

Using Guided Pathways to Build Cross-Sector Pathways Partnerships

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Acknowledgments

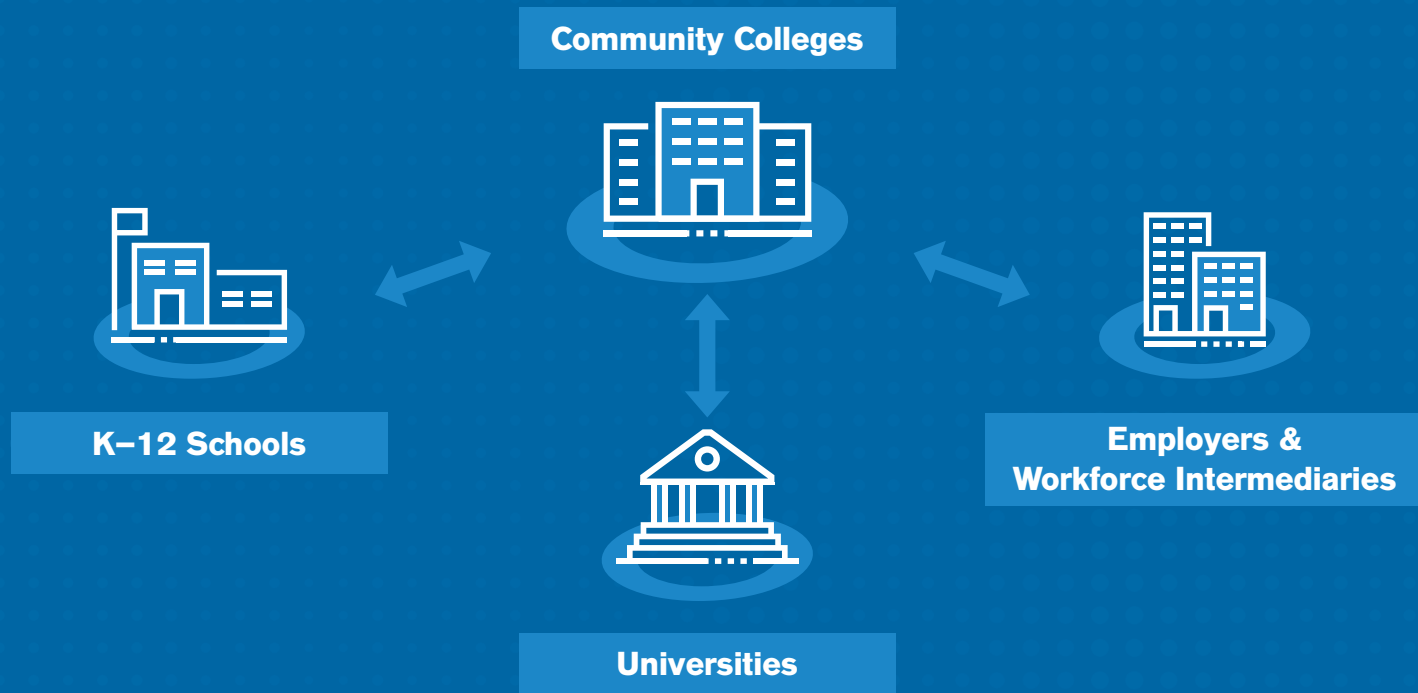
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Introduction



Elaborating on the Guided Pathways Model

Faced with chronically low student success rates and declining enrollments, hundreds of community colleges nationally are abandoning the access-oriented “cafeteria college” model of the 1960s and redesigning programs and student supports following “guided pathways” principles.

Some colleges are building on their guided pathways reforms in partnership with employers, universities, and K–12 schools to create **cross-sector pathways** to college and career opportunities for students in their regions—particularly those students traditionally underserved by higher education. The aim is to improve economic mobility for community residents and to meet the workforce needs of area employers.

Based on an exploratory study at four such colleges, this report introduces a cross-sector pathways model and highlights emerging practices and strategies to strengthen ties between guided pathways colleges and their partners. These strengthened partnerships reduce barriers that students face as they transition between institutions and employers in their journey from high school to college and careers.

HOW THIS REPORT IS ORGANIZED

We begin this report by discussing key challenges facing community colleges and their students today, and by illustrating how guided pathways reform efforts that emphasize cross-sector partnerships serve as a model for addressing these challenges. We then introduce our exploratory study and the study colleges from which we draw examples throughout the rest of the report, and we provide some key takeaways on how these colleges have thus far developed cross-sector pathways.

Next we outline a set of 12 innovative cross-sector pathways practices, 3 that occur in each of these domains: (1) within community colleges themselves, (2) between community colleges and employers, (3) between community colleges and universities, (4) and between community colleges and K–12 schools. We also highlight strategies that community colleges are using to build mutually beneficial relationships with employers and other educational institutions.

We draw three broad conclusions from our exploratory study of innovative cross-sector practices and community college relationship-building strategies.

- 1** Innovating at scale rather than through targeted programs—that is, establishing new practices that affect all students—creates and sustains momentum for institutional transformation.
- 2** To implement and sustain innovations at scale requires changing the mindsets of faculty, staff, and partners.
- 3** Implementing cross-sector pathways at scale requires community colleges to move from transactional relationships to transformational relationships focused on “win-wins” for both the colleges and their external partners.

Our research also suggests a number of future directions for cross-sector partnerships. These include an expansion of experiential learning in and outside of the classroom, creating clearer pathways to jobs in non-CTE fields, improved college and career exploration for students starting in middle school, and understanding cross-sector pathways in rural areas.

Why Guided Pathways?

Why Cross-Sector Partnerships?

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Today's community colleges face several related challenges:

- + Declining enrollments*
- + Low rates of degree attainment*
- + Stagnant returns to community college credentials*

Guided pathways reforms that emphasize regional cross-sector partnerships aim to address these challenges.

Declining Enrollments

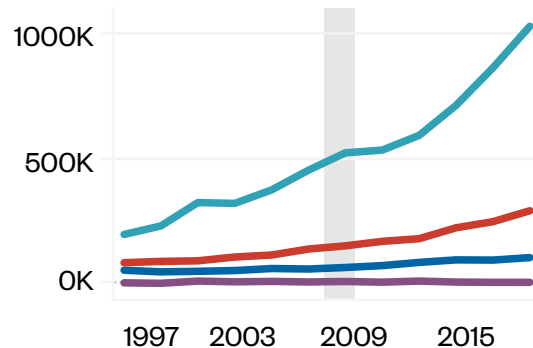
Enrollments in community colleges have been declining since 2012.

Since around 2012, community colleges have seen dramatic declines in enrollment by older students and have lost market share of traditional college-age students to public and private four-year institutions. The only group in which community colleges have expanded enrollment is high school dual enrollment students.

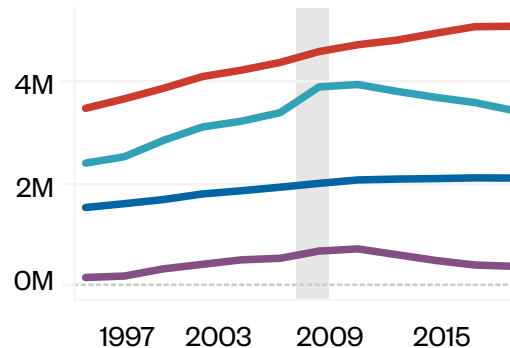
The pandemic has exacerbated community colleges' enrollment challenges. In fall 2020, community college enrollment was over 10% lower than in fall 2019 compared to a decline of just over 1% among public four-year institutions.

Fall Enrollment Trends by Age IPEDS Data, 1997-2019

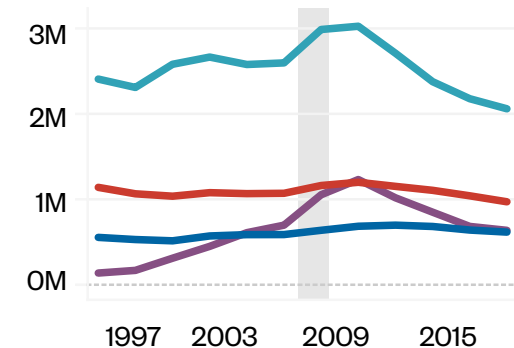
Age: Under 18



Age: 18-24



Age: 25+




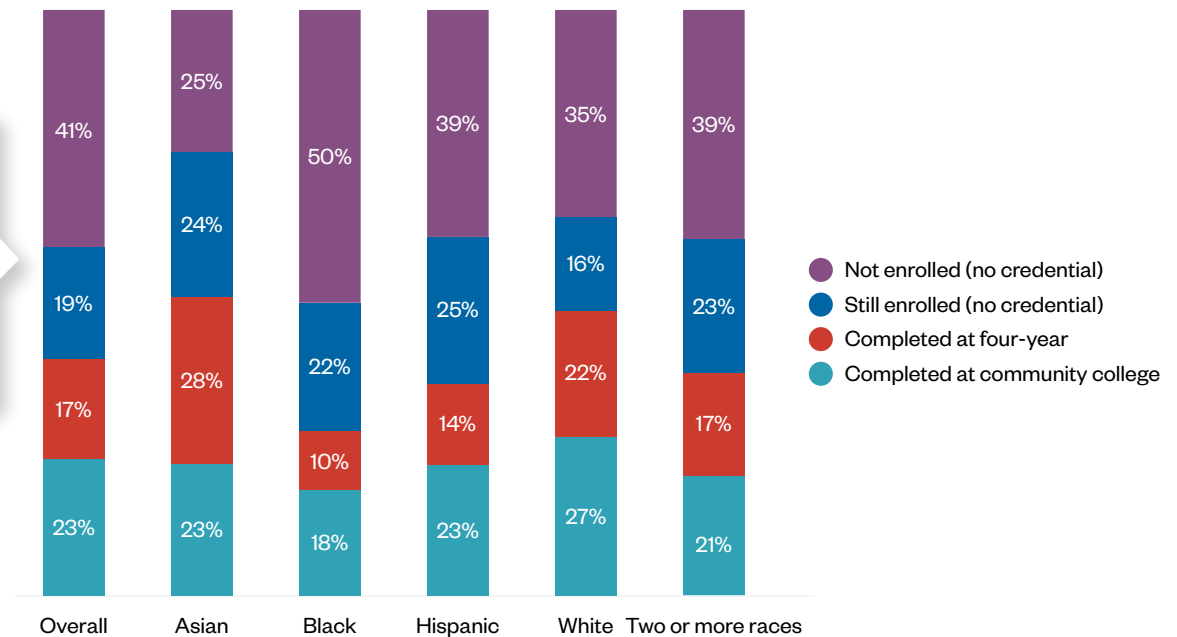
Sector (CCRC Definition) ● Community colleges ● Public four-years ● Private not-for-profit four-years ● Private for-profits

Source: CCRC analysis using IPEDS data, <https://public.tableau.com/profile/john.fink#!/vizhome/UndergraduateEnrollmentTrendsbySector/Summary>

Compounding enrollment challenges, the completion of degrees and certificates by students who start in community colleges remains low, especially among underrepresented students.

Six-Year Highest Outcomes of First-Time College Students Who Started at a Public Two-Year College in Fall 2014

 Most students who start at a community college do not earn any postsecondary credential, let alone a bachelor's degree, and attainment for Black and Hispanic students is especially low.


