

Next Generation Career Pathways Subcommittee

Vision

The Next Generation Career Pathways Subcommittee envisions a future where all Nevadans are prepared for evolving career pathways, both as young learners in school and as adults learning throughout their careers. Learners are supported on pathways towards careers that will ensure a family sustaining income. In this vision, all Nevada students are engaged in career exploration throughout their school experience, with increasing opportunities throughout middle and high school, equipping them with the tangible knowledge, durable skills, and workforce experiences necessary to navigate long-life careers. In addition, workers have opportunities to develop new skills and earn supplemental credentials aligned to evolving workforce demands and personal interests. As a result, Nevada's industries flourish when supported by a well-prepared, skilled workforce that meets their current and future hiring needs.

To achieve this vision, there is an imperative to create robust partnerships between businesses and education. Such partnerships position industry as active collaborators with education experts at multiple engagement points, including support of career exploration, curriculum development, and work-based learning experiences. Ensuring students have sustained opportunities to gain real-world skills through internships, apprenticeships, and hands-on learning, all of which are aligned with classroom experiences. We recognize that learning happens both inside and outside the classroom, and policy can support more out-of-school learning by adapting seat-time requirements and incentivizing internships and other work-based learning experiences.

Career and technical education (CTE) is a critical pathway in this vision, and it must be available equitably to all students, without stigma. Career coaches play a pivotal role by providing modern, accurate advising and leveraging labor market data to support students in making informed decisions. There is a clear pipeline that begins with exposure to career possibilities and continues towards career outcomes. Each student is able to see a future that aligns with their interests and skills and each employer has access to a pipeline of highly qualified candidates.

The subcommittee recognizes the need to embrace both college and career, with permeable pathways to higher education, work-based learning, apprenticeship, credentials, and entrepreneurial endeavors, while providing equitable access to career exploration opportunities. Resources must be provided to support rural communities and incentives enable employers to engage with students, educators and school districts equally throughout the state. Success requires embracing new technologies, including virtual and augmented reality, to expand career exploration opportunities, ensuring that all students have access to the tools and skills needed for success in a tech-enabled future workforce.

This vision is rooted in the belief that the traditional one-credential, one-career model is no longer sufficient. Today's students must be equipped with durable, entrepreneurial, and transferable skills to navigate a rapidly changing workforce. Achieving this vision requires a statewide commitment to policies and structures that support continuous learning, collaboration between educators and employers, and a reimagining of how students engage with their future careers. Together, we are building a system that prepares Nevada learners to be fulfilled workers and engaged citizens who contribute to a thriving economy.

Current Nevada Context

Nevada has a strong foundation of Career and Technical Education (CTE) as well as a robust system of workforce development offerings. Both serve as a springboard for the Next Generation Pathways subcommittee to envision policy that prepares students for success in the future of work. CTE offerings have grown steadily in recent years in Nevada and continue to blend practical work experience with industry-recognized credentials and dual enrollment opportunities, allowing students to easily transition into careers.

The efficacy of Nevada's CTE programming has been bolstered by key political achievements. The adoption of Assembly Bill 7 in 2017 established the College and Career Readiness Diploma, with the ambitious goal of ensuring that 50% of Nevada's students earn this credential by 2026. In addition, efforts by CTE leadership to alleviate barriers for employer engagement have been successful, offering flexibility in areas such as insurance and background checks while providing resources for training both staff and student employees. The recent update to the work-based learning guide in August of 2023, following Assembly Bill 38, extends opportunities beyond CTE students, making work-based learning more inclusive across the student population. These advancements are complemented by a growing emphasis on support and training for educators. Teacher externships are growing and enabling Nevada's educators to have first hand exposure to modern career pathways.

Nevada's workforce development is also benefiting from robust partnerships between employers and educators. Nevada Workforce Connections, utilizing WIOA funding, actively supports youth facing employment barriers, including, but not limited to, parenting teens, English language learners, and individuals with disabilities. Funding is also supportive of growing industries across the state including culinary arts, information technology, and green energy. These efforts not only provide students with critical support but also strengthen the pipeline of skilled talent.

