

Postsecondary Workforce Development Policies

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What Is the Issue, and Why Does It Matter?

Researchers suggest that the economy of the future will consist of [jobs that do not currently exist](#), there will likely be a shortage of individuals with [necessary education and credentials](#) to fill those jobs, and if the nation does not produce this workforce, there will likely be a [\\$1.72 trillion loss in productivity](#) by 2030. Considering these projections, policymakers continue to seek ways to create opportunities for individuals to access training and education that translate to jobs and careers, all while meeting the labor demands of an evolving economy.

In 2019, as in years past, states introduced and enacted legislation that forms [connections between education and workforce development](#). While these connections can take place at a local or institutional level, many states have enacted policy that expands beyond local activity to make statewide workforce development and education connections.

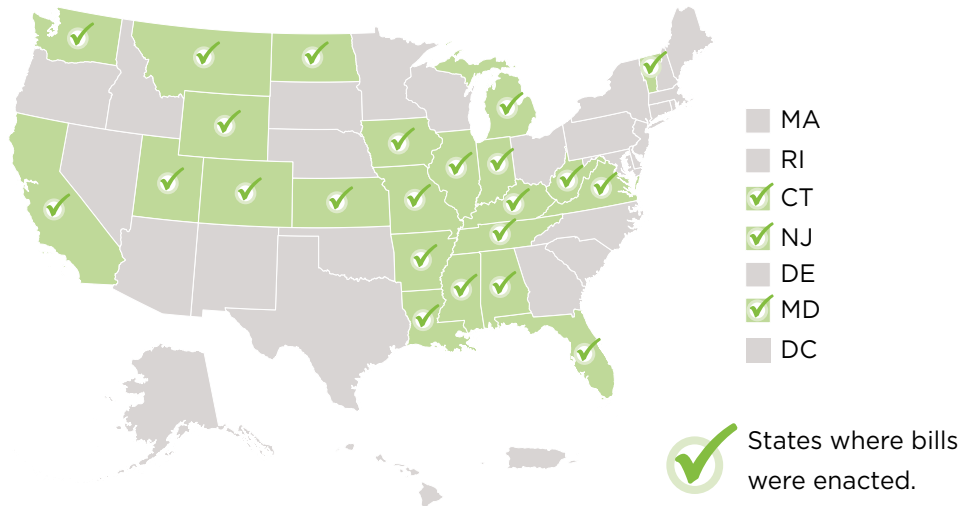
Several states have recently enacted legislation relating to postsecondary education and workforce development in the following areas:

- **Career pathways and skills:** Creating programs that connect people with opportunities to earn credentials and degrees needed to access jobs and careers.
- **Partnerships and working groups:** Fostering collaboration and connections across all workforce development stakeholders, including K-12 and postsecondary education, to create aligned planning and programming.
- **Financial incentives:** Providing financial support to institutions and other stakeholders to develop and grow programs or providing individuals funding and aid to pursue credentials and degrees.
- **Workforce data:** Connecting K-12, postsecondary and workforce data to inform postsecondary and workforce development programs, systems and policy.

How Many States Enacted Legislation in 2019?

Based on a review of 2019 legislative activity concerning postsecondary workforce development:

At least **258** bills were **INTRODUCED** in 49 states.




At least **49** bills were **ENACTED** in 26 states.


Enacted Legislation			
Alabama	S.B. 295	Michigan	S.B. 134
Arkansas	S.B. 522	Mississippi	S.B. 3015 , S.B. 3014
California	S.B. 586 , A.B. 1019	Missouri	H.B. 3
Colorado	H.B. 19-1294 , S.B. 19-097	Montana	H.B. 754 , S.B. 60 , H.B. 619
Connecticut	S.B. 1029 , S.B. 356 , S.B. 607	New Jersey	S. 1887 , A. 841
Florida	H.B. 7071	North Dakota	H.B. 1171
Illinois	S.B. 1919	Tennessee	H.B. 740 , H.B. 353
Indiana	H.B. 1002	Utah	S.B. 138 , H.B. 280 , S.B. 136
Iowa	S.F. 245	Vermont	H. 533
Kansas	S.B. 199 , S.B. 71	Virginia	H.B. 1700 , S.B. 1617 , S.B. 1495 , H.B. 2185 , H.B. 2726 , H.B. 1920 , H.B. 2020
Kentucky	H.B. 392 , H.B. 246 , S.B. 98 , H.B. 61	Washington	H.B. 2158
Louisiana	S.B. 203	West Virginia	S.B. 1 , H.B. 2004
Maryland	S.B. 260 , S.B. 515	Wyoming	S.F. 122


Career Pathways and Skills

States seek ways to create a skilled workforce by connecting people with opportunities to gain skills through education, training and [work-based learning](#). An increasing number of states enacted legislation related to pathways for individuals to earn credentials and degrees. Frequently, states identified targeted populations or fields of study for workforce programs. In some cases, states codified provisions allowing people to earn credit at postsecondary institutions for apprenticeships and work-based learning experiences. In 2019, at least 13 states enacted legislation related to career pathways and skills. These states enacted at least 21 bills.

Examples of Enacted Legislation

 [S.B. 607](#) requires the labor department and the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education create a plan to establish pathways to earn a bachelor's degree from a state university with credits earned through apprenticeships. The plan is required to include information on the subject areas with low completion rates and need among employers in the state, how to apply for apprenticeships in those fields, the minimum requirements an apprentice would need to meet in each subject area and apprenticeship completion requirements. The departments must present the plan to the general assembly by January 1, 2020.


