



GOV. JARED POLIS
Chairman of the National Governors Association
2024-2025

ROADMAP FOR GOVERNORS





Letter from NGA Chair Governor Polis

All Americans deserve access to an education that prepares them for success in life. As the world changes and technology evolves, ensuring all students graduate with the skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary for success is critical for both the well-being of our communities and U.S. economic competitiveness, especially as we confront rapid shifts in global competitiveness and the adoption of AI.

The “Let’s Get Ready! Educating All Americans for Success” initiative drives toward two complementary purposes: empowering individuals with the skills, knowledge, and competencies needed to thrive after graduation, and building our states’ and nation’s economic competitiveness. When a student completes their education, they

should be ready for whatever comes next—yet for too long, many of our definitions and indicators of “readiness” have narrowly focused on academic proficiency that only scratches the surface of what a student needs to be successful throughout their lives. In order for our communities to thrive, and for our nation to remain competitive, our public schools should prepare every student to leave our school systems with a solid academic foundation but also with a clear grasp of our civic system, an overall sense of health and well-being, and, critically, skills that will prepare them for success in the workforce. And our higher education systems must continue preparing students for success by aligning with labor market demands and offering a clear return on investment to students.

Building individual readiness of all citizens and growing the collective economic power of our states and nation is a tall task—and education is the best tool we have to achieve that goal. As Governors, we have a central role to play in leading our states toward better education systems: Education is often the single largest line item in our annual budgets, accounting for 25–30% of annual state costs. That means Governors are in the best position to provide a tangible return on investments in education, and to hold schools and systems accountable for improving the lives of every student who steps into a classroom. We must honestly assess the challenges we face as states and the challenges of our communities—stagnant academic achievement, disengagement from community and civic life, skills and workforce mismatches and shortages, a pandemic of loneliness and isolation—that lead to widening opportunity gaps and limited economic mobility. This is our call to action.

When we take a look in the mirror, it’s clear we have plenty of work to do. More than 4.6 million youth between the ages of 16 and 24 are [neither enrolled in school nor working a job](#)—and about half of these disconnected young people even have a high school diploma. At the same time, [employers](#) across the U.S. are increasingly struggling to fill open positions and retain qualified employees. We’re also [losing ground](#) in math and reading proficiency—and that’s happening not just for young learners, but for [adults](#) too. Those declines have real consequences for young people—fewer Americans than ever before are achieving a [higher standard of living](#) than their parents. Shockingly, only a quarter [of Generation Z](#) strongly believes that democracy is the best form of government. Even those stark indicators only give us a partial view of what’s really happening. It’s 2025, and we don’t yet have a clear way to view how our states’ education systems—from early childhood through postsecondary and workforce training—are really preparing students for their long-term futures while building resilience and competitiveness for the social and economic changes that are already underway.

In Colorado, I’m proud of my Administration’s efforts to tackle the challenges in our education system and build a better path forward. I believe the Centennial State can be a model for what’s possible and invite readers to learn more through the [case study](#) in this report.

The Let’s Get Ready! Initiative is a call for Governors to demand better. We have a responsibility to drive innovation within our systems, bolster our capacity to measure what works and what doesn’t, and most importantly, to prepare our students for workforce readiness, civic engagement, and well-being. Our citizens, our communities, our states, our nation, and our global partners deserve nothing less.



– Jared Polis





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Executive Summary



As Chairman of the National Governors Association for the 2024-2025 term, Colorado Governor Jared Polis focused on building a roadmap for how Governors can lead their states toward education systems that work better for all learners and for our economic competitiveness. **The “Let’s Get Ready! Educating All Americans for Success” initiative drives toward two complementary purposes: empowering individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive after graduation, and building our states’ and nation’s economic competitiveness.** The initiative sought to address three questions through its convenings, leaning on those diverse voices to help Governors understand:

1. What do learners need to know at every step of their educational journeys to achieve success in life and to ensure that our nation continues to be competitive?
2. How are we currently measuring outcomes to ensure that education practices as well as systems are effectively delivering for students and our economy?
3. How can we do more to shift limited resources and change policies and practices to do more of what works to achieve these outcomes, and hold ourselves accountable for achieving success?

Looking at how most states evaluate their K-12 education systems sends a clear message: that only math and reading proficiency matter. Literacy and numeracy are, without question, the most foundational skills for success as active members of society and

productive participants in our modern economy. But ask any American adult, or the experts at the Let’s Get Ready! convenings, and they will tell you math and reading are just the tip of the iceberg of what it takes to achieve success in the workplace, actively participate in our civic life, and have a sense of personal satisfaction and well-being. A clearer view of readiness is increasingly essential in a world shaped by rapid technological change and the expanding influence of AI.

In order to drive success in our education systems, states should measure and define readiness with the broader competencies that students need to achieve success: academic foundations, postsecondary and workforce preparedness, civic engagement, and lifelong well-being. However, in most states, the data do not exist to tell us these things, such as the degree to which students understand and are prepared to engage in our democracy or whether they are building life-long habits that will lead to physical and mental well-being. **We have a “Measurement Mismatch” between the skills, knowledge, and traits we want our high school graduates to have when they walk across the stage and the things we invest in and measure.** Our current data collection methods often fall short of providing insights that illustrate the degree to which high school graduates are prepared for life outside the classroom, and the extent to which higher education institutions help students pursue and achieve high-paying, in-demand credentials. In truth, most states have limited ability to collect and analyze meaningful measures that generate new evidence about how to better prepare students for success across all domains of readiness.

Governors can work to bridge the gap between the elements of readiness that we value most and the metrics our education systems currently measure, following the roadmap outlined below.

1. Define A Vision for Student Readiness and Assess How Your State is Measuring It

A Governor’s core responsibility is to define a vision for how students can progress through a learning pathway, from early childhood to career, to set ambitious but realistic goals to make that vision reality, and to track short-term and long-term outcomes aligned with those goals to ensure student readiness and economic competitiveness. Governors should:



- Define a vision for “readiness” at every level of the education system;
- Assess how their state is currently measuring that vision;
- Develop and publicize a strategic plan that sets ambitious but realistic goals to make that vision a reality; and,
- Identify the gaps in metrics and data needed for the state to build a full picture of student readiness.

2. Eliminate Government Silos that Impede Progress

Every state has numerous agencies and initiatives focused on supporting children’s well-being from birth onward. While these programs play important roles in addressing local needs, they often operate in isolation, with limited communication and coordination. Individual programs may do a great job measuring the outcomes for the children they serve, but too often, this work is done in disconnected and incoherent silos. Governors should:

- Bring together leaders responsible for delivering on their education vision by convening groups, restructuring or creating new agencies, and/or appointing a dedicated person, team, or office to lead cross-agency efforts;
- Align the state’s education budget and resources to deliver on the vision across multiple agencies and programs; and,
- Explore innovative models to connect funding to outcomes.

3. Build Systems and Infrastructure to Measure Outcomes

Governors can support their states to build systems and infrastructure that enable outcome tracking across agencies and educational stages. An early childhood through postsecondary and workforce Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) is essential, linking data from early learning through the workforce. Governors should:

- Designate an individual or team responsible for elevating education-to-employment data insights;

- Expand their statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) to connect student data from early childhood to postsecondary and workforce; and,
- Establish partnerships with neighboring states, national initiatives, and researchers to measure outcomes beyond state lines.

4. Maintain Focus on Outcomes with a Public Dashboard

Dashboards not only increase transparency and track progress, but also serve as a strategic action and change management tool for Governors. When thoughtfully designed, they help measure whether key investments, reforms, and initiatives are taking root, and signal where mid-course corrections may be needed. Best practices include focusing on a manageable set of metrics, incorporating both outcomes and leading indicators, disaggregating to understand patterns, and ensuring timely access to data. It is also important to make dashboards user-friendly and available in multiple languages to allow diverse stakeholders to access and utilize the data. Governors should:

- Launch a [public dashboard](#) that increases visibility, accountability, and focus on the state’s education and workforce goals;
- Use that dashboard to inform on the status of student readiness and progress toward the vision; and
- With time, use dashboard data in conjunction with research and knowledge from those on the ground to implement changes (e.g. program and budget shifts) that drive continuous improvement toward outcomes.

5. Consider a More Effective Federal-State Partnership in Education

The current federal administration has asserted that authority over education should rest solely with the states and not the federal government. While much is unknown about how the new federal education administration will operate, state leaders can anticipate changes in three key areas where the U.S. Department of Education (USED) has important oversight: accountability, funding, and research. These three functions comprise the backbone of our nation’s education system to support national competitiveness and opportunity.





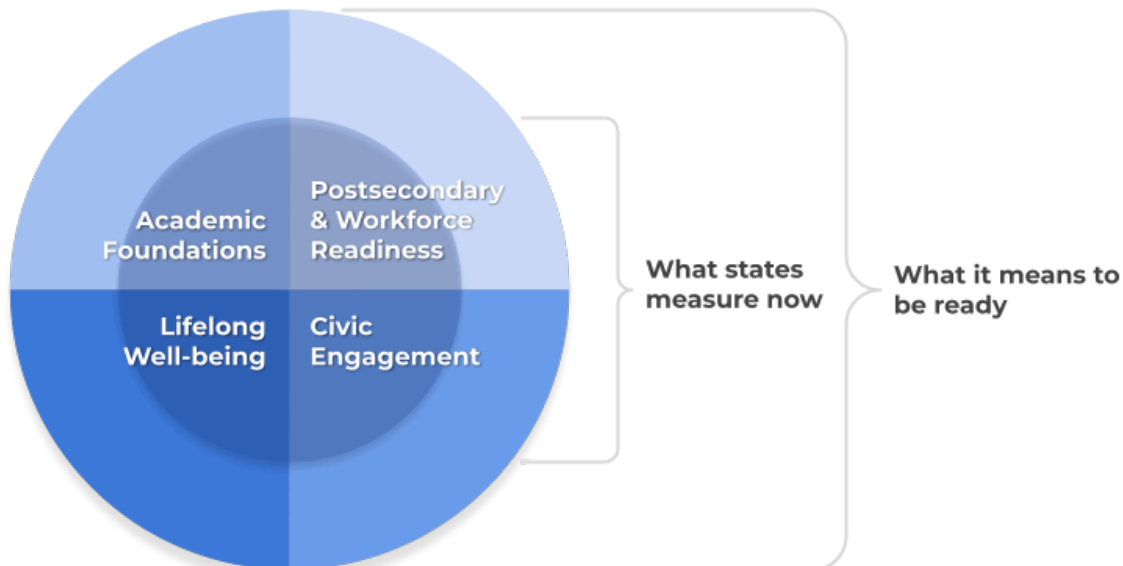
Governors may consider elevating the need for a federal role in education either through the federal government or through consortiums that allow states to continue:

- Assessing individual student performance;
- Identifying student groups that are and are not meeting standards;
- Directing funds to high-need students and workforce programs; and,
- Contributing to a national research effort.

No one political party has a monopoly on good ideas when it comes to improving educational outcomes for students. Indeed, much of the discussion around measuring outcomes has nothing to do with party or

ideology; it's simply what works for students and for the economy. That is why, in addition to considering the questions in the context of our own states, Governors of both parties are committed to working together and in partnership with the federal government to better evaluate outcomes and prepare our students for successful futures and our economy for greater success.

Now, more than ever, states must talk to each other, share information, and coordinate closely to solve common challenges and ensure readiness for all Americans. To start, states can use this roadmap as a jumping off point to begin key conversations about analyzing and improving ways to define and measure readiness.



The Measurement Mismatch is the gap between skills, knowledge, and traits we want our high school graduates to have when they walk across the stage and the things we invest in and measure.





Let's Get Ready! Initiative Overview

As Chairman of the National Governors Association for the 2024–2025 term, Colorado Governor Jared Polis focused on building a roadmap for how Governors can lead their states toward education systems that work better for all learners and for our economic competitiveness. The initiative has highlighted the voices of students, educators, employers, advocates, researchers, and policymakers from across the country and taken on an original, systematic review of how states are evaluating progress and outcomes from their investments in education.

The initiative sought to address three questions through its convenings, leaning on those diverse voices to help Governors understand:

1

What do learners need to know at every step of their educational journeys to achieve success in life and to ensure that our nation continues to be competitive?

2

How are we currently measuring outcomes to ensure that education systems are effectively delivering for students and our economy?

3

How can we do more to shift resources and change policies and practices to do more of what works to achieve these outcomes, and hold ourselves accountable for achieving success?

The first half of this report outlines the challenge and opportunity, synthesizing lessons learned over the course of the initiative and sharing much of what we learned from the experts who engaged in the initiative. The second half focuses on the 'how'—the steps Governors can take to bring their state closer to universal educational opportunities that achieve student success. The appendix shares additional learnings from the convenings and resources for state leaders to use on the ground.





Defining Ready: What We Expect from our Education Systems

***"Whether you're Republican or Democrat, you want the best education for your kids. So how do we get there? We have a saying in Oklahoma: classrooms to careers." – Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt
NGA Vice-Chair***

Governors, as stewards of statewide education systems and major funders of public education, understand that what schools measure and prioritize is what ultimately drives results. With the ability to set a vision and bring together educators, employers, and communities, Governors are uniquely positioned to lead a shift toward a more comprehensive definition of readiness—one that prepares students not just for graduation, but for success in life. Through this initiative, a clear consensus has emerged around what that readiness entails: strong academic foundations, preparation for postsecondary education and the workforce, the skills to engage meaningfully in civic life, and overall well-being.