Looking ahead, Nevada is focusing on aligning its CTE and workforce goals to meet the demands of its top industries, which include aerospace and defense, healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, logistics, and green energy. The Governor's Office of Economic Development has identified these industries as key to Nevada's economic future, and CTE programs are adapting to ensure that students are prepared for roles in these high-skill sectors. Additionally, digital

platforms such as Nevada Pathways connect teachers and businesses, fostering collaboration and ensuring that career exploration is integrated throughout the educational experience.

With these systems in place, Nevada is uniquely positioned to leverage technology and expand access to career pathways that not only support the state's economic growth but also empower students to achieve success in rapidly evolving industries. By embracing emerging job sectors and continuing to invest in strong partnerships, Nevada is charting a course toward a future where all students can access the opportunities they need to build fulfilling careers aligned with their skills, interests, and future aspirations.

Guiding Principles for Policy Recommendations

As we discuss, align, and refine our policy recommendations, we want to consistently stress-test whether they meet the following guiding principles:

- 1. Incentivize Ongoing Learning and Continuous Improvement, Rather than Mandates**
Our policy recommendations should not take the form of “one-size-fits-all” mandates that stifle innovation and prevent opportunities from reaching all populations.
- 2. Remove Inconsistent or Restrictive Policies:**
Our recommendations should identify and challenge existing policies that inhibit innovation and continuous learning and growth.
- 3. Strengthen Rather Than Duplicate Existing Efforts across Education and Workforce Development:**
Policy recommendations should recognize current efforts and investments, and where possible seek ways to scale impact rather than start anew.
- 4. Focus on Sustainability and Scalability:**
Design the system with flexibility in mind, allowing it to adapt to future trends and evolving student needs. This includes building the capacity for emerging labor market needs, as well as ensuring scalability across all districts and schools in Nevada.
- 5. Ensure the Voices of Students, Educators, and Industry Leaders are Meaningfully Included in the Policymaking Process:**
Students, educators, and industry should be engaged as meaningful partners in the development of the dashboard. Their input, guidance, and feedback will be essential to ensuring that metrics measure and emphasize what they find relevant, impactful, and essential to their long-term success.
- 6. Actively Seek Opportunities for Cross-Sector Partnerships**
Our policy recommendations should avoid working in isolation or prioritizing leadership of one partner over another. Mechanisms for shared leadership, communication, and data infrastructure should be considered to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

Policy Recommendations

1. Expand Career Exploration and Career Exposure offerings to ensure it reaches all students, beginning in elementary school and is a prioritized experience in the middle school grade levels.

The subcommittee recommends expanding the existing work-based learning framework to include developmentally relevant career exposure activities for all elementary students, and increase career exploration activities outlined for grades 4-9, with increased exposure to STEAM career pathways. Additions to the framework include development of individualized career plans and ensuring all students, regardless of geographic location, have multiple career exploration experiences each year. Middle school students are supported in career interest inventories that actively support their agency in selecting career exploration experiences. Applied equitably, this targeted early intervention aims to support middle school students in better understanding options for career pathways as they transition to high school and beyond.

The subcommittee recognizes that expansion of career exploration experiences should not impact existing Perkins funding allocations and recommends an initial review of resources available to sustainably support this effort, where possible, in partnership with Nevada's workforce and economic development systems. Currently, a small portion of Nevada school districts leverage Perkins funding to support middle school CTE programming. However, funds that are used for middle school efforts often deplete the resources available for high school programs.

2. Fund, train, and hire career coaches who are responsible for ensuring all students gain awareness of career pathways, transferable skills, multiple avenues of workforce training opportunities and credentialing options.

Through investing in staff that are dedicated to career development, Nevada can ensure that learners remain well-informed of career and technical education, work-based learning, and emerging industries. In this model, the subcommittee recommends:

- a. All middle and high schools have access to at minimum a part-time career coach dedicated to individualized career plans, employer partnerships, and collaborating with guidance staff and teachers to ensure access to opportunities
- b. Career coaches and school administrators receive ongoing professional development including analysis of labor market trends, local industry data, effective employer engagement strategies, and career-connected learning technology.
- c. Career coaches have exposure to classroom experience to support experiences that are aligned to class content and reinforce classroom instruction where possible
- d. Career coaches, and relevant classroom teachers experience externships to ensure understanding of emerging industry work environments, trends, and transferable skills across a career pathway
- e. Efforts and policies to support career counselors engage in continuous learning from states with similar policies such as Mississippi and Maryland.