 [S.B. 199](#) creates the Accelerating Opportunity: Kansas program. In the program, adults above the age of 21 can earn a high school equivalent credential and industry credential through career pathways approved by the state board of regents.


 [A. 841](#) directs the New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development to consult with each county college to develop certificate programs. The programs should connect regional employers to county colleges to meet regional labor needs. The certificate programs and curricula must be developed by employers in consultation with county college faculty. Additionally, the county colleges will provide faculty and facilities for the programs. Employers participating in the certificate program commit to interviewing all program graduates for open positions at their businesses.


Partnerships and Working Groups

All states convene education and workforce stakeholders through state and local workforce development boards. However, some states add broader K-12, postsecondary education, and health and human services representation. In addition to changes in board composition, some states require working partnerships and collaborations between postsecondary education, businesses and workforce systems to support programs, pathways, work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities. In some cases, before codifying partnerships, states enact legislation to create working groups studying the best ways to make these connections. In 2019, at least 14 states enacted legislation related to postsecondary workforce development partnerships and working groups. These states enacted at least 18 bills.

Examples of Enacted Legislation

 [S.B. 522](#) adds representatives from career and technical education, health and human services, correctional agencies, economic development agencies and chambers of commerce as non-voting members to the Arkansas Career Education and Workforce Development Board. The legislation amends the powers and duties of the board by requiring the board to collaborate with the department of higher education, higher education coordinating board and department of education to bring together business, education, state agency and workforce development stakeholders to develop a strategic plan for future workforce demands by July 2020. The plan must assist agencies in understanding the changing economy, promote alignment between workforce education and higher education, identify costs with implementing the proposed plan, identify revenue streams that could support the plan and identify areas of high unemployment.

 [H.B. 19-1294](#) requires the Colorado Community College System to convene a working group to determine the best way to transfer credits from registered apprenticeship programs in the construction industry to college credits. If possible, the working group must include representatives of community colleges, area technical schools, local district colleges, relevant four-year institutions, and applicable union and non-union labor organizations. The group must gather information from experts and consider a range of topics from how best to align apprenticeship curriculum with existing community college courses to the feasibility of all community colleges to offer registered apprenticeship programs.

 [H. 533](#), among many postsecondary workforce development provisions, requires the department of labor to work with qualified training providers, the Vermont Department of Children and Families and health care providers to increase the availability of training programs that lead to credentials in health care, construction, manufacturing and child care. Additionally, the department of labor, department of education, Vermont State Colleges and Vermont Adult Technical Education Association are required to examine and report on the design, implementation and cost of an integrated postsecondary career and technical education system.

Financial Incentives

To foster program development and collaboration, as well as support student access to workforce education and training, states provide funding and incentives for institutions and students. Frequently, financial supports to institutions come through direct appropriation or grant programs that either support institutional program development or infrastructure. In some instances, financial support for program creation is tied to requirements for collaboration among stakeholders.

An increasing number of states provide financial support to people seeking a range of education and training. Often this support comes in the form of financial aid, grants or loan repayment to individuals in specific programs or high-demand fields of study. In 2019, at least 18 states enacted legislation providing financial incentives for postsecondary education workforce development. These states enacted at least 24 bills.

Examples of Enacted Legislation



[S.B. 1919](#) requires the state board to establish and administer the 21st Century Employment grant program. Community colleges and public high schools that establish collaborative partnerships with workforce development organizations can apply for the grant. The applicants must submit a plan that outlines the collaboration, how the program will develop specific professional skills, a description of who will enroll in the program, the certificates offered and a budget. The state board is required to create an advisory council for the grant program.



[S.B. 3015](#) appropriates \$6.75 million to support workforce development centers and advance training centers to defray startup costs for programs and for the replacement of obsolete equipment at community and junior colleges. In addition, the legislation appropriates \$3 million to the state community college board to enroll adults with lower skill levels in career pathways that combine high school equivalency, skills training and workforce credentials.



[H.B. 1171](#) creates and appropriates funds for the skilled workforce loan repayment program and skilled workforce scholarships. Each year the state will appropriate \$3 million to each program. On a biennial basis, the state board of higher education must report to the legislature on the programs. Individuals eligible for loan repayment must complete an educational program in a high-demand field. The recipients must reside in the state and work in the high-demand field. The workforce scholarship requires eligible individuals to pursue a degree or credential through a qualified program that is in a high-demand field identified by the department of higher education and workforce development council. The degree and certificate programs must be completed in four semesters.

Workforce Data

State policymakers and leaders [reported](#) that having access to education and workforce data is important for making informed policy decisions related to workforce development. However, there are only [16 states](#) that have full systems that capture data across early learning through the workforce. In 2019, at least nine states introduced bills related to education and workforce development data. Among those states, three enacted legislation.

Example of Enacted Legislation



[H.B. 619](#) adds a requirement for the superintendent of public instruction to match student level K-12 data with higher education and workforce data. The superintendent of education can release student-level information to the commission of higher education and the department of labor to ensure the K-12 education system meets the expectation of Montana's universities and workforce. The legislation establishes guidelines and a timeline for data sharing agreements.



About the Author

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As a policy analyst, Tom contributes to the work of the policy team on issues across the education spectrum. Prior to joining Education Commission of the States, Tom taught middle school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Tom is dedicated to providing state policymakers with quality research that supports them in making a positive impact on students' lives. Contact Tom at tkeily@ecs.org or **303.299.3694**.

Related Resources

[50-State Comparison: Statewide Apprenticeships](#)

[Workforce Development Systems](#)

[50-State Comparison: State Policy Models for Connecting Education to Work](#)

[Approaches to State Workforce Development Systems](#)

