

Aligning State Education, Workforce Development, and Benefit Systems to Support Students

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Background

As the future of work rapidly evolves, state public higher education institutions and systems continue to integrate workforce development goals and strategies into their missions. More than [40 million](#) Americans have completed some college, but not earned a credential and more than 2.2 million adults are [seeking employment](#) and have not found a job. State higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, serve as key hubs for credential and degree attainment in targeted workforce areas. Through [expansions and modifications](#) of state financial aid programs, [innovative postsecondary funding strategies](#), and [expansion of career-ready programs](#), states are supporting community college goals to rapidly respond to workforce needs.

State policymakers are also working to align, connect and coordinate efforts among state agencies, public colleges and universities, and business and labor partners. Several states have undergone legislative or administrative efforts to redesign state agencies to work together on education and workforce development goals, such as Missouri's [merger](#) of the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development. States are also trying to seamlessly integrate public services, which are often [difficult to navigate](#), while also utilizing nondegree credential offerings to advance workforce outcomes.

State Policy Action

WORKFORCE SYSTEM REDESIGN

■ VIRGINIA

In 2023, Virginia lawmakers passed [SB 1470](#) to create the new Department of Workforce Development and Advancement led by a chief workforce development officer with oversight over all workforce

Key Takeaways

- States continue to work to align efforts between public colleges and universities, state agencies, and business and labor partners.
- Several states have merged or redesigned workforce systems and agencies to avoid program duplication and streamline processes for students.
- States have also explored the creation of “one door” models for public supports and nondegree credential offerings that can support state workforce goals.

development programs offered in the commonwealth. Prior to this law, Virginia had more than 1,500 workforce programs spread across more than a dozen state agencies and 23 state community colleges. Proponents of the legislation [argued](#) that this old approach created too many silos and led to difficulties for students navigating an overly complex system. A 2015 [audit](#) conducted by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission found that “Lack of coordination and inconsistent participation by key local agencies undermines quality of workforce development efforts.” The legislation also includes provisions to promote state apprenticeship programs and improve data collection and analysis.

■ ARKANSAS

In 2019, Arkansas lawmakers passed [SB 522](#) to create a comprehensive statewide workforce development system. The legislation aims to reduce unnecessary duplication of programming and coordinate all state and federal career education and workforce development programs. The legislation includes requirements to develop a catalog of nationally recognized credentials that are widely adopted by the respective industries and where these credentials can be earned. This [Catalog Of Industry Recognized Credentials](#) is published by the



Office of Skills Development and includes in-demand fields such as health care, information technology and manufacturing.

Connecticut

In 2020, the Office of Workforce Strategy was created by Gov. Ned Lamont and the office was codified by [SB 1202](#) in 2020. The agency has broad authority over the state’s workforce development system and is led by the chief workforce officer. The chief workforce officer also serves as the head of the [Governor’s Workforce Council](#) which consists of members from business, labor, education and elected officials. The Office of Workforce Strategy is charged with creating a statewide strategy for workforce development among related state agencies.

One Door Model

■ UTAH

In 1992, a [legislative audit](#) found that Utah had a fragmented workforce development system that included difficulty accessing public services. In response, Utah has undertaken [several legislative](#) and executive reforms to create a “one door” model for combined workforce and human services. These services have [been integrated](#) under the Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS), which included programs such as health insurance, housing, refugee support and vocational rehabilitation. As part of the “one door” model, Utah emphasizes [public benefits](#) as part of a work-first approach where applicants work with a caseworker to navigate more than 50 federal and state funded programs. The state operates locations in each county as part of single-state local area designation under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act. DWS has [identified](#) that the “one-door” model has enabled a unified statewide structure for service delivery which has created efficiencies in funding and improved customer service. Additionally, Utah was one of the [fastest states in the country](#) to recover jobs lost during the COVID-19 pandemic.

■ TEXAS

In 2023, Texas legislators passed [SB 2315](#) to create a task force to develop a plan for the consolidation of workforce development programs administered by the Texas Workforce Commission and social services programs administered by the Health and Human Services Commission.

Incorporation of Nondegree Credentials

■ LOUISIANA

In 2020, Louisiana’s Board of Regents incorporated statewide quality standards for nondegree credentials into its [higher education master plan](#). The standards, developed with the state higher education system, workforce commission and other state agencies also had the support of the [National Skills Coalition](#). Quality credentials must meet certain thresholds, including maintaining a 20% wage premium over a high school diploma in the state. Analysis from [Jobs for the Future](#) found that the new standards propelled some community colleges to shift to credentials that meet higher wage thresholds for students.

■ DELAWARE

In 2021, Delaware passed [HB 166](#), which created the [Elevate Delaware Program](#), providing up to \$10,000 for students approved for noncredit certificate programs. The funding can be used to cover direct program costs or basic living expenses while enrolled. Individuals are eligible if they are employed by a company with fewer than 51 employees and pay Delaware income tax. The legislation also required the state Workforce Development Board to create a list of eligible noncredit certificate programs and establish priorities based on the skill requirements of employers in the state.

Additional Resources

- [NCSL Postsecondary Bill Tracking Database](#)
- [NCSL Nondegree Credential State Policy Framework](#)

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