Research and practice support this broader view of readiness. An analysis conducted by the Urban Institute's [Student Upward Mobility Initiative \(SUMI\)](#) concluded that parents, educators, and employers are largely on the same page when it comes to the additional skills and competencies they want to see from high school graduates.

Employer surveys and state and school district Portraits of a Graduate showcase that analytical thinking, critical thinking and problem solving, resilience, adaptability, leadership, communication, and self-awareness are highly-valued. Yet states do not have ways to measure these critical skills. SUMI is working toward a solution that would create new and better ways to measure priority skills and competencies, such as testing for critical thinking embedded within state standardized tests.

As states expand their vision of readiness, they also need to address how learning feels to students. According to a recent survey by [Transcend](#), a [majority](#) of American students say school feels "irrelevant, boring, and offers them few opportunities to take charge of their learning." Despite teachers' commitment and creativity, we see too many students "check out" and fail to reach their highest potential when education systems fail to engage students in meaningful and relevant experiences. Richard Reeves, President of the [American Institute for Boys and Men](#) and author of *Of Boys and Men*, called attention to the need to make learning feel more relevant to boys, in particular. This challenge is not unique to the U.S.: a recent [OECD study](#) found that 49% of teenagers felt unprepared for their future paths following compulsory education. If we could build our education systems and learning opportunities from scratch, as [Dr. Steven Levitt](#)—University of Chicago economist and co-author of the best-selling book *Freakonomics*—pointed out during the initiative's Denver convening, the systems we would build would bear very little resemblance to those we currently have in place.



***"My own feeling is that the purpose of high school should be to show kids what the possibilities are in the world, and hopefully get them excited about one or two or three of them, and then give them the path." – Dr. Steven Levitt,
University of Chicago economist and co-author of the best-selling book Freakonomics***

To truly prepare students for success, state systems must evolve beyond their current limitations. Levitt's point played out in the frequent refrain we heard over the course of the initiative: schools are not prepared to deliver on all of the things we expect kids to know to achieve success. However, Governors have an opportunity to bring together educators and employers to find creative ways to make classroom learning more tangible for students, illustrate real connections between what students are learning in the classroom and what they may take on in their careers, and





ensure classrooms are a space where students can develop transferable skills that will serve them across career pathways and throughout their lives.



"If we cannot transform the core of the high school, not through electives, but the central courses students take to immediately meet them at what fascinates them, we'll continue to lose the vast middle of the American high school. That is our total focus right now." – David Coleman, CEO, College Board

Governors are responsible for their state's vision for education. Our education systems and learning opportunities should not just give students certain knowledge; they should also foster a thirst and appreciation for life-long learning and put students on a path toward fulfilling lives and careers. Preparation for adulthood is about more than just the knowledge acquired through textbooks—it's also about building the social capital and hard and soft skills needed to navigate systems of higher education and employment, even as the world and economy changes.

As Dr. Tan Oon Seng, Director of the [Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education](#), noted during the NGA International session in Vancouver, a key partner in this work are Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs). EPPs prepare new teachers to enter the field in traditional and non-traditional ways. Their development will need to evolve to consider the broader range of skills and knowledge demanded of learners to be successful in this new paradigm. Eva Moskowitz, founder and CEO of [Success Academy Charter Schools](#), also spoke about the demands on educators in her remarks at the New York convening, where she shared that Success Academy teachers receive the equivalent of 13 weeks of training and support annually. EPPs are the training ground for those who will be expected to ensure students meet the readiness goals we set for them and states are responsible for ensuring teacher candidates are informed and up to the task.

Additionally, states need to prepare themselves to track and measure student readiness and to use that information to drive toward their vision. Graduation rates and college entrance exam scores are not sufficient for students to "get ready" for success and power our economy. State agencies, school districts, parents, and the public need to know whether or not students are leaving school ready in multiple key areas. And everyone, from the Governor to the preschool teacher, needs to be prepared to use that information to launch new ideas, reevaluate existing strategies, and simply, to just do more of what works.

Each state may define readiness in its own terms, but a clear consensus emerged from our work: no matter how you frame it, readiness rests on four essential elements. These are the priorities consistently emphasized by stakeholders across the country—employers, educators, parents, researchers, and policymakers alike:

**Academic
foundations**

**Workforce
preparedness**

**Civic
engagement**

**Lifelong
well-being**



Academic Foundations

Governors have high ambitions to see the people of their states thrive in their communities, workplaces, and personal lives. In order to bring that vision to life, children, youth, and adults require the academic foundations, beginning with literacy and numeracy skills, to meaningfully engage in the world. Academic foundations are the best measured and studied of the four essential elements, but states need to do more to close the gaps and achieve successful academic learning outcomes. **Governors play a vital role in ensuring every individual builds the foundational skills in reading and math necessary for readiness by prioritizing student access to evidence-based materials, well-trained educators, and academic supports that start early and bolster learning inside and outside of the classroom.**

Recent national data confirm that students are not yet equipped with the academic foundations necessary to be considered ready for the next step in their education journey. The [most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\) data](#) demonstrated widespread stagnation and decline for 4th- and 8th-grade students since the pandemic, and as Governor Polis pointed out during the Las Vegas convening, we weren't headed in the right direction even before COVID. Where there were bright spots (e.g., [Louisiana](#), [Washington, D.C.](#)), we see a clear commitment, sustained over the course of several years, to ensuring all students are mastering academic foundations. Research confirms that in order to be "ready," learners need to be able to be literate and numerate. At the New York City convening, Tequilla Brownie, CEO of [TNTP](#), shared some staggering lessons about the connection between academic foundations and upward mobility from TNTP's [Paths of Opportunity](#) report:

- Strong academic outcomes made mobility much more likely. When young people experiencing poverty had strong academic outcomes in high school, their odds of earning a living wage by age 30 rose to 6 in 10.
- Those who most needed a strong academic foundation were the least likely to get the means to build one. Just 1 in 10 young people experiencing poverty had experiences that led to strong academic outcomes, one-third the rate of their more affluent peers.

"In our research Paths of Opportunity, we found that young people across the country coming from poverty had only about a 30% chance of experiencing a living wage by the age of 30. And to be clear, a living wage is the floor, not the ceiling. Our highest-performing students only had about a 58% chance of getting to a living wage. That means our best and brightest from poverty had the toss of a coin's chance of getting to a living wage by 30. That tells us that academics did increase the chances for kids from poverty, absolutely. But it also showed us that academics in isolation is insufficient."

Tequilla Brownie, CEO of TNTP



[2024 research from the Urban Institute](#) further backs the importance of academic foundations. This research considered what happened to adult outcomes when resources were devoted to children's health, social, and cognitive development, along with what aspects of cognitive development play larger roles in those outcomes. Researchers found that for all races and ethnicities, math scores in childhood were highly predictive of future earnings. And as we know, the stronger their academic success in childhood, the more likely learners are to be successful in other areas of life.

In the last 15 years, our country has learned a tremendous amount about what works to build math and reading skills for K-8 students. We know [high-quality](#)





[instructional materials](#), high-quality classroom screeners and assessments, [high-impact tutoring](#), and [effective educator professional development](#) can all flag student learning gaps early, target support, and result in a measurable and sustained impact on student learning. For example, during the New York City convening, Governors were able to visit [The Magnet School of Inquiry and Expression](#) to see foundational academic work in action and hear about its impact. The school, as part of New York's [Back to Basics Reading Plan](#), aligns its curriculum, instructional strategies, and educator professional development to the Science of Reading. During the visit, educators pointed to the research-informed strategies they are implementing to ensure every student can read. Similar strategies and investments in math could be one next step to continuing to build on foundational skills for K-8 students.

Looking at the building blocks of literacy and numeracy, we know that academic foundations begin even before students enter kindergarten, making early childhood education an area of great importance for Governors.

By five years old, 90% of a child's brain is developed.

Investment in the youngest learners pays dividends for states, contributing to their readiness for school while simultaneously sparking short-term economic growth and upwards economic mobility for families. At the Let's Get Ready! convening in Washington, D.C. during the NGA Winter Meeting, Emily Oster—professor of economics at Brown University, best-selling author, and founder of [ParentData](#)—[summarized a recent study](#) that

finds low-income parents' income rises by 20% where universal prekindergarten (pre-K) is available, and continues to be 20% higher years beyond when their children accessed those services. This is because access to child care allows for "career continuity" and a steeper career path. Oster concludes, ***"from an economic standpoint, the biggest value to universal pre-K may be that it helps parents return to the labor force and make a better life for their families in the short and long run."*** Recognizing the importance of early childhood education for its educational merits and pivotal role in economic advancement, cities like New York City and Washington, D.C. and states including Colorado and West Virginia have launched successful universal pre-k programs that serve as models to inform the initiatives of other states. In many of these geographies, universal pre-k seats are offered in mixed delivery of centers and schools—allowing families the opportunity to choose the setting that matches their need, and ensuring that public investments support the larger early childhood ecosystem. The implications for states are striking: policies that we have often thought of as entitlements to parents actually show a tremendous return on investment for both young learners and our economies.

It is also vital that Governors consider strategies to invest in readiness for those outside formal education systems who are unemployed or under-employed, including setting a vision and goals for re-engagement, enrollment, and credentialing. At a [panel discussion](#) during the Vancouver convening, Governors heard from Zoe Weintraub about how [Guild](#) is working to remove financial and structural barriers for working adults to pursue education.





Their approach focuses on building education-to-career pathways that emphasize stackable credentials, soft skills development, and measurable economic advancement. Several states have pursued similar strategies to create re-engagement pathways that offer more promising postsecondary opportunities. Under Governor Wes Moore, the [University of Maryland Global Campus \(UMGC\)](#) is providing high-quality, career-connected degree and certificate programs to adult learners that empower students to pursue meaningful advancement through education while delivering measurable value to their employers. Another model for states to consider is Colorado's policy [allowing community colleges full authority to develop and award](#)

[high school diplomas](#)—as well as bachelors and even masters degrees—ensuring adults have the credentials that employers value.

In summary, there is simply no way around the fact that in order to succeed in adulthood, all students must first master foundational academic skills and gain core knowledge. Governors can lead the way to ensure their states prioritize academic foundations for every student, and to ensure the lessons we can find in core academics—the need to identify and implement research-based practices to improve student learning—extend to all aspects of a child's educational experience.

Putting Technology to Work in Classrooms

As Governors build education systems that support student success and achievement, considering technology and the role it will play is critical, and technology was a frequent topic of discussion throughout Let's Get Ready! discussions.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an emerging tool with the potential to reshape how students and teachers engage in the classroom—but as any teacher can attest, technology in the classroom is a dual-edged sword. [Sal Khan](#), CEO and founder of [Khan Academy](#), noted during the Las Vegas convening that AI, if used well, can free up teachers' time to focus on teaching: "[AI can help] save teachers 10-15 hours per week on things like lesson planning, progress reports, the teacher portion of [Individual Education Plans], and grading papers. That should help... free up their time and energy for students." AI-powered and live on-line tutors can also help amplify teaching and how teachers connect with students while streamlining learning.



Emily Oster, professor of economics at Brown University and best-selling author, joined a Let's Get Ready! Initiative panel during NGA's February winter meeting in Washington, D.C. and outlined a similar point of how educators could use technology to increase individualization and targeted instruction. During this panel, technology expert and journalist Kara Swisher named both the benefits and challenges of technological change. "It's really important to think about what's going to happen with AI and the deleterious effects of technology," said Kara Swisher. "I have four children, and I think about this a lot. Three things are critically important: Promoting creativity, because AI cannot make creativity. Second is team-building—teaching kids how to team build, work together and collaborate. Last is critical thinking. There's no need for memorization anymore. But how do you learn about history, English or





humanities and then pull them together in a cogent way?” Swisher’s comments highlight the essential challenges and tradeoffs of using AI in education—even as it offers new avenues for efficiency and individualization in learning

Additionally, technology plays an important role in both how students feel about themselves, and in the future they will face. They need to be ready to use technology in ways that are healthy, in ways that support critical continued development, and in ways that prepare them for the technology they will face in the workplace. Preparing to use AI in classrooms is about the responsible use of technology for students, sufficient training and support for educators, and the development of systems that prepare students for the technological future they will face and the skills they will need to be successful.

Ultimately, Governors will need to grapple with these complex questions as they shape policies that guide the role of technology, and especially AI, in schools. Striking the right balance between innovation and caution will require thoughtful leadership, informed by the best available research and grounded in the real-world needs of students and educators. Resources like aiEDU’s [AI Readiness Framework](#) and NCEE’s [Framework for AI-Powered Learning Environments](#) can serve as valuable guides, offering practical strategies for how students, educators, and districts can prepare for AI’s potential while staying anchored in equity, responsibility, and human-centered learning.

Postsecondary and Workforce Preparedness

Our education systems should also ensure students graduate ready to thrive in the workforce, in higher education, and in their communities. While many states aspire to this, far fewer have built systems that deliver on it. Employers and higher education leaders bring valuable insights about what “readiness” actually looks like after high school—and increasingly, they are calling for a broader set of skills and learning experiences than traditional academic preparation alone provides. Governors are uniquely positioned to bring K-12 systems into alignment with economic and postsecondary realities by setting a clear vision for what it means to be “postsecondary and workforce ready”, creating cohesive systems, expanding high-quality opportunities, and ensuring that success can be measured in ways that matter for life after graduation.