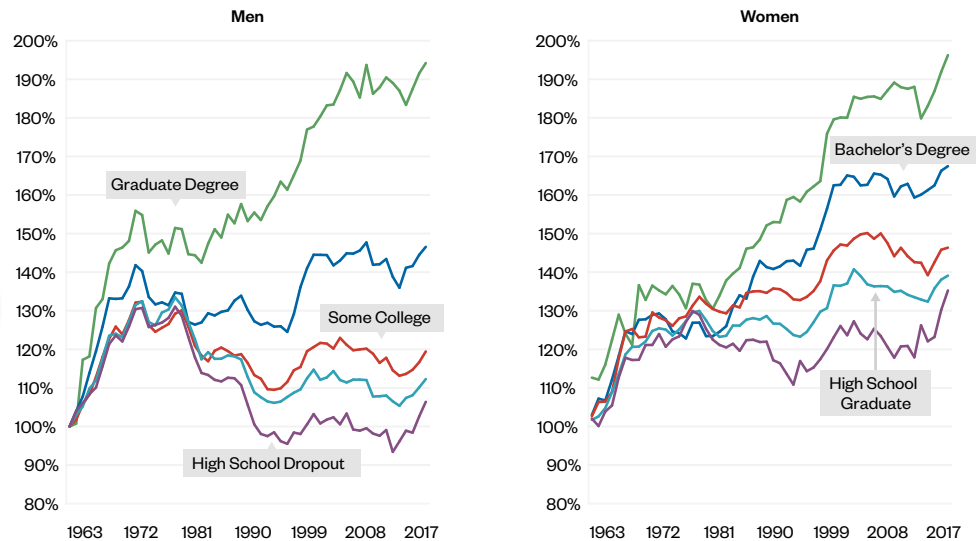


Source: CCRC analysis using data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (December 2020), Completing College 2020, <https://nscresearchcenter.org/completing-college/>

Stagnant Returns to Community College Credentials

One reason for declining enrollment may be that returns to certificates and associate degrees have stagnated, while the returns to bachelor's and graduate degrees have increased. To remain competitive, community colleges need to strengthen their transfer relationships to bachelor's degree programs in fields of economic value (or begin offering more bachelor's degrees themselves).

Cumulative Change In Real Weekly Earnings of Working-Age Adults
Ages 18–64, 1963–2017



The economic returns to bachelor's and graduate degrees have remained strong, even as the returns to “some college” (including certificates and associate degrees) have stagnated or declined.

Source: Autor et al. (November 2020). *The Future of work: Building better jobs in the age of intelligent machines*, MIT Task Force on Work of the Future. <https://workofthefuture.mit.edu/research-post/the-work-of-the-future-building-better-jobs-in-an-age-of-intelligent-machines/>

Note: Series are calculated from March Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement data for earnings years 1965 to 2018. Each series depicts the percentage change in real hourly earnings relative to its value in 1965 for the indicated education and sex group.

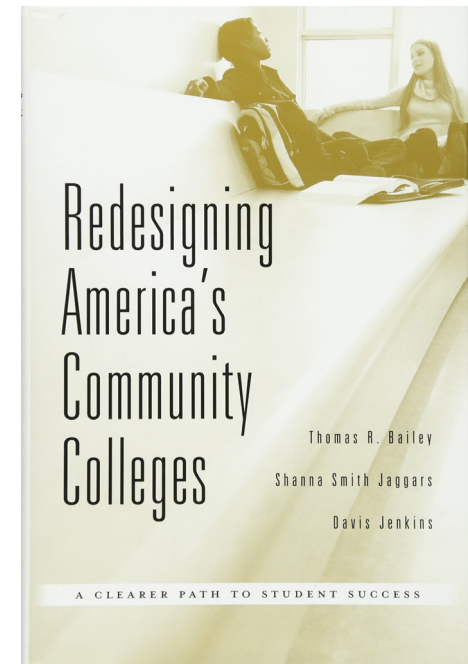
The guided pathways model is intended to improve student outcomes through college-wide redesign efforts focused on helping students enter and complete programs of study.

The Guided Pathways Model

A whole-college redesign model through which colleges “backward map” programs of study to good jobs and baccalaureate transfer by field while redesigning advising, placement, instruction, and technology systems to enable students to choose, plan, and complete programs efficiently and affordably.

The Goals of Guided Pathways

The guided pathways approach is intended to address inequities in educational opportunity by encouraging and supporting all students—particularly students of color and low-income students—to explore, plan, and complete a program that leads to a good job or transfer in the student’s major field of interest. Guided pathways aims to eliminate sorting mechanisms in community colleges, such as standardized placement tests and outmoded remedial curricula, that create barriers to college and career success, particularly for students from underserved groups.



The Growth of Guided Pathways

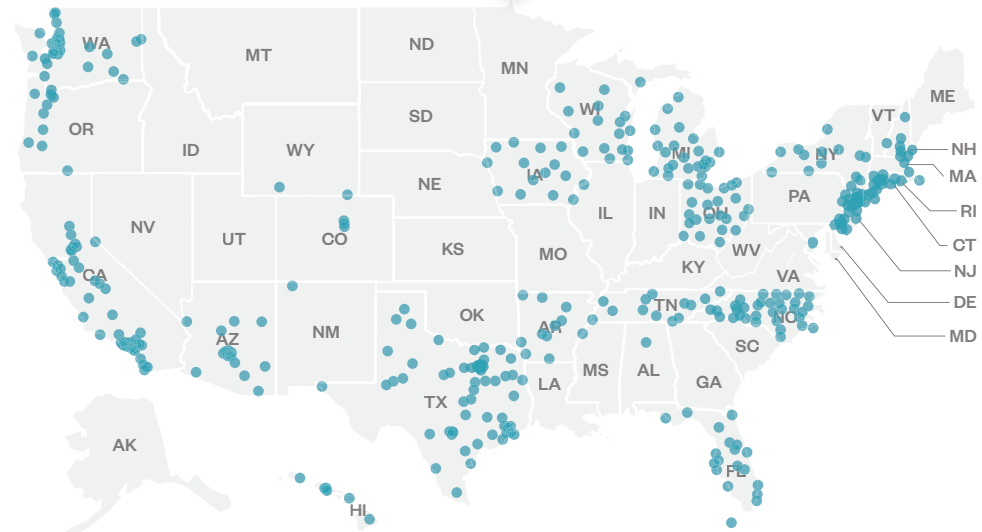
To improve college and career outcomes for their students, particularly those from underserved groups, and build back enrollments in the face of increased competition, hundreds of community colleges are now redesigning their institutions following the guided pathways model.

Redesigning Colleges through Guided Pathways

- **Organize all programs by field and backward-map to good jobs and transfer** (with no excess credits) in fields of importance to the local community.
- **Redesign new student onboarding** to help all students to explore interests and options, connect with an academic and career community, and develop an individualized educational plan aligned with their career and transfer goals.
- **Reorganize advising** to support case management by field and the use of students' individualized plans to schedule classes and monitor academic progress.
- **Integrate active and experiential learning throughout programs**, both in and out the classroom, to build students' confidence as critical thinkers and learners.



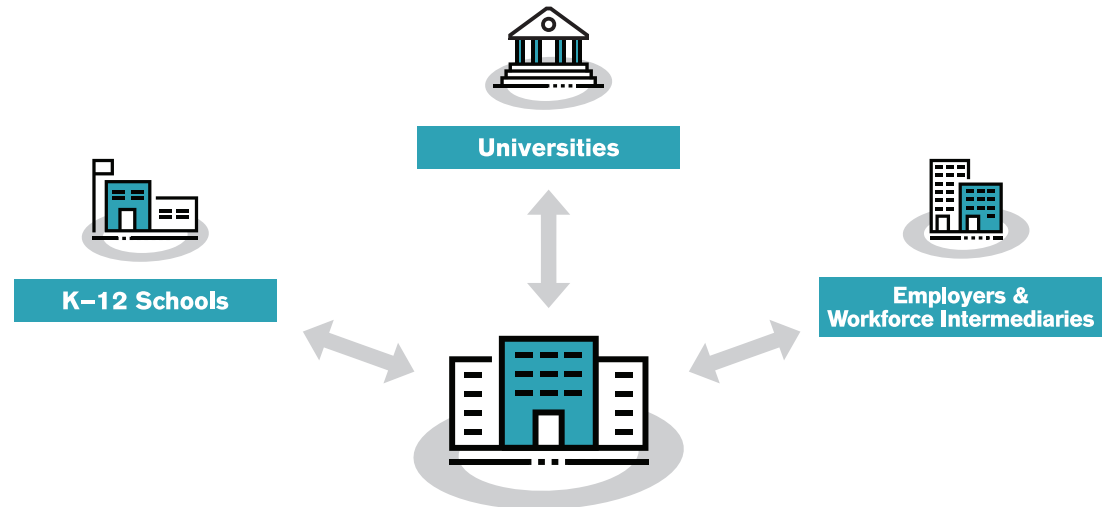
More than 400 colleges are involved in formal national or state guided pathways reform initiatives.



Updated December 2020

Building Cross-Sector Pathways

To realize the potential of guided pathways reforms in advancing opportunity and upward mobility for students and in meeting talent needs of local employers, community colleges work with partners to build cross-sector pathways in their regions. This begins by making fundamental changes within community colleges themselves.



Community Colleges

The colleges make innovations—based on the organization of college practices by regionally important career fields called meta-majors—to strengthen connections within and between academic and student services divisions. This provides a more integrated, supported, and goal-oriented experience for students.

The aim is to help all students explore interests, develop college and career plans, and gain exposure to employers and the workplace.

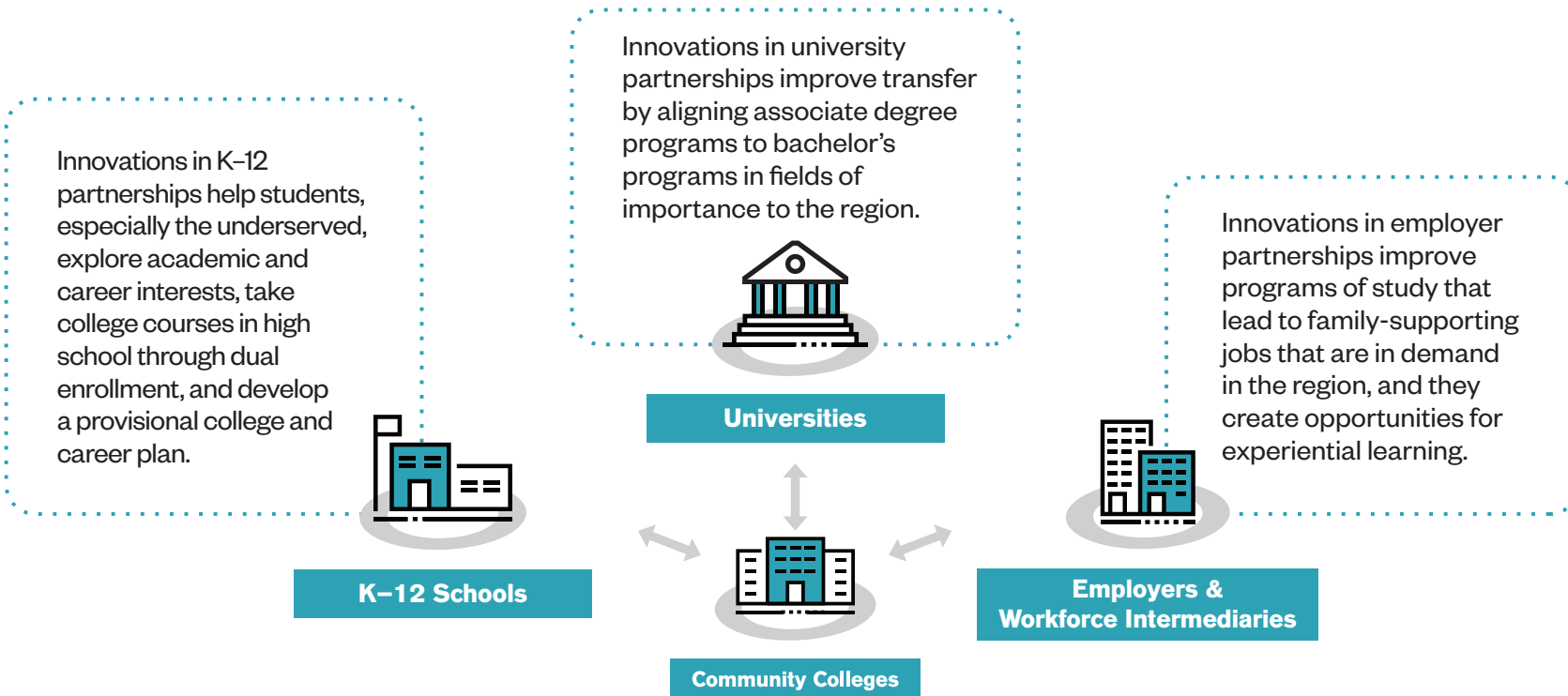


Community colleges drive the regional cross-sector model.