The subcommittee recognizes the need for a dedicated career coach role that is not a supplemental responsibility to existing school counselors and recommends exploring career coaches with industry experience or other untapped workforce populations such as returning retirees.

3. Enhance mechanisms to intentionally connect employers, particularly in industries prioritized by the Governor's Office of Economic Development, systematically and consistently with educators.

While workforce boards and CTE leaders have established connections with employers, school leadership and classroom educators seek a more seamless avenue to connect with employers in curriculum development or career exploration. As a result, career exploration experiences are dependent upon the social capital and relationships of individual educators. The subcommittee recommends developing a centralized process for information and resources sharing focused on the following priorities:

- a. Communicating and developing transferable employability and entrepreneurial skills to benefit learners and employers
- b. Connecting to small and mid-sized employers for career exposure, curriculum development, and experiential and work-based learning experiences
- c. Providing targeted supports for rural learners
- d. Connecting to human resources and talent acquisition professionals to establish not only an understanding of skills needed for success in an occupation, but job also placement and career development skills
- e. Understanding emerging skills for future tech-enabled and STEAM career pathways
- f. Supporting skill development relevant to meet the needs of a global, digital and remote workforce

The subcommittee emphasizes the importance of communicating labor market information timely and consistently to career coaches and school administrators in an effort to ensure that school-based staff have a clear understanding of alignment opportunities and can effectively support student access and career exploration.

4. Explore options for career exploration technology and ongoing technology evaluation that enables and encourages usage of technology for career-connected learning, particularly for rural and remote communities.

Currently technology is introduced in small pilots or ad-hoc localized partnerships. Not only does this perpetuate the divide in access, but it prevents effective evaluation or scale of impact. Technology for career exploration will increase exposure and access for communities that have minimal access to employers or in-person career exploration opportunities.

The subcommittee recommends formalizing a review committee to identify and vet implementation opportunities and needs.

Technology reviewed could include:

- a. Augmented and Virtual Reality technology that provides direct career exposure and facilitates hands-on technical skills development.
- b. Platforms that leverage virtual convening to career mentorship, virtual site visits, and employer connections. These platforms promote the reality of the future of remote and virtual work environments.
- c. Digital career interest inventories that support career exploration and are developmentally appropriate for elementary, middle, and high school levels.
- d. Targeted resources to support rural access and distance learning

Outstanding Questions and Implementation Considerations

1. How can we ensure that policy does not replicate existing efforts and rather continues to enhance efforts that are currently in action? Alternatively, are there existing policies that rely on outdated strategies or efforts that could hinder our ability to create spaces for innovation and new policies?
2. How do we continue to ensure equitable access for all populations and learners regardless of geographic location, ability, and language learning. Are there resources for students or incentives for industry to proactively reduce access barriers?
3. How do we balance local employment demands with career exploration that may result in a student drive to explore new or different geographic locations? How do we address potential shifts in population?
4. Should this subcommittee develop systems for long-life learning? What policies put into place at the K12 education level that could transcend to support adult workforce training, community college and the future of higher education?
5. How do we track data and embed consistent systems of evaluation, particularly to measure impact of recommended efforts, staffing, and school-curriculum shift?
6. What mechanisms are in place to communicate multiple career and college pathways options and outcomes to families, guardians, communities and young people?
7. What security and safety policies need to be in place in leveraging new, adaptive technologies? How can we ensure policies are responsive to rapid changing technologies including machine learning models, augmented reality, and artificial intelligence, particularly when leveraged to support student career-connected learning?
8. What additional funding is necessary for our recommendations, and what sources or flexibilities exist? Are there funding sources that exist outside of legislative avenues that we should consider including philanthropic or corporate investments?