Employers are essential partners in shaping this readiness. Education systems, including higher education, power the economy when learners develop the knowledge and skills that employers need and graduate ready to enter the workforce or continue on to postsecondary education or training. **Let’s Get Ready! brought employers and educators from both K-12 and higher education together to understand that readiness for life beyond high school requires students to have access to a comprehensive set of learning experiences that prepare them to become well-rounded, capable high school graduates.**



“At the minimum, we should be thinking about these important benchmarks, which are: When our students finish K-12 and/or a CTE credit and/or a college degree, are employers excited to hire them?” – Shalinee Sharma, CEO and Co-Founder of Zearn at the New York City Convening

High school career pathways illustrate how education can align with local workforce needs. Courses and programs at the high school level that focus on the skills and knowledge required for specific jobs or fields of work, often coupled with a third-party certification acknowledged by employers, are perhaps the clearest example of how partnerships between educators and employers can shape our approach to education. When done well, this kind of partnership leads to postsecondary and workforce readiness programs that





fill the unique needs of a particular community, build valuable skills among students, and bolster the workforce. [The MDRC Center for Career and Technical Education](#), a “hub for building and synthesizing evidence on the effectiveness of career and technical education,” has found that the most successful CTE programs are those embedded in well-structured career pathways. These programs combine sequenced coursework with work-based learning, strong employer partnerships, and opportunities to earn college credit in high school. When designed with these components, CTE pathways lead to higher high school graduation rates, increased college enrollment and completion, and stronger earnings, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds and traditionally underserved groups. [SUMI](#) is working to bring more clarity to the specific benefits of work-based and CTE programs, as they may represent success across several indicators, including technical skills, social capital, soft skills, and student engagement.

Of course, not all industry and career credentials are created equal and states play a critical role in differentiating—and helping employers understand—the quality and value of these experiences. At the Vancouver convening, Timothy Knowles, president of the [Carnegie Foundation](#), noted the rapid expansion in the number and availability of non-degree credentials. A new tool created by the Burning Glass Institute, the [Credential Value Index Navigator](#) is one resource states can use to access and disseminate data on how non-degree credentials impact workers' jobs, skills, and earnings.

Making high-quality apprenticeships ubiquitous as part of the K-12 experience is another way states can expose students to real-life work experience and careers, and equip students with marketable skills prior to graduating from high school. The Urban Institute and Mathematica have [detailed different incentives](#) that states across the political spectrum have used to advance apprenticeship programs. In Delaware, Governor Matt Meyer's [executive order on youth apprenticeships](#) demonstrates one approach state leaders can take to integrate meaningful work-based learning opportunities into secondary education. At the Las Vegas convening, we heard from Martin Ritter, the CEO of Switzerland-based train-building company [Stadler](#) US Inc., about another approach to apprenticeships. After opening their Salt Lake City location in 2016, Stadler built a unique apprenticeship program in partnership with two Utah school districts. Over the course of the three-year

apprenticeship, high school students earn increasing professional responsibility and pay, culminating in a debt-free associate's degree and a full-time employment offer. Stadler's program brings the innovations of Europe's workforce development structure to the United States and illustrates how partnerships between employers, school districts, and educators can prepare learners for future success. This need for public-private partnerships was echoed by Reshma Saujani, Founder of [Girls Who Code](#) and Founder and CEO of [Moms First](#), at the Las Vegas convening. She credits the rapid increase of female students in collegiate computer science and engineering programs with the focus on and investment in talent pipeline development that she and similar organizations have made.

Workforce success also depends on durable, transferable skills. High school courses and programs tied to career pathways, though, are only part of the workforce and postsecondary preparedness puzzle. These programs often focus on building industry-specific technical skills required to execute a specific job—but success after graduation requires well-rounded individuals with a set of “soft skills” that apply to any role, especially given the shifting landscape of AI and the unknown possibilities of future careers. Randi Weingarten, President of the [American Federation of Teachers](#), noted during the

March initiative convening in New York City that skills like problem-solving and critical thinking—valued in college and the workforce—can be taught through experiential and project-based learning. Schools like [Southeast Career Technical Academy](#) (SECTA) in



Las Vegas do exactly that by weaving experiential learning and marketable skill development directly into the school day. When Governor Polis visited this school as part of the Las Vegas convening, SECTA students shared their experiences “majoring” in things like cybersecurity and medical professions alongside more traditional academic coursework.

In Vancouver, Wendi Campbell, from Junior Achievement British Columbia, pulled together the concept of public-private partnership and the need for transferable skills in describing their Company Program, which allows students to build and run a real business. This hands-on approach teaches both hard skills (like budgeting and





pricing) and essential soft skills (like leadership, teamwork, and decision-making). She also underscored the value of collaboration between the public education system and nonprofit organizations. Rather than relying

solely on schools to deliver complex and evolving career skills, groups can leverage the expertise of business leaders to bring financial education to life in ways that are relatable and actionable for students.



The Importance of Foreign Language Skills

There are some skills that most states have yet to tackle but which promise to be an increasing need in our economy in future years. Language learning is an example of an overlooked readiness skill with growing demand. For example, only 20% of all K-12 students are enrolled in foreign language instruction, yet bilingual workers are in high demand in the workplace, especially in industries that serve the broader public, such as healthcare. A survey of employers by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) found that nine out of ten respondents rely on employees with language skills in languages other than English. Healthcare and social services expected a 64% increase in the need for multilingual skills by 2029, and the skilled trades expected a 59% increase in need. It is important to note that while demand for foreign language skills continues to evolve—particularly as AI translation becomes more accessible—these skills remain valuable for their positive impact on cognitive development and their role in fostering cultural competence.

Europe provides a model of how language learning can be integrated into students' educational experiences. Recognizing the value of multilingualism in personal, social, and economic spheres, the European Commission distinguishes language learning as one of the eight key competencies needed for college, career, and civic engagement. In Europe, most students study their first foreign language by age 9 and pursue a second language later in their academic careers. In fact, studying a second foreign language for at least one year is compulsory in more than 20 European countries. These educational investments result in direct market returns for European nations. **A study conducted by the RAND corporation estimates that foreign language competency produces at least a 2:1 return on investment, especially for Arabic, French, Mandarin, and Spanish languages.**

Across the nation, all fifty states have taken initial steps to advance foreign language learning by integrating a State Seal of Biliteracy, which recognizes students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation. Building on the success of this initiative, the USED's Office of English Language Acquisition recommends that states strengthen the Seal of Biliteracy by expanding access for English learners and low-income students, promoting its benefits, broadening proficiency pathways, and automating the identification of eligible students.

Even if states do have a vision of what it means to be ready for the workforce, they often face challenges of determining the right measures for readiness. As Stephen Moret, President and CEO of [Strada Education Foundation](https://www.stradaeducation.org/), and Shanika Hope, Director at [Google.org](https://www.google.org/),

pointed out during initiative convenings this year, states should look at postsecondary outcomes like unemployment, insurance, wages, occupation, lifelong earnings, productivity gains, and social mobility. These outcomes show whether students are truly achieving





economic mobility and long-term success, not just earning diplomas. Governors, with oversight across K-12, higher education, and workforce systems, have both the authority and obligation to align state efforts toward these broader goals.



"The pace at which industry moves versus the pace at which some of the institutions that have the responsibility of preparing our students for future jobs – we move at very different paces... You can give people skills, but they need practice in the field of work with the skills. And that's what creates and unlocks the earnings." -- Shanika Hope, Director at Google.org

One strategy Governors may use is leading their states to build systems that both measure the things we value, like problem-solving, collaboration, and work ethic; and give actionable insight into how well our education systems actually set students up to succeed in the workforce. Currently, multiple tools at different levels of scale are used to measure qualitative and quantitative outcomes. For example, the [Skills for the Future Initiative](#), led by the Carnegie Foundation and [Educational Testing Service](#) (ETS), is working to develop assessments of non-cognitive qualities, like teamwork and relatability, that are highly prized in the modern workforce but undetectable through conventional academic metrics like grade point average or school attendance. At the same time, the College Board's [AP Career Kickstart](#) expands the successful AP model by offering high schools a new set of career courses and exams that validate recognized professional skills and meet industry needs, providing students with the opportunity to earn college credit and employer-endorsed credentials. [Certiport](#) is another tool for states, which provides

access to industry-recognized certification exams and related training. These new courses and exams can lead to college credit and employer-endorsed credentials for students, preparing them for in-demand careers. Another approach, already in use in more than a dozen states, is to use a standardized assessment like [ACT WorkKeys](#) to measure general workforce readiness. The ACT WorkKeys system evaluates students' abilities using items developed to match authentic workplace situations in applied math, workplace documents, and graphic literacy. Still other states use qualitative measures, like "Portrait of a Graduate" frameworks, to assess student growth in areas like collaboration, communication, and critical thinking.

Regardless of the ways they choose to measure postsecondary and workforce readiness, Governors can emphasize that their strategy is a push for more meaningful evidence-based assessment, not just more testing. As a result, shifting to new assessments may also require letting go of measures that do not reflect what truly matters for student success.

Additionally, the responsibility to prepare students for lifelong success does not fall solely on K-12 schools; our postsecondary education system plays a key role in also ensuring students have the skills they need to successfully enter the workforce upon completion. To better align postsecondary systems with labor market needs, Governors should challenge colleges and universities to measure and improve their contribution to workforce readiness. This includes tracking graduate earnings, incorporating those outcomes into college accountability frameworks, and distinguishing how workforce preparation differs between high school and higher education, along with aligning their data systems to measure longitudinal outcomes. Increasingly, states are adopting outcomes-based funding models that reward institutions for producing credentials in high-demand fields or improving students' economic prospects. These tools give Governors the leverage to align public investment with real-world results.



"When I started in Teach for America, they placed me in fourth grade. It took me about six, seven days of teaching to realize some of these students were coming in unable to read the math word problems put in front of them. We need to invest, in intensive ways, in school readiness, really, from the age of zero to make sure that by the time kids are 4 and 5, they're truly ready to go to school. That's a large element of what we're going to do, and the other is career readiness. Many students graduating out of our high schools aren't really prepared for the economy of 2025, and beyond. If you go into industry and see the innovations happening, many of those innovations can be taught in schools from the youngest age to truly prepare a workforce, not just to win as a state, but to win as a country." - Governor Matt Meyer (DE)



Ultimately, each state will—and should—define postsecondary and workforce readiness differently; each state has a unique economic make-up, and even within a single state, needs vary significantly from region to region. Governors can lead their states to set a coherent vision for readiness across the educational pipeline that prepares all students to be successful after graduation, and allows for students to have multiple entry points in and out of the educational system throughout their lives to gain those skills. Throughout this initiative, a unifying theme has emerged from employers and those in higher education: students are best prepared when they engage in a comprehensive, well-rounded education that includes both academic foundations and a comprehensive set of learning experiences.

Civic Engagement

To fully prepare students to thrive in society, education systems and learning opportunities should also prepare them to participate fully in civic life. Yet today's students are entering adulthood with alarmingly low levels of civic knowledge and engagement. Governors can play a powerful role in reversing this trend by setting clear expectations for civics education, expanding access to high-quality learning experiences, and listening to the real concerns of young people. Being ready for life after high school includes having the knowledge, skills, and sense of agency to contribute meaningfully to our democracy.

Civic readiness is often overlooked as a core outcome of education. Our education systems are not just responsible for preparing learners for jobs, but to be full participants in civic life and in our democracy. Feeling like active members of a community, being able to engage respectfully with our neighbors, having an understanding of how civic institutions work and our rights and responsibilities, and expressing our opinions

through actions such as voting are key to individual and societal functioning and progress.

However, the most recently [released NAEP data](#) also show a startling lack of understanding about civics among students, with only 20% achieving proficiency on the NAEP civics test and **only one-third of 8th graders able to correctly identify and describe the three branches of government.**



At the Denver convening, Dr. Marty West, Professor of Education at the Harvard School of Education and member of the [National Assessment Governing Board](#), hit on one reason why this might be the case. "When you ask eighth graders whether they're spending any time





studying these topics, [responses indicate] they're not," Dr. West explained. "I don't think that students are incapable of learning [civics]. We just haven't been focusing any attention on it."

This insight is no surprise given the inconsistent state approach to civics education, varying requirements, and lack of coherent measurement by states beyond metrics like high school proficiency exams. There are states that include civics credits as a graduation requirement, and others that require passage of the United States exam for citizenship. Still, other states have no mandates or expectations for students. The Understanding America Study, conducted by the University of California, found that there is [bipartisan consensus](#) of the need to improve civics education. However, there is little consistency of vision in what matters or in what skills and knowledge a student needs to take full advantage of their citizenship.

Utah Governor Spencer Cox elevated this issue in his [Disagree Better](#) initiative as the 2023-2024 NGA chair: "In our country today, we've gotten really, really good at tearing things down. Building institutions is hard work; tearing them down is easy. We need some architects. We need more builders. And that's exactly what we're trying to do." Americans need to learn to disagree in a way that allows us to find solutions and solve problems instead of endlessly bickering. As doers and builders, Governors are in a unique position to model what healthy conflict looks like. The initiative shared relevant [resources](#) for policymakers, educators, and parents.