Employers, Universities, and K-12 Schools

Facilitated by internal changes, community colleges build stronger connections with employers, universities, and K-12 schools to break down barriers students face.

The creation of pathways between community colleges and partners in other sectors completes the cross-sector pathways approach.



Cross-Sector Pathways Versus the Status Quo

The cross-sector pathways approach aims to affect the entirety of the student’s journey.

In the following, we consider how Jada’s experiences are shaped by two different educational approaches—the conventional “siloed” approach and the regional cross-sector pathways approach.



Meet Jada

Jada is 18 years old and will be the first person in her family to attend college. She has some different career interests, but she’s not sure what direction she should go in. She thinks going to college will help her build a good future for herself, but she’s also uncertain about what to expect.

The Conventional “Siloed” Approach

Jada’s “siloed” experience is characterized by a lack of support to help her understand, plan, and succeed in college and career. There is little guidance as she transitions from one sector to the next.



High School

- Does not learn about careers or college options in courses, either through high school or local colleges
- Takes dual enrollment courses that are college prerequisites and neither connected to a college program nor aligned to her interests
- Has limited opportunities to speak with faculty outside of her dual enrollment courses.



Community College

- Participates in onboarding that focuses on an introduction to college and registration for first-term courses
- Participates in advising that focuses on semester-to-semester course registration
- Learns little about careers or options for transfer, either through community college or regional transfer institutions



University

- Receives inaccurate information about the transferability of her courses and enters her transfer institution with excess credits
- Is uncertain whether there are supports available for transfer students and has difficulty figuring out how to navigate her new campus

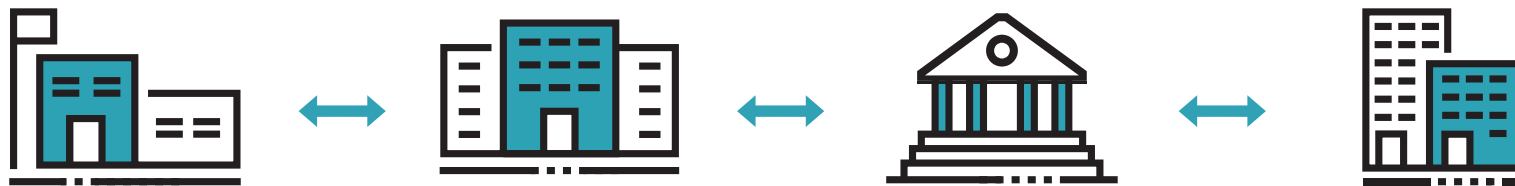


Career

- Is uncertain about where to look for a job or what job she should pursue. She is also uncertain about available career paths
- Does not have connections, either with faculty or employers, that might help her find a job

The Cross-Sector Pathways Approach

Jada's cross-sector pathways experience is characterized by greater support to help her understand, plan, and succeed in college and career. There is greater guidance as she transitions from one sector to the next.



High School

- Learns about careers and colleges in high school courses and through outreach events by community colleges
- Takes dual enrollment courses that align with her interests and provide an on-ramp to a program of study
- Has opportunities to speak with faculty and staff in a field of interest at the community college

Community College

- Participates in onboarding that focuses on exploring options and choosing a program aligned to her interests and goals
- Participates in advising that is field-specific and focused on developing and updating a full-program educational plan
- Learns about careers and options for transfer
- Gets hands-on experience in her field through experiential learning embedded in her program
- Creates a clear plan to transfer

University

- Transfers with junior standing in her major and is on track to graduate in a timely fashion
- Knows departments and services that are available to support transfer students
- Uses college and employer connections to secure experiential learning opportunities (service learning, internships, apprenticeships, cooperative education) that increase her employment prospects after graduation

Career

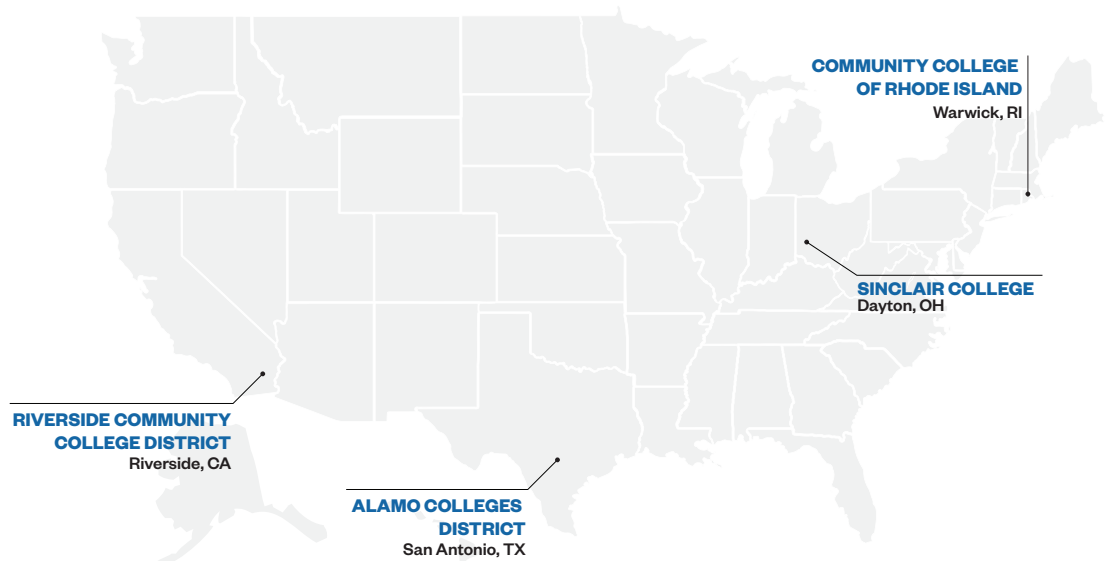
- Feels prepared to begin her career due to her coursework and experiential learning opportunities
- Has connections with faculty and employers that can help inform her future plans for career or education

About Our Study: An Exploration

CCRC & WestEd learned how four community colleges implementing guided pathways reforms are innovating within their own institutions and with external partners. They are creating cross-sector pathways to credentials and jobs in high-opportunity, high-value fields, which is essential for underserved students.

The Community Colleges We Examined

These college were selected because of their commitment to creating cross-sector pathways with the dual goals of supporting upward mobility for students from underserved groups and meeting the workforce needs of area employers.



ALAMO
COLLEGES
DISTRICT

Enrollment: 103,965
% Black students: 7%
% Hispanic students: 63%
Year college began implementing guided pathways: 2014



COMMUNITY COLLEGE
OF RHODE ISLAND

Enrollment: 19,283
% Black students: 9%
% Hispanic students: 22%
Year college began implementing guided pathways: 2016



RCCD
RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY
COLLEGE DISTRICT

Enrollment: 65,049
% Black students: 8%
% Hispanic students: 60%
Year college began implementing guided pathways: 2017



SINCLAIR
COLLEGE

Enrollment: 32,704
% Black students: 14%
% Hispanic students: 4%
Year college began implementing guided pathways: 2013

Source: 2019-20 12-month undergraduate headcount, IPEDs

Note: Enrollment based on 12-month unduplicated headcount.

Our goal was to learn how community colleges are building cross-sector pathways with employers, universities, and K-12 schools.

Research Questions

- 1 How can community colleges work effectively with employers and educational institutions to address common challenges in creating educational pathways to careers in high-opportunity fields?
- 2 What approaches do colleges and their partners take to establish and manage cross-sector partnerships?

Research Activities

Researchers conducted interviews with:

- 96 college personnel
- 14 partner representatives from:
 - 2 employers
 - 5 four-year partners
 - 7 K-12 partners

Cross-Cutting Themes from Our Fieldwork

Although the study colleges are at different stages of using their guided pathways reform efforts to build cross-sector pathways, we found shared themes across all four sites.

Vision

The colleges are leading their partnerships with explicit goals for advancing equity, upward mobility, and workforce development. Partners across sectors agree that community colleges play a key role in driving such efforts.

Scale and Method

The colleges are rethinking their programs, services, and partnerships in fundamental ways and at scale (i.e., for all students)—building on the guided pathways “backward design” approach.

Mindset

Innovations in practice require changes in culture and individual attitudes, which takes time and strong leadership to develop.

Necessity

Leaders at the colleges believe that making innovations in practice is necessary to achieve their institutional mission in an increasingly competitive environment.

Strength

Leaders also believe that the innovations they have implemented make them better positioned to respond to the challenges posed by Covid-19 and to the subsequent environment of heightened competition and diminished state support.

Opportunity

Building cross-sector partnerships provides an opportunity to bridge public-private barriers and advocate for systemic change at the policy level.

Innovative Cross-Sector Practices

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Using examples from the four study colleges—Alamo, CCRI, Riverside, and Sinclair—we describe emerging cross-sector practices that community colleges and their partners are implementing to break down barriers and build connections to advance college and career opportunities for students.

Innovations are presented in order of the following domains:

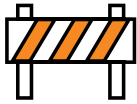
- + Within community colleges*
- + With employers & workforce intermediaries*
- + With universities*
- + With K-12 schools*



Innovation Within Community Colleges

Community colleges are implementing new practices within their own institutions that reduce internal barriers and support cross-sector pathways.

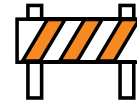
Barriers Within Community Colleges



The siloing of transfer, career-technical education (CTE), and adult basic skills programs limits opportunities for students.

Students in technical fields increasingly need bachelor's degrees to advance to strong career opportunities in the labor market, but they are not usually well informed about transfer programs. At the same time, students in transfer programs want help understanding career options and connecting with employers for internships and other experiential learning opportunities. Yet, most students seeking to transfer are not helped to examine career opportunities.

Similarly, many students in noncredit training programs and adult basic skills programs (ABE, ESL, GED) could benefit from earning degrees, but in most colleges there are neither formal nor practical mechanisms to help students transition to credit programs.



Cursory student onboarding and generalist advising are not useful enough in guiding students.

New student onboarding typically focuses on helping students enter the college and schedule first-term classes rather than on helping them to explore academic and career options and to connect them with faculty and others in a field of interest.

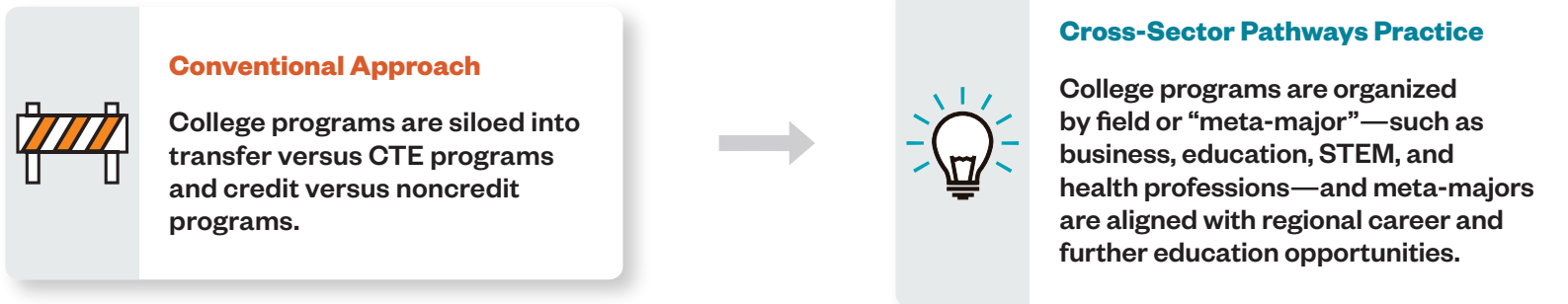
This is the case even though entering students say they want to connect with and be advised by persons with expertise in their field of interest. Field-specific advising is available at many colleges, but usually only if students seek it out on their own. Underserved students are the least likely to seek out help from advisors.



