schools start to receive funds when a threshold percentage of students meets the college, career or military readiness goals, which include completion of an associate degree or earning an industry-based certification. The state awards additional funds when schools achieve these outcomes goals for students from low-income households.



Washington has four dual credit programs available to high school students: Running Start, College in the High School, CTE Dual Credit and advanced courses such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate. While the programs are not typically free for students, the state has implemented a variety of policies to both expand access and improve quality.

EQUITABLE STUDENT ACCESS

Taking action to realize the vision of equitable access articulated in its 2015 dual credit opportunities law, Washington is the first state in the country to adopt an automatic acceleration policy for all high school students. Every student who meets or exceeds the state standard on an English, math or science assessment is automatically enrolled in the next most rigorous level of advanced course or program. Washington's policy reduces barriers for students who qualify for accelerated courses but who may not have participated in the past, an issue that [disproportionately affects](#) Black and Latinx students nationwide.

HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS

Washington has a statewide [direct transfer agreement](#) for associate degrees in the arts and the sciences that is accepted at all of Washington's public four-year institutions and some of its private, not-for-profit four-year institutions. The transfer option is very popular in the state; [more than half](#) of Washington's bachelor's degree-earners complete an associate degree at a community college prior to transferring to a four-year institution. The direct transfer agreement includes degrees earned by high school students through the Running Start and College in the High School programs. To certify the quality of these associate degrees, Washington [passed a law](#) in 2019 requiring all postsecondary institutions that offer college courses in public high schools to be accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships by the 2027-28 academic year.

ROBUST STUDENT SUPPORTS

Each student in Washington must complete a High School and Beyond Plan in partnership with counselors and advisors and with the involvement of a parent or guardian. The plan helps students select courses and graduation pathway options based on their own career and education goals. As part of the process, counselors and advisors must inform students about academic acceleration, dual credit courses, career and technical education and financial support. By providing students with a supportive environment for exploring available options, the High School and Beyond Plan aims to allow students to develop informed and individualized academic and career pathways.

CROSS-SECTOR PROGRAM DESIGN

Washington's annual State Report Card includes both statewide and district-level participation and completion data for dual credit programs. The data can be disaggregated either by type of dual credit program or by the student's race and socioeconomic, disability, military and migrant status. State leaders use the data to monitor progress on policies intended to diversify dual credit programs, such as academic acceleration and the Dual Enrollment Scholarship Pilot Program. In 2020, Washington convened a cross-sector [Dual Credit Task Force](#) to develop data-informed strategies to increase equitable enrollment.

Final Thoughts

Nationally, postsecondary attainment rates have lagged behind what will be required to meet rising workforce needs. While barriers to postsecondary attainment exist throughout the student pipeline, many are currently embedded in the complex transition space between high school and college. The 13th Year Concept model eliminates many of these barriers by creating a seamless experience for students. The model extends public education by one year, redesigns high school curricula and provides a host of supports to ensure that students graduate from 13 years of public education with both a high school diploma and a postsecondary credential.

Through analysis of existing state programs, this guide outlines four policy principles core to the implementation of the 13th year at scale: equitable student access, high-quality programs, robust student supports and cross-sector program design. These principles — alongside examples in Colorado, Texas and Washington — illustrate the ability and capacity of state policy to develop strong transition programs and increase postsecondary attainment.

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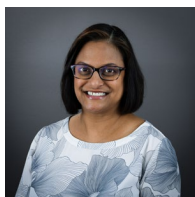
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