There are various promising models that can help elevate and expand civic education. One such initiative is the [National Civics Bee](#), operated by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and funded through 2026 by the [Daniels Fund](#). The National Civics Bee is a competition for middle school students, who can win prizes, recognition, and the opportunity to attend the annual national championship in Washington, D.C. It represents an opportunity for Governors and educators alike to lift up and prioritize civics education. Additionally, [CivxNow](#) is a

coalition of 300+ organizations working to provide civic education in the U.S. To help civics education scale across the U.S., the National Council of the Social Studies, the professional association of social studies educators, has created the [College, Career, and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework](#) and the [Seal of Civic Readiness Toolkit](#). Moreover, community-based civics education programs like [Generation Citizen](#), exemplify how states can leverage non-profit partnerships to facilitate and advance civics education.

Community involvement and service-learning opportunities offer additional powerful ways to build meaningful civic engagement by connecting learning to real-world community needs. For example, starting in 2026, students in Washington D.C. [must perform 100 hours of community service](#) to be eligible to graduate. These programs not only foster civic responsibility but also provide another avenue for students to develop essential skills outside of traditional work-based learning.

Engagement in community and civic society drives economic gains for individual students and provides another reason that this focus is key. Per Dr. Raj Chetty, who leads Harvard's Opportunity Insights research group and spoke at the April virtual convening, research shows the strongest predictors of economic mobility are social connections across income levels, something that can only be achieved when students have access to the broader community through service work, mentorships, and programming outside of the classroom. Taken all together, there are numerous resources, from standards frameworks to programs, that states can leverage to further civics education. Governors can prioritize the effective coordination, use, and scaling of these resources so that all students have equitable access to civic learning and engagement.

By prioritizing civics education, Governors can ensure that readiness includes not just the ability to succeed in the workforce, but the confidence, knowledge, and sense of belonging needed to participate fully in civic life and strengthen our democracy.





Lifelong Well-Being

In today's rapidly changing world, supporting students' lifelong well-being is essential. From mental health and relationships to identity and purpose, young people face a complex mix of pressures that affect their ability to learn, grow, and succeed. **To be truly ready for life after high school, students need more than academic skills or career pathways; they need the emotional and psychological grounding and character to thrive as whole people. Governors can align systems and supports that help young people build this strong foundation for lifelong well-being.**

The well-being of youth—their [emotions, relationships, engagement, character, accomplishments, and sense of purpose](#)—is a source of near constant concern among parents and a topic of conversation among educators, experts, pundits, and the media. The pressures young people face in our modern world, driven by rapidly changing technology, global instability, and economic insecurity, make it challenging to navigate school and make the most of opportunities inside and outside of the classroom.

Well-being means many things to many people, and a recent [peer-reviewed study](#) found a lack of consensus and a fractured body of research on the topic. However, we heard common themes throughout this initiative that being ready means leaving high school with a strong sense of self, supportive relationships, the psychological skills to persevere through challenges, and a clear, attainable path toward a meaningful and contributive adult life.

Mental health and life skills are essential components of readiness that Governors can support. No one disagrees on the importance for learners to be supported in their mental health, and Governors were given a clear playbook on the role they can play through Governor Phil Murphy's 2023 NGA initiative: [Strengthening Youth Mental Health, a Governor's Playbook](#). We heard more about this at the April virtual convening from Dr. Angela Duckworth, co-founder of [Character Lab](#), who studies factors that determine success in the classroom and beyond—particularly life skills like grit, empathy, and self-control. Duckworth made clear that, **"If we are going to educate all Americans for success, it is not just language literacy, and it's not just math literacy. Those things are very important. But... when you**

look at income, relationships, mental health, happiness, and physical health, it is extraordinarily clear in the research that this suite of psychological skills or character strengths are at least as important as the more traditional topics in K-12 education. And I think we're at an exciting moment in time, because it's also clear that there is scientific evidence about how we can equip young people better with these important skills."

A sense of purpose and vocational identity are also key to lifelong well-being. The initiative highlighted that it is important for students to exit high school with a personal understanding of where their interests and skills lie, ideally accompanied by some recognized memorialization of those skills; an attainable and accessible vision for their own future; and a sense of purpose as a member of our society. Scott Pulsipher, President of [Western Governors University](#), was clear on this when he moderated a panel of experts at the New York City convening.



"We've certainly discovered in our work at WGU that if an individual does not have a sense of how they are going to contribute to the world, what we like to call a 'vocational identity,' they won't attach a purpose to their education," he said, "It has to have something to connect to how they see themselves contributing to the world."



This theme was also raised during the closing plenary session at the NGA 2024 Summer Meeting, where SUNY Chancellor and former U.S. Secretary of Education, [John](#)



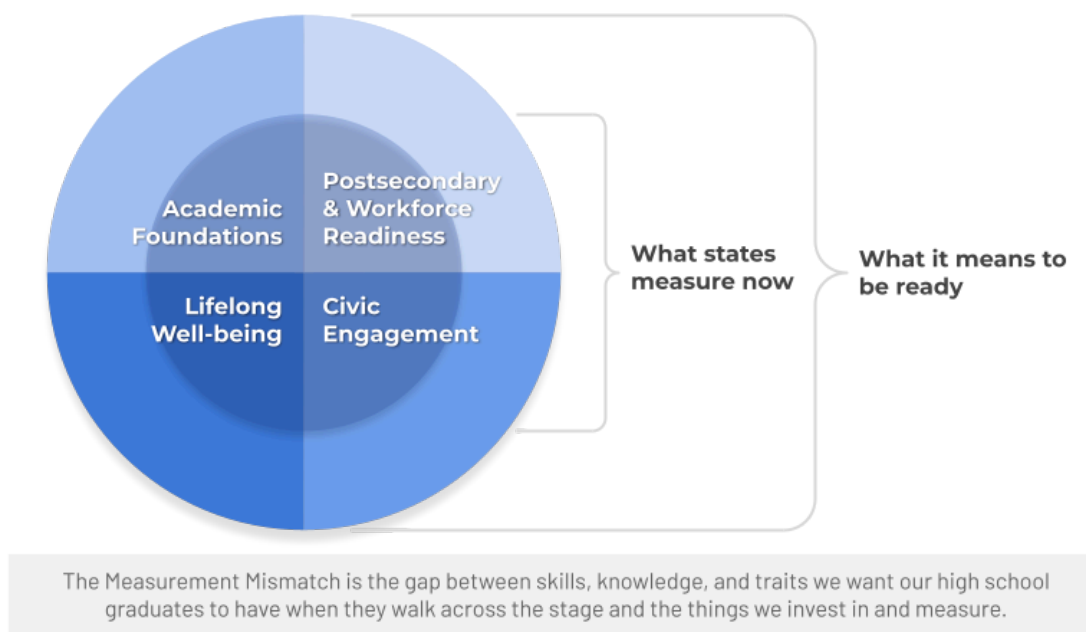
[B. King, Jr.](#) shared, “We have to be intentional for every kid—identifying what are they passionate about, what are they excited about? There’s a program called Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR), started by a school counselor in Minnesota. It’s one of the Investing in Innovation [grants] that has scaled over time, has impressive evidence...One of the things they do is bring teachers and counselors together and they figure out for every kid...what [they are] excited about,...passionate about,...and how do we feed that at school so that she wants to be here?” States like Maine and Wyoming are using the [BARR model](#) to empower educators to use real-time quantitative and qualitative data to foster an environment where they know their students’ strengths and collaborate to ensure student well-being. Students attend school more, are engaged, achieve academically, and graduate on time.

Another powerful way Governors can promote student well-being and long-term readiness is by measuring the student experience. These metrics not only offer real-time insight into how students are doing day to day, but also serve as early signals of outcomes that typically take years to show up in longitudinal data. For example, [Cultivate from UChicago Impact](#) is a research-based tool that helps schools use real-time data to understand and improve the quality of students’ learning environment.

Simply measuring these aspects can have positive outcomes; [research](#) consistently shows that high-quality student experience measures are strongly linked to improved well-being. As part of the previous NGA Chair’s Initiative, [Disagree Better](#), Utah Governor Spencer Cox and First Lady Abby Cox further emphasized that engaging in service activities can break down social barriers, uplift communities, and support mental well-being.

Lastly, Governors have an especially important role in ensuring the well-being of young learners, given their position in overseeing agencies responsible for all aspects of the well-being of children and their families. This work goes two ways: in the best of education systems, our students will struggle to succeed if their other needs are not being met. Housing and food insecurity can negatively impact a student’s ability to access the opportunities they are presented with. One effective way Governors have addressed this challenge is by implementing universal free school meal programs, such as Arkansas’s [free breakfast program](#), that ensure that every student starts the day with a nutritious meal. Likewise, lifelong economic stability requires a solid educational foundation. Governors can ensure the entirety of the state’s systems are working in alignment to support their vision for students.





The Measurement Mismatch: How Do We Know If Students are Ready?

The things we measure are a reflection of the things we value—or at least, if we could design our systems from scratch, they would be. Too often, there is a mismatch between the skills, knowledge, and traits we want our high school graduates to have when they walk across the stage and the things we invest in and measure. In other words, the inputs of our education systems—the dollars, initiatives, standards, requirements—are not consistently and singularly aligned to the outcomes we want most for our kids. **This is where Governors step in.**

"How do we define a measure of success? We know, of course, there's things we look at that might correlate with success. We look at test scores, we look at graduation rates, we look at attendance. These are important markers. But Governors are thinking bigger than that. We want to know if students are succeeding. And of course, we want to know if our economy is succeeding and employers are able to hire people with the skills and talents that are needed."

– Governor Jared Polis

Across the domains of academic foundations, workforce preparedness, lifelong well-being, and civic engagement,

Governors should start by first defining how success will be measured. For every investment a state makes in education or a related initiative, there should be a clear definition of success rooted in quantitative measures. From there, Governors should require that agencies develop systematic check-points to assess whether each investment is on track to achieve its intended purpose according to the expected outcomes.

In most states, education is the single largest category of state funding. Over their tenure, Governors will make countless decisions about how education funding flows to agencies, organizations, and programs. As with any investment, it's critical that Governors have a clear understanding of what the returns are and drive better outcomes.

In every state, thousands of adults dedicate their lives to educating students. If you asked each of those adults what it means for a student to be ready for life after high school, you would get thousands of different answers. A high school math teacher might point to a student's proficiency in algebra; a principal might focus on whether a student earns a high school diploma; a college and career advisor might emphasize a student's ACT or SAT score. For purposes of federal accountability, states



are [required](#) to measure academic achievement; student growth; progress of English language proficiency; graduation rates; and a flexible indicator of “school quality and student success,” which can include things like science assessments, student engagement rates, and attendance. States have the flexibility to innovate beyond those federally-required measures, but [state leaders often stay close to these expectations](#). Many of our current measurement systems are relics of earlier eras, shaped by past policy priorities and often reinforcing a status quo that no longer fully serves today’s students or economy.

Each of these metrics matter—but do they capture a full picture of what we want our systems to build for our students? Do they provide Governors an understanding of the effectiveness of their education systems as a whole and how well those individual metrics are translating to lifelong success for learners? Do they consider and measure student readiness beyond the school building or state capacity to set up the conditions of success for all children to succeed in school? As recent state assessment and NAEP scores have demonstrated, we have much work ahead as a country to return to and exceed pre-pandemic levels of student achievement. Governors have an important voice in preserving the annual federal testing requirement of all states to ensure that educators, policymakers, and the public have the rich, disaggregated performance data they need to understand progress, identify areas for improvement, and map out where to make further investments.

Further, the [discrete metrics we currently use](#) to assess education in our states don’t add up to a clear picture that can inform Governors, policymakers, and educators of how well their education systems are driving toward a clear vision for student readiness and success.

More broadly, Governors have a responsibility to both preserve what works and to drive innovation toward better systems. That includes ensuring new approaches don’t simply layer on additional burdens for schools, but instead rethink measurement and accountability so they reflect what truly matters and work for all learners.

A [recent report](#) by FutureEd and the Keystone Policy Center underscores this very dilemma, arguing that current accountability systems assess academic proficiency, but often overlook broader contributors to student success. Drawing on decades of research, the report proposes a more comprehensive measurement model that includes school culture, access to rigorous coursework, postsecondary outcomes, and educator effectiveness as essential indicators of school effectiveness.

However, in most states, the data do not exist to tell us the degree to which students understand and are prepared to engage in our democracy, or whether they are building life-long habits that will lead to physical and mental well-being. The [Urban Institute’s Education-to-Workforce Framework Data Tool](#) offers 99 research-backed indicators spanning academic, social-emotional, and workforce outcomes—enabling communities and policymakers to track critical milestones and conditions for success across geographies and over time using federal data. Yet as indicated in the tool, many of the indicators toward success [do not yet have standard data collection](#), so states often lack information about the degree to which high school graduates are truly prepared and resourced to thrive in the workplace and contribute to their community. Put simply, our measurement systems do not consider the more complete definitions of readiness that we heard from experts throughout the Let’s Get Ready! convenings.