Innovative practices that address these barriers:

- 1 Career-aligned meta-majors**
- 2 Onboarding by meta-major**
- 3 Advising and networking by meta-major**

Innovation 1. Career-Aligned Meta-Majors



Benefits of the Innovative Practice

- Helps current and prospective students and employers (who are generally not familiar with the way community college programs are organized or even named) to get a clearer, more intuitive idea of the programs the college offers and where they lead to in terms of careers and further education.
- Enables students in CTE programs to earn credits toward degrees (which are increasingly required in addition to skills training for good jobs), enables transfer students to see the connection of transfer programs to careers in fields they are interested in, and makes clearer the pathways to college credit and degree programs for students in noncredit workforce and adult basic skills programs.
- Provides a framework for reorganizing onboarding and advising by field, and facilitates meta-major-based career communities that can help engage and motivate students and provide them with a network of support.

Innovation 1. Career-Aligned Meta-Majors

EXAMPLES

The study colleges are organizing their programs by meta-majors connected with regional career and further education opportunities.



Alamo Institutes

The Alamo Colleges have relied on their extensive relationships with employers and economic development organizations in the greater San

Antonio area to align their meta-majors (called **Institutes**) to jobs and transfer opportunities in fields of importance to San Antonio. The colleges have also invested substantial efforts in creating structured, degree-applicable pathways from the Alamo Colleges to area four-year institutions.

Alamo Institutes

- Creative & Communication Arts
- Business & Entrepreneurship
- Health & Biosciences
- Advanced Manufacturing & Logistics
- Public Service
- Science & Technology



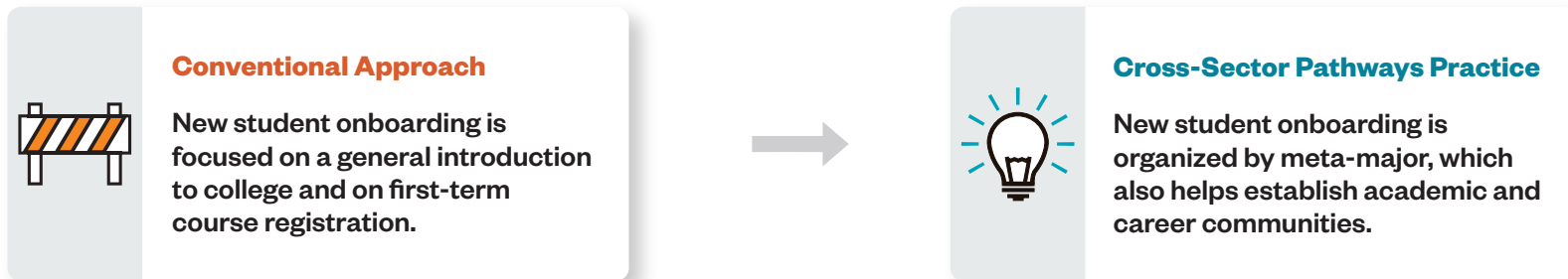
CCRI Academic and Career Paths

CCRI designed its meta-majors (called **Academic and Career Paths**) to align with the University of Rhode Island's meta-majors.

CCRI Academic and Career Paths

- Arts & Humanities
- Business, Economics, & Data Analysis
- Communication, Media, & Film
- Education, Government, & Human Services
- Environment & Sustainability
- Health & Health Administration
- Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics

Innovation 2. Onboarding by Meta-Major



Benefits of the Innovative Practice

- Introduces students to the college overall while helping students understand the college's range of programs and how they relate to various careers.
- Supports students in envisioning their longer-term goals and aspirations.
- Connects students to faculty, other students, employers, and others in a field of interest, building an academic and career community to guide them and facilitate internships and other opportunities.
- Encourages students to start exploring, choosing, and planning a program of study.

Innovation 2. Onboarding by Meta-Major

EXAMPLE

The Alamo Colleges have redesigned their new student enrollment, orientation, and advising processes by meta-major to help students begin exploring a program of study as soon as they start college.

Enrollment

- Applicants identify a meta-major of interest on their application.
- Alamo hired 25 enrollment coaches across all five colleges who contact applicants to welcome them and guide them through enrollment, helping those who get stuck. They also confirm each applicant's choice of meta-major.

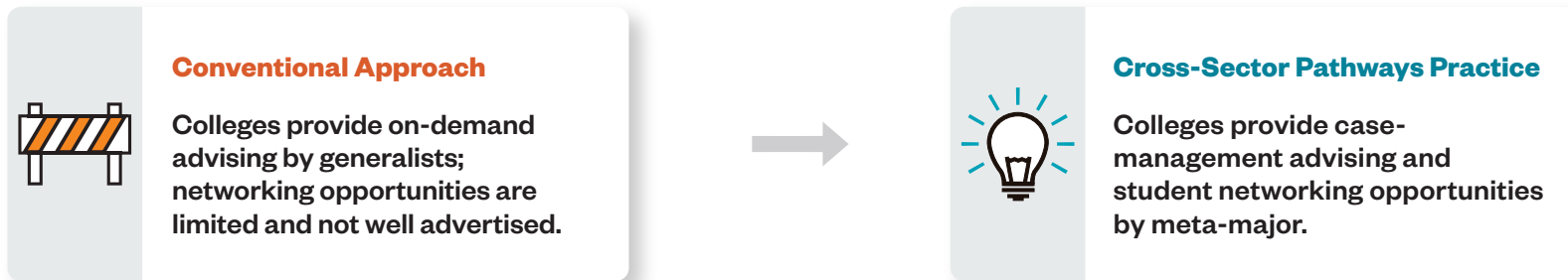
Orientation and New Student Advising

- Orientation is organized by meta-major; students participate in group advising sessions at orientation.
- Students are assigned an advisor within their meta-major.

Career and Transfer Advising

- Students have access to hundreds of transfer advising guides customized by meta-major and major for each of several transfer partners; the guides are frequently updated.
- In a first-year experience course, students complete a “mission statement” in which they formulate provisional education and career goals, meet with their advisor, and then develop a full-program educational plan.

Innovation 3. Advising and Networking by Meta-Major



Benefits of the Innovative Practice

Case Management Advising by Meta-Major

- Because they specialize in a limited number of programs and have a dedicated caseload of students, meta-major advisors are well-equipped to monitor individual students' progress within a program and discuss academic and career options related to each student's field of study.
- Whereas the conventional approach to career exploration requires students to seek out such support on their own through career assessments or career counseling, meta-major-based advising (and networking) helps ensure that all students are getting support in exploring their interests and options.

Networking Opportunities by Meta-Major

- Meta-majors can also function as academic and career communities in which students are connected with advisors, faculty, peers, and others knowledgeable about particular fields. Meta-majors can thus enable students to build a social network within their meta-major (or program), which is critical for connecting college to careers.
- Networking events outside of the classroom spur more extensive and more personalized opportunities to learn about education and career paths, especially when alumni and employers attend these events.

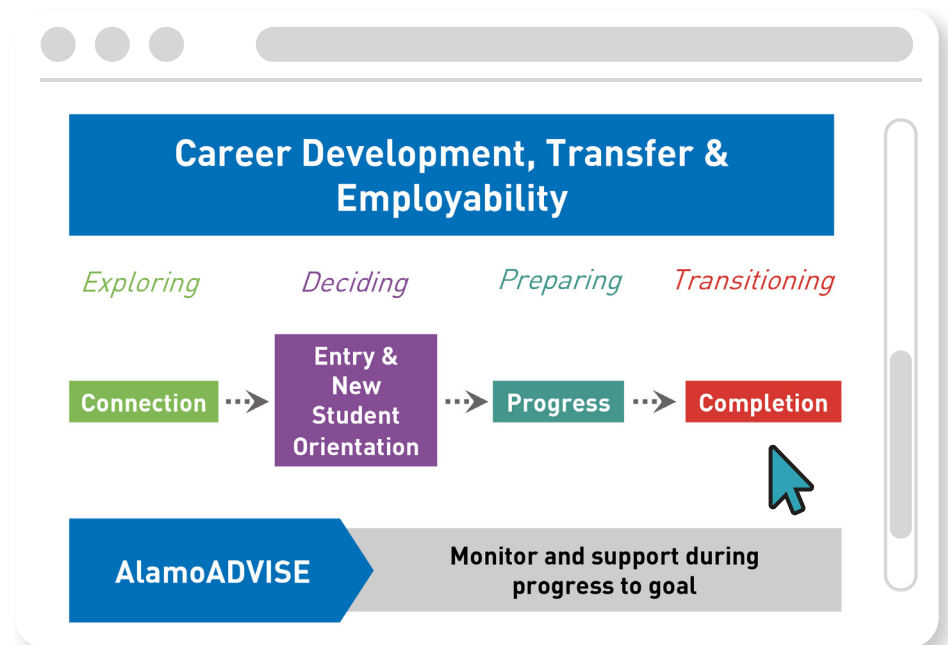
Innovation 3. Advising and Networking by Meta-Major

EXAMPLE 1

The Alamo Colleges use a case management model of advising organized by meta-major.

AlamoADVISE

Not only have the Alamo Colleges adopted a case management model of advising with regular, required meetings connected to specific goals and learning objectives for each stage of a student's educational journey, but they have also aligned their advising model with the district's meta-majors (called Institutes). Advisors are assigned to specific Institutes or specific programs within an Institute, allowing them to become experts in the programs in which the students in their caseload are enrolled.



Source: <https://www.alamo.edu/contentassets/d9fe06d8343847dc8b7582182c82d16f/category-6-concurrent-presentation.pdf>

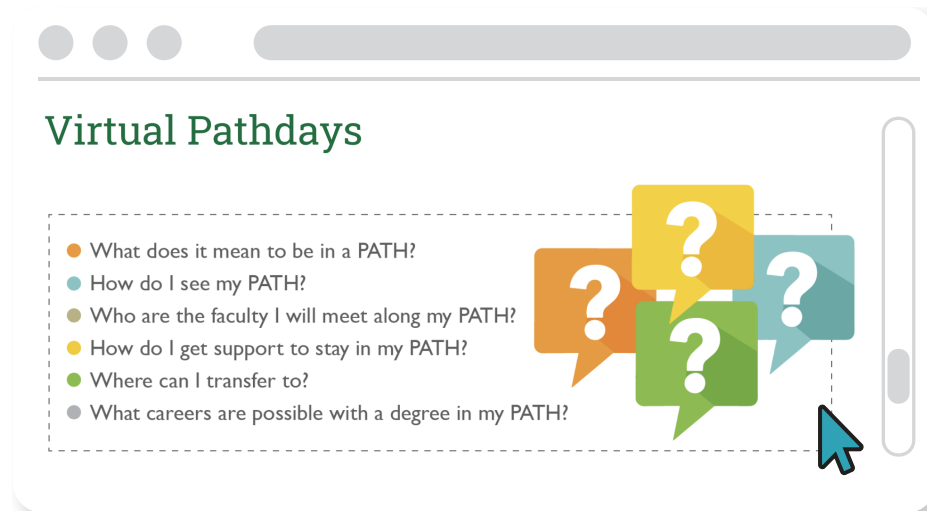
Innovation 3. Advising and Networking by Meta-Major

EXAMPLE 2

CCRI uses a specific venue called Pathdays for students to begin networking with faculty, staff, and others within their meta-major.

CCRI Virtual Pathdays

Held one day each semester, Pathdays provide information about career paths within particular meta-majors for interested students, who gain a deeper understanding of their field of interest while meeting faculty, advisors, peers, employers, and recent graduates. During Pathdays, which have been offered virtually due to the pandemic, area employers participate in online discussions in which they speak about their hiring needs, while recent graduates describe what their typical workday is



Source: <https://www.ccri.edu/pathways/pathdays/>

like, what someone can expect in the first five years of their career, how the college helped them prepare for their career, and what they wished they had known when they were students. Faculty also use the venue to recruit students into their

programs. Students can access videos of interviews with regional employers as well as recent CCRI graduates anytime through the college's **On-Demand Library**. CCRI also maintains an online **Pathdays Archive** that includes all recorded Pathdays.

