

Essential Elements of a High-Quality College and Career Pathway

To realize the *Guiding Policy Principles*, California recognizes the importance of creating the following student focused essential elements of a high-quality college and career pathway:

- A. **Student-Centered Delivery of Services** for all K–14+ college and career pathways incorporates the removal of institutional or systemic barriers that impede the progress of students in achieving their education and career goals. This includes a renewed commitment to offer an engaging learning experience and support the diversity of individual student needs while accommodating their multiple entry points as they progress along a continuum of education and training, or advance in a sector-specific occupation or industry.
- B. Student **Equity** goes beyond the reduction of institutional barriers to create an environment of being fair, impartial and free from racism, bias, or favoritism, promote educational and employment attainment, and to eliminate the achievement gap for all students including, but not limited to, English language learners and students with disabilities in the K–14+ college and career pathway system.
- C. **Access** denotes a broader vision of equity ensuring that all students are provided ample opportunities to attain the necessary skills, education and training required to maximize their individual goals including a collective awareness of all the supports that are available to students both inside and out of class. Access also facilitates the elimination of the achievement gap by providing information on how to access programs, services, and rigorous course work for all California students regardless of region, gender, socio-economic status, special needs, and/or English proficiency. Access also includes creating pathways with demonstrable careers for students.
- D. **Leadership at All Levels** is required to achieve greater integration across systems and programs to ensure that the contexts for an engaging learning experience can occur and programs connect, so all students can reach across systems easily and succeed with their desired outcomes including employment, and employers have the workforce needed to thrive.
- E. **High-Quality, Integrated Curriculum and Instruction** informed by labor market information, student interest, technology, industry standards, and real-world engagement through relevant work-based learning opportunities is essential to prepare students. Rigorous and aligned programs should be supported to guide students through relevant course sequences (i.e., both in-person and online) and work-based learning opportunities leading to a mastery of standards, high school graduation, and transition to postsecondary education, training, apprenticeship, and/or employment, as appropriate. Courses and programs may be designed to use cross-system strategies like dual enrollment and/or dual credit with community colleges and universities or other articulations to create a seamless student experience, and avoid unnecessary repeating of courses or other inefficient practices to facilitate “on-time” postsecondary graduation, where appropriate. Stackable badging and credentials can ensure frequency of assessment and a value-added outcome.
- F. **Skilled Instruction and Educational Leadership, informed by Professional Learning**, is the cornerstone of the public education system in California. The educational experience is only as strong as the capacity and investment made in faculty, educational leaders, and the other key field talent to provide in-class, online, or work-based learning opportunities as well as developing an awareness of student support services. California encourages the culture of innovation and entrepreneurialism in program instruction and design that leads to student success.

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- G. The strong presence of **Career Exploration and Student Supports** is an essential component for establishing a learning plan for all K–14+ students. This includes identifying appropriate foundational courses (i.e., using competency-based learning) and information about jobs, determining student progression in a single pathway or along multiple pathways or sequences of learning, or making available in-class and online course offerings and work-based learning opportunities. To complement their learning plan, students should also have access to comprehensive counseling, individualized supports along their journey (including, but not limited to, for students who are part-time, face barriers to learning, need academic or cultural supports, transportation, child care, or financial aid), or opportunities through student leadership development organizations to achieve their individual goals and aspirations, through a variety of transitions, in an ever-changing workforce.
- H. **Appropriate Use of Data and Continuous Improvement** should continue to drive CTE through relevant accountability that is outcomes-based, is supported both vertically and horizontally across systems, and ensures equity and access for all students. Continuous improvement ensures students can access the best pathways possible. Focusing on students' and employers' needs will allow for identification of capacity building, refinement of programs, and elimination of inefficiencies to meet the existing and emerging needs of regional economies. Through intentional sharing of specific data elements that are actionable across systems will help to showcase student attainment, including mastery of standards, and be informed by industry needs to achieve relevant system outcomes. Responsible data use is to inform practice and improve programs, not to track students.
- I. Opportunities for strategic and intentional **Cross-System Alignment** should be informed by the ongoing analysis of student data, and alignment of data definitions across systems to provide, for example, deliberate sector-based programs, deployment of technical field assistance using a regional distribution, or evidence-based practices and processes to optimize pathway success and upward mobility opportunities for all participants.
- J. **Intentional Recruitment and Marketing (Promotion, Outreach, and Communication)** should reflect an understanding of students' and employers' needs, be consistent in its messaging to stakeholders across all segments, and use tools and reports as a platform to display the added value of high quality K–14+ college and career pathway programs.
- K. **Sustained Investments and Funding through Mutual Agreements** must be present to encourage regional alliances along with industry sector strategies, especially with a focus on current and/or emerging high-skill, high-wage, and/or high-demand occupations. This includes but is not limited to Kindergarten through grades twelve (K–12) Education, Adult Education, Higher Education, Labor, Economic Development Councils, Chambers of Commerce, Workforce Development Boards, career advisory boards, and regional industry alliances aligned by sector that lead to an industry-recognized credential or certificate, postsecondary training, apprenticeship, and/or employment.
- L. **Strong Partnerships with Industry** and appropriate employers must be developed to inform and improve CTE program design, instruction and work-based learning activities; as well as, ensure that career pathway programs in all grade levels, organizations and apprenticeship programs continue to meet the workforce demands.