Current Focus of State Accountability Systems:

- Achievement and growth on English Language Arts and Math assessments
- English language proficiency
- Graduation rates
- School quality and student success, such as:
 - ◆ Science assessments
 - ◆ Attendance or chronic absenteeism
 - ◆ Student surveys

Readiness Themes:

- Academics: proficiency in the core academic subjects that are shown to be vital to lifelong success
- Workforce: preparedness that includes industry-specific skills and universal soft skills
- Well-being: mental health, a sense of belonging and purpose, and basic needs met
- Civic Engagement: civic literacy, community engagement, voter registration and participation





Appendix B provides examples of measurements Governors can use to track progress toward the achieving readiness for students across domains. There may not be perfect measures for every issue important to a Governor, but these examples provide a solid foundation. The research has not necessarily caught up to the expanded definitions of readiness we know are needed. Additionally, much of the data that could answer our readiness questions may lie beyond states' K-12 accountability systems or standard workforce reporting. And, as Dr. Vicki Phillips, CEO of the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), articulated at the Vancouver convening, we can't measure everything: "[We need to pick] the critical few that are truly trajectory altering. We can all have conversations where we just add on and add on, and everybody wants their indicator...we have to really resist that and be very, very clear." The goal of this work is not simply to reconfigure the accountability system; it's to assess the metrics Governors will need specifically and where and how those might be found, a different task than providing schools and educators with data to inform instruction.

For example, Kindergarten entry (or "readiness") assessments (KEA) are one way states and school districts examine children's readiness to learn in a classroom setting, but the quality and value of these assessments—and the resulting information and kindergarten readiness—[varies widely](#). The Government Accountability Office found that during the 2023-24 school year, only 27 states required local districts to conduct KEAs, with only 17 using the data to inform the public. In discussion groups conducted as part of the study, teachers questioned the accuracy and relevance for instruction when they were given (one month into school) and how (sometimes using technology new to students). Assessing kindergarten readiness is important—teachers use the information from assessments to identify students with additional needs and understand baseline skill levels—but states are not all doing so in a way that supports students and teachers in the classroom.

Another way states measure the effectiveness of their education systems is through cohort graduation rates. In 2005, the National Governors Association spearheaded the *Graduation Counts Compact* initiative, which committed states to improving data collection and reporting on graduation. All 50 Governors and 12 national education organizations signed the *Compact* to ensure there was alignment across states when it came to assessing who truly counted as a high school graduate. In 2008, USED refined the metric proposed by NGA and the states and made it a federal requirement. Bipartisan, unanimous agreement among Governors led to this shift. Beginning in the 2011-2012 school year, the U.S. Department of Education began requiring states to calculate and report the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate. The cohort graduation rate continues to be used today, giving us more than a decade of comparable, longitudinal data for the state and nation. And yet, even as graduation rates across the country reach all-time highs, states are grappling with the mismatch between what a graduation rate tells them and what it means for graduates to be truly prepared for success in college, career, and the military. (The next section of this document highlights the results of a research study, commissioned as part of this initiative, on designing a consistent methodology for measuring postsecondary readiness.)

The measurement mismatch is not just about collecting better data—it's about creating learning systems that can continuously improve through systematic research and development. States need education R&D infrastructure that treats measurement as an ongoing research question, involving educators and communities in validating new and innovative approaches and ensuring that measurement systems actually drive the improvements we seek for students. The performance expectations that Governors adopt should be clearly communicated to stakeholders, including the educators responsible for implementing them in the classroom and the parents eager to understand their child's access to quality opportunities.





College and Career Readiness Measurement Research Study

According to a [50-state analysis](#) conducted by [All4Ed](#) and SUMI for the Let's Get Ready! initiative, 42 states currently use at least one college and career readiness indicator for federal and/or state high school accountability requirements, and 16 states have multiple indicators. The goal of these measures is to ensure that all students are set up for success after high school graduation. However, as shown in the table below, some of these measures have a stronger connection to post-high school outcomes than others. Measures of non-cognitive skills, sometimes called durable skills or soft skills, are increasingly the focus of policymakers and

communities, in part because they can provide educators with actionable insights into how to support students. Employers value these skills, which can include characteristics like teamwork, creativity, self-control, emotional intelligence, and grit, but don't typically have good insights into the extent to which these skills are present in prospective employees. However, [researchers specifically recommend](#) that measures of non-cognitive skills should not be used for accountability, particularly because these measures may suffer from reference bias and due to the potential for data manipulation.

High-Level Findings for 12 College and Career Readiness Measures

No or little causal research
 Some causal research

Modest causal research
 Stronger causal research

Modest positive effect
 Larger positive effect

No or undetectable effect

Measure	Higher Education Enrollment		Persistence or Degree Attainment		Employment and Earnings		Notes
	Evidence strength	Effect	Evidence strength	Effect	Evidence strength	Effect	
Enrollment in AP or IB classes							
AP and IB test achievement							Effects typically for students on the margin of a given score
Mandatory ACT or SAT testing							Evidence on attainment for students induced to attend
ACT or SAT minimum score							Enrollment effects for four-year colleges
Advanced coursework							Findings on earnings range from null to very small
High school exit exam or minimum state test score or end-of-course exams							Effects typically for students on the margin of barely passing versus barely failing
Mandatory FAFSA completion							Larger effects for low-filing schools
Academic early college or dual enrollment participation							
Military enlistment							Larger earning effects for Black and Hispanic veterans; attainment effects for associate's degrees
JROTC							Substantial effects on military enlistment



Measure	Higher Education Enrollment		Persistence or Degree Attainment		Employment and Earnings		Notes
	Evidence strength	Effect	Evidence strength	Effect	Evidence strength	Effect	
Industry-recognized credential or dual enrollment CTE credential							
CTE enrollment or dual enrollment ^a							Larger earning effects for men and for Black and Hispanic, low-income, and disabled students
Apprenticeship							Little causal evidence to date in U.S. high schools

Source: Blagg, K. (2025). Which College and Career Readiness Standards Best Align with Positive Outcomes after High School? Urban Institute.

Note: Blue highlight indicates a measure that appears more strongly linked to postsecondary outcomes.

Governors can lead in addressing the mismatch between what states measure and the outcomes we expect our education systems to deliver for learners. They should work with educators and researchers to set an ambitious bar for student outcomes that are connected to their vision for success. They can push for more clarity around what to measure to assess student readiness and work with agencies to define desired goals for each of them. They can also use their position to elevate key performance metrics that focus the system on delivering outcomes for learners.

A Focus on the End of High School: Toward a State Student Readiness Index

STUDENT UPWARD MOBILITY INITIATIVE

States have worked hard to establish clear sets of college and career indicators used for accountability and school improvement that they can build from. But relying on school accountability metrics is insufficient to inform Governors' and state legislators' budgeting and planning; their efforts to improve alignment between PK-12 education, workforce and economic development and postsecondary education; and their ability to evaluate how investments are boosting students' economic mobility in adulthood. By refining and using new metrics and data, state leaders gain a more forward-looking perspective and stronger insights into how the choices of interventions and resource allocations they make earlier in PK-12 education and youth have long-term benefits to their state's populace.

To know whether a state's high school students will leave school ready to contribute to thriving economies and communities, policymakers need to track measures that are linked to adult success, update their data systems to easily monitor these data points, and adopt more skill-based measures and data collections as the field develops those. Drawing from a review of a [50-state scan](#) of the college and career readiness used in education accountability systems as well as a [review of the evidence](#) connecting those measures to long-term outcomes, this summary provides actionable steps state leaders can take toward a [State Student Readiness Index](#).

A State Student Readiness Index should focus on [research-backed metrics](#) that are associated with improved postsecondary outcomes or adult wages. This is intentional to give state leaders a view into how students will thrive post-high school. These metrics do not try to count each student's high school or post-high school credentials. This is a key difference from state accountability system metrics (often called college and career readiness metrics), where there is a need to be more inclusive of all students' potential pathways. Rather, these measures show what share of students may be on a mobility-boosting path. The field does not yet have all the measures to create a State Student Readiness Index but there are steps states can take toward it as new measures are developed.





Short-term

States can ensure education and workforce agencies:

- Use individual-level data from state education data systems to **track the metrics that are associated with postsecondary and adult success** and are aligned with the state's goals. Research-backed measures include enrollment in AP or IB classes, early college or dual enrollment participation, CTE pathway completion, an industry-recognized credential or other CTE credential, and military enlistment. Also, **track the implementation of evidence-based policies**—mandatory FAFSA completion and mandatory SAT or ACT testing at the school or district level.
- **Add granularity in the data and analysis of CTE pathways and industry-recognized credentials** to acknowledge the wide range of programs offered and the [associated breadth](#) of long-term outcomes.
- Increase understanding of the degree to which all students have access to pathways and credentials by **disaggregating each metric** by students' family income, gender, race, English language status, and disability status.
- Build metrics into public-facing State Student Readiness Index **dashboards at the school, district, and state levels**, ensuring student privacy is maintained. Set goals and embed those into the State Student Readiness Index dashboards, similar to the [Indiana Graduates Prepared to Succeed dashboard](#).
- **Analyze** the relationships between these metrics and economic self-sufficiency measures using state data, forge research-practice partnerships to identify and better understand schools that appear to be performing better or worse than expected in these relationships (e.g., [school-based value-add](#)), and carry out research to understand local policies and practices that appear to be differentially successful.

States can also make targeted investments to improve these key metrics linked to adult success, such as: SAT and ACT offered during the school day; FAFSA application support; AP access and fee waivers for low-income students; access to community college courses or mobility-boosting CTE pathways; and statewide transfer policies for credit transfer.

Longer-term

By using linked data across PK-12 and postsecondary and workforce systems, states can go beyond the metrics collected above to make the data more specific to their states, see actual long-term student outcomes, and monitor the impact of upstream innovations and investments on high school students and adult outcomes.

Specifically, states can:

- **Link education and workforce measures** to see the differential impact of high school metrics for different student groups.
- Create clear and transparent dashboards that include information about each offered **CTE pathway's average wages at 5 and 10 years after high school** for students with a high school diploma only, a two-year degree, a four-year degree, or a graduate degree.
- [Strengthen definitions and data systems](#) to capture the range of work-based learning experiences, so that researchers can strengthen the evidence base on these topics.
- Create **clearer definitions for industry-recognized credentials** that prize ones that are [mobility boosting](#).
- [Strengthen unemployment insurance data systems](#) to make more meaning out of adult wage data
- Ensure integrated data systems include not only postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and degree information but [nondegree credentials](#), such as employer-aligned and market-validated certificates built to





support local industries in partnerships, sometimes in collaboration with a state's technical or community college system.

- Partner with the state's revenue agency to allow for state-level data sharing of tax data for a **more comprehensive view of adult economic success** for more people and across more dimensions (e.g., marital status, household size, and asset profiles). Or [partner](#) with the Internal Revenue Service and Census Bureau to also be able to track the outcomes of those who work out of state, are in the gig economy, or are enlisted in the military. Alternatively, work through a [multistate collaboratives](#) to understand out of state employment.
- Ensure **research partners can use these data** to ensure upstream innovations, and ensure targeted investments have the intended effects.

Measuring Other Key Skills

While the metrics above are predictive of long-term success and therefore useful for accountability purposes, their usefulness for other planning, investment, and alignment purposes is limited because they tend to be blunt markers and not measures of students' specific abilities. They are necessary but not sufficient. Many of the skills employers, students, parents, and educators agree are needed—such as analytical and critical thinking skills, clear communication, the ability to work collaboratively, problem solving skills, adapting, and self-awareness—are not currently measured at scale, if at all. Even within frequently assessed areas, like mathematics, it is not known if certain skills are more key to success than others. Yet, these metrics could be important for state leaders, such as Governors and legislators, to understand as they seek to build systems that support all students on a pathway to lifelong success. Better understanding the skills that drive success could also be incredibly important as Governors make hard decisions about the use of interventions and investments.

The [Student Upward Mobility Initiative](#) is working to fill this gap by establishing a set of skills and competencies in PK-12 education—across academic achievement, “noncognitive” factors, health and well-being, social capital, and career preparation—that educators and policymakers can use to shape practices, programs, interventions, and broader systems change. The research and development through this initiative will fill the key gaps in the State Student Readiness Index.

As new, scalable measures are developed, states can adopt and track these. For example, [teams](#) are already at work determining whether commonly collected data (e.g., subscores and item-level data from summative assessments and CTE assessment scores) can provide skills-based insights that are even stronger predictors of adult outcomes. They are also investigating whether already collected education data can be used to measure important measures of future success, like students' social networks and their critical thinking.

States may also want to encourage the federal government to continue to fully fund and administer benchmarked high school exams, such as the 12th-grade NAEP, the long-term NAEP for 17-year-olds, and the Program for International Student Assessment. State policymakers who are particularly interested in their progress relative to other states and across time could consider [supporting state-level estimates of 12th-grade NAEP](#) and increased frequency of administration to produce comparable and validated results at the state and national levels.

With better tracking of the skills that drive success—and evaluation of these data—states will be able to more effectively shape future-oriented plans and identify the education investments most likely to lead to upward mobility and economic success.





Let's Get Ready! A Roadmap for How Governors Can Lead Education Systems to Deliver for Individuals and the Economy

The Let's Get Ready! initiative has two aims for state leaders: empowering individuals with the skills, knowledge, and competencies they need to thrive after high school, and building our states' and nation's economic competitiveness. The first section of this report highlights the mismatch between the elements of readiness that we value most and the metrics our education systems currently measure.