Innovation 3. Advising and Networking by Meta-Major

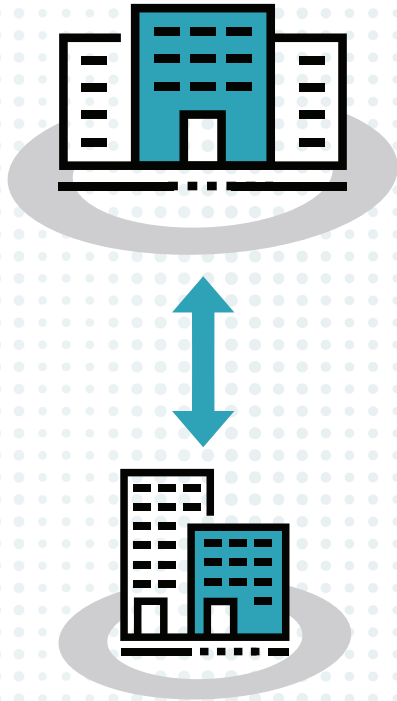
EXAMPLE 3

Sinclair College holds Career Conversation events for undecided students to discuss career paths with professionals in their (or another) meta-major.

Career Conversations

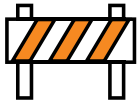
Career Conversation events held at Sinclair College provide opportunities for students who are unsure or undecided about their career plans to meet local professionals, learn about academic and career paths, and begin building a professional network. Students receive a “playbill” containing a short bio for each expert participating in the event and circulate around the room to talk to them one-on-one or in small groups. Some events are organized for an entire meta-major and may include up to 20 local professionals, while others are organized for a specific program and may include only a few.





Innovation with Employers & Workforce Intermediaries

Community colleges are connecting with regional employers to implement practices that support cross-sector pathways.



Limited relationships between community colleges and employers, focused narrowly on CTE programs, are insufficient in facilitating pathways to high-quality, high-opportunity careers.

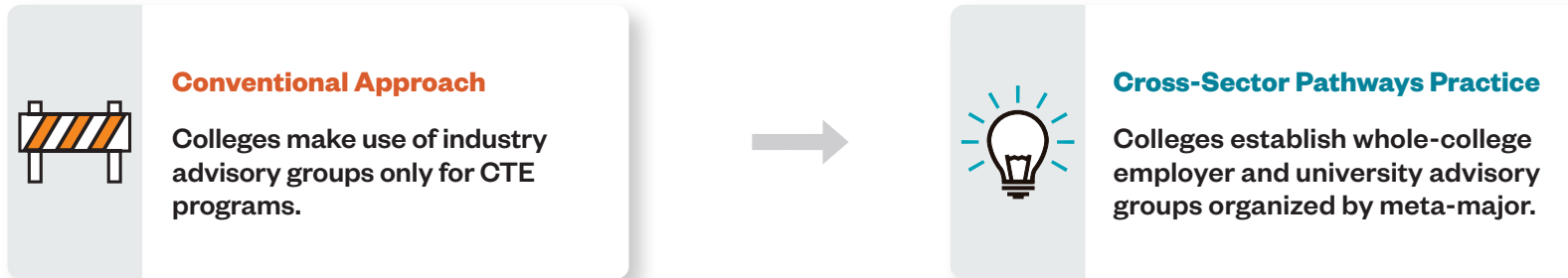
- CTE programs have industry advisory groups that inform their curricula, but these groups generally do not provide input on how academic transfer or noncredit programs can prepare students for careers.
- Individual faculty in CTE programs often have connections with employers and can thus help students find internships and jobs, but outside these typically informal relationships, there is no prescribed process for developing internship or job opportunities.
- Most colleges offer contract training for employers, and many develop training programs with funding from government grants—yet these programs are typically ad hoc, serve small numbers of students, and disappear when grant funding ends.
- When developing new programs and reviewing existing ones, colleges often rely on labor market data rather than on market knowledge developed through relationships with employers.



Innovative practices that address these barriers:

- 1** Industry advisory groups by meta-major
- 2** Community colleges as talent suppliers
- 3** Program-relevant experiential learning

Innovation 1. Industry Advisory Groups by Meta-Major



Benefits of the Innovative Practice

- Allows community colleges to better understand the needs of regional employers and transfer institutions.
- Enables community colleges to develop strategies to better meet these needs within particular meta-majors.

Innovation 1. Industry Advisory Groups by Meta-Major

EXAMPLE

The Alamo Colleges' whole-institution industry advisory structure supports the engagement of employers and universities by meta-major.

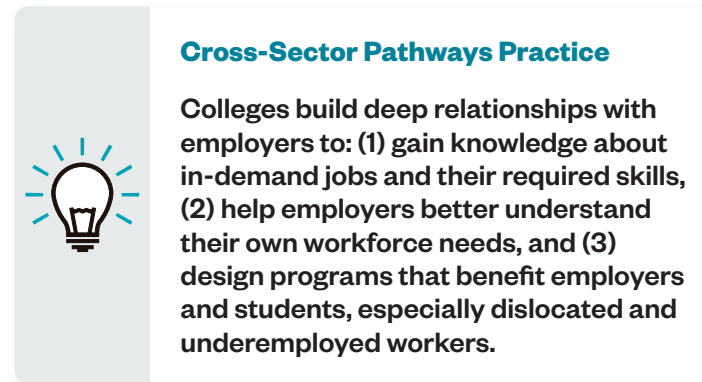
Alamo Industry Advisory Structure

Alamo Colleges have a multi-tiered industry **advisory structure** linked to all programs to share knowledge throughout the district. At each Alamo college, program-level advisory committees inform a meta-major (Institute) committee. These committees, in turn, interact with district-level meta-major advisory committees. This layered advisory structure emphasizes employer engagement and employer and university needs and expectations, especially in terms of program design.

Alamo's College-Level Institute Committees

- Engage faculty, student success representatives, and administrators in strategic conversation both with regional employers and transfer-aligned university partners.
- Create opportunities for applied experimental learning within programs.
- Ensure integration of feedback from other committees and teams.
- Provide oversight for the alignment of marketable skills to appropriate program learning outcomes.

Innovation 2. Community Colleges as Talent Suppliers



Benefits of the Innovative Practice

- Helps community colleges identify well-paying, in-demand jobs not always identifiable using conventional labor market data.
- Enables employers to better understand what talent they need to fill open positions and assess whether they are getting that through their current hiring methods.
- Facilitates the co-design of programs with employers, ensuring that program completers have the knowledge and skills employers want; programs thus serve as a source of qualified talent for employers.
- Helps colleges design programs to meet the needs of adult students, through two approaches:
 - Accelerated degree programs enable students to graduate in a shortened time frame and enter or re-enter the labor market sooner than in traditional programs.
 - Career ladder programs help students—and in particular unemployed and underemployed adults—gain employment that is linked to opportunity for advancement through additional education and training.

Innovation 2. Community Colleges as Talent Suppliers

EXAMPLE 1

Sinclair College is creating accelerated career programs with employers.

EAGLE Program

Sinclair has created fourteen 15- and 36-month degree programs, known as the **Engaging Adults to Graduate and Lead to Efficiencies (EAGLE) Program**, specifically for returning adult students, though the 15-month program attracts motivated high school students as well. The programs are developed with employers to meet demand for skilled workers for well-paying, high-opportunity jobs.

Program Features

- Students enrolled full-time can complete these programs in 15 months over the course of four consecutive semesters, including the summer. The 36-month programs are part-time options that provide similar benefits as the 15-month programs.
- Programs range from supply chain management to exercise science.
- A variety of incentives are offered:
 - Priority registration
 - Predictable scheduling each term
 - Personal Navigators help students address academic and non-academic challenges

Innovation 2. Community Colleges as Talent Suppliers

EXAMPLE 2

Sinclair College is also creating targeted career programs with employers.

Skills Academies

Based on the success of their transfer partnership models (see p. 46), Sinclair is currently developing a “Skills Academy” model that will develop education-to-career pathways for unemployed and underemployed workers, starting with short-term certificates and building to associate and bachelor’s degrees. The goal is to start with three or four academies in different fields and identify workers in low-wage positions who could be trained for high-wage, in-demand positions. For example, hospitals need more IT employees, so the program could seek to enroll hospital employees in positions like cafeteria cashiers.

Guaranteed Employment Pathways

Sinclair has developed Guaranteed Employment Pathways through a partnership with Tesla. The **Tesla START Program** is an intensive, 12-week, 15-credit program with guaranteed employment upon completion. While enrolled, students can live in the dorms at Wright State University.

In-Demand Career

**START AT SINCLAIR
COMPLETE IN
12 WEEKS**

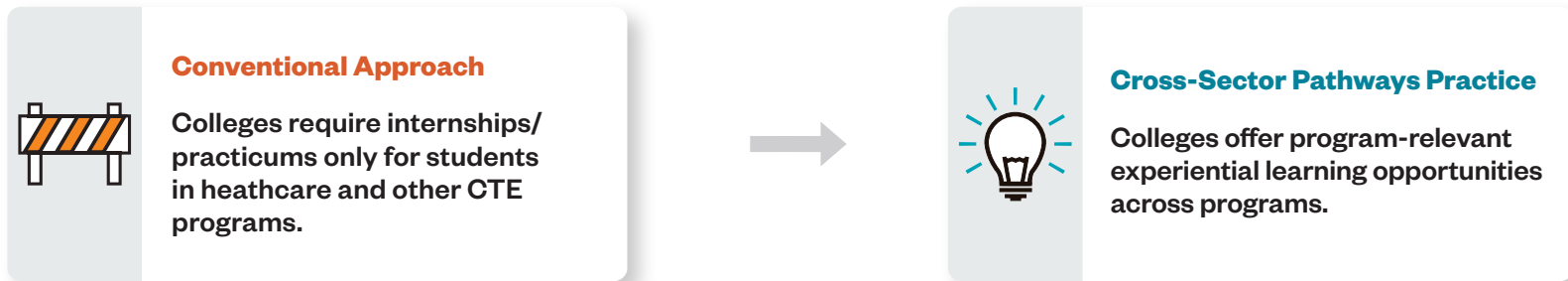
**RELOCATE TO
SERVICE CENTER
IN NORTH
AMERICA**

**TRANSITION TO
FULL-TIME
EMPLOYMENT**

JOBS

Source: <https://www.sinclair.edu/academics/divisions/sme/aut/tesla-start-program/>

Innovation 3. Program-Relevant Experiential Learning



Benefits of the Innovative Practice

To secure well-paying jobs with good advancement prospects, job seekers increasingly need relevant experience in addition to strong credentials. Community college students are often constrained from participating in co-curricular opportunities because they need to work while they are studying to support themselves and their families.

Unless community colleges can expand experiential learning by integrating it into program curricula, the lack of opportunities for program-relevant experiential learning will remain a barrier to gainful employment and upward mobility for the majority of community college students who do not participate. The colleges we studied are taking steps to expand experiential learning beyond healthcare and CTE to students in all programs.

Innovation 3. Program-Relevant Experiential Learning

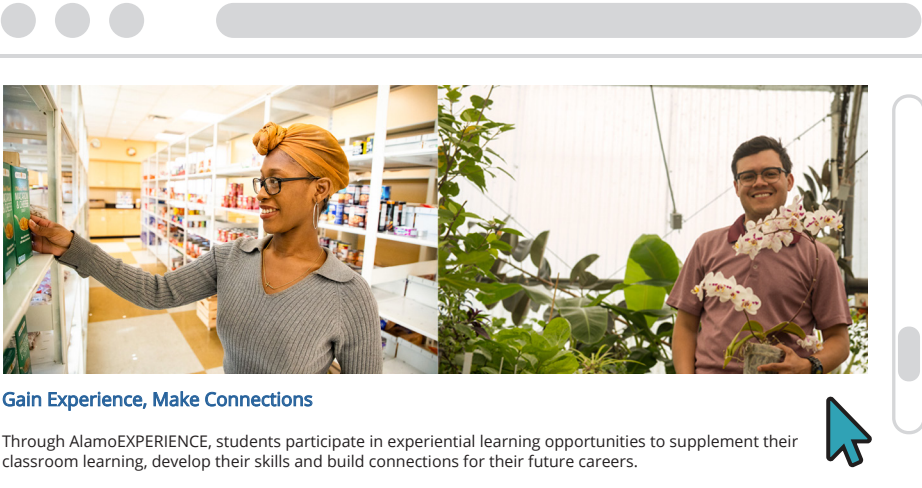
EXAMPLE 1

The Alamo Colleges are planning to expand experiential learning for all students.

AlamoEXPERIENCE

The **AlamoEXPERIENCE** initiative will require all students to participate in at least one experiential learning experience before they graduate. Students will be encouraged to participate in service learning, internships, apprenticeships, cooperative education, or other experiential learning opportunities as early as possible in college as a means to test and reaffirm their program and career interests.

As part of these efforts, students' experiences will be documented on a "co-curricular transcript" that they can present to prospective employers. The colleges will create a rubric that defines whether experiential learning is "foundational," "intermediate," or "advanced" for the benefit of students and employers.



Gain Experience, Make Connections

Through AlamoEXPERIENCE, students participate in experiential learning opportunities to supplement their classroom learning, develop their skills and build connections for their future careers.

Source: <https://www.alamo.edu/experience-the-alamo-colleges/current-students/student-opportunities/alamo-experience/>

Innovation 3. Program-Relevant Experiential Learning

EXAMPLE 2

CCRI is planning to expand experiential learning for all students.

College Planning Activities

Like the Alamo Colleges, the Community College of Rhode Island is also planning for every student to engage in experiential learning. College administrators believe that such opportunities can help prepare students to be ready for work while assuring employers that students are prepared to work in their field.

Currently, the college is examining all of its programs to determine where experiential learning should be embedded into curricula. The college's newly hired Workforce Learning Engagement Coordinator is helping to identify industry partners that can provide work-based learning opportunities for students such as internships. For those programs that lack connections with industry, the college is planning to expand capstone courses with a career and experiential learning focus.



Every student that leaves this college will have had some opportunity to connect with industry.

– College Administrator, CCRI



Innovation 3. Program-Relevant Experiential Learning

EXAMPLE 3

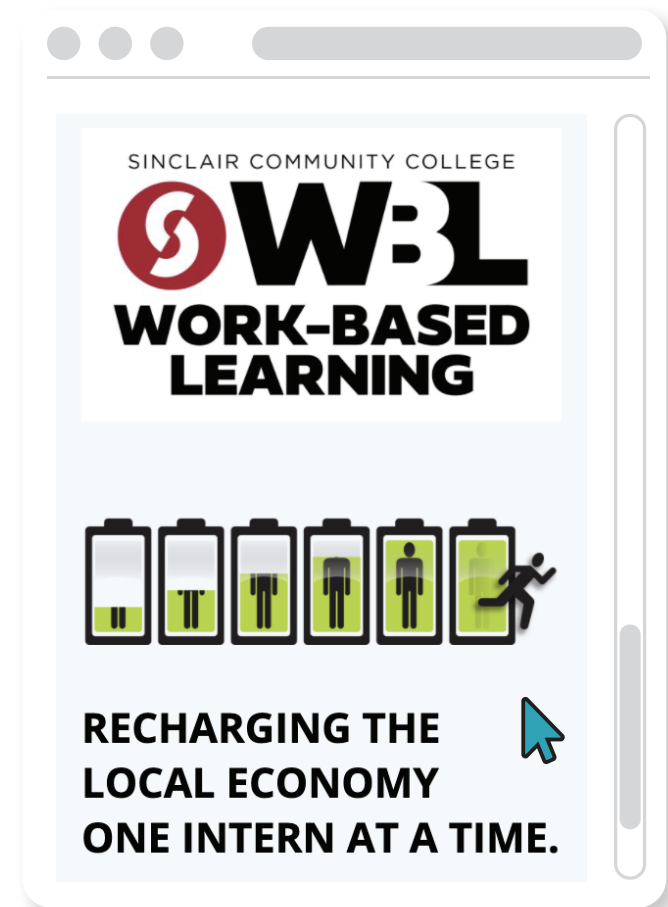
Sinclair College created a department to promote experiential learning.

Work-Based Learning Department

Sinclair's work-based learning department helps secure (paid and unpaid) internships for students across programs. The goal is to connect students to jobs in their field of interest so that they begin gaining experience in a career while completing a credential.

Staffing at the Department

- Director
- Assistant Director
- 3 Worksite Developers
 - Business and Public Safety
 - Liberal Arts and Communication Sciences
 - Science, Math, and Engineering
- Apprenticeship Manager
- Pre-apprenticeship Coordinator (high school)
- Career Development Coach
- 2 part-time administrative assistants

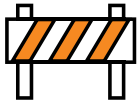


Source: <https://www.sinclair.edu/services/graduation-career/work-based-learning/>



Innovation with Universities

Community colleges are connecting with universities to implement practices that support cross-sector pathways.



Community colleges and universities do little to coordinate transfer. Articulation agreements are difficult for non-experts to interpret and do not always safeguard students' interests.

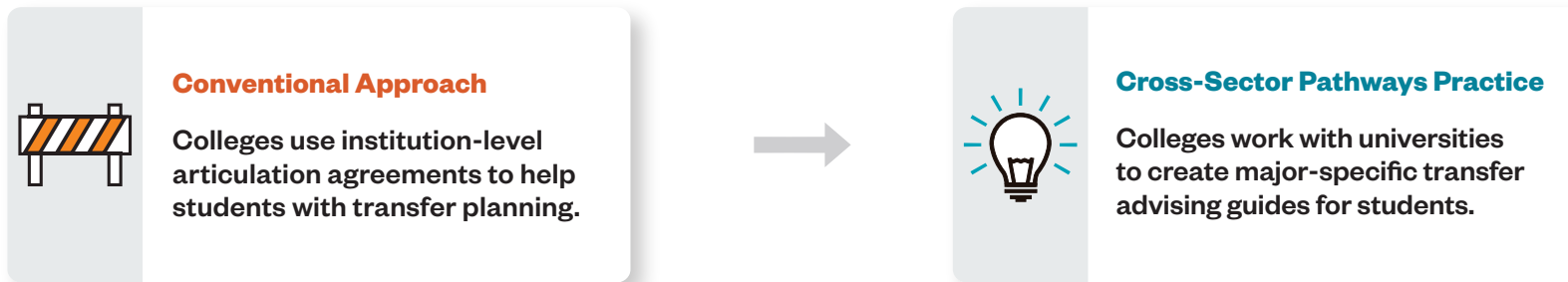
- Many community colleges have developed institution-specific articulation agreements with universities to stipulate how particular kinds of credits earned at the community college will be treated by a university, but the agreements can be hard for students to understand, and they are often out of date.
- Articulation agreements are generally made at the institution level rather than the school or department level. Schools or departments within universities may not abide by them—particularly in terms of what credits are accepted for transfer within a major—which has detrimental impacts for students.
- Guidance from advisors with field-specific knowledge is especially important to ensure that students can transfer with junior standing in their major. Yet, typically, there is limited communication or coordination between advising activities at community colleges and four-year colleges.



Innovative practices that address these barriers:

- 1** Major-specific transfer advising guides
- 2** Concurrent enrollment bachelor's pathways
- 3** Comprehensive transfer support

Innovation 1. Major-Specific Transfer Advising Guides



Benefits of the Innovative Practice

Transfer-intending students at community colleges are often unsure how their credits will be treated by four-year colleges. Indeed, students frequently accumulate substantial numbers of excess credits that do not apply to their program of study at their four-year destination institution, costing students time and money and depleting their financial aid.

In large part, the difficulties students experience with transfer can be attributed to a lack of collaboration between community colleges and four-year institutions and a reliance on (sometimes outdated) general articulation agreements that say little about the articulation of credit for within-program courses that are required for specific majors.

By developing and regularly updating detailed transfer advising guides that are major-specific, community colleges and their four-year partners make it easier for students to take degree-applicable courses (i.e., courses that will count as required courses within a major) and transfer with junior standing in a program of study. The close partnership between community colleges and universities in this endeavor not only provides students with more confidence in the transfer process but also creates greater institutional accountability for transfer.

Innovation 1. Major-Specific Transfer Advising Guides

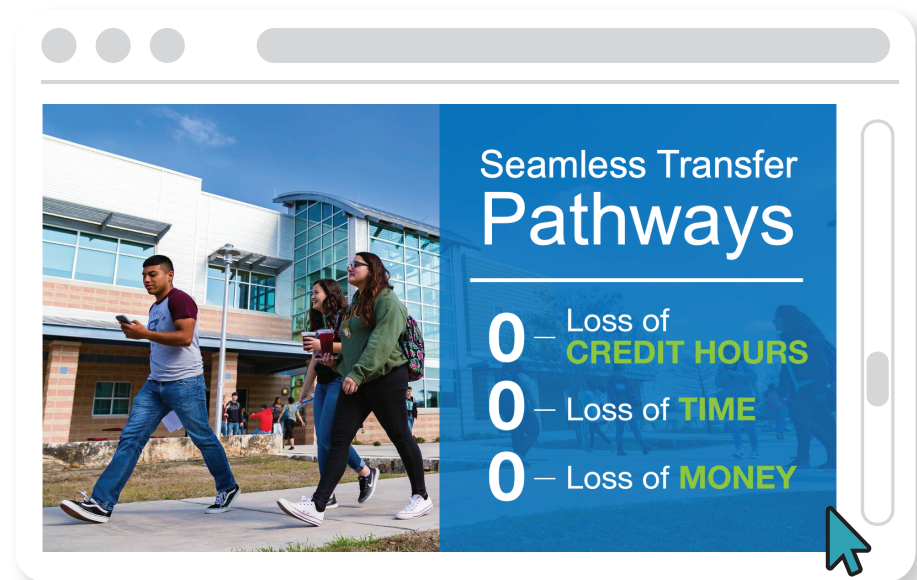
EXAMPLE

The Alamo Colleges are partnering with universities to create transfer advising guides that meet key needs of transfer-intending students.

Transfer Advising Guides

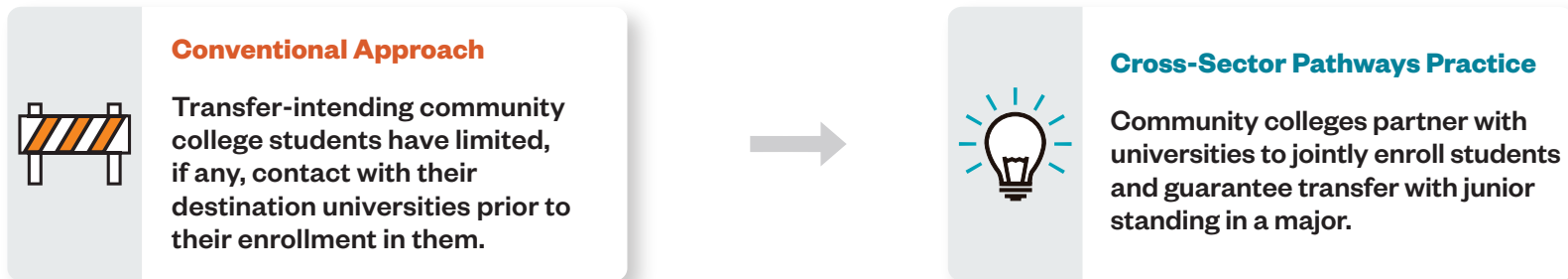
Advisors at the Alamo Colleges use **Transfer Advising Guides (TAGs)** developed with university partners to ensure that students take courses with degree applicability at their intended transfer destination. Advisors also refer to the TAGs to help students compare the requirements for particular majors at different transfer destinations.

In addition to course requirements, TAGs include important information such as grade requirements for distinct courses and recommendations about the optimal timing for transfer in specific programs.