Bridging that gap is crucial to our students' and our nation's future, and Governors are best positioned to lead their states toward a better way—but how exactly can they do that? The following pages propose concrete strategies Governors can adapt to their own state context:

- 1. Define a vision and assess how your state is measuring it;**
- 2. Eliminate government silos that impede progress;**
- 3. Invest in systems and infrastructure to measure outcomes;**
- 4. Maintain focus on outcomes with a public dashboard; and**
- 5. Consider a more effective federal-state partnership in education.**

1. Define a Vision and Assess How Your State is Measuring It

A Governor's core responsibility is to define a vision for education, from early childhood to career, to set ambitious but realistic goals to make that vision reality, and to track outcomes aligned with those goals to ensure student readiness and economic competitiveness.

As the chief executives of states, Governors maintain focus on a clear, long-term vision that connects every stage of learning to both individual opportunity and economic prosperity. An effective vision is tailored to each stage of learning—from early childhood through high school, postsecondary, and beyond—and clear enough to guide action at every level of the system, from the statehouse to the classroom. That means charting a path that moves learners toward a fulfilling life and strengthens our states' economic futures.

Bringing that long-term vision to life requires bold, collaborative leadership—something Governors can



provide. During the initiative's New York City convening, Geoffrey Canada, founder and President of the [Harlem Children's Zone](#), emphasized the importance of thinking big when it comes to setting a vision for the student experience. Canada implored

Governors to look at a “cradle-to-career” model that serves students from the time they are born through their entry into the workforce: “Our model is cradle to career... This is all about preparing the next group of folks to enter the labor market in this country.” And critically, in Canada's view, achieving that vision is not something a school can do alone: “This has to be jointly tackled by the school and folks in the community...”





Governors are best positioned to take this ambitious and collaborative approach to vision-setting for their own states.

Governors should also ensure their vision addresses all geographies and populations in their state, particularly those that may need differentiated support or resources to prepare learners for success—including rural and indigenous populations. Rural schools serve nearly 10 million students—one-fifth of the U.S. student population. However, due to generations of divestment, rural students face unique obstacles to attaining the education and skills needed to access and thrive in well-paying jobs and contribute to the long-term economic development of their communities. Rural areas face higher rates of poverty and significantly lower levels of educational attainment and labor force participation compared to metro areas—and rural students often lack access to guidance to help them navigate the complex landscape of post-secondary opportunities. Alaska, Arkansas, Idaho, Missouri, and Texas have all partnered with [rootED Alliance](#), for example, to train dedicated career and college advisors to work one-on-one with students in rural high schools. Noa Meyer, the board chair of rootED Alliance, spoke at the New York City convening about how counselors build a Plan A and a Plan B with each student with a goal of finding economic prospects that work for them in communities where students face unique poverty, homelessness, and drug addiction issues.



"We as an organization are completely agnostic about what that best fit is, anything from military service all the way to four-year college works for us, and everything in between. But the idea and the goal is to have every kid have a plan A and a plan B when they graduate." - Noa Meyer, rootED Alliance

Similarly, the state of education in our nation's K-12 schools for Native students is distressing. According to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#), Native students perform two to three grade levels below their white peers in reading and mathematics, are 237 percent more likely to drop out of school and 207 percent more likely to be expelled than white students. While in Vancouver, the Let's Get Ready! initiative heard from Dr. Brad Baker, Superintendent of Indigenous Education, Ministry of Education and Child Care in British Columbia and Sxwíxwtn Wilson Williams, General Councillor and Spokesperson for Squamish Nation, and visited the Capilano Little Ones Elementary School—designed specifically to improve success and support for Indigenous students, and increase the presence of Indigenous culture, languages and history for all students.



With a clear statewide vision for student readiness in place, the next step is to examine how well current metrics align with that vision. Are we measuring what matters? Are the data even available? A Governor might prioritize verbal and written communication as key readiness skills—but existing assessments, such as high school writing exams, may only provide a partial picture. Every aspect of a Governor's vision needs a clear definition of success rooted in quantitative measures. From there, an effective system of measures should both enable a Governor to know how the system is performing against outcome goals, and to know whether changes they are making to improve that performance are taking hold. This includes both leading indicators and long term outcome measures that together help them lead the change needed. Overall, analyzing the benefits and shortfalls of existing metrics helps reveal where there's a "measurement mismatch" between what we say we value and what we actually track.

Once misalignments are identified, Governors can lead efforts to fill those gaps by developing more meaningful, actionable indicators of readiness—whether related to



academic, workforce, or well-being outcomes. Doing so enables Governors to not only define a vision that brings people together, but to back it up with the evidence needed to monitor progress and hold stakeholders

accountable. When states measure what they truly value, the entire system is better positioned to deliver on the promise of readiness for all students.

Governors should:

- Define a vision for “readiness” at every level of the education system;
- Assess how their state is currently measuring that vision;
- Develop and publicize a strategic plan that sets ambitious but realistic goals to make that vision a reality; and,
- Identify the gaps in metrics and data needed for the state to build a full picture of student readiness.

2. Eliminate Government Silos that Impede Progress

Governors are singularly positioned to break down the silos that get in the way of tracking progress and hamper a coherent experience for students. Every state has numerous agencies and initiatives focused on supporting children’s well-being from birth onward. While these programs play important roles in addressing local needs, they often operate in isolation, with limited communication and coordination across agencies. Individual programs may do a great job measuring the outcomes for the children they serve, but too often, this work is done in disconnected and incoherent silos.

Governors can bridge these silos by convening groups together, restructuring or creating new agencies, and/or appointing a dedicated person, team, or office to lead cross-agency coordination efforts. One example of this approach is the work following [Maryland’s ENOUGH Act](#), which empowered the Governor’s Office to lead statewide coordination aimed at ending child poverty and increasing economic mobility across 27 community-led organizations. In Colorado, Governor Polis recently signed an Executive Order directing other state agencies to work closely with the Department of Education with helping individuals already out of high school earn needed credentials for workforce success. And in the early childhood space, a number of states—including Colorado, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Virginia—have moved to [consolidate disparately administered early childhood programs](#) into a single

agency to improve coordination of services and reduce administrative burdens.

Similarly, breaking down silos is essential to connecting the various systems that support readiness, particularly the education and workforce systems. As Dr. Katie Jenner, Indiana Secretary of Education, shared at the NGA Summer Meeting, it is “[incredibly important] for us as a country to not look at education as a linear path, but to really think about how we might blur the lines” between K-12, higher education and workforce development. This requires not only ensuring access to skill development but also considering how individuals signal their skills to employers and postsecondary institutions, and how those employers and institutions trust those signals in turn. Without clear, validated ways to demonstrate what they know, individuals risk misalignment with opportunity. Governors should consider how to bridge these gaps, particularly as AI and shifting market demands redefine what’s needed. This includes assessing whether we have the infrastructure for evolving career pathways, how learners can identify and communicate in-demand skills, and whether employers are equipped to recognize them.

In order to eliminate silos, agencies and stakeholders need the right resources to do the work. This requires the investment of the Governor: investment of their time and focus, financial investment in the budget,





and engendering public investment through the use of the bully pulpit. Agencies should feel supported by the Governor and the public and work together as a team to achieve the state's vision for its education systems.

The majority of state education dollars flow directly to local districts, who maintain autonomy over how those funds are spent. Marguerite Roza of Georgetown's Edunomics lab and a speaker at the April virtual convening, urged smarter spending and equipping school boards with the financial skills to make strategic, outcome-oriented budget decisions. Her core message: data must be actively used to guide spending, and states should hold districts accountable to ensure education dollars truly benefit students.

This starts with the state budget, of which education is often the largest proportion. Are education systems funded sufficiently, but most importantly, are they funded in a way that aligns to the priorities that are laid out in the Governor's vision? If we want, for example, to grow literacy rates in the elementary grades, does the state budget reflect that, and can that initiative be tracked across funding streams? This scenario also requires ensuring that the school districts receiving funding have the incentives and capacity to translate state dollars all the way through to changes in the classroom. It requires that teacher preparation programs in higher education are able to prepare new teachers to enter the profession with the skills to implement new strategies.

Funding should encourage aligned actions by downstream actors. If a literacy initiative is important to

the state, discretionary funding from the Governor's budget can encourage school districts to adopt it and classroom teachers to embrace it. In Tennessee, for example, the state undertook a full overhaul of its school funding formula, launching the [Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement \(TISA\)](#) formula. The student-based funding model prioritizes students over systems, empowers parents to engage in their child's education, incentivizes student outcomes to ensure all students—regardless of location or learning needs—are served at a high-level, and creates flexible funding that prepares students for post-secondary success.

Additionally, outcomes-based funding can incentivize continued implementation of proven programs. [Colorado's Pay It Forward Fund](#) (CO PIFF) provides zero-interest loans to learners, training providers, and employers aimed at providing the state's residents with the skills they need to fill in-demand well-paying jobs. Loan repayments are based on whether the individual is earning a living wage or the employer generates additional revenue, investing participants at all levels in the success of individual participants.

The same principle applies to higher education. Governors can look beyond enrollment and graduation metrics to ask whether colleges are delivering real value for students. States like Texas are leading the way by measuring which higher education programs result in credentials of value (programs that leave students better off economically) and [linking funding to those outcomes](#). These reforms, [driven by state legislation](#), provide a model for how state policy can drive postsecondary institutions to deliver better returns for students and the economy.

Governors should:

- Bring together leaders responsible for delivering on their education vision by convening groups, restructuring or creating new agencies, and/or appointing a dedicated person, team, or office to lead cross-agency efforts;
- Align the state's education budget and resources to deliver on the vision across multiple agencies and programs; and,
- Explore innovative models to connect funding to outcomes.





3. Build Systems and Infrastructure to Measure Outcomes

Governors have the ability to build the systems and structures that allow their education vision to become reality. In order to effectively evaluate whether state education systems are delivering for learners and the economy, Governors should ensure their systems and infrastructure are built to provide the necessary data.

To ensure they have the infrastructure and capacity to collect, integrate, and analyze education-to-employment data effectively, states need dedicated staffing with expertise in data analysis, economics, and education research who can translate complex data into actionable policy recommendations. States could, for example, designate a unit with full-time responsibility for generating education-to-employment insights and informing policy decisions across the Governor's office, education agencies, workforce development boards, and legislative committees. Additional infrastructure elements to support statewide coordination include systems that capture learner-level data for all postsecondary programs, integration capabilities that connect education completion data with detailed employment outcomes over time, and analytical tools that can examine data and report on outcomes.

One tool that states can use to build coherence and measure progress across the education system is a strong statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS). Several states have already created an SLDS, and Governors can learn from their examples. Further ideas would include interoperability and information sharing across states. An effective SLDS incorporates data across not only the K-12 system, but also from early childhood, postsecondary, and the workforce as well. For example, California recently launched its [Cradle to Career Data System](#), which includes information on early learning, K-12 education, higher education, financial aid, social services, and more. The state aims to create "a source of actionable data and research on education, economic, and health outcomes for individuals, families, and communities." Washington has also been working to unify its career and college readiness efforts into a single, streamlined platform. This platform, [SchoolLinks](#), provides real-time data dashboards that both helps educators and leaders monitor how students are

progressing toward readiness goals and offers a user-friendly, coherent interface for students as they navigate key educational and career transitions.

Furthermore, an effective SLDS enables more rigorous evidence-based policymaking by giving leaders the tools to go beyond surface-level metrics. These systems give policymakers the data needed to analyze policies with greater nuance, including, identifying emerging trends, testing hypotheses, and evaluating the effectiveness of programs and policies. One notable example is former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley's *StateStat* model, which involved regular cross-agency meetings to review progress on key initiatives and develop coordinated improvement strategies. The result was not just transparent data, but data-driven policy shaped by the full scope of government to improve outcomes for Marylanders. Another example is [North Carolina's Government Data Analytics Center](#), which connects all of the state agency data and allows policymakers to use it to manage resources and make investment decisions.

In order to make the most of their SLDS, states will need to establish partnerships with neighboring states and national initiatives to track graduates who relocate for employment or further education. This multi-state data sharing is essential for accurate outcome measurement in an increasingly mobile workforce. Additionally, states should provide researchers with access to anonymized, individual-level matched education-to-employment datasets to support evidence-based policy development and program improvement.

For state leaders committed to improving their data infrastructure, the Strada Education Foundation developed a tool to help states assess how well they are measuring post-high school outcomes that are connected with opportunity and to improve their policies and practices. [The State Opportunity Index](#) identifies five priority areas: Clear Outcomes, Quality Coaching, Affordability, Work-Based Learning, and Employer Alignment. Tools like the State Opportunity Index give states a head start on developing metrics for their learners that are driven by research and allow for coordination and comparison across states.



**Governors should:**

- Designate an individual or team responsible for elevating education-to-employment data insights;
- Expand their statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) to connect student data from early childhood to postsecondary and workforce; and,
- Establish partnerships with neighboring states, national initiatives, and researchers to measure outcomes beyond state lines.

4. Maintain Focus on Outcomes with a Public Dashboard

Governors can shine a light on the extent to which their state's systems are—or are not—delivering on their promises to learners and the economy with a public dashboard. Public dashboards should provide Governors, agencies, and the public with the kind of nuanced information that is necessary to determine what comes next, and Governors should be prepared to take action to ensure continued progress toward the vision. This can look many ways: it can include additional study and analysis, ending long-standing initiatives, or launching new strategies. What's important is that it's driven by the outcomes in the definition of success, furthers the state's vision, is supported by research and best practices, lives in the Governor's office, and allows for sufficient time for an initiative to take root and be fully and faithfully implemented.



A number of states provide examples for how dashboards can support big changes to improve student outcomes. At the New York convening, Rhode Island Governor Dan McKee shared how his state uses their [dashboard](#) to measure and address chronic absenteeism in support of

increasing parent engagement. The [Indiana Graduates Prepared to Succeed \(GPS\)](#) dashboard tracks and communicates data to educators and policymakers in their pursuit of continuous improvement, going beyond just test scores to report on indicators that the state has identified as key to success after high school. The indicators, such as kindergarten readiness and student attendance, were selected based on their connection to the characteristics of a successful graduate which include not only academic mastery but also things like work ethic and civic literacy. The website is user-friendly and includes multiple levels of disaggregation.

The result of all these dashboards is data that not only keeps the public better informed, but also equips Governors to adjust investments, strategies, and policies to improve outcomes. By making data transparent, dashboards offer a real-time view of how individuals in the state are doing compared to the long-term vision for success, ensuring both accountability and action.

To support Governors in developing dashboards that provide meaningful and relevant information, Let's Get Ready! created a [prototype](#) which can be adjusted for each state's priorities and focus. See Appendix B for a list of metrics that states might include in a dashboard.

Governors should:

- Launch a public dashboard that increases visibility, accountability, and focus on the state's education and workforce goals;
- Measure and report on both long-term outcomes and leading indicators;
- With time, use dashboard data in conjunction with research and knowledge from those on the ground to implement changes (e.g. program and budget shifts) that drive continuous improvement toward outcomes.





5. Consider a More Effective Federal-State Partnership in Education

The current federal administration has asserted that authority over education should rest solely with the states and not the federal government. While much is unknown about how the new federal education administration will operate, state leaders can anticipate changes in three key areas where the U.S. Department of Education (USED) has important oversight: accountability, funding, and research. These three functions comprise the backbone of our nation's education system to support national competitiveness and opportunity.

At this moment, states are faced with the possibility that the federal government will cease or cut back these three functions, creating uncertainty for how states will consistently measure outcomes and be held accountable for creating education systems that serve all students. "Dumbing down" standards or not considering results from some students to create the illusion of success is prevented by a neutral honest broker, the federal government. Thus, even as Governors continue to lead state-level efforts to improve their education systems, they may consider elevating the need to maintain key components of a federal role in education either through the federal government or through consortiums that allow states to continue:

- **Assessing individual student performance for all students.** Tracking individual performance helps Governors understand how students are progressing and whether they are on track for readiness. Federal systems track all students, including students with disabilities and multilingual learners, to help ensure that states are serving all students. Governors should consider what state-level accountability systems may be needed, either to complement existing federal requirements or to replace them if federal oversight is reduced.
- **Identifying student groups that are and are not meeting standards.** This type of accountability is essential not only to target supports and interventions where they are most needed, but also to ensure that all students can make informed choices about their postsecondary and workforce plans. For example, federally mandated data on private and out-of-state colleges—many of which

fall outside a Governor's direct oversight—helps protect students from unmanageable debt and provides transparency around outcomes, costs, and value.

- **Directing dollars to students and programs who need it the most,** including through targeted dollars for students with special needs and students experiencing poverty, workforce development funding (e.g. Perkins, WIOA), as well as critical support programs like Americorps that allow students to participate in public service and workforce development programs.
- **Contributing to a national research effort** that manages standard school and district demographic and financial data to drive ongoing improvement in the field, including through biannual NAEP assessments.

In addition, there is longstanding bipartisan agreement that the federal government plays a critical role in education research and development (R&D). Just as federal investments in [scientific R&D have yielded 150% to 300% returns](#) across sectors like medicine, technology, and defense, education R&D represents a strategic national investment in student outcomes, competitiveness and security. The [Alliance for Learning Innovation's Task Force on the Future of Federal Education R&D](#) outlines core functions and practices for a federal role in education R&D, including empowering state and local innovation through productive partnerships.

States with significant student growth have historically led in creating conditions, incentives, and accountability for changed action in classrooms and schools. The path forward for learners and for our economies relies on a continued commitment from the federal government to ensure states have continued accountability, funding, and research across state lines.





Case Study: Let's Get Ready! In Colorado

Governor Polis' experience during his two terms informed the direction of the Let's Get Ready! initiative and demonstrates how a strong gubernatorial focus on educational outcomes can move the needle in a short period of time. Under Governor Polis's leadership, Colorado is raising the bar for what it means to prepare students for lifelong success. The state is not only equipping high school graduates with the skills, knowledge, and competencies they need to thrive, but also building the systems and infrastructure necessary to measure those outcomes and drive continuous improvement. Colorado's approach reflects a deep commitment to ensuring every student is ready for whatever pathway comes next, while also championing the state's and nation's economic competitiveness.

Defining Readiness for Coloradans

Colorado's [vision](#) is that all high school graduates demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to succeed in postsecondary settings and to advance in career pathways as lifelong learners and contributing citizens. That vision is supported in how Colorado prepares its graduates. Colorado's free universal, mixed delivery [preschool](#) and [full-day kindergarten](#), as well as its flagship [reading](#) and [math](#) legislation, help ensure students are prepared with the **academic foundations** necessary for readiness. Through the Governors Emergency Education Relief (GEER) fund, Governor Polis also [invested nearly \\$10 million in the nonprofit Zearn](#), an online math platform, to further support numeracy for all elementary and middle school students.

Colorado also sets a high bar for **postsecondary and workforce readiness**. Every student is required to complete an [Individual Career and Academic Plan](#) (ICAP) and graduate having completed college credits, earned a high-quality industry credential, or engaged in meaningful [work-based learning](#). Previous

state-supported initiatives like the [Homegrown Talent Initiative](#) and Rural Coaction Grants have also helped districts [build locally relevant pathways](#) aligned with economic opportunity. The state also prioritizes **civic engagement** through required [civics](#) and [financial literacy](#) courses, and supports **lifelong well-being** through initiatives like its [Landscape of Wellbeing and Belonging](#), which blends guidance, resources, systems, and best practices to improve outcomes for students, staff, and families.

Getting Coloradans Ready

Under Governor Polis's leadership, **readiness in Colorado is more than a K-12 commitment: it's a coordinated, cross-sector priority**. Earlier this year, Governor Polis signed a [landmark Executive Order](#) directing the Departments of Education, Labor and Employment, Higher Education, Regulatory Agencies, and the Office of Economic Development to break down silos and improve credential attainment. The order calls for new strategies to integrate postsecondary education and skills development, simplify navigation across state systems, reduce bureaucratic barriers, and ensure that learners and earners can access meaningful job opportunities.

Upon signing the Executive Order, Governor Polis stated, "Colorado is a national leader in helping students and workers develop needed skills to enter the job market with credentials and build a successful career. We've broken down barriers to apprenticeships, made it free to attend community college for in-demand credentials, and created new ways to help Coloradans succeed. This Executive Order builds on that work by ensuring our state meets learners and earners where they are and helps Coloradans get a meaningful job. We're asking how our state agencies and





operations can better support Coloradans throughout successful lives and careers."

To further **eliminate government silos that impede progress**, Colorado's [HB22-1215](#) launched a task force focused on the expansion and alignment of programs that integrate secondary, postsecondary, and work-based learning opportunities throughout the state. The task force made recommendations that were enacted into law under [SB25-315](#), including creating a consolidated postsecondary and workforce readiness funding model.

Colorado has taken several additional steps to **align its measures and investments with its vision of student readiness**, especially focused on improving the pipeline from high school to postsecondary and workforce opportunities. For example, the state convened a task force to redesign K-12 accountability systems under [HB23-1241](#). As a result, the state is aligning its accountability requirements to its expectations for graduates to ensure schools are incentivized to support all aspects of readiness, as codified in [HB25-1278](#).

Beyond initiatives themselves, Colorado has **invested in systems and infrastructure to measure these outcomes**. Under [HB 21-1330](#), Colorado established the Student Success and Workforce Revitalization Task Force. One of the Task Force's [recommendations](#) was for the Colorado Commission on Higher Education to develop new measures of success for higher education, leading to the creation of the [Minimum Value Threshold \(MVT\)](#)—a Colorado-specific metric designed to assess the return on investment in postsecondary education by examining whether credentials lead to meaningful wage gains and career success. Another recommendation was to enhance the transparency of postsecondary and workforce data. [Launched in 2024](#), Colorado's SLDS will connect data across state agencies, enabling the state to track learner outcomes over time, identify emerging trends, and evaluate the impact of major policy initiatives. Finally, the Task Force recommendations led to the [Opportunity Now](#) program, which funded and scaled innovative regional partnerships between K-12, higher education, and industry to address workforce demands.

Furthermore, Governor Polis has led investments that support readiness and success for all Coloradans. Recent [state law](#) bridges CTE programs into apprenticeship opportunities to drive continuity on key pathways; investments like [Care Forward](#) (\$26M), [Career Advance](#) (\$42M), and the [Pay It Forward Fund](#) (\$8M) help learners gain credentials in IT, healthcare, and skilled trades with zero upfront cost; programs like the [Colorado Community College Growth Engine Fund](#) and [CO WORC](#) support credentialing and short-term training for in-demand fields; and Colorado is advancing skills-based hiring across agencies as part of the [Transformers in the Public Sector](#) initiative.

Colorado is also working to make sure that these investments hold value for learners wherever their education or career pathways might take them **by staying focused on public data**. Colorado's [Student Bill of Rights](#) gives postsecondary students the right to know how their general education and program-specific courses will transfer between public institutions and provides new protections for students with regard to how quickly transfer credit requests are processed and visibility into why credits are or are not accepted. The state is building on this momentum by building a [transfer credit website](#) to show students how their previous academic and work experiences transfer as credit.

Finally, Governor Polis has taken his education agenda to the national stage, using his role as Chair of the National Governors Association to **advocate for stronger federal action** on student readiness and to position education as a top national priority.

Colorado's Path Forward

Looking ahead, Colorado is focused on building stronger data infrastructure to support ongoing evidence-based policy-making and continuous improvement and on ensuring high-quality implementation of its many readiness initiatives. These initiatives must all come together to ensure success and economic opportunity for all Coloradans.





Conclusion: Looking Ahead

Every Governor, and every state, wants their systems of education to be driving toward the same goals—individual preparedness and economic competitiveness—in ways that incorporate best practices to achieve their vision, using smart tools to measure progress and make adjustments along the way. The path to success will not always look the same for every individual. For that reason, the initiative focused Governors on asking the right questions to help develop their state's unique pathway and the roadmap provided guidance on how to translate the answers to the questions into real world change.

No one political party has a monopoly on good ideas when it comes to improving educational outcomes for students. Indeed, much of the discussion around measuring outcomes has nothing to do with party or ideology, it's simply what works for students and for the economy. That is why, in addition to considering the questions in the context of our own states, Governors of both parties are committing themselves to working together to better evaluate outcomes and prepare our students for successful futures and our economy for greater success.

In the current political climate, states can count on less federal engagement and a diminished role in coordinating among states. It is more important than ever for Governors to come together in a bipartisan way to support common sense ideas that boost outcomes for all children. The work does not end here. We must

continue to talk to each other, share information, and coordinate on solving problems that are common to us. To start, states can use this roadmap as a jumping off point to begin key conversations about analyzing and improving ways to define and measure readiness.

To catalyze this type of collaboration, NGA is partnering with technical assistance experts to lead a cohort of Governors to undertake a process in their own states related to improving measures of key components of their education systems. Participating states will be ones who are working to make concrete, meaningful progress toward identifying and actualizing a set of measures for success, grounded in the examples from the roadmap. The process will support Governors to establish their own dashboard with measures of both outcomes and systems, including metrics specific to their states, metrics that are used across states, and identification and integration of skill-based metrics as they are developed. The key objective of forming the cohort is to identify, connect, and support state leaders who want to understand and use measures of their public schools' success, including both student outcomes and system indicators.

As leaders responsible for improving outcomes across a wide array of sectors, stewards of state budgets that make significant investments in our education systems, as well as our state's economic competitiveness, Governors are uniquely positioned—and uniquely obligated—to find a better path forward. Our young people, and our economies, depend on it.





Appendix A: Summary of Initiative Convenings

Included here are resources from each of the Let's Get Ready! convenings, including the transcripts, videos, and written pieces, that helped inform this roadmap and the knowledge and wisdom of those voices who helped shape what it has become.

NGA 2024 Summer Meeting in Salt Lake City

- In the closing plenary of the [2024 NGA Summer Meeting](#), Governor Polis led a discussion with Governors and education leaders on the importance of adapting U.S. educational systems to better prepare students for the modern workforce. Joining Governor Polis were Indiana Secretary of Education Dr. Katie Jenner and SUNY Chancellor and former U.S. Secretary of Education, John B. King, Jr.

Denver Convening in November 2024

- [Education for Life – A Conversation with Dr. Steven Levitt](#)
Economist and co-author of *Freakonomics* Dr. Steven Levitt shared: If I were a Governor, the one question I would be asking a lot is: Why are we still doing things the way we're doing them?... Another question I would ask is: If you were starting from scratch, would we actually do it this way?
- [Let's Get Ready to Educate for Opportunity](#)
Governors from coast to coast joined the conversation to trade ideas on everything from early childhood education to high school apprenticeship programs to tackling the social factors behind opportunity gaps. Participants included NGA Chair Colorado Governor Jared Polis, NGA Vice Chair Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt, Delaware Governor-elect Matt Meyer, Hawai'i Governor Josh Green, and New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan-Grisham.
- [Let's Get Ready to Better Measure Success](#)
Dr. Marty West, Professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a member of the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees the administration and release of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), was on hand to share an overview of NAEP's findings. The discussion was moderated by Marlon Marshall, CEO of City Fund—an organization dedicated to providing grant funding in partner cities to give all students, especially those historically denied access, a quality education.

Las Vegas Convening in December 2024

- [Let's Get Ready for AI in Education](#)
Governor Polis, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, and Utah Governor Spencer Cox opened the meeting with remarks on efforts in their states; then, they led a discussion with Sal Khan, CEO and founder of Khan Academy, and a leader in education innovation on the opportunities of AI in education.
- [Let's Get Students Ready for Success](#)
Governor Polis was joined by College Board CEO David Coleman for a discussion on ways Governors can transform the current high school education system to prepare high school students for diverse college and career paths.
- [Let's Get Ready to Innovate](#)
Governors were joined by leaders on the cutting edge of education innovations designed to open opportunity to underserved populations: Reshma Saujani is the Founder of Girls Who Code and Founder and CEO of Moms First; Dr. Shanika Hope is a former elementary school teacher, principal and high school turnaround specialist who now serves as Director at Google.org; and Martin Ritter is CEO of Stadler US, a Switzerland-based train





company that developed an apprenticeship program to train young workers for successful careers in its Utah plant.

NGA 2025 Winter Meeting in Washington D.C.

- [Emily Oster and Kara Swisher joined Governor Polis at NGA's 2025 Winter Meeting](#) to explore: What else should we be measuring? What data will tell us that students are career-ready, or college-ready? How can we harness technology to identify and implement solutions?

New York Convening in March 2025

- [Governors Polis and Hochul Spotlight Education Innovation in New York City](#)
Governor Kathy Hochul welcomed National Governors Association (NGA) Chair Colorado Governor Jared Polis for one in a series of bipartisan events in support of his NGA Chair's Initiative. Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, and Rhode Island Governor Dan McKee joined the conversation in New York City, while NGA Vice Chair Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt and Delaware Governor Matt Meyer joined virtually. Attending Governors had a closed-door meeting with Education Secretary Linda McMahon at the convening.
- [Let's Get Ready to Partner on Education](#)
This panel focused on developing bottom-up approaches rather than top-down governance to achieve success. It featured Randi Weingarten, president of the 1.8 million-member American Federation of Teachers (AFT) since 2008, and Geoffrey Canada, founder and president of the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), a world-renowned education and poverty-fighting organization based in New York City.
- [Let's Get Ready to Build Education to Workforce Pipelines](#)
Governor Polis introduced an expert panel that discussed how to better define and measure educational success beyond standardized tests, which factors contribute to student achievement, and how technology can help. It included Dr. Tequilla Brownie, CEO of TNTP, Dr. Stephen Moret, President and CEO of Strada Education Foundation, Shaline Sharma, CEO of Zearn, and Scott Pulsipher, President of Western Governors University.
- [Let's Get Ready to Improve Education and Support Rural Communities](#)
The day's third panel discussion featured Eva Moskowitz, founder and CEO of Success Academy Charter Schools, and Noa Meyer, Board Chair at rootEd Alliance, which places dedicated college and career advisors directly in rural high schools to work with all students. Themes from the panel included the need for better educational systems, the benefits of parent and family engagement, and the importance of data-driven approaches.

April 2025 Virtual Convening

- [Let's Get Ready to Improve the Value of Education](#)
How can we reshape the education system to promote economic mobility? How should we assess the value of a diploma? What role do life skills play in career success, and how do we measure them? How can we ensure states are effectively measuring the ROI of education initiatives to confirm we're investing in what works? The Let's Get Ready! initiative tackled those questions and more in a virtual convening.

NGA Chair Colorado Governor Jared Polis and Delaware Governor Matt Meyer welcomed expert panelists with deep experience exploring the educational factors driving economic mobility: Dr. Raj Chetty, William A. Ackman Professor of Public Economics, Harvard University; Dr. Angela Duckworth, Rosa Lee and Egbert Chang Professor of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania; and Dr. Marguerite Roza, Director, Edunomics Lab.





Vancouver Convening in June 2025

- **Let's Get Ready for Improved Educational Outcomes**

Zoe Weintraub from Guild and Wendi Campbell from Junior Achievement British Columbia joined Governor Polis for a fireside chat on preparing students of all ages for workforce success. U.S. Consul General James DeHart welcomed attendees to Vancouver before turning the microphone over to Governor Polis, who introduced the speakers.

- **Let's Get Ready to Close the Achievement Gaps for All Students**

Of Boys and Men author Dr. Richard Reeves joined NGA Chair Colorado Governor Jared Polis to discuss an often overlooked challenge: the growing struggles of boys and men in education, workforce readiness and social engagement. Reeves emphasized that focusing on achievement gaps observed in boys doesn't mean taking our eye off the ball when it comes to historical achievement gaps experienced by girls.

- **Let's Get Ready for International Best Practices in Education**

The Vancouver convening provided a valuable opportunity to collaborate with international counterparts to get a fresh perspective and learn how other nations are finding success in tackling common challenges in education. One of those counterparts was Dr. Tan Oon Seng, Director of the Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education. In that role, he has helped Singapore integrate academic rigor with soft skill development. He joined NGA Chair Colorado Governor Jared Polis to share lessons learned from Singapore's strategy to invest in character and citizenship education as part of a "whole child" approach to prepare students for success in the 21st century economy.

- **Let's Get Ready to Define Success**

The last session of the Vancouver Let's Get Ready! convening returned to what Governor Polis called the central question of the initiative: How do we define a measure of success? Dr. Vicki Phillips, CEO of the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) and Dr. Timothy Knowles, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching joined the Governor to explore this question.





Appendix B: Example Metrics and Dashboard Prototype

Governors can measure the success of their state's education system beyond literacy and math. Research conducted by Mathematica developed a comprehensive [Education-to-Workforce Indicator Framework](#), which, "recommends indicators of student outcomes and milestones and related system conditions needed to help every student succeed as they progress from early education through their career." Each indicator includes a description of why it matters for economic mobility. The data below includes some of the indicators from their full repository aligned with our four domains.

A dashboard prototype can be accessed at: www.watershed-advisors.com/resources.

Academic Foundations

- Consistent attendance
- Early grades, 6th, and 8th grades on track
- Math and reading proficiency in 3rd grade
- Completion of algebra I by 9th grade
- SAT and ACT participation and performance
- High school graduation
- Post-secondary enrollment directly after high school

Lifelong Well-Being

- Positive behavior
- Social awareness, self-efficacy, growth mindset
- Mental and emotional well-being
- Physical development and well-being
- Economic and food security
- Access to affordable housing
- Health insurance coverage

Workforce Preparedness

- Early college coursework completion
- Career pathway concentration
- Industry-recognized credential
- Participation in work-based learning
- Successful transition from high school to postsecondary or career
- Communication and higher-order thinking skills
- Economic mobility

Civic Engagement

- Cultural competency
- Social capital
- School-family engagement
- Social awareness
- School and workplace diversity
- Voter registration





Appendix C: State Implementation Self-Assessment

Rethinking how your state delivers education at all levels can seem overwhelming, and it may not be clear where to begin. States can start by asking themselves some key questions to reflect on where they stand when it comes to establishing a vision, measuring the right things to track progress toward that vision, and establishing the infrastructure needed to provide those on the ground with the necessary tools.

These questions are not comprehensive; they are a self-assessment tool to start down the road toward implementation.

Has your state established and communicated a vision for any of the areas of readiness—academic foundations, workforce readiness, lifelong well-being, and civic engagement?

Example Question Prompts:

- Does your state have a vision related to health, early intervention, preschool enrollment, and other outcomes associated with a quality early childhood experience?
- Has your state communicated a vision for what it means to graduate ready for what comes next and what needs to happen in K-12 schools to accomplish that?
- What does your state consider “workforce ready,” and is it aligned to your state’s economic needs?
- How is your state thinking about civic engagement and lifelong well-being in the education system?

What education outcomes does your state currently measure and report, and do they reflect a full vision of “readiness?”

Example Question Prompts:

- Do these metrics align to the areas of readiness? Where are they lacking?
- Are the goals for these metrics aligned to the state’s vision for learners?
- How frequently and when is your state collecting data and is it being reported in a way that supports understanding and action?
- Is your state collecting and acting upon important measures that impact education but which may require solutions beyond the school building?





Does your state have the tools in place to collect, connect, and analyze student data to inform decision-making?

Example Question Prompts:

Longitudinal Data Questions:

- Does your state have a longitudinal data system (SLDS)?
- Are there agency sharing agreements in place that allow for longitudinal analysis?
- How does the Governor currently use data in decision-making? In what ways is it made available?
- Does the state have data dashboards that allow for clear and easy assessment of performance for both agencies and the public?

Data Collection Questions:

- Does your state collect detailed data on all postsecondary education and training programs, including nondegree and noncredit programs?
- Are unemployment insurance wage records enhanced to capture hourly wage equivalents, job titles, and worker locations?

Data Integration:

- Can your state track individual learners from education completion through employment outcomes over time?
- Do you have data sharing agreements between education, workforce, and labor agencies?
- Can your systems disaggregate outcomes by institution, program, race/ethnicity, family income, and gender?

Data Access and Transparency:

- Do you provide open data files with anonymized education-to-employment statistics?
- Can researchers access individual-level matched datasets for policy research?
- Do students and graduates have secure access to their own verified outcome data?
- Can researchers access individual-level matched datasets for policy research?
- Do students and graduates have secure access to their own verified outcome data?

Analytical Capacity:

- Do you have dedicated staff for generating education-to-employment insights?
- Can your state calculate return on investment for different education programs?
- Do you have partnerships for tracking graduates who relocate to other states?





Are state agencies and functions currently structured in a way that supports the vision?

Example Question Prompts:

- What actions is the Governor taking to ensure all state agencies understand the statewide vision for student readiness and their role in implementation and measurement?
- Are there systems in place to encourage and facilitate the coordination of all agencies supporting children within and outside of schools?
- What role does the Governor's office currently have in ensuring data and information are de-siloed across agencies and aligned toward shared goals?

Are state agencies engaging in R&D to continue learning about effective outcomes?

States should refer to the Alliance for Learning Innovation's report, [Seizing the Opportunity for State Education R&D](#), for recommendations of example questions and actions.





Appendix D: Let's Get Ready for a Connected World: Reconceptualizing Foreign Language Instruction

Across most states, and in most local school districts, students are required to take a foreign language for two years in order to meet graduation requirements. Most end their foreign language education there, with no additional classes, lacking conversational fluency. The skills they have learned in those two years are insufficient to be of value in the job market and may have seemed uninteresting and disconnected to their other course work. Bilinguality in English and Spanish, for instance, is an excellent example of a skill learned in K-12 that advances a student's opportunities and earnings in fields such as nursing. Additionally, [cognitive research](#) shows that individuals are most adept at learning new languages before age 18, with children under 10 learning especially quickly. But for most states, neither the college nor career-focused pathways consider this.

The answer to this problem, of course, is not to abandon foreign language instruction in high schools. It is to reconceptualize what foreign language education looks like across a student's educational career. Here's how that might work if the problem is tackled using the three guiding questions.

What do learners need to know at every step of their educational journeys to achieve success in life and to ensure that our nation continues to be competitive?

We know that part of answering this question is developing education systems that provide diverse experiences that are aligned to a career pathway. What could that look like for foreign language? For some students, it may mean eliminating the requirement, allowing them to focus those course hours on something more applicable to their pathway and interests. In other instances, it could become an expanded requirement for certain career pathways or a targeted one. Students earning health sciences certifications could be required to take four years of Spanish or to take courses on communicating medical information.

How will we measure outcomes to ensure that education systems are effectively delivering for students and our economy?

Adjusting foreign language instructional requirements is tied to career preparedness and employability, as well as future earnings potential. States can measure not just how many students are participating in foreign language instruction, but what percent of students are actually gaining fluency. Measuring the success of this type of initiative spans the K-12 system into post-secondary institutions and workforce data. This is the type of work that Governors are well-positioned to facilitate through data-sharing requirements, realignment of agency responsibilities, or funding for state longitudinal data systems.

How can Governors do more of what works?

In this example, Governors can call attention to the issue through their legislative priorities, which is a chance to establish a vision for success and to invest in pilot programs that pursue a different approach to foreign language instruction. Rethinking foreign language instruction could be an important part of a larger reconsideration of the skills and knowledge employers are seeking and how those are incorporated into classrooms.





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