Source: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/r33nm6poly8z35e/TAGs.pptx?dl=0>

Innovation 2. Concurrent Enrollment Bachelor's Pathways



Benefits of the Innovative Practice

- Universities can begin recruiting community college students who express interest in particular major programs well before they transfer.
- Students who are not initially accepted into the university of their choice can enroll at the community college first and pursue a guaranteed path for transfer in their major.
- Because both institutions are invested in students from the beginning, there is additional motivation for university faculty to work with community college faculty to align curricula.

Innovation 2. Concurrent Enrollment Bachelor's Pathways

EXAMPLE

Sinclair College offers concurrent enrollment opportunities that guarantee students will be able to transfer with junior standing in a major.

University of Dayton/Sinclair Academy

The **University of Dayton/Sinclair Academy** enables students to earn an associate degree and transfer as a junior to the University of Dayton in over 50 programs.

Wright State University/Sinclair's Wright Path Program

In partnership with Wright State University, Sinclair's **Wright Path Program** involves 2+2 articulation agreements and fully defined program plans that enable students to earn an associate degree and transfer as a junior with guaranteed admission in over 60 programs.

Additional University Partnerships

Sinclair has partnered with **five other local universities** to provide similar 2+2 or 3+1 guaranteed transfer opportunities, although in fewer programs.

YOUR PATHWAY TO SUCCESS + SINCLAIR COLLEGE University of Dayton = ASSOCIATE & BACHELOR'S

THE WRIGHT PATH

YOUR PATHWAY TO SUCCESS + 2 YEARS SINCLAIR COLLEGE WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY = ASSOCIATE & BACHELOR'S

SINCLAIR COLLEGE

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

University of Dayton

MIAMI UNIVERSITY

ANTIOCH UNIVERSITY

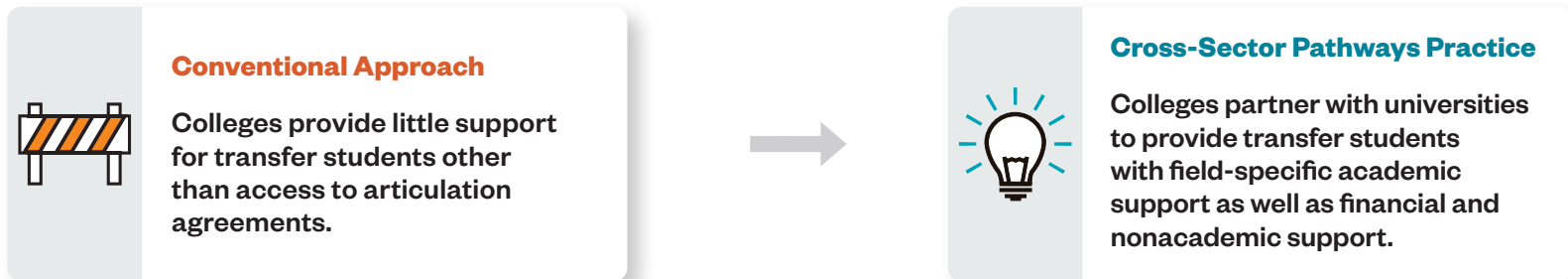
OHIO UNIVERSITY

FRANKLIN UNIVERSITY

University of Cincinnati

Source: <https://www.sinclair.edu/>

Innovation 3. Comprehensive Transfer Support



Benefits of the Innovative Practice

Increasing the number of students successfully transferring from community colleges and completing bachelor's degrees requires the provision of ongoing support to help students navigate their journey.

Community colleges that have made a commitment to increasing transfer student success are not only enhancing their own support services for transfer students, but are also collaborating with their university partners. The goal is to provide academic, financial, and nonacademic support to promote a seamless transfer transition and, ultimately, bachelor's success.

Innovation 3. Comprehensive Transfer Support

EXAMPLE

As part of their concurrent enrollment offerings, Sinclair College and its university partners provide field-specific academic support as well as financial and nonacademic support.



By connecting Sinclair students with faculty and advisors at the university, students have a support network, not just their course list. They understand what is going to happen when they get to the university system.

– Staff Member,
Wright State University



Comprehensive Transfer Support

In addition to aligning program requirements through the 2+2 concurrent enrollment model, Sinclair partners with the University of Dayton and Wright State University to provide a comprehensive suite of supports designed to promote successful transfer outcomes.

The University of Dayton/Sinclair Academy and Wright Path Program provide:

Field-specific Advising

At Sinclair advisors are assigned by meta-major (Career Community), at Wright State they are assigned by college, and at UD they are assigned by division. Students work with both Sinclair and university advisors while enrolled at Sinclair.

Financial Support

Students realize cost savings through locked-in tuition rates and the opportunity to apply for merit- and need-based scholarships designated for transfer students. They are also eligible for additional funding for textbooks.

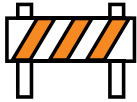
Nonacademic Community Support

Students are provided opportunities to become part of the university community while enrolled at Sinclair; these include access to university events and the option to live in university dorms.



Innovation with K-12 Schools

Community colleges are connecting with schools to implement practices that support cross-sector pathways.



Community colleges make limited efforts to help underserved high school students and their families consider their full range of postsecondary education options and get on a clear, efficient, and affordable pathway to a college credential and career.

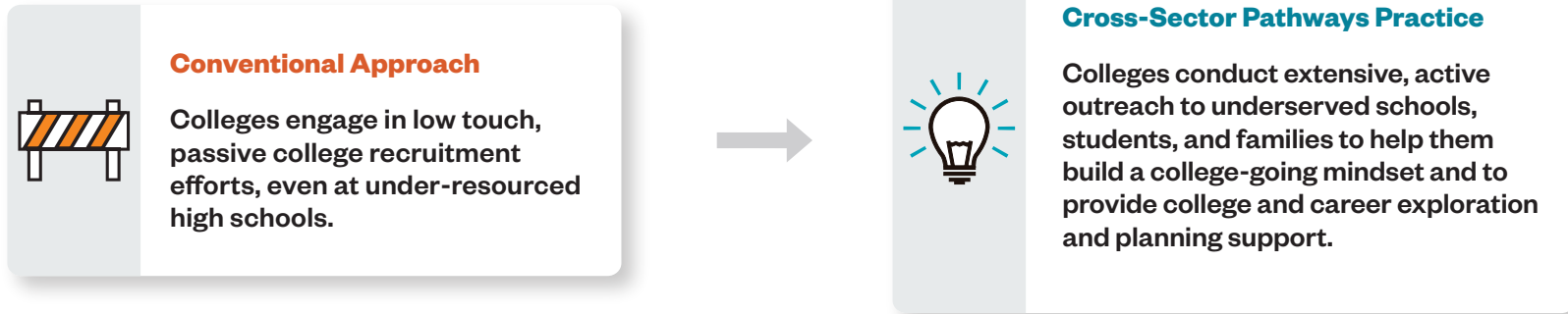
- Community college representatives frequently visit high schools to recruit students, but these efforts tend to reach students and families who are likely already planning to go to college.
- Most community colleges offer some students—often the already college-bound—an opportunity to take college courses through dual enrollment, but the most popular offerings include math, English, and other general education requirements rather than foundational program coursework associated with degrees.
- Most community colleges work with local high school CTE programs to develop articulation agreements that specify which credits will be accepted for credit toward college occupational certificate programs. Yet the colleges do little to advise and prepare high school CTE students to enter associate or bachelor’s degree programs, which are increasingly required (along with technical skills) to secure a family-supporting, career-path job.



Innovative practices that address these barriers:

- 1 Active outreach to underserved schools and students**
- 2 Dual enrollment as an on-ramp to a program of study**
- 3 High school CTE as an on-ramp to degree programs**

Innovation 1. Active Outreach to Underserved Schools and Students



Benefits of the Innovative Practice

Stronger connections between community colleges and high schools can increase college enrollment and completion. Community college outreach to K-12 schools traditionally lacks a focus on supporting under-resourced schools and districts and the students they serve. Some guided pathways colleges are now paying more attention to these schools.

They are doing this by helping students and their families understand the community college's program offerings and associated career paths and by helping them both to begin exploring their college options and start making a plan to go to and pay for college.

Innovation 1. Active Outreach to Underserved Schools and Students

EXAMPLE 1

The Alamo Colleges use enrollment coaches to reach out to to underserved high school students and get them on a path to college.

Alamo Enrollment Coaches

Enrollment coaches play an important role in connecting local high school students to the Alamo Colleges early on. The coaches—trained to work with and respond to the needs of high school seniors, including less-advantaged **AlamoPROMISE** students—participate in extensive engagement, outreach, and recruitment activities. These activities occur throughout the academic year and include opportunities for high school students to interact in group and one-on-one meetings with the coaches.

Beyond promoting the benefits of attending college and the Alamo Colleges in particular, enrollment coaches are an important resource for students as they transition to college. The coaches:

- assist with and monitor students' completion of Alamo enrollment requirements
- work with specific students during the enrollment process and until those students are paired with an advisor in the student's field of interest

Innovation 1. Active Outreach to Underserved Schools and Students

EXAMPLE 2

Sinclair College reaches out to high school students in several ways to get them on a path to college.

Career Counseling

In partnership with several under-resourced high schools, Sinclair is facilitating college and career counseling through YouScience, a skills- and interests-based career assessment. High school students complete the assessment and then meet with a Sinclair counselor, who helps students review the results and understand how their competencies and interests relate to college programs of study. After their initial meetings, students can continue to meet with a Sinclair counselor every six months throughout high school to develop one or two potential academic paths for college by their senior year.

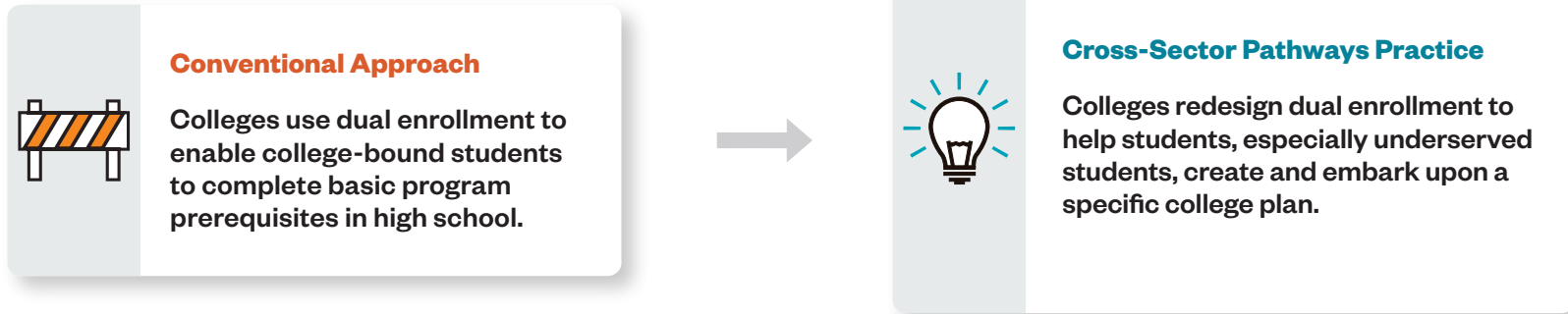
Faculty Connections

The Sinclair admissions office organizes high school student visits to campus so students can see “how learning happens” and meet faculty members. Sinclair faculty also make visits to under-resourced high schools to talk with students and give them a taste of college.

Transition Advising

Four new Sinclair “transition” advisors work with assigned caseloads of students at dedicated high schools. Specializing in different meta-majors (Career Communities), they help students understand how their high school coursework can connect to a path at Sinclair and assist them in developing academic plans. While many such students take dual enrollment courses through Sinclair, the college wants to do a better job in helping students select those courses and make future education choices. The college would also like to increase the number of dual enrollment students who choose to attend Sinclair after graduating from high school.

Innovation 2. Dual Enrollment as an On-ramp to a Program of Study



Benefits of the Innovative Practice

Nationally, the vast majority of dual enrollment programs consist of students taking discrete courses on campus, online, or at their high school. Although these courses provide college credit, students often take courses based on availability and not because they align with their interests. The most popular courses fulfill college general education requirements, which can benefit students but do little to shape or inform future college or career plans.

Colleges and high schools have also taken a laissez-faire approach when it comes to who takes advantage of dual

enrollment opportunities. Students from more privileged backgrounds, who are most likely to go to college, are overrepresented among dual enrollment course-takers.

Given the widespread availability of dual enrollment courses—which enroll over 1.5 million students every year and account for one in seven community college students—colleges taking a cross-sector approach seek to capitalize on these opportunities to dramatically increase college-going and success for underserved students.

Innovation 2. Dual Enrollment as an On-ramp to a Program of Study

EXAMPLE

The Alamo Colleges have made dual enrollment available to more students, aligned the organization of college and high school career fields, and used enrollment coaches to recruit and guide dual enrollment students.

Dual Enrollment at the Alamo Colleges

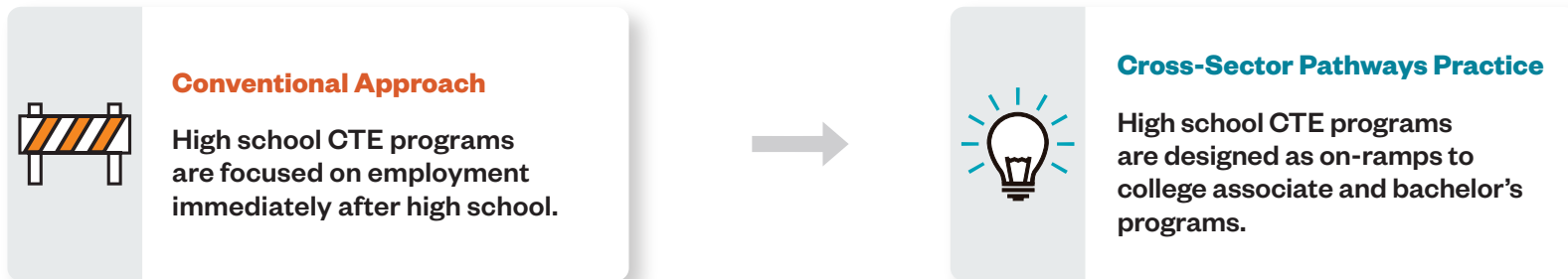
- The Alamo Colleges have expanded dual enrollment offerings to students in under-resourced high schools in their service area.
- All the colleges have aligned their meta-majors (Institutes) and program maps with the state's five high school "endorsement areas," career field areas every Texas high school student is required to choose from. Together, the endorsement areas and college meta-majors help high school students to explore and narrow their interests and program choices by field.
- Enrollment coaches work directly with high school dual enrollment students throughout the state.

How does dual enrollment benefit Alamo students?

- Dual Credit increases the likelihood that a student will complete high school and will enroll in and persist in college
- Decreases the cost of tuition and fees for students in completing their academic degrees
- New graduates enter the workforce at an accelerated rate and begin to earn wages, benefiting themselves and making positive contributions to our economy
- Students can earn up to 42 hours of college credit before graduating from high school
- Increase student self confidence

Source: <https://www.alamo.edu/sac/admissions-aid/specific-populations/high-school-programs/students2/dual-credit/>

Innovation 3. High School CTE as an On-ramp to Degree Programs



Benefits of the Innovative Practice

Career-technical education programs offered in high schools are typically marketed as opportunities for high school students to prepare to enter the workforce immediately after graduation. While these programs serve a valuable function, especially for those students who need employment right after high school, this approach may also limit students' consideration and pursuit of higher education, which is increasingly important for entry and advancement within a variety of technical fields.

In contrast, the cross-sector pathways approach encourages high schools to offer such programs with structured connections to college associate and bachelor's degree programs so that, in the short- or long-term, students can expand their career options and earn higher wages in their field of interest.

Innovation 3. High School CTE as an On-ramp to Degree Programs

EXAMPLE

High school CTE students have a path to college and career through Sinclair's partnership with Butler Tech.

Mechatronics Program at Sinclair Partner Butler Tech

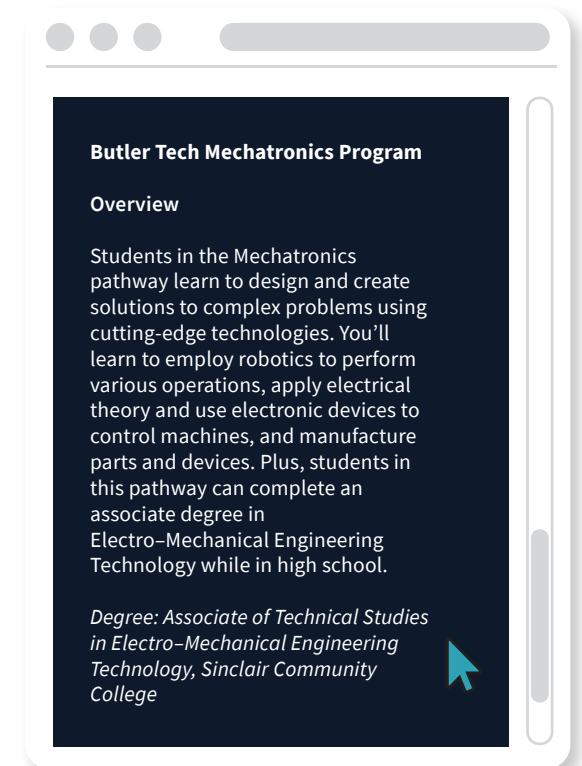
Butler Tech, a career-technical high school serving Southwest Ohio across four campuses, helps students explore and pursue their career interests through hands-on training programs, many of which either prepare students for or have direct articulation with college programs. For example, in partnership with Sinclair, Butler offers a mechatronics program that enables students to complete their associate degree in electro-mechanical engineering technology at the school through Sinclair.

This program, operated through Ohio's dual enrollment program (College Credit

Plus), is designed in close collaboration with Sinclair's engineering faculty to ensure that students are taking the same rigorous coursework they would as matriculated college students.

Students in the program:

- take courses taught by a combination of engineering faculty from Butler Tech and Sinclair
- use a well-equipped lab so that students engage directly in the engineering process
- have regular opportunities to interact with industry professionals from major companies
- receive support from a dedicated transition advisor from Sinclair to ensure that they are on track with their courses



Source: <https://www.butlertech.org/program/mechatronics/>

Strategies for Relationship Building



The innovative practices that community colleges are pursuing require stronger connections with their cross-sector partners. Colleges use strategies that are mutually beneficial to the respective partners while advancing opportunities for students.

The cross-sector partnership approach encourages partners to transform their relationships to advance opportunities for students.

Despite common goals across community colleges, employers, universities, and K-12 schools, these institutions tend to work in isolation from one another, which is detrimental to the students and communities they serve.

Cooperation between sectors has traditionally been transactional—focused on specific populations of students, programs, or jobs over limited periods—which can benefit small groups of students but is insufficient in facilitating broader, long-term improvements in how we educate students for an evolving economy.

Our exploratory study suggests that community colleges seeking to develop more effective cross-sector pathways for students strive to:

- reduce barriers between sectors, and
- produce mutual benefits to community colleges and their partners.



Here we present insights into how community colleges are:

- 1** Building relationships with employers
- 2** Building relationships with universities
- 3** Building relationships with K-12 schools

Building Relationships with Employers

Colleges work with employers to ensure that programs prepare students to enter and advance in high-demand career fields, which requires colleges to be responsive to changing employer needs.



Colleges involve employers in designing and updating programs.

For example, leaders at the Alamo Colleges create regular opportunities for program faculty and area employers to meet (see p. 33). During these meetings, faculty help employers identify college programs whose completers may make valuable job candidates, but they also discuss how to make programs themselves more effective. They sometimes talk about the creation of new degree or skills training programs to meet industry needs.

A Win-Win Scenario

Colleges stay up-to-date with evolving skill demands. The result is that employers are more likely to support and hire students from the college.

Employers are reassured that their workforce talent needs are being addressed. They gain increased confidence in the programs and the students who complete them, which helps to solve their hiring needs.



Colleges engage workforce intermediaries and government entities to help build market-responsive relationships with employers.

For example, Moreno Valley College, part of the Riverside Community College District, is an anchor institution within the Moreno Valley. MVC has representation on the city's solicitations teams, which work with the city's economic development center to both attract employers and respond to industry needs.

A Win-Win Scenario

Colleges enhance their reputation as institutions that support workers and local industry. They may also build relationships with new employers.

Employers learn about potential job candidates and meet community college personnel who are eager to learn about their evolving hiring and training needs.

Colleges work with universities to help more students enter and complete bachelor's degree programs.



Colleges develop concurrent and other coordinated program pathways with universities to expand the pool of students seeking bachelor's degrees at universities.

For example, through Sinclair's partnership with Wright State University (see p. 46), leaders at Wright State now consider concurrent enrollment to be essential in building back their enrollment.

A Win-Win Scenario

Colleges build on-ramps to bachelor's degrees for their students, often in communities with the greatest economic need for university graduates.

Universities gain access to a pool of students seeking bachelor's degrees beyond those who are able to enroll in a university directly, which is particularly important in many parts of the country that are experiencing declines in high school graduating classes.



Colleges demonstrate to universities how mapping clear pathways for students increases upper-division success rates for students who transfer from a community college.

For example, the Alamo Colleges have done research with the University of Texas at San Antonio showing that transfer students from the Alamo Colleges who have access to transfer advising guides (see p. 25) and improved transfer advising through the Alamo Institutes are earning fewer excess credits, experiencing higher rates of post-transfer bachelor's degree completion, and reducing their time to bachelor's degree completion post-transfer from over 2 years to 1.7 years.

A Win-Win Scenario

Colleges help students transfer to their destination of choice in a timely fashion with junior standing in their major.

Universities build a reputation for helping transfer-directed students to complete their bachelor's degrees.

Building Relationships with K-12 Schools

Colleges work with K-12 schools, especially those that are under-resourced or that serve low-income populations, to help students get a head start toward college and careers.



Colleges reach out to low-resource schools and their students with information and direct counseling on programs in high-opportunity degree fields.

For example, Sinclair hired transition advisors (see p. 53) to help students in high school explore interests and develop a plan for college and careers.

A Win-Win Scenario

Colleges help support equitable outcomes for students. They show underserved students viable pathways, which gives them an incentive to complete high school and then go to college, boosting college enrollments.

K-12 schools are better able to recruit and retain students, particularly in areas where policy allows parents to choose public schools for their children.



Colleges reach out to schools in times of need to address problems.

For example, in response to the transition to remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sinclair made staff available to support local K-12 schools. In one case, two staff members from Sinclair worked with Centerville City School District to help their teachers prepare to teach online.

A Win-Win Scenario

Colleges build goodwill with their K-12 partners and support younger students in their communities—students who will be the target of future college outreach efforts.

K-12 schools gain access to information, resources, supports, and contacts that are otherwise unavailable to them through their district. They see the college as a worthy partner in realizing broad education goals.

Future Directions for Cross-Sector Partnerships

.....
*Our research suggests opportunities for the
continued growth of regional cross-sector pathways.*



Expanding experiential learning beyond the classroom.

Students need both credentials and relevant hands-on experience to be competitive in the job market. Colleges need to work with employers and other regional partners to identify and establish workplace-based learning opportunities that complement the curricula in all programs.



Creating clearer pathways to jobs in non-CTE fields.

As this study illuminates, more research is needed to examine how colleges are helping to make clearer pathways to jobs in non-CTE fields, both for students seeking associate degrees and in partnership with university partners.



Supporting career and college exploration starting in middle school.

Learning about career and college options in the context of one's own developing interests, aspirations, and responsibilities takes time, especially for students (and their families) from underserved communities who are unfamiliar with how college works. Colleges can help students get early support in understanding how particular educational pathways lead to particular careers in their community and beyond.



Understanding cross-sector pathways in rural areas.

The three colleges in this study are located in urban areas. Research is needed to understand how rural community colleges with fewer local partners spread out over larger areas are engaging with employers, universities, and K-12 schools as part of their guided pathways reforms.

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The Community College Research Center (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University, has been a leader in the field of community college research and reform for 25 years. Our work provides a foundation for innovations in policy and practice that help give every community college student the best chance